Bringing the Mission Home: IFIP Regional Meetings

IFIP hosted two successful Regional Meetings this year in Vancouver, British Colombia and in Boston. The events were the result of new collaborations with local affinity groups, The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, an open network that promotes giving to these communities, and New England International Donors, which introduced an entirely new grantmaker group to Indigenous philanthropy.

Regional Meetings are the product of a strategy to provide peer-to-peer education through targeted events in key philanthropic centres. These smaller convenings allow deep engagement on the most pressing issues for Indigenous communities.

Initially, IFIP hosted Regional Meetings in Copenhagen, New York, and San Francisco. Post-meeting surveys consistently show that current and potential donors leave inspired to explore new collaborations, while Indigenous participants often gain new contacts and funding.

In May the Northwest Regional Meeting focused on pathways to Indigenous philanthropy, and global collaborations for Indigenous rights. Held at the Musqueam...

By Marina Aman Sham, Jessica Dolan, Susannah McCandless, and Melissa Nelson

In October 2013, thirty North American Indigenous environmental professionals and practitioners gathered in Capay Valley, California for the inaugural North American Community Environmental Leadership Exchange (NACELE), a platform for Indigenous environmental practitioners, scholars and activists to discuss issues particular to Indigenous nations and to strengthen networks. The theme of the meeting was, “From Conflict to Collaboration in Indigenous Territories: Tribal Strategies for Resistance and Restoration.”

At the workshop, Cultural Conservancy President, Melissa Nelson (Anishinaabe [Turtle Mountain Chippewa]), reminded us that “water is not a resource, but a relative.” She continued, sharing from the Tlatokan Atlahuak Declaration of the 4th World Water Forum, “For all Indigenous peoples of the world, water is the source of material, physical and spiritual life.” Giving testimony to that relationship, Kelly Dennis showcased the undamaged Long Island shoreline of Shinnecock Nation in the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy—eelgrass the Tribe had replanted buffered it against the storm surge. From those untroubled
Workshop elders Frank and Maureen Bilagody (Navaho, Tuba City Chapter) connected us to a living stream of committed leaders.

The group followed Karuk Cultural Biologist Ron Reed’s upstream journey to un-dam the Klamath River for the Klamath biocultural tradition of salmon harvest and stewardship. We bumped along in a National Park Service vehicle with Tuolumne Cultural Affairs Officer Reba Fuller and her elder, traveling in hard-won collaboration with Park officials into the still-smoldering remains of the Rim Fire, to assess the status of cultural sites on Tuolumne traditional territory. We savored the story of Chomorro chefs in Guam, partnering with farmers and cultural advocates to bring their celebration of native foodways, “Eat Your Heritage”, to the public’s table.

As co-organizers, the Global Diversity Foundation (GDF) and The Cultural Conservancy (TCC) were deeply motivated by the success of the first exchange. Participants affirmed that sharing collective knowledge and cross-mentoring allowed them to build connections and allies in their work, leaving them feeling strongly supported and energized. NACELE 2013 was made possible with major support from a Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation Network Innovation Grant, as well as The Cultural Conservancy, Bioneers, the Salvia Foundation, and the Global Environments Summer Academy Alumni Innovation Fund. It was also partially funded by The Christensen Fund, a founding member of IFIP.

With the success of the 2013 exchange, we eagerly await NACELE 2015 and the opportunities and experiences it will offer. Drawing inspiration from its location at the Montréal Botanical Garden and our previous conversation in 2013, we will gather under the theme, “Nourishing Relations: People, Plants and Place.” Three dozen representatives of North American Native Nations are invited to share insights and challenges from their respective work on wellbeing, connecting health, sovereignty, and biocultural diversity. We will focus on the environmental work and collaborations of Haudenosaunee, Cree, Innu and other regional nations in their biocultural homelands.

NACELE 2015 will build on lessons learned in 2013 (NACELE 2013 Video: http://youtu.be/r3-lcy64W5k), which were generated by sharing strategies for collaboration to restore, maintain, and reacquire sovereignty over territory and traditional agricultural techniques to be utilized. This year, some participants will be invited to attend with an elder. The goal is to support inter-generational knowledge exchange, especially within the momentous feat that contemporary Indigenous leaders face, bridging the knowledge of Native and Western sciences and modes of governance.

As co-conveners, this bridging work is a key focus for GDF. Our future depends upon our understanding, respecting and protecting our planet’s great diversity. Through processes of inquiry and mutual learning, we aim to facilitate the strengthening of Indigenous communities by protecting and restoring land, water, traditional foodways, and sovereignty. NACELE is part of GDF’s broader Global Environments Network (GEN), which brings together inspiring environmental changemakers who are innovating solutions to intractable environmental and social problems at local, national, and international scales (http://www.globalenvironments.org).

Using 2013 as a model to create an equally successful meeting, a dynamic and knowledgeable team of Indigenous scholars, activists and allies are currently organizing NACELE 2015, led by Global Diversity Foundation (www.global-diversity.org), The Cultural Conservancy (www.native-land.org), Jessica Dolan of McGill University, and Alain Cuerrier of the Montréal Botanical Gardens and Université de Montréal.
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The Sharing Circle is a newsletter for the members of the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples. IFIP is an association of grantmakers who support, or are interested in supporting, projects involving Indigenous people worldwide. IFIP and its members strive to:

• Increase knowledge and understanding of the unique issues related to funding projects that involve Indigenous peoples by providing a baseline of information on issues relevant to the Indigenous context.

• Encourage innovation and increase effectiveness within the grantmaking community by facilitating networking opportunities and an ongoing exchange of ideas and practical tools.

• Foster a cross-disciplinary understanding of the Indigenous peoples and the holistic context in which they live and work. IFIP members represent such diverse funding disciplines as environmental conservation, health, economic development, and human rights.

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