



# Supporting the Self-Determination of Native Nations

TO ACTIVELY REBUILD THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF NATIONHOOD

**W**hen the Bush Foundation established the goal to support the self-determination of Native nations, it was a new direction for us. We had a long tradition of supporting programs for the tribes. But as we embarked on this journey and began talking to people from Indian Country, we discovered that continuing to fund programs of our choosing would not lead to lasting or far-reaching change. Instead, the tribal leaders told us that we needed to honor the sovereignty of the Native nations and support self-determination – the right of Native nations to shape their own futures according to their own designs.

“Once we decided to support self-determination, we knew our efforts needed to focus on working in partnership with the tribal leaders,” said Jaime Pinkham, vice president and leader of the Native Nations team for the Bush Foundation. “We don’t get to pick the leaders. We don’t get to choose the issues, the timeline or the solutions. We simply get to commit to the goal and put ourselves out there in support of the tribal leaders as we decide together how to advance.”

## BUILDING COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Throughout 2009, the Bush Foundation’s Native Nations team met with the leaders from each of the 23 tribes that share the same geography as Minnesota and the Dakotas. “We spent much of the year building relationships with the tribes in a brand new way,” said Pinkham. “We were interested

in learning from the tribal leaders and discovering where our goals as a foundation intersect with the tribes’ unique issues, cultural distinctions and priorities.” Just as the priorities of the tribes differed, so did their reactions. “From most there was great support; from some there were probing questions; from others not complete agreement,” continued Pinkham. “All of these discussions enriched and shaped our work.”

After meeting with the tribal leaders, we extended an invitation to the leaders of the 23 Native nations to a [Tribal Leaders Summit](#) in October. Representatives from the [Native Nations Institute](#) (NNI) and the [Harvard Project](#) on American Indian Economic Development co-facilitated a two-day session where participants shared ideas and best practices about governmental frameworks, strategic planning, relationships with other governments, and how to address disputes and other internal matters.



#### TRIBAL LEADERS FOCUS ON NATION-BUILDING

John Spotted Tail, Rosebud Sioux, listened intently at the Tribal Leaders Summit in October 2009, as presenters shared ideas on leading rebuilding efforts.

“The timing of the Summit was perfect,” said Vice Chairman Boyd Gourneau, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. “This meeting has begun to facilitate a process to address the needs on every reservation.” Josh Weston, president of the Flandreau Santee Sioux, agreed: “Having the Bush Foundation, NNI and the Harvard Project talking about the positions of tribes and their nation-building efforts provided a taste of the leadership and information sharing that we need.” At the request of the tribal leaders, we plan to sponsor a second annual Tribal Leaders Summit in the fall of 2010.

#### NATIVE NATIONS REBUILDERS PROGRAM

We also discovered that supporting the self-determination of Native nations is about more than working with the current leaders in authority. “Many tribal leaders told us that developing current and emerging Native leaders will be crucial to their nation’s long-term success,” said June Noronha, a member of the Foundation’s Native Nations team. “We developed the **Rebuilders** training in response to this need.”

“We have to educate our young people on tribal government, state government and federal government so they can eventually take over,” said Chairman Richard Marcellais, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. “It’s like a new construction; you have to start from the foundation. Educating our youth and our tribal members is a start in that direction.”

The **first cohort of 28 Rebuilders** was announced in early 2010. These leaders will participate in regular

seminars to strengthen their leadership skills and nation-building knowledge so they can be instrumental in moving their nations forward, in cooperation with elected leadership.

The Rebuilders met for the first time in February 2010. “The experience was very enriching, educational and stimulating for all involved,” said Tina Merdanian, a member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. The Foundation plans to form nine cohorts of Rebuilders between 2010 and 2018.

#### CONSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

During the past year, a number of tribes also requested support as they evaluate their governance structures and constitutions. According to the tribal leaders, they face a constant challenge in determining how their constitutions honor the traditional values of their tribes, while meeting current governmental needs. In response, we started work with four tribes using a new tool called **Governance Analysis for Native Nations** (GANN), which provides a framework for analyzing governance structures and identifying opportunities for individual nations. We plan to continue this work in 2010, expanding the GANN process to additional tribes and holding a conference on tribal constitutions.

The tribal leaders themselves recognize that Native nations don’t live in isolation, but have neighboring governments with similar needs and concerns. To this end, we are focusing on intergovernmental issues in partnership with the tribal leaders and local, state and national leaders where the needs intersect.

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#### REBUILDERS PROGRAM LAUNCHES

J.R. LaPlante, Cheyenne River Sioux, and Patricia Petite, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, were two participants in the first cohort of Rebuilders, which met for a day-long workshop in February 2010.

#### ON THE COVER

A drum circle starts the day at Todd County High School on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation.

Photographer: Carl Valiquet

## PARTNER PERSPECTIVES: NATION-BUILDING

Nation-building is building on the strengths that we have; building on our values to create the infrastructure, governance and self-determination for our tribe that will help us achieve our dreams. I believe that real change comes from the ground up. It comes from the people. In the future, I see a good job and decent home for every tribal member and a good education for every child. I'm a great believer in constitutional reform and in building our nations. With good housing, employment, health care and education, we will achieve a better future.

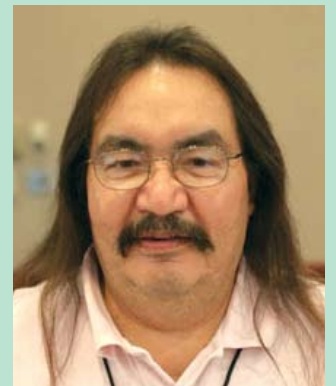
*Chairwoman Erma Vizenor, White Earth Band of Ojibwe*



To me, nation-building is pulling ideas together from the whole community to improve upon what our nation is doing. I see it as progress, moving forward, taking ideas from all of the community members to find new directions to pursue.

**We need to create our own opportunities as we create jobs and create stability for our community – to create a better place for the next generation.**

*Chairman Robert Cournoyer, Yankton Sioux Tribe*



## WHAT IS NATIVE NATION-BUILDING AND WHY DOES IT WORK?

*By Stephen Cornell, Ph.D., Director, Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona, Tucson*

Native nation-building refers to the effort by Indigenous peoples to create foundational systems of capable, self-determined governance.

The Indigenous peoples of North America face daunting challenges. For most of the last two centuries, they have been administered peoples – denied the opportunity to make their own decisions about their futures or to manage their resources and affairs in their own ways. The legacies of that experience are apparent on most reservations, where poor health, inadequate housing, scarce jobs and deep poverty have long been the norm.

Society at large has not entirely ignored these problems. Particularly since the 1930s, successive federal policies and philanthropic initiatives have tried to address the dismal social

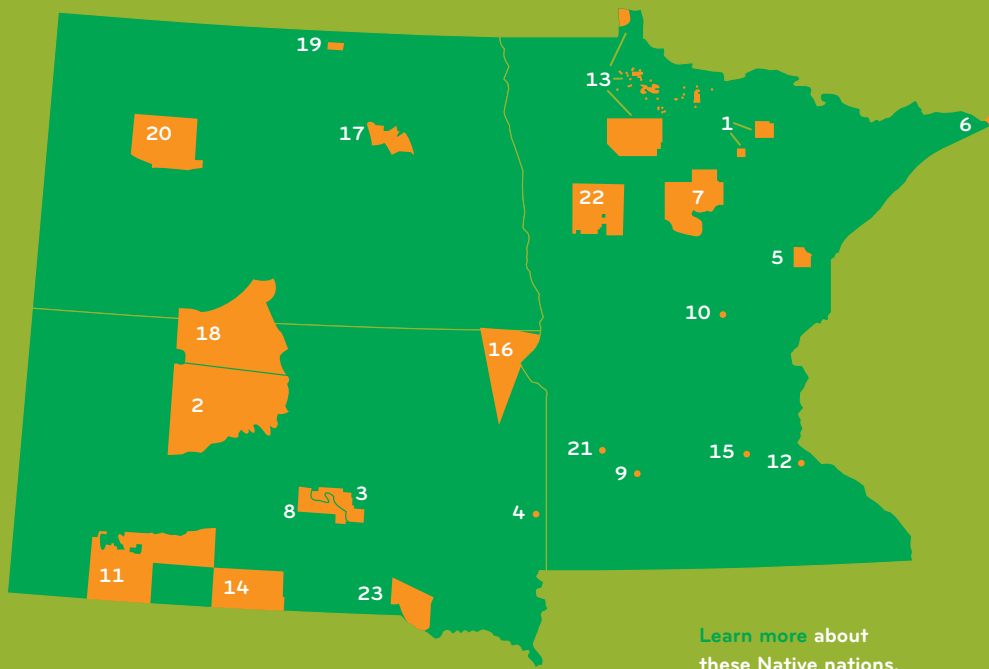
and economic conditions on reservations. Priorities have changed from time to time – educate the Indians, move them into cities, shut down the reservations, turn them into tourist attractions and so forth. But for decades these initiatives had one consistent feature: They were outsiders' solutions, well-intentioned efforts to apply someone else's designs for change – usually in a one-size-fits-all fashion – across the enormous cultural, historical and situational diversity of Indian Country.

In the last several decades, that approach has begun to change. Beginning with the activist politics of the 1960s, when tribes demanded control over their affairs, and with the federal self-determination policy of the 1970s, decision-making power has begun to flow back into Indian hands. But Native nations have quickly discovered that

decision-making power alone is not enough to address the challenges they face. They have to be able to put power to use in fair, consistent and productive ways. They have to be able to govern well.

This has led to a nation-building revolution as these nations rethink their governing systems. As they establish the rule of tribal law and build effective dispute-resolution mechanisms, they create environments that encourage their own citizens to invest time, ideas and money in the Indigenous future. Furthermore, their investments in education, health care and economic development begin to pay off.

Nation-building works because it puts governing power in Indigenous hands and allows Native nations to develop governance solutions of their own design.



## THE 23 NATIVE NATIONS

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Bois Forte Band of Chippewa                | 13 Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians                            |
| 2 Cheyenne River Sioux                       | 14 Rosebud Sioux  |
| 3 Crow Creek Sioux                           | 15 Shakopee-Mdewakanton Sioux Community                         |
| 4 Flandreau Santee Sioux                     | 16 Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate                                      |
| 5 Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa | 17 Spirit Lake Nation   |
| 6 Grand Portage Band of Chippewa             | 18 Standing Rock Sioux Tribe                                    |
| 7 Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe                  | 19 Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa                             |
| 8 Lower Brule Sioux                          | 20 Three Affiliated Tribes – Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation |
| 9 Lower Sioux Community                      | 21 Upper Sioux Community  |
| 10 Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe                 | 22 White Earth Band of Ojibwe                                   |
| 11 Oglala Sioux                              | 23 Yankton Sioux  |
| 12 Prairie Island Indian Community           |   |

## WHY TRIBES HAVE SOVEREIGNTY – IT'S INHERENT

By Professor Robert J. Miller, Lewis & Clark Law School, Portland, Oregon

Indigenous peoples populated North America for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans, governing themselves as sovereign nations.

The European leaders who colonized North America recognized the authority of tribal governments, negotiating commercial and treaty processes through official diplomatic efforts. From its inception, the United States continued this political and diplomatic tradition. Since 1778, when the United States signed its first treaty with an Indian tribe, American governments have continued to deal with tribes via treaties and a government-to-government political process. Our country has signed at least 400 treaties with tribal governments, the vast majority of which are still binding today.

To this day, tribal governments continue to engage in a government-to-government relationship with the U.S. federal government, maintaining their status as sovereign entities with primary jurisdiction over their citizens and their territories.

Indian tribes have also played a major role in the development, law and history of North America. This influence occurred both through the tribes' opposition to American expansion, and the treaties and land sales they made to the U.S. government, as well as through the very positive aspects they have brought to American history and modern-day life.

Learn more about the sovereignty of Native nations and the history of U.S. federal Indian policy.



### FROM ONE LEADER TO ANOTHER

Marcus Levings, chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes – Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, addressed President Obama during the [White House Tribal Nations Conference](#), held at the Interior Department in Washington, D.C. in November 2009. *Photographer: Pablo Martinez Monsivais/AP*

## BUSH FOUNDATION

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The Bush Foundation was established in 1953 by 3M executive Archibald Bush and his wife Edyth. The Foundation strives to be a catalyst to shape vibrant communities in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, and in the 23 Native nations that share the same geography, by investing in courageous and effective leadership that significantly strengthens and improves the well-being of people in these states and Native nations.

## SUPPORTING THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF NATIVE NATIONS

### GOAL FOR THE DECADE

All 23 Native nations are exercising self-determination to actively rebuild the infrastructure of nationhood.