NB3 NATIVESTRONG

NOTAH BEGAY III FOUNDATION

Exploring Native Strong:
First Two Years

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Executive Summary

In August 2013, the Notah Begay III Foundation (NB3 Foundation) launched its *Native Strong: Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures* program. This national Native Strong program includes grantmaking, technical assistance, research, communications, and advocacy.

To support Native American communities in its preventative health efforts, *Native Strong* implements two primary grant programs:

- *Promising Program Grants* support projects that target the reduction of childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes through existing programs for physical activity and healthy nutrition.
- *Capacity Building Grants* focus on assessing and advancing participating organizations' efforts to improve the health and fitness of Native American children within their communities.

The NB3 Foundation wanted to continue to refine its approach to working with community partners and evaluating the partners' work based on lessons learned with *Native Strong's* initial cohorts. To this end, NB3 Foundation worked with Indigenous Methods, LLC, to perform a program evaluation of these cohorts and receive input from the community partners.

As a result of this program evaluation, the most significant achievements, strengths, and competencies amongst the community partners were identified:

- Cultural Alignment
- Community Building/Nation Building/Cultural Sustainability
- Strategic Thinking/Assessment/Sustainability
- Resiliency
- Collaborations/Relationships

Three areas for growth were also identified:

- Consistency/Expertise in Evaluation Responses and Data Collection
- Community/Organizational Capacity
- Community Outreach and Stakeholder Support (Volunteers, Parents, Participants, and Tribal Leadership)

Finally, Indigenous Methods put forth six crucial recommendations for the NB3 Foundation:

- Continue to Focus On Sustainability and Community Building
- Develop Digital Media Capacity and Understandings
- Promote the Development of Community-Based Action Plans
- Conduct/Enhance Training Based on Native American Models of Knowing and Learning
- Develop Partner Network for Accountability
- Strengthen Community-Led Engagements with a Focus on Tribal Leadership

As the NB3 Foundation moves forward, it will continue to update and fine tune the model of its work based on new lessons learned and input from partners and their communities. This input is the key to using information in ways that fully realize the potential of community partners. The NB3 Foundation has also increased its commitment to supporting Indigenous ways of learning, reporting, sharing, and helping. In part, the aim of this support is to demonstrate how these ways can function as rigorous, community-based qualitative analysis. With current and future cohorts, the varied new lessons learned are being and will be implemented. This enactment has and will result in better support for the goals of each community and better documentation of the partners' successes and challenges.

Introduction

The aim of NB3 Foundation's work is to reduce Native American childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes. The NB3 Foundation supports locally based solutions that work to ensure healthy futures for Native American children, youth, families, and communities.

As a Native-controlled nonprofit that seeks and provides grant funding, NB3 Foundation has gained valuable experience and knowledge working with community partners within the philanthropic field. These relationships with their sometimes competing perspectives have positioned NB3 Foundation to effectively advocate for resources dedicated to Native communities and to directly support our community partners on the ground to improve the health of Native children.

In August 2013, NB3 Foundation launched its *Native Strong: Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures* program. Native Strong is a national program of grantmaking, technical assistance, research, communication, and advocacy. To support Native American communities in their preventative efforts, *Native Strong* implements two primary grant programs: one for program development and the other for community capacity building. Both programs are designed to build evidence of successful interventions in Indian Country and develop long-term strategies to reduce threats to childhood health.

1. Promising Program Grants support projects that strategically target the reduction and prevention of childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes through existing programs for physical activity and healthy nutrition. Community partners engage in direct service projects that feature a range of culturally enriching, healthy activities for children and communities. Ultimately, the program seeks to improve the health and fitness of Native American children through projects that encourage positive behaviors and cultural engagement. The first cohort of *Promising Program Grants* included 10 partners, while the second cohort included 12, for a total of 22 grants.

2. Capacity Building Grants focus on assessing and improving each participating organization's efforts to improve the health and fitness of Native American children within their communities. Community partners engage their communities in assessing and developing strategies to improve community health and reduce childhood obesity. The first cohort of *Capacity Building Grants* included 10 partners, while the second cohort included eight, for a total of 18 grants.

Both grant programs are based on the same understanding:

> In order to create meaningful, sustainable change, the NB3 must authentically engage its partners and the communities they serve. A collaborative process must meet all partners where they are, acknowledge the context in which they work, and involve working *with* and *in* communities, rather than working on them.

The NB3 Foundation's approach to working with its partners involves acknowledging both the profound strengths and resources that Native American communities bring to their work and the barriers they may experience in efforts to mobilize these resources to affect positive change. Underlying this work are multiple assumptions including:

- Individual communities know who they are and what they need.
- Such communities have valuable resources in their values, culture, language, history and stories.

At the same time, the history of colonization, generations of trauma, and pervasive devaluation of Native American ways can mask these assets. A community may need a significant amount of time and effort to see clearly its assets and understand how to use them in effective ways to improve the health and wellbeing of community members.
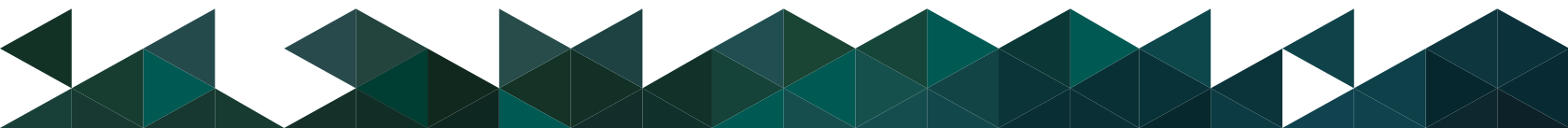
To help lay a strong foundation for future health initiatives focused on Native American children, this report contains:

- Brief backgrounds on *Native Strong* community partners.
- A description of the NB3 Foundation's evaluation framework.
- Highlights from the strengths and accomplishments of the community partners.
- Challenges faced by the community partners and ways to address these challenges.
- Recommendations to guide the NB3 Foundation's future grantmaking efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of Native American children.

This report is based on a review of grant proposals, final reports, partner interviews, and individual and collective conversations held throughout the grant cycles.

Through the scope and depth of this report, the NB3 Foundation is demonstrating its deep commitment to supporting and developing effective health prevention programs. To be effective, these programs must be authentic, dynamic, responsive, practical, and in alignment with the Native American communities they serve.

"There is potential for ownership, buy-in, and staying power when strategies aimed at improving the health of Native youth and community are designed, delivered, and evaluated with the active participation of the people most impacted."

▶ Indian Health Board of Minneapolis

[1] The NB3 Foundation has chosen to refer to the recipients of Native Strong grants as community partners rather than grantees. This reference demonstrates its commitment to relationships with these partners that involve shared vision, shared learning, and shared responsibility for improving the health of Native American youth.

Community Partner Background

Though national in scope, *Native Strong* grantmaking initially targeted five specific states and regions that have concentrated populations of Native American people. The three geographic regions (and states) are the Upper Midwest (Minnesota and Wisconsin), the Southern Plains (Oklahoma), and the Southwest (New Mexico and Arizona). However, recognizing that important work was being done across the country, the NB3 Foundation accepted applications from all states with the intention of funding one or two high-potential projects outside of these three regions.

For both rounds of applications for the *Promising Program Grants* and *Capacity Building Grants*, the NB3 Foundation received 213 proposals for a total request of $6.76 million dollars. The largest group of applications (69) came from the Southwest, with the second-largest number of applications (60) from outside the NB3 Foundation's target regions. Thirty-nine communities were awarded grants totaling $1,225,370, with 22 awarded to Native-controlled nonprofits and 19² awarded to tribes. The tables below show the target region breakdown of the community partners' locations.

Regional Breakdown: Cohort 1

Region	State	Community Partners Awarded Grants
Midwest	Minnesota	3
	Wisconsin	2
Southern Plains	Oklahoma	4
Southwest	New Mexico	8
	Arizona	1
Outside the Target Regions	California	1
	South Dakota	1

Regional Breakdown: Cohort 2

Region	State	Community Partners Awarded Grants
Midwest	Minnesota	4
	Wisconsin	1
Southern Plains	Oklahoma	3
Southwest	New Mexico	3
	Arizona	7
Outside the Target Regions	California	1
	Washington	1
	South Dakota	1

These two major grant programs were structured to support two related but very different types of strategies. The Promising Program Grants make the case for and support direct service programming practices that are showing promise in addressing Native American childhood obesity. Capacity Building Grants support community health assessments and community planning that will identify data-driven strategies to address Native American childhood obesity.

All 39 community partners had a strong connection to their communities and a focus on children's health. Not surprisingly, they varied in many ways, including their:

- Overall approaches.
- Community engagement strategies.
- Capacities to plan and implement their grants.
- Cultures.
- Languages.
- Governance systems.
  1. Native American-controlled non-profit organizations (both on and off tribal reservations).
  2. Programs housed within the governments of Native American tribes, pueblos, and sovereign nations.

Community partners had a range of organizational assets and challenges they faced, many unique to their communities and organizations and some that resonated for all partners. In part, these important assets and challenges triggered the creation of this report. The themes of this report are critical in that they continue to shape the NB3 Foundation's learning, approach to grantmaking, and dedication to strengthening the impact of its work and the work of community partners.

These grants were the first in Native Strong's grant cycles. The grants provided Native Strong staff with two opportunities. The first was to test their ideas about how to do effective and efficient grantmaking that celebrates and employs the assets of Native American communities. The second was to learn how to help Native American communities to better respond to the health needs of their children. The projects supported through these grants have delivered multiple benefits, including:

- Supporting the formation of dynamic relationships with community partners.
- Aligning the NB3 Foundation's values with those of the community partners.
- Making success a shared responsibility between the NB3 Foundation and the partners.
- Reinforcing Indigenous methods and strategies.
- Encouraging caring for and learning from one another.
- Keeping the focus on building strong, healthy youth.
- Enhancing the NB3 Foundation's learning.

The strong thread that weaves through all these benefits is that they enable the NB3 Foundation to uphold shared responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of Native American children unto the seventh generation.

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[2] Math clarification – A total of 40 grants were awarded to 39 community partners. One of these partners received two grants: Santa Ana Pueblo in New Mexico received both a *Promising Program Grant* and a *Capacity Building Grant*.

Using Indigenous Methodology

NB3 Foundation is a Native American-led nonprofit organization and its partners represent sovereign nations and Native American communities in the United States. Hence, *Native Strong* has, from its outset, engaged in grantmaking through an Indigenous lens, working to develop policies and procedures that are aligned with Native American cultures and values.

Reciprocity and the cyclical nature of things are fundamental elements of many Native American worldviews. Therefore, it is appropriate that the NB3 Foundation used the lessons it learned with the first two cohorts to help refine its approach to working with community partners and evaluating their work. To this end, NB3 Foundation worked with Indigenous Methods, LLC, to review the projects undertaken by partners in the first two cohorts and receive input from the partners. NB3 Foundation then used this information to refine and further indigenize their model of community-based assessment and evaluation. This newly honed framework is imbued with wisdom articulated by Native American elders, scholars, and community members over the course of the past several decades.

Reframing Evaluation

The NB3 Foundation chose the American Indian Higher Education Consortium's (AIHEC) *Reframing Evaluation*[3] as their primary guiding framework. This document outlines five key criteria that are essential in evaluating projects within Indigenous communities.

1. Context is critical—Understanding the history and cultural attitudes of each Indigenous community is necessary to grasp the long-term principles that should guide decisions, interactions, and relationships.
2. Place-based—Indigenous communities have a place-based worldview. Consequently, the connections to land and ecology must be taken into consideration in evaluation work.
3. Recognition of gifts—This grateful acknowledgment stems from the communal culture of Indigenous communities. It is based on the belief that each member of the community has a unique and positive role to play in its development.
4. Centrality of family/community—Interactions in Indigenous communities principally revolve around family and community relationships. From clans to societies, the family/community units are key to the health and wellbeing of the community.
5. Nation building—Those doing evaluations should remain aware of how their work contributes to nation building and reinforces sovereignty and the spirit of self-determination. This fifth criterion could also be called community building, especially as it applies to urban Indigenous communities.

To bolster this evaluation framework, the NB3 Foundation turned to the work of Red Star Innovation's Tribal Public Health Institute (TPHI) Feasibility project, a project examining the potential roles for TPHI in improving health among American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The strong AIHEC evaluation framework (detailed on page 6) was combined with TPHI's *Seven Directions[4]* (detailed below).

Collectively, the seven strategic directions can serve as the appropriate public health framework needed in developing programs, projects, and public policy initiatives that address the health and wellness of Native American communities. What follows are those seven strategic directions, each with its defining action steps.

1. Knowledge—Access and use data and information in meaningful ways.
2. Service—Develop internal capacity, "grow your own."
3. Governance—Strengthen public health authority as a function of sovereignty.
4. Sovereignty—Expand advocacy and influence on federal policy.
5. Culture and Identity—Reclaim, revitalize, and reaffirm Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices.
6. Integration—Make important connections and collaborations to integrate public health and health care systems.
7. Families and Communities.

Indigenous Health Model

In order to effectively evaluate programs designed to increase health in Native American communities, the NB3 Foundation also needed to incorporate Native American understandings of health and knowledge. It had to ensure that the metrics defining success are appropriate to the cultures and experiences of both community partners and members of their communities.

As the NB3Foundation attempts to establish a new process for evaluating Indigenous health systems and healthy behaviors for Indigenous youth and communities, it has adopted several models and instruments. Programs and organizations can use these models and instruments to gain deeper understanding of the impact of their work as viewed through an Indigenous lens. One such model is the Indigenous Health Model.

The Indigenous Health Model[5] is represented as a convergence of several components bound together in a "spider web." This image reinforces the Indigenous framework of connectedness through which the evaluation work can be best understood. The use of the spider web illustrates how the various components are parts of the whole and how changes in any area affect other components of the web. Each of the various components can be seen on page 10.

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[3] LaFrance, J., and Nichols, R. (authors), *Reframing Evaluation: Defining an Indigenous Evaluation Framework*, American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), Alexandria, VA, 2009.

[4] Beaudette, J. and Matsumoto, A. (editors), *Seven Directions: A Blueprint for Advancing the Health and Wellness of Our Native Communities*, Red Star Innovations, Tucson, AZ, 2015.

[5] Model developed by Dr. Lee Francis IV and Robert Sturm of Indigenous Methods, LLC.

Ecological Systems: Individual, Family, Community, Creation

The first component is the ecological systems model, which draws upon the work of Bronfenbrenner, though it uses Indigenous terminology and philosophical understandings in each of the ecological levels. The inclusion of "creation" adds an important cultural element missing from most Western models and allows for a broader understanding of the influences and impact of the work.

- The "individual" level speaks to the grounding of work in an individual perspective, a subjective perspective, and an awareness of the individual's biases, understandings, relationships, and assumptions. This space is where the individual asserts personal agency and choice.
- The "family" level refers to familial connections and perspectives. In an Indigenous framework, this may also include clan, kiva, society, moiety, and extended family connections. This level represents those who are closest to the individual and have a strong influence on the individual's actions and reflections.
- The "community" level is the community in which the individual and family reside and/or are most closely associated. The community dictates norms and values and can have a powerful influence on the individual through the framing of meaning and value conveyed in cultural and traditional understandings.
- The final level is the "creation" level. This level includes all that exists before and beyond the community, what binds everything together. Creation refers to all the spiritual and physical interfaces amongst the ecology, the environment, the community, the family, and the individual.

Each of these levels is impacted by changes and developments in any of the other levels. Appreciating these complex, intertwined relationships is key to understanding the multiple impacts from projects and programs.

Four Aspects of Health: Emotional, Mental, Physical, Spiritual

Among Indigenous peoples, the four aspects of experience carry significant meaning for healthy behaviors, community sustainability, and overall balance. Each aspect is interrelated and connected to all of the other aspects. Together, they function as an interconnected whole. If one area is out of balance or dysfunctional, the other aspects are affected as well. As such, any health-related project or program must take into account how it is affecting all four aspects. Staying aware of the interrelatedness of all the aspects is necessary even if the program/project does not directly incorporate one or more aspects.

Holders/Carriers of Meaning, Relationships, Language and Culture, Stories, Ceremony

In Indigenous communities, identity and meaning are defined and understood through relationships and are stored and reflected in language, culture, stories, and ceremony. In the modern Western model, the individual can determine his or her identity in isolation, choosing to "be whoever you want to be." In Indigenous cultures, a person is defined through relationships to family, community, and creation. These relationships define roles and responsibilities, reflect the individual's place in his or her world, and help to define an understanding of health and balance.

Traditional stories hold a community's knowledge and values and help individuals understand what is expected of them and of others. They help individuals to feel connected to something bigger than themselves, and to understand how their choices affect family, community, and creation. Traditional knowledge is also stored and communicated through language and other aspects of culture so that the learning and sharing of language and culture intrinsically strengthen the individual's understanding of self and relationships to others. This understanding facilitates actions that support both individual and communal health and wellness. Ceremony is a special type of activity that expresses a community's values and world view and increases the experience of interconnectedness that is built on shared values and understandings.
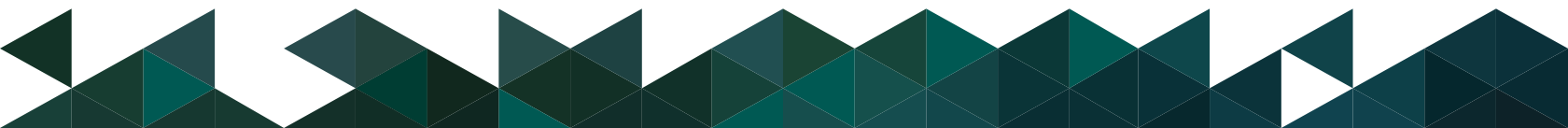
Indigenous Domains of Knowledge

Castellano[6] describes the three Indigenous Domains of Knowledge as Traditional Knowledge, Empirical Knowledge, and Revealed Knowledge. Traditional Knowledge is made up of those critical learnings and teachings that emerge from stories and cultural engagements as passed on through multiple generations of families, clans, and community members. Empirical Knowledge is composed of those learnings that can be explained through observation and experimentation. Revealed Knowledge comes from the learnings gained from prophesy or spiritual revelations. For a modern context, we can take Revealed Knowledge to mean deeply intuitive knowledge, which can be elusive and difficult to explain without connections to the other two domains.

For the purpose of this evaluation work, we can access these domains by asking three questions regarding the projects being enacted:

1. What do you know?
2. What do you see?
3. What do you sense or feel?

Asking these questions, the NB3 Foundation can derive a baseline understanding of the community, the context of the work, and the positions of the change agents (project directors, managers, and/or evaluators) engaged in each project. This baseline understanding allows for an Indigenous process to be established at the beginning of the project and creates a space for critical reflection on both the process and the outcomes, all framed within a local, Indigenous context.

Indigenous Model of Planning

The NB3 Foundation recognized that to create a sufficiently robust evaluation framework that resonates with Native American communities, it needed to combine rigorous Indigenous evaluation practices with established Native American public health guidance. The NB3 Foundation decided to take Native American ways of knowing and learning and demonstrate how they can be used rigorously. This decision seemed more appropriate than taking mainstream models and trying to train Native American partners and communities to adopt them and make them fit their work.

The Native American model strengthens community partners' belief in their traditional ways of working in community by recognizing the value in the way they already do things. This strengthening in turn supports healing and a more integrated way of doing the work that is more likely to create authentic, sustainable change.

The decision to use this model was only a starting point. By using an Indigenous lens, the NB3 Foundation acknowledges the importance of including the knowledge and experience of all involved in the process. This includes NB3 Foundation staff, community partners' staffs, and community members where the projects take place.
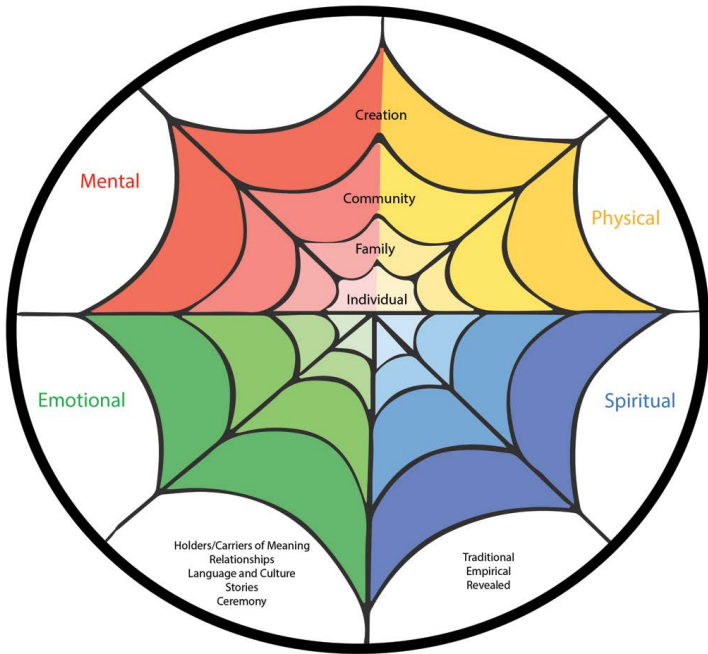
The NB3 Foundation also recognizes that the process of planning, developing, and assessing is ongoing and cyclical. Thus the evaluation plan must be a living, evolving structure that can develop and change as new information becomes available. Native Strong staff have been progressively implementing the components of this plan into their work with community partners. They have also been learning from their experience and that of the partners about what is most effective and continuing to fine tune the process based on this learning.

[6] Brant-Castellano, M., "Updating Aboriginal Traditions of Knowledge," in *Indigenous Knowledge in Global Contexts: Multiple Readings of Our World*, G. J. Sefa Dei, B. L. Hall, D. Goldin-Rosenberg (Eds.), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2000.

An Indigenous Model of Planning and Evaluation[7], as illustrated in the figure below, continues to guide this process. This model works as a cyclical process in which lessons learned in one cycle inform choices in the next.

Indigenous Health Model

Creation
Mental
Community
Physical
Family
Individual
Emotional
Spiritual

Holders/Carriers of Meaning
Relationships
Language and Culture
Stories
Ceremony

Traditional
Empirical
Revealed

Indigenous Model of Planning

PLANT: Implement program and project ideas
GATHER: Identify resources, tools, personnel, etc. for the work
CULTIVATE: Ongoing assessment of need and impact with data
SURVEY: Review the work that needs to be done.
HARVEST/RECYCLE: Celebrate, reflect, adapt, improve, prepare

[7] Model developed by Dr. Lee Francis IV and Robert Sturm of Indigenous Methods, LLC.

Highlighting Five Key Areas

The most significant achievements, strengths, and competencies among community partners are described below.

Cultural Alignment

Almost all of the community partners seem to recognize the value of cultural connection in the lives of Native American children. Youth who experience a strong connection to their communities, cultures, and history are more likely to have positive self-images and the self-efficacy required to make healthy life choices. Thus, all activities that increase youth's connections are working to effectively advance their health.

Whether the projects were focusing on promoting health through increased physical activity or improved diet, the majority undertaken by the first two cohorts included cultural information and practices, where appropriate. Some of the projects involving physical activity focused on traditional Native American activities, such as horseback riding, traditional dancing, and lacrosse. Those focused on diet often included education on traditional diet. Some also included a discussion of food sovereignty and the value of consuming locally produced foods. Many of the projects also included some use of Native American language and sharing of cultural values, history, and stories in their programs.

From those participating in the *Capacity Building Grants*, the majority of community partners engaged in:

- Assessments of their communities' capacities in traditional food systems. Traditional food systems are those types of food sources and cultivation processes that were available and celebrated before colonization.
- Establishment or expansion of food sovereignty for youth and families. Food sovereignty refers to the ability of a community to control and sustain its own food systems.

The community partners made great efforts in connecting their assessment work to the development of these concepts of traditional food and food sovereignty. The partners were intently focused on helping their communities develop more positive relationships to traditional healthy eating behaviors and increasing community access to traditional foods and other healthy foods. They understood that activities with cultural dimensions had increased meaning for the youth participants as well as for their families and other community members.

"At my high school, there is a fried food line, and I am concerned so much that I would like to see parents organized to eliminate fried food and to eliminate the sugar pop soda vending machines that are too easily accessed during school hours."

▶ White Eagle Health Center Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma

Community Building / Nation Building / Cultural Sustainability

It is takes more than a single program or group in a community to effect a systemic impact on its own. Hence, it was highly appropriate that *Native Strong's* community partners demonstrated their commitment to identifying individuals and groups in their communities who:

- Support the specific goals of the project funded by NB3 Foundation.
- Help to integrate the project into a broader framework of efforts to increase childhood health and wellbeing.

This broad approach is essential to bringing about the societal and systems changes needed to make long-term, sustainable improvements in healthy behaviors.

For the *Capacity Building Grants*, community partners developed community action plans as a required part of their assessment and capacity-building work. These plans are critical to capacity building because they provide direction and establish goals to inform future programs. Further, creating action plans enabled partners to:

- Participate in broader strategies to engage stakeholders on the issues of childhood obesity and public health.
- Explore community members' experience and understanding of the factors impacting childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes in their community.

Creating community action plans not only helped the partners to develop programming strategies that are truly based on community needs and experiences. They also helped to build the relationships that will be essential to community participation in new programs once they are implemented.

As part of the *Promising Programs Grants*, many of the projects consisted of activities that:

- Engaged youth in healthy behaviors.
- Supported positive community development.
- Focused attention on community health and wellbeing.

The activities of several partners included the creation and maintenance of community gardens. Such gardens are often a necessity in communities that have limited access to healthy foods. Fresh from the earth, these gardens' varied produce is especially effective in demonstrating how healthy and satisfying traditional foods can be. Hence, these gardens are important tools in helping Native American youth to reduce consumption of fast food and junk food.

Additionally, the cultivation of these gardens reintroduces and reinforces the traditional teaching methods that help sustain communities. Further, as several project-related stories underscore, the engagement of youth in these gardens is:

- Effectively building human capital as part of community and cultural sustainability.
- Broadly impacting other community efforts.
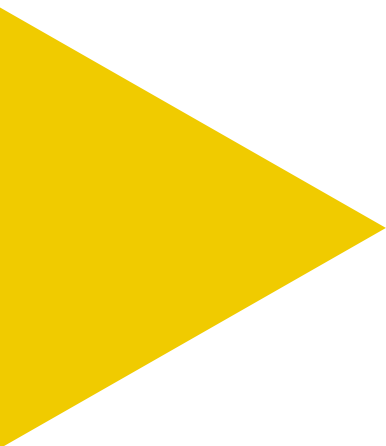
Several of the partners were able to leverage the grants received from the NB3 Foundation, gaining additional resources from other organizations and institutions, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This additional support enabled continuation or implementation of their programs. It is worth noting the two different ways that these efforts help reinforce or initiate cultural engagement:

- For Native American communities with strong cultural elements already in place, these projects and activities serve as support mechanisms for the existing cultural engagement.
- For communities with less developed cultural connections (those in urban areas, for example), these efforts are a critical way of developing cultural understandings among youth and community members.

Finally, this work of the community partners highlights significant approaches that can help the NB3 Foundation and others achieve sustainability in their cultural programs.

The *Native Strong* community partners have engaged in thinking about how to assess community health in ways that are aligned with community values and relationships. This focus helps ensure that their work is viable, enduring, and authentic. Too often, Native American communities receive funding for efforts that are not aligned with community values and therefore do not produce the intended impact. The sometimes meager results occur because community values and relationships are not cultivated, enhanced, or maintained as part of the work. To avoid such missteps, *Native Strong* partners carefully drew upon the context and values of their respective communities. They did so as they developed action plans well aligned with:

- The need for community change (in regard to healthy food systems).
- A sustainable strategy for the community to establish ownership of the process and outcomes.

"You made an impact on our students by teaching them how to prevent diabetes. I liked how [Eagle Educators] had a realistic approach to nutrition. For example, so many programs tell children never to eat chips, candy, etc. Instead they talked about 'sometimes foods' and 'everyday foods.' I think that is something children will consider more than cutting it out completely."

▶ Teacher at the Chickasaw Nation

Resiliency

In this context, we observed that the majority of the community partners were able to persevere in overcoming obstacles. Community partners shared stories that made clear how even when aspects of the work were more difficult than they had expected or circumstances changed in problematic ways, they adapted their plans. They were not deterred from providing the best possible programs and projects, given their resources.

This demonstration of resiliency and adaptability was critical. It built confidence in community partners' ability to successfully complete upcoming and ongoing projects even though the outcome may be different than originally conceived. This resiliency also aligns with the Indigenous Model of Planning and Evaluation. The model acknowledges what's true about managing all projects: we must periodically reassess the environment and our assumptions and use this information to refine or redirect our work.

Collaborations / Relationships

Of course, relationships are central to human identity and experience and also to the success of community-based projects. Hence, the development of relationships, both internal and external, is a key aspect of capacity building and the implementation of strong programs and projects. In order for public health projects to have a meaningful impact on the communities in which they function, they must gain trust and participation from individual community members and community leaders. Acquiring such "buy-in" may be especially difficult in communities that have experienced numerous cases of outsiders appearing on the scene and offering help, only to demonstrate later that their ultimate goal was not providing service to the community.

One of the major strengths of the NB3 Foundation's work with community partners is the assumption that communities know who they are and what they need. The NB3 Foundation recognizes that each Native American community is unique and that the best strategies for addressing childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes will vary from place to place. It also understands that groups and organizations based in the communities are best positioned to engage community members in the development and implementation of strategies and projects that authentically embody community values and needs.

The vast majority of community partners in the first two cohorts were successful in leveraging existing relationships to garner community support and participation in ways that outside organizations probably could not have matched. This leveraging helped them to design programs that were based on the needs and values of the community and are thus likely to be successful and sustainable.
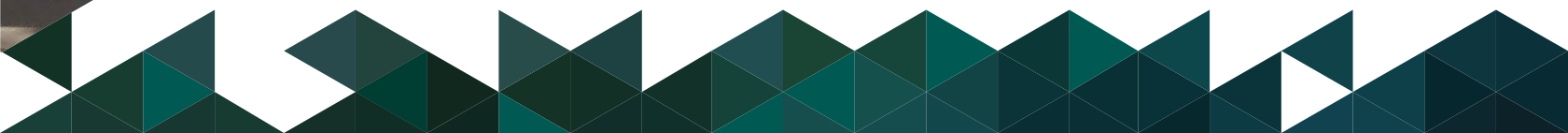
The Annual NB3 Foundation Partner Gathering/ Conference was effective in supporting the development of strong relationships and collaborations among the community partners. This type of gathering allows for:

- Sharing of best practices.
- Cultivation of creative problem solving.
- Development of a support network.

By playing a central role in building a vigorous network, the NB3 Foundation has helped foster relationships among partner organizations that can positively affect future public health initiatives. In addition, the process and conversations have helped inform the NB3 Foundation on best practices and innovative ways to work within Native American communities.

"We strive to develop youth as health leaders/ change agents in their family units and work to instill a vision of hope that type 2 diabetes can be prevented by living strong and healthy lifestyles. We want to make physical activity and healthful food choices fun while also honoring Chickasaw traditions."

▶ The Chickasaw Nation

Studying Three Challenges

Though the community partners showed impressive resolve, resiliency, and competence in their efforts, they also revealed areas for growth.

Consistency / Expertise in Evaluation Responses and Data Collection

Effective project assessment and evaluation are crucial in the development of projects that achieve broad impact on public health and environmental changes. To be effective, evaluation efforts hinge on:

- Meaningful data collection.
- Ongoing community interactions.
- Consistency in reporting and evaluation approaches.

Only when evaluation work succeeds can grantmaking organizations get a clear picture of comparative impacts and effective practices.

Evaluation responses from the partner organizations were varied due in part to the diverse expertise and ability levels of the staff within the organizations. This variability created some inconsistencies in data collection and internal analysis of project results.

Community / Organizational Capacity

Many community partners of the Native Strong programs acknowledged challenges involving human resources. In some cases, individual staff members were not provided the education they needed to do their work. In others, a staff that was already working at full capacity was asked to take on additional programming without an increase in staff size. Frequent staff turnover was also a problem, particularly when an individual who was involved in the original conception of a project left before the project was fully implemented.

These difficulties appear not only in the area of direct service but also in evaluation, fundraising, outreach, promotions, and strategic planning. Some of the community partners appropriately raised concerns about their internal capacities to implement the projects as initially outlined.

"Inter Tribal Sports understands traditional foods can help alleviate and combat diabetes and obesity epidemics plaguing Native American communities. We are relating this information to our communities."

▶ Inter Tribal Sports

**Community Outreach and Stakeholder Support
(Volunteers, Parents, Participants, and Tribal Leadership)**

A few of the community partners reported difficulties with outreach and attendance. Although the projects were thoughtfully developed, low attendance by volunteers, parents, and/or youth hampered some efforts to fully implement the projects as planned. This same challenge often appears when establishing new projects in Native American communities or expanding existing programs. Even when the providers/partners are established in their communities, projects frequently take longer than anticipated to gain traction and become fully enacted.

There are many factors that may lead to this reality. Transportation can be an issue, especially in decentralized, rural communities. People may want to attend an event or program but may not have a way to get there. Communication can also be a problem, particularly in communities with limited media resources. Program leaders need to be creative in developing effective ways of disseminating information about their work. In communities where there is a history of programs opening and quickly closing, it may take a while for individuals to trust a new program, even if it is connected to people or other programs they know. Finally, because the projects supported by Native Strong deal with a sensitive topic, it may take time for the supported projects to gain the trust needed for strong community participation.

Six Crucial Recommendations

Indigenous Methods, LLC conducted careful analysis of what Native Strong community partners did well and where they stand to improve. Their analysis provides the groundwork for these six recommendations to guide future efforts to improve the health and wellbeing of Native American children.

Continue to Focus on Sustainability and Community Building

Supporting the development of long-term strategies for which the community can take ownership should be central to future grantmaking and technical assistance. Exploring ways to garner continued external financial resources for a project or program can be valuable. However, those responsible for action planning will greatly benefit from broadening the scope of their thinking by:

- Searching for new opportunities to develop healthy food systems within their communities.
- Identifying the challenges inherent in promoting holistic wellness for the community and combating them in ways that are culturally engaging and revitalizing.
- Exploring opportunities to develop increased community support for wellness based more on developing relationships and using assets already available within the community.

Rather than just planning for indefinite programming to respond to specific health needs, this work can take a more global and holistic perspective that focuses on using assets already in the community to shift attitudes toward health and healthy behaviors. By restoring self-efficacy and self-worth to individuals and the community as a whole, these efforts can increase motivation for self-care and community decisions that support healthy activities and lifestyle.

In addition, *Native Strong* should consider lessons learned and evaluate whether the current structure of its grant cycles is efficient and effective. For example, it takes a significant amount of time and effort to mobilize and coordinate community efforts to produce a meaningful assets map and needs assessment. Therefore, it may be appropriate to provide more time to capacity building grant partners. A longer grant period would allow more training focused on data gathering, analysis, and reporting. A longer grant period would also leave sufficient time to engage the community in deep and meaningful ways.

Conversely, a streamlined process that allows successful community planners to move easily into a program grant relationship would help ensure the implementation of the plan they have developed. Frustration can result when a group engages in successful planning work and is then unable to find funding to move forward with the action plan they have developed. Knowing that continued support is available beyond the planning phase could strengthen partners' resolve to be rigorous in their assessment work and in compliance with Foundation requests around documentation and evaluation.

This streamlined process would also better support community engagement and capacity building by facilitating the movement from planning to implementation. This facilitation is particularly important in communities that have often been asked to provide information and input for projects that never took shape in a way that benefited them.

Develop Digital Media Capacity and Understandings

Making clear the results of participation also matters. The work that partners in capacity building projects undertake requires significant participation from stakeholders and community members outside their organizations. These individuals are more likely to see the value in their participation if it leads directly to changes they can see. More immediate visibility will encourage community partners to use the communal energy and relationships developed during the planning work as they move forward. It will also demonstrate to those whose help they solicited that they are really making a difference.

The NB3 Foundation should stay respectfully aware that some Native cultures actively discourage the use of video or cameras to capture the story. However, outside of those cultures, sharing stories with photos and videos has become a powerful, timely approach. Due to the low cost of digital media, using cameras and computers to capture project results has never been easier. However, the consistency of the quality of the videos across programs can be problematic.

Efforts should be made to provide partners with a toolbox of digital media options, such as the following:

- Free website builders (Weebly, Wix)
- Vine
- Photo Voice
- Focus Group Time lapse
- Audio Story

Using these tools can help create the broad environmental and political shifts necessary to support sustainable, healthy Native American communities.

"We believe that our initiatives are also reconnecting our children to the earth and really teaching them about what it can do for us today (as it did for our ancestors)."

▶ Cheyenne River Youth Project

The NB3 Foundation should engage partners in training on these various digital media options during the course of the grants. This training can build the organizational capacity of the partners and increase youth engagement for ongoing and future projects.

Continue to Focus on Sustainability and Community Building

There are multiple methods to develop viable action plans, and all can be beneficial depending on the community context. It is vitally important to challenge standard perceptions of what is acceptable or "good enough" in action plans. It is also crucial to provide partners with a range of options from which they can select both the process and the outcomes that best fit them and their community.

The yardstick to measure the quality of action plans should always be how well the plans yield benefits for the community. Action plans are only as good as their implementation. A loose outline that is communicated orally without specifics can be as useful as a plan with multiple objectives that spells out each detail. The former is not inherently better or worse than the latter.

Therefore, technical assistance should be used to establish a framework based on partner input that allows flexibility and accountability within the planning process. For example, while some communities may be ready to develop action plans, others may be at an earlier stage where the right move is just taking a snapshot of the community issues. This snapshot can work as an initial "community map of assets and needs" to inform thinking about how to move forward.

No matter the process a partner engages in or the form and content of the plan produced, it is essential that the frameworks of the plan align with each community's context, values, and culture. This alignment requires developing the plan in ways that involve significant input from a range of voices in the community, particularly those groups in the community who are most affected by the work or will be expected to participate in the work. NB3 Foundation should work with partners to assess the best way to gather this input from affected groups in each community.

Finally, a longitudinal analysis will be needed, one that ascertains which partners implemented their action/strategic plans and to what extent their plan goals were met. Such an analysis will advance understanding of both long-term capacity development and the impact of this type of grant.

Continue to Focus on Sustainability and Community Building

The NB3 Foundation should conduct and enhance training opportunities for community partners on qualitative/quantitative analysis. It should also implement a planning and evaluation approach that is based more on Native American models of knowing and learning. In addition, the NB3 Foundation should advocate for this model of evaluation with the Foundation's funders.

The community partners who are most successful at engaging and working with their communities may never be fully conversant with the theory and vocabulary of program evaluation. Additionally, they may not be comfortable or adept at reporting on their work in written form. Recognizing these facts, the NB3 Foundation should adapt its application and evaluation process to help partners succeed no matter where their capabilities lie. Changes might include:

- The use of less specialized vocabulary in documents that ask community partners to describe their work.
- Additional training for partners in how to integrate evaluation into their programs from the outset in order to make the process less burdensome.
- Using procedures to formally capture information gathered from partners via conversations and interviews, so that those who are better at talking than writing can still report fully on their work.

In addition, it is worthwhile to educate partners that evaluations are often highly practical and ordinary.

- *Practical*. Analyzing programs is too often driven by the requirements or needs of a funder (e.g., federal or private). It would be beneficial to help community partners learn to see evaluations as a practical, ongoing process that supports the success of their programs.
- *Ordinary*. Especially partners new to evaluation appreciate hearing that many of them are already evaluating their programs. For example, they are doing so when on a daily basis, they look to see who is attending, how they are responding, etc.

Presenting the idea of evaluation in these ways can make it seem less alien and arbitrary. It can also help partners be more consistent and thorough in both their data collection and evaluation. The Indigenous Model of Planning and Assessing, Indigenous Health Model, and Indigenous Domains of Knowledge introduced previously are all designed to support this process. They do so by introducing a model of planning and evaluation that respects and is based on the types of planning and assessment most community partners are already using.

Without training or direction, some community partners may have a difficult time understanding the nuances of their own observations. They may not be using the data in ways that can strengthen current and future projects. Additionally, though partners may already be utilizing strong metrics and analysis methods, they may need coaching in how to translate those findings and observations so that funders can easily understand and use them. For example, utilizing Indigenous-based instruments and analysis methods (such as network and community mapping or Indigi-Q/Q-Sort methodology) can assist in providing the vocabulary and framework needed to articulate findings for varied audiences.

Providing training and direction would also serve to focus on developing strong reflective practices, especially in transferring knowledge regarding lessons learned. Partners often need help in passing along the importance of what they have learned and how what they learned can be used in future projects or activities. Community partners gaining skills in these areas will create greater consistency in program evaluation responses and simultaneously will build organizational capacity as they move forward in their health-related efforts.

In addition to the training provided to community partners, it will also be necessary to educate funders and public health professionals on the model the NB3 Foundation is using as well as the tools community partners and the Foundation are using to measure success. As a nonprofit public charity, NB3 Foundation is both a grantseeker and a grantmaker. The funds it grants to community partners come through grants from other foundations, not from income on assets held by NB3 Foundation itself. Thus, the Foundation must report to its funders in ways they understand and accept while also staying true to their own values.

This situation puts NB3 Foundation in the unique position of needing to:

- Demonstrate the rigor and value of Indigenous methods of evaluation.
- Advocate for the use of these methods, particularly in Native American communities.
- Establish the need for the Native American model of knowing and learning.
- Showing how this model better supports effective work in Native American communities through alignment with the communities' values and worldviews.

Finally, the NB3 Foundation will need to prove that this model is as rigorous and "scientific" as the models more current in the world of mainstream philanthropy.

"The last customer to pull up is a white truck with the Community Health Representative (CHR) emblem on the door. Out hops the CHR who walks slowly up to the Final Mile table, sizing up the scenarios before she asks any questions. She observes the surveys, watches the community members moving about, walks over at the Mobile Farmers Market truck, nods approvingly. For Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment (COPE), who has worked with the Navajo CHR Program for five years, the opinion of the CHR is a good barometer for the community. We are delighted when finally, she asks, 'What do you think about doing something like this at the next Chapter Meeting at Pueblo Pintado?'"

▶ Community Outreach and Patient Empowerment (COPE)

Develop Partner Network for Accountability

Many partners found the Annual Partner Gathering/ Conference to be enriching and useful. Building on the benefits of that gathering, future and ongoing efforts should focus on developing strong Foundation-facilitated networks among community partners. The goal should be to build the best possible network, one that enables partners to share skills and best practices as well as hold one another accountable for their work. In this way, the work continues to build and cultivate relationships beyond the grant cycle, ensuring sustainability and broad connections.

Strengthen Community-led Engagements with a Focus on Tribal Leadership

In connecting the project and the community, community partner organizations should strengthen their outreach, raise awareness around health issues, and get stakeholders more involved. Three primary ways to do so are to:

- Cultivate community stakeholders as lead partners for projects. This cultivation results in better sustainability and outreach.
- Ensure partners engage community members not only in project implementation but also in the development of program design and discussions of lessons learned. This expanded focus creates a stronger sense of community ownership and ensures a sustainable project.
- Engaging community members can help program staff avoid misanalyzing data by allowing community participants to respond to staff perceptions and analysis of what is taking place. This engagement also embodies the Indigenous value of reciprocity by allowing those who will benefit or participate in a program to be involved in all stages of the program's development and evaluation.
- Actively engage tribal and community leaders and governmental entities in all projects, starting as early as possible. Tribal governance can help or hinder community-led engagements. Bringing these stakeholders inside and on board can establish critical support for projects and public policy initiatives.

Conclusion

Beginning in August 2013, the first cycle of *Native Strong* grants promised a new direction for grantmaking in Native American communities. Recognizing a need for more authentic interactions and information gathering, the NB3 Foundation set a strong course to match the grant work to a more deliberate understanding of the outcomes, with a focus on Indigenous concepts and self-determination.

Native Strong's first two cohorts provided significant results in a number of areas. The accomplishments of community partners made valuable contributions to their communities, and the experience of working with these partners provided a rich learning experience for the NB3 Foundation. The use of Indigenous evaluation strategies was a strong catalyst for accessing this critical information. As these evaluation methods continue to be utilized in the future, the varied critical lessons learned from Native Strong will raise the efficacy of future work to reduce childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Through the NB3 Foundation's work with the first two cohorts and the community partners' work to assess their projects, the Foundation has come to four conclusions about the evaluation process.

1. *Native Strong's* ongoing work has benefited from the NB3 Foundation having:
   - Learned many lessons from the 39 community partners in the first two cohorts.
   - Refined strategies to be more effective and better aligned with the overall goals and values of the *Native Strong* program.
2. Many communities and partners are engaging in multiple levels of evaluation without realizing the potential information they are collecting.
3. Small additional efforts to orient the work and expand documentation will reveal the remarkable outcomes already taking place.
4. Approaching this process from an Indigenous perspective gives the community partners unique opportunities. They can learn and listen in ways that not only align with the values and cultures of the communities where they work. They can also shape the work to be more equitable, more empathetic, and, ultimately, more human.

As the NB3 Foundation moves forward, it will continue to update and fine tune the model of its work based on new lessons learned and conversations with partners and their communities. These conversations set the stage for using information in ways that fully realize the potential of community partners.

The NB3 Foundation has increased its commitment to supporting Indigenous ways of learning, reporting, sharing, and helping. This support will allow the NB3 Foundation to demonstrate that these ways can function as a broadly respected, rigorous, community-based strategy of qualitative analysis. With current and future cohorts, learning about these ways is and will resulting in better support for the goals of each community and *better documentation* of the partners' successes and the challenges.

About the Notah Begay III Foundation:

Notah Begay III (NB3) Foundation is a 501(c)(3) an award winning, national Native American nonprofit organization dedicated to reversing Native American childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes. NB3 Foundation is setting a national standard for investing in evidence-based, community-driven and culturally relevant programs to ensure the healthy futures of Native American children and their communities.

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