THE INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S FLOW FUND
FOUR YEARS OF STORIES
Sitting here considering the last four years with Kindle Project and the IWFF, I feel that small, quiet movement inside that recognizes my sisters and their lifepaths. I am grateful for this extraordinary opportunity; I still remember sitting in my car and getting the phone call that invited me into this journey. I was feeling alone, unheard, and frustrated. This circle of Native women, who come together and through mutual respect and consensus decision-making flow needed resources to Native communities, became my sisters and my sounding board. They make me feel a part of something bigger and better!

The process confirms to me the movement of spirit when a prayer is offered with the notion of having “one heart, one mind.” Those decisions are then rippled out to Native communities and organizations, which in turn flow their prayer of commitment to the people, land, water and all the earth’s creation. I admire each woman in our circle for their special gifts, their dedicated hearts, and their profound love for their home communities. I sit with them and feel the connection that makes them maške. They are like the tree that sways with the wind, the clouds moving to form a thunderstorm, the birds flying in formation towards the south, or the horse who will touch your heart with its silent language of healing and compassion. For this, my heart echoes pidamaya Ye!

The Kindle Project team has always provided us with a forum to discuss prayerfully and profoundly those communities and organizations we seek to flow funds to. They have given us the space that unites us all in decision-making that will impact communities, in an inter-relational dynamic, to aid in the return of cultural values, norms, language, and the sense that we all are related. Han hečetu. Wopida taŋka kinhanyawapi kte!

~ IWFF Women’s Cohort Member
REFLECTIONS FROM A MEMBER OF THE WOMEN'S COHORT

The Indigenous Women’s Flow Fund is a plant slowly growing—extending its tender roots gently into the soil at the speed of trust. The process unfolds organically and measured. We build relationships of kinship and love because we are willing to take the time to establish faith and coherence. We may not move at the speed and scale of conventional philanthropy, our influence and inspiration are solid enough to be felt throughout the web of the giving world. The founder of Kindle Project, which houses the program, is of Indigenous Afghan communities. She knew to move slowly at first, gather the right people, earn trust, ensure consent, and consult community for the right way to do it. This is why we succeed. Any other way would not have worked with the protocols, values, and principles of Indigenous women. Growing from this foundation, the magic of our cultures is allowed to exhale, like mushroom spores from the forest floor, and seed special projects across Turtle Island.

As Indigenous women, our giving will necessarily be of a different world. Firstly, our languages and worldviews are rooted firmly in prayer—in a belief that we can be instruments for a benevolent consciousness greater than our own. We pray before and during all our proceedings. Because of this, we believe our giving is guided by something greater than we can imagine or understand. This is probably the most important part of our giving strategy.

Secondly, we can’t help but recognize all Creation as equal, beloved family. Other lifeforms have their own nations. They are our relatives. We wouldn’t do anything to them that we wouldn’t do to our own mother or grandmother. Philanthropy means the love of human beings. Our giving extends outside the human realm, towards philecopy, or the love of our home planet and all the sacred life thereon. Our giving will necessarily be ecological, ecosystemic, and holistic.

Thirdly, our ceremonies emphasize the “giveaway.” This is the practice of preparing feasts, corn specialties, goods and treats, potlatches, kiinaaldas, the fourth year of a person’s sundance, and so many other Indigenous praxes of generosity. It is in our blood to give. We are here to help the world do this in ways so old they are new, ways that just might offer alternatives we didn’t know were available.
The IWFF Women’s Cohort is a multi-generational circle of women representing Ho-Chunk, Diné/Tsétsêhéstâhese, Isañti Dakota, Raramuri, and Northern Arapaho, some of whom prefer to remain anonymous. This sisterhood is made up of artists, seed savers, community advocates, poets, organizers, mothers, daughters, and grandmothers. The IWFF culture has been cultivated over time with trust and prayer, opening pathways for vision and decisions to be made from a place of togetherness, with instinctiveness, cultural relevance, heartfelt confidence, and in sync with the rhythms of nature. The IWFF Women’s Cohort is facilitated by Sharon Lungo, with Kindle Project.

The IWFF Donors are multi-generational and committed to leading with trust, sharing power, and using creativity in their grantmaking. Much more than a transactional source of funding, the IWFF Donors are an integral part of the ecosystem. Sharing power is as much a journey as it is a skill that can be developed. Some find their power-sharing path by donating to the program, others engage in further exploration by participating in the Donors Cohort. This Kindle-facilitated, peer-learning community supports the donors to reflect upon and evolve their role.

As the Kindle Project Team Cohort, we serve as facilitators, advisors, administrators, and organizers of this project. Being present in both the Women’s Cohort and the Donors Cohort, we undergo a peer-learning process ourselves. As a team we are unpacking our own assumptions, challenging our edges, and expanding our grantmaking based on the experiences of being part of IWFF.

These cohorts are linked in curiosity, learning and a commitment to moving through the limitations of old philanthropic patterns to find new relationships to sharing power through giving.

The IWFF Grantees are grassroots groups serving vital frontline roles in their communities. Each contributes to vibrant Indigenous communities through their work in food and land sovereignty, language revitalization, nourishment for women, girls, and two-spirit relatives, seed sharing, arts and culture, and rematriation. Since IWFF’s inception in 2020, the Women’s Cohort has made 78 grants and awards to Indigenous-led grantees and/or individuals. These Flow Funding decisions were made as a result of the women’s depth of connection to their communities and to organizations that are often unseen by traditional philanthropy. These groups and individuals are located across 18 states.

OUR ECOSYSTEM

Power-sharing requires trust. As a Kindle Project team, we feel remarkably honored to be trusted by the donors to the program and by the Indigenous women. Our role as bridge-maker allows us to weave between the cohorts of this program, supporting new ideas and facilitating conversations as community grows within and between each circle. This ecosystem is a living testament to what happens when time, space and relationships are centered.
OUR APPROACH

We prioritize relationships across the IWFF ecosystem so that the interconnectedness between participants becomes the program’s symbiotic root system, making it less about money itself and more about how it is moved. Mutually nourishing relationships emerge between the donors, Flow Funders, grantees, and our own team, which then generate overlapping ripple effects far greater than money alone.

POWER SHARING

We define power-sharing in philanthropy by centering communities to decide for themselves what they need, how much they need, how they need to receive it, and what success means for them. Without community self-determination we can’t disrupt the systems we’re trying to change.

EMERGENT DESIGN

Creativity, flexibility, and nimbleness allow us to be responsive to emergent needs and opportunities. We co-create structures and facilitate spaces for real-time explorations that work with. This allows donors and community-based decision-makers to focus their time and energy on moving money in powerful ways, and creating alternative pathways to grantmaking for systemic change.

PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

Participatory grantmaking empowers individuals and groups outside of typical philanthropic institutions with funds that they recommend to organizations of their choice. This method allows us to break open predictable patterns of decision-making, and enables the democratization of funding. The Women’s Cohort shapes the themes of the program and identifies groups to support.

PROVIDING CAPACITY

As an intermediary, we provide the scaffolding of staffing, administration, due diligence, fundraising, and education to the communities and donors we work with. This allows donors and community-based decision-makers to focus their time and energy on moving money in powerful ways, and creating alternative pathways to grantmaking for systemic change.

The INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S APPROACH

By making space for Indigenous women to create their own practices, rituals, and relationships to giving, IWFF becomes an example of what is possible when communities are given the autonomy to design processes that work best from within their own cultures and wisdom.

The natural elements are key to the guidance of the Women’s Cohort, as they make decisions about their giving in alignment with the moon, plants, seeds, and seasons. They decided to host their meetings on the new moon according to the Lunar calendar, and to consider phases of rest, rebirth, renewal and regeneration—much like the seasons and a seed’s cycle of life in a garden. The stories shared by our IWFF Women’s Cohort facilitator and one of the Indigenous women in that circle exemplify the depth of their approach.

IWFF presents an opportunity to lean into our Indigenous ways in all aspects of the giving process. Facilitating this group means holding space using our own Indigenous methodologies—like talking circles—that prioritize our elders, calling in spirit to guide us, and decision-making based on deep and respectful relationships. Our meetings include aspects of the natural world that call us to mirror the life cycles of our plant relatives, and see our grantees in their cycles of growth and as gifts to the rest of creation. Moving resources through our Indigenous Peoples means all life is accounted for.

- Sharon Lungo, IWFF Women’s Cohort Facilitator

A story from a Women’s Cohort member

This circle is inter-tribal, a place where hope, optimism and seventh-generational thinking can break down colonial constructs.

The energy that each sister brings to the circle is the love that can only be nurtured by our collective ancestors surrounding us in this work. Our ancestors guide us in community, and they draw our attention to people and efforts. We are able to share not only the accomplishments of the grantees, but we focus on the heart of the work—the spirit that does not always translate into words on a grant application.

One of my earliest memories is of my father. He would talk about having one foot in this modern world and the other foot grounded in our traditional ways. Having that responsibility and privilege, we need to maintain balance to be grounded in this world.

Our collective prayers are to support our brothers and sisters across Indian Country. To care for the caretakers. To lift up the voices of the unheard. To show others the work of the unseen. We are trying something new, by doing something as old as time. By imitating our ancestors, and replicating a way of life where everybody can thrive. We shared our tables, we shared our homes, we shared our harvest and we took only what was needed.

There are so many of our people trying to heal and break through inter-generational traumas in order to ensure their culture’s perpetual way of life. There are unspoken shared values, unspoken intentions, but seeing each other with one foot in our world and one foot in the modern world, we are part of the change that the world has been waiting for.

These shifts cannot be made alone. I have so much gratitude to the Donors Cohort and the amazing team at Kindle Project who provide the space to shift colonial powers to a decolonized view of philanthropy. Both the Donors Cohort and the Kindle team have shared their resources and their power with five Indigenous women, to dream into making Indian Country more resilient.
HOW THE MONEY MOVES

IWFF uses three unique methodologies for giving, each with its own ability to uplift and expand the wisdom and decision-making of the Women’s Cohort as individuals and as a sisterhood.

I. FLOW FUND GRANTS TO ORGANIZATIONS
Individual Flow Funders recommend grants to organizations of their choice. This method uplifts the unique wisdom of each member of the Women’s Cohort, and celebrates their agency. From 2020-2023, they moved $585,000 to 30 Indigenous-led groups.

II. AWARDS TO INDIVIDUALS
In 2021-2023, a generous member of our Donor Cohort trusted the Women’s Cohort with $10,000 each to give as awards to individuals of their choosing. The response from the cohort was tremendous and they reflected that this gifting process allowed them to recognize and honor the unseen and invisibilized people that philanthropy often misses. From 2021-2023, $150,000 in gifts was moved to 28 Indigenous individuals.

III. COLLECTIVE FUND
The Collective Fund empowers group decision-making to nominate organizations for a grant. This method prioritizes the wisdom of the group and celebrates consensus-building. With three years of Collective Funds, the women have evolved the articulation of their thematic focus. They move through this process with the prayer and intention that there is enough for everyone. “Perennials” are groups who have previously been supported, while new additions are called “Annuals.” The Collective Fund supports work that contributes to restoring healthy, vibrant Indigenous communities, which includes:

- Food sovereignty, cultivating and sharing seeds, access to traditional local foods, and land stewardship, restoration, and sovereignty
- Language and cultural revitalization and transmission, rematriation, and capacity building
- Nourishment and protection for all women, children, youth, and two-spirit relatives
- Intergenerational care, from birth to ancestral communal support
- Arts, culture, media

From 2020-2023, the Women’s Cohort moved $830,000 to 27 Indigenous-led groups, with grants ranging from $10,000-$50,000.

TOTAL IWFF GIVING 2020-2023: $1,840,000 to 78 Indigenous groups and individuals, including $275,000 in honoraria to the Women’s Cohort

As the storyteller and listener for IWFF for the last three years, it has been my honor to listen deeply to the women continually refer to their work together as “Rematriating Philanthropy.” Rematriation to them means remembering the traditional role that Indigenous women once played in caring for their communities as givers. It means listening to their ancestors and engaging in ceremony before making a decision on where to give. It means relying on the wisdom passed down from Grandmothers and Aunties throughout many generations, and trusting that this inner knowing is essential to the process of giving. Essentially, it is returning to the heart of giving and caring for grantees as if they are relatives in a meaningful process of Right Relationship.

Rematriating Philanthropy is a powerful idea and is implemented by engaging in radical redistribution and reparations work with donors, which is essential to ending generations of extractivism and harm. Rematriation acknowledges that modern philanthropic practices often exclude Indigenous women from positions of power and privilege in making decisions that directly affect their lives and communities. For me, it is a sacred responsibility to engage with our donors, our Kindle team, and our grantees, as we use the idea of Rematriation to build a bridge between the past and the future of philanthropy together.

Pearl Gottschalk (Lujan), IWFF Advisor
WHERE THE MONEY MOVED

COLLECTIVE FUND RECIPIENTS 2021-23
BREATH OF MY HEART BIRTHPLACE
CENTER FOR INDIGENOUS MIDWIFERY
DAKHOTA IAPI OKODAKICIYE
DREAM OF WILD HEALTH
DZIL YJIIN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PROJECT
EASTERN SHOSHONE TRIBAL HEALTH SDPI
GREAT PLAINS ACTION SOCIETY
GROW OUR OWN
HERRING PROTECTORS
HOPI TUTSKWA PERMACULTURE INSTITUTE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TASK FORCE
LAKOTA YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
MENDING THE SACRED HOOP
NATIONAL INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER
NATIVE BIRTH WORKERS
OAYE LUTA OKOLAKICIYE
SAHNISH SCOUTS
SAVE CALIFORNIA SALMON
SEEDING SOVEREIGNTY
TEXAS BUFFALO PROJECT
TTAWAXT BIRTH JUSTICE CENTER
UKWAHKWA OUR FOODS
WAKAN TIPI OWANYANKAPI
WICONI WAWOKIYA, INC
WIND RIVER FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PROJECT
WIND RIVER TRIBAL BUFFALO INITIATIVE
YELLOW BIRD LIFE WAYS

FLOW FUND GRANTS TO ORGANIZATIONS 2020-23
BRAVE HEART SOCIETY
CHEYENNE RIVER SIOUX TRIBE HOMELESS SHELTER
EUCHEE (YUCHI) LANGUAGE PROJECT
FLOWERING TREE PERMACULTURE INSTITUTE
GENOA US INDIAN SCHOOL FOUNDATION
HEARTS GATHERED WATER FALL SCHOOL
HONOR OUR PUEBLO EXISTENCE
KE KULA NUI O WAIMĀNALO
KERES CHILDREN'S LEARNING CENTER
MAK'AMHAM OHLONE CAFE
MIGIZI COMMUNICATIONS
NATIVE CONSERVANCY
OYATE TECA PROJECT
SAAD K'IDILYE
SACRED HEALING CIRCLE
SACRED PLACES INSTITUTE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
SEVENTH GENERATION FUND THRIVING WOMEN INITIATIVE
SITTING BULL COLLEGE LAKHÓL'IYAPI WAHOHPI / WIČHÁKINIWOWÁYAWA
SU'IKAWAKA'IT TA WOU'TSPE: TEACHINGS FROM THE HORSE NATION
THUNDER VALLEY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
WIND RIVER FOUNDATION
WHITE BUFFALO RECOVERY

AWARDS TO INDIVIDUALS 2021-23
NATE ETSITTY
PAMELA FOSTER
JAMES HALLUM
MIKE HENRY
APRIL HOLDER
SILAS KITTO JR.
GARRETT NIMMO
JULIE RICHARDS
ALLISON SAGE
KAYLANAH SHENDO
LESLIE SPOONHUNTER
BERNADINE 'LECLAIR LITTLE THUNDER
CRYSTAL WAHPAPEH
10 CHOSE TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS
How can we create space for a healthy relationship between the IWFF program’s emerging values and vision of success with the donors’ emerging vision? When you imagine coming together with the flow funding cohort, or in another situation in which you play a donor role, are there any feelings or fears that you wish to acknowledge in order to show up as a more authentic version of yourself?

What roles do I currently play in supporting the conditions for power-sharing to occur, within the IWFF program and elsewhere? Where might I look to further develop these roles in order to support the growth and evolution of this program?

Are there ways I can help trust and power-sharing to flourish, enabling the program to grow organically into its next phase?

What are the co-creative edges in the program that you are excited about developing?

Through their firm commitment to sharing power, the Donor Cohort is forging new pathways for how philanthropic funding can uplift Indigenous communities. The donors participating in the cohort have renewed their pledges through the next four years of the program. This multi-year support enables the IWFF ecosystem to have the confidence to act on its potential and promise, and builds a sense of trust that we are all in it together.

The Donors Cohort sessions provide a unique interplay between on-the-ground learning from the Women’s Cohort, shared learning amongst peer donors, and individual reflection, which serves to inform other spaces in which participants show up as donors. As the Kindle Project team designs these spaces, we are able to coalesce a unique set of learnings that feed into the ongoing evolution of participatory grantmaking methodologies.

Some questions the Donors Cohort have grappled with:
- How can we create space for a healthy relationship between the IWFF program’s emerging values and vision of success with the donors’ emerging vision?
- When you imagine coming together with the flow funding cohort, or in another situation in which you play a donor role, are there any feelings or fears that you wish to acknowledge in order to show up as a more authentic version of yourself?
- What roles do I currently play in supporting the conditions for power-sharing to occur, within the IWFF program and elsewhere? Where might I look to further develop these roles in order to support the growth and evolution of this program?
- Are there ways I can help trust and power-sharing to flourish, enabling the program to grow organically into its next phase?
- What are the co-creative edges in the program that you are excited about developing?

The Indigenous Women’s Flow Fund is one of the most original, heartfelt, meaningful, and effective philanthropic approaches I’ve come across in a long time. Kindle Project, the Women Flow Funders, and the other donors in this experiment have committed to working together over several years to experience what it feels like to flow money, and I believe everyone is enriched in the process. As we have come to know each other, to trust the process, and ultimately to trust each other more, we broach topics like power, structural oppression, grief, loss, creativity, and possibility, among others—all of which manifest in various ways as we act in our distinct roles to shift resources to those usually excluded from traditional philanthropy. This program is proof-positive that money is only one asset and that philanthropy will only be transformed when we recognize and mobilize the many powerful assets that exist among all of us.

- Mary Fifield, IWFF Donor Cohort Member, Cotyledon Fund

We know that there are tremendous opportunities amongst the communities served by the IWFF program, who could realize a fuller potential with committed resources. We also know that there are many donors who deeply care about the role they can play beyond simply transacting financial resources, and they struggle with the role they are asked to play in making decisions that have significant impacts, both intended and unintended. The IWFF Donors Cohort provides a space for donors to re-humanize their role in community, to explore learning edges, and to be in shared service to a greater purpose. This is an incredible opportunity to help steward this journey and see how growing this capability amongst colleagues leads to meaningful, long-term change. I feel truly fortunate to have the opportunity to play a role in supporting this effort!

-Adam Rubel, IWFF Donor Cohort Co-Facilitator

Working at Kindle Project is about building movements, bridges, opportunities, and spaces for transformation. Organizing with donors is as much a part of movement-building as working with communities. We get to straddle the lines between worlds, and IWFF is a stunning example of what becomes possible with care, attention, vulnerability, and brave spaces for honest discussion. For me, donor organizing is not about a transactional outcome—it’s about the incredible opportunity to support donors and foundations in inquiring about what might need to change at personal and organizational levels to support bigger transformation in the sector at large. How are we going to change (and eradicate) philanthropy if we aren’t setting a big, beautiful, welcoming table for everybody? I adore working with the IWFF donors because they all are committed to sharing power. Our donors are doing the hard work of unlearning assumptions about how money should (or shouldn’t) move. They are working within family contexts and legacies, foundation boards, and competing interests and opportunities for funding. And yet, they have all made open-hearted and steadfast commitments to the Indigenous women and their communities. The trust they extend to themselves, each other, Kindle Project, and the Women’s Cohort is exactly the kind of philanthropy I wish more donors would embrace.

- Arianne Shaffer, IWFF Donor Cohort Co-Facilitator
JOIN US

We welcome you to join our beloved Indigenous Women’s Flow Fund community. There are many ways to support and elevate our work. We are currently hoping to raise $2.2 million to sustain IWFF through 2026. Thanks to generous, multi-year funding from our current donors, we have all the core programming and staffing expenses covered. Therefore, every new dollar raised will go into the grantmaking budget, to be redistributed directly to Indigenous communities.

There are two ways to engage as a donor to IWFF. Those who desire minimal engagement can bless this work with a trusting, no-strings-attached donation. We will provide annual storytelling reports and one-on-one updates as needed. Those who desire deeper engagement, and want to pledge substantial multi-year financial support, are invited to join our Donors Cohort, a community of practitioners and friends exploring the world of shared power together.

We invite you to inspire others by sharing our story with your friends, family, colleagues, and the greater philanthropic community. We welcome you to uplift our voices by passing forward this report, inviting us to speak at your event, panel, or to your board, asking us to write in your publication, or otherwise bringing us into your community.

Thank you for accompanying us on this journey!

Sadaf Rassoul Cameron
Kindle Project Co-Founder and Executive Director
KINDLE PROJECT TEAM
(The Women’s Cohort chose to remain anonymous)

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