



# REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Indigenous Tomorrows Fund  
2026 Grant Cycle



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## WELCOME

The Indigenous Tomorrows Fund (ITF) is a youth-led participatory grantmaking initiative resourcing Native communities through a funding strategy created by youth leaders. The priorities, criteria, and vision that shape this RFP were authored by young people who were asked what they love about their communities and to dream big about what they believe their communities need to thrive.

This funding cycle resources **Native-led and Native-serving organizations** with a total of **\$1,650,000** across three tiers of investment (\$25K, \$65K, and \$100K). Applications are reviewed and funding decisions are made by youth (ages 14–24) whose judgment is grounded in Indigenous community knowledge and lived experience.

Grants are one-time, flexible funding awards provided for a 12-month performance period.

**Applications open May 20 and close July 14**, and will be available through the JustFund application platform on [nativephilanthropy.org/itf](https://nativephilanthropy.org/itf).

We prioritize Native-led and Native-serving organizations and collectives whose work is accountable to Indigenous community. Applications are open to:

- Native-led and/or Native-serving 501c3 organizations & collectives across the U.S. and its territories
- Federally and state-recognized Tribal Nations, and their affiliated/sponsored/chartered entities and governmental programs or initiatives
- Fiscally sponsored projects of a 501c3 organization that are Native-led and/or Native-serving

Strong applicants can locate their work within at least one of the five youth-named impact bundles, demonstrate how youth are involved in their work (especially those under 18), and understand their work as part of a larger ecosystem of community thriving.

## THE FRAMEWORK: A GARDEN PLANTED BY YOUTH

ITF's funding strategy is a garden — a planted, tended, living space where young people cultivate the harvest that Indigenous communities need to thrive.

Youth leaders collaboratively identified dimensions of wellbeing that bundle together the unique strengths and challenges that Indigenous communities hold. These bundles are expressions of an integrated community vision, and the inclusion of young people as leaders and participants in community life stands central throughout each of them.

## WHAT GROWS IN THE GARDEN: FIVE BUNDLES

The plantings in this garden are five bundles that youth leaders named as the dimensions of community thriving. The bundles identify the ways that existing community strengths can uniquely address community challenges, and they are intentionally interplanted as expressions of a holistic vision for wellbeing – roots reaching across one another underground, leaves overlapping above. One bundle's work feeds another's, and an organization's work often touches several bundles at once.

Each bundle carries a shared priority: **work where youth are centered – as leaders, as participants, or as those whose sustained wellbeing the work is designed to serve.**

### MAINTAINING THE LIFE CYCLE OF BALANCE

We support cultural and spiritual infrastructure that awakens the spirit, honors individual experiences, and connects us back to each other. Cultural access is a matter of sovereignty, and is an intervention for wellbeing and identity development. Carrying this bundle is about creating spaces for youth to lead or be meaningfully involved in cultural practices like spirituality, language, artistic expression, and good citizenship. We believe that cultural access, protection, and practice form the foundation on which communities are built and strengthened, and balance is maintained when all members of a community are encouraged and enabled to participate in their cultures. We also recognize the deep importance of building opportunities for cultural connection across geographies – in urban, rural, and reservation communities alike.

**How Youth are Centered:** Young people as culture carriers, as participants in ceremony, and as those whose identity is built through cultural access.

### INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE & RELATIONSHIPS

We support the weaving of youth, adults and Elders to create a living basket of culture, tradition, experience, and knowledge. The relationship between generations is the wellbeing intervention itself. Each generation has perspective to share with another, and individuals and communities are made more whole when generations are in good relationship with one another. Involving youth in programs and practices that place them into relationships with different generations prepares them to step into their next phases of life and models the values they should hold themselves when they inherit leadership roles. Adults and Elders are also rejuvenated and sustained through sharing perspectives with younger generations, and they should be accountable to youth as well.

**How Youth are Centered:** Young people are one of the parties the relationship requires – their presence is what makes the work exist, and they are both contributing to the health of the intergenerational community and benefiting from its strength.

## HEALING

We support approaches to wellbeing that center and honor Indigenous knowledge through holistic, culturally informed care that empowers the whole self. Physical and mental health are inseparable from the economic, safety, and cultural conditions that shape them. We believe that young people deserve access to culturally grounded healthcare that supports their physical, mental, and spiritual nourishment and works to transform the material conditions that affect wellbeing.

***How Youth are Centered:*** Young people as those whose sustained wellbeing the work serves, and as participants and leaders in defining what healing looks like.

## NURTURING THAT WHICH NOURISHES US

We support the reclamation, maintenance, and protection of Indigenous foodways, lands, and water as one interconnected system. Indigenous children deserve to eat the foods their ancestors ate, and we know that land and water reclamation and protection are essential to that nourishment. Indigenous communities define their own knowledge systems, solutions, and measures of success to cultivate and nurture the environment which nourishes them.

***How Youth are Centered:*** Youth as caretakers being trained in land-based knowledge and relationship, and as those whose rights to traditional food and lifeways are being protected.

## BUILDING POWER & ACTIVATING ABUNDANCE

We support resourcing Native communities to build lasting power and activate the abundance already inherent in our peoples. Tribal nations are sovereign, and young people should be empowered citizens who understand their civic identity in the context of their history and culture. Building power in Native communities is interdependent with ensuring that people have access to the resources they need to thrive and participate in community life – nourishment, shelter, economic stability. We believe that cultivating strong leadership rooted in cultural values and accountability will build thriving, engaged communities. Power without abundance isn't lasting. Abundance without power is theft.

***How Youth are Centered:*** Young people as leaders in organizing, as the generation the power is being built for, and as participants in political and civic life.

**These five bundles are not solely parallel funding categories. They are five expressions of one integrated vision, and the strongest applications understand how their work lives within that larger whole.**



## HOW WE PLANT THE GARDEN: THE THREE SISTERS

The bundles describe **what** grows through ITF's funding ecosystem. The Three Sisters describe **how** organizations are planted within it.

In a Three Sisters garden, squash, beans, and corn grow together because each does something the others cannot. Squash spreads close to the ground and shelters the soil. Beans climb what stands beside them and feed the soil in return. Corn grows tall and holds the architecture the others rely on. The Three Sisters thrive through interdependence— just like community.

Every grantee in the ITF cohort grows in this garden as one of the Sisters.

### SQUASH – SPECIALIZED WORK

Squash spreads close to the ground. Its broad leaves shade the soil, hold moisture in, and shelter the roots of everything else from heat and weeds. Without squash, the garden dries out.

Squash-zone organizations work close to the ground within a single bundle. Their work is specific, place-based, and rooted in one dimension of community life. They build the deep excellence the rest of the garden depends on. Specialization is the canopy that keeps the soil alive.

**Apply as squash if** your theory of change lives within one bundle and your strength is depth in that single dimension.

*EXAMPLE:* A Community-Based Youth Wellness Hub- The Youth Wellness Hub is a youth-led initiative to provide fitness equipment to their community. Youth identified a specific barrier to their health and wellbeing and defined a solution to address it. The work is specific, place-based, and primarily relevant to the “Healing” bundle. Strong outcomes in this type of work, however, naturally impact the overall wellbeing of the whole system.

### BEANS – INTERSECTIONAL WORK

Beans climb. They reach toward what is already standing and find the structure that lets them grow upward. In return, beans fix nitrogen back into the soil, feeding the very plants that hold them up. The relationship is reciprocal: beans need something to climb, and what they climb grows stronger because beans are there.

Beans-zone organizations work at the intersections of two or more bundles. Their work requires holding multiple dimensions together and moving them simultaneously, because moving any one alone would not produce the change the work is reaching for. Like the bean plant, this work depends on what stands beside it and gives back to what supports it.

**Apply as beans if** your work cannot be honestly described inside a single bundle, and you can name the intersection your work holds in your own words and tell us what would be lost if either dimension were removed.

*EXAMPLE: A Working Farm that Serves Systems-Impacted Youth-* This working farm leverages the intersections of traditional land-based knowledge and foodways, healing, and maintaining cultural balance. Their work is strong, deep, and place-based with real outcomes for the youth that are served and developed. They have a wide community-impact, and the power of the work comes from the intersections they utilize.

### **CORN – SYSTEMS-LEVEL MOVEMENT**

Corn grows tall. The stalk is the architecture other plants climb; corn holds the whole planting together by giving it shape. The garden depends on corn to provide structure for everything that needs to reach upward.

Corn-zone organizations – or community-initiated collaboratives of specialized organizations – hold the architecture of integrated community thriving. Their theory of change requires moving the whole ecosystem simultaneously, because the work is the system. Sometimes a single organization carries this scale; sometimes it is held by several specialized organizations growing together intentionally as one structure.

**Apply as corn if** your work integrates multiple bundles as one interconnected system, and your community recognizes you, or your collaborative, as holding that integrated architecture together.

*EXAMPLE: A Holistic Youth-Driven Community Center-* This community initiative holds the architecture of youth thriving for their community, integrating culture, wellness, power-building, traditional foods, and family services as an interconnected system. Their work requires an integrated systems-level approach to provide needed community infrastructure. They are modeling the system the youth in the community want and deserve.

### **WHY THE THREE SISTERS GROW TOGETHER**

The Three Sisters are interdependent. That is the agricultural truth, it is the strategic truth.

A garden of only squash would have no structure for upward growth and no plant returning nitrogen to the soil. A garden of only beans would have nothing to climb and no shade for the ground. A garden of only corn would have no protection at soil level and would deplete the ground it stands in.

The ITF cohort is planted as a whole garden – squash, beans, and corn together – because that is how the harvest sustains community. **We are tending a balanced garden.**

## TENDING GROWTH IN THE GARDEN: THREE TIERS OF INVESTMENT TO RESOURCE WHAT YOUR WORK NEEDS

Tier describes what your organization can hold **right now** – the growth stage your work is in. Plants in a garden need investment matched to where the work actually is: a newly planted seed needs different care than a mature stand bearing fruit, and both are needed for the garden to thrive across years.

**Tier is independent of zone. Any of the Three Sisters may apply at any tier.**

### SEED – \$25,000

We are newly planted, or planted before the bed was fully prepared. Community embeddedness is our primary strength – the work is already happening, often before the infrastructure exists to hold it formally. We are emerging organizations, grassroots efforts, or community-based initiatives doing the work because the community needed it done.

**Apply at Seed if** your organization, project, or program/initiative is in its early seasons and what you most need is the resourcing to take root.

### SUSTAIN – \$65,000

We are rooted and bearing fruit, season after season. We are established organizations with demonstrated community accountability, doing sustained place-based work that has weathered seasons and continues to nourish the people we serve.

**Apply at Sustain if** your organization has the staffing, infrastructure, and track record to absorb mid-range investment and put it to work in the community where you already grow.

### SYNERGIZE – \$100,000

We nourish the whole garden. Our impact, efficacy, and capacity strengthen, deepen, or substantially move community systems beyond our own work. We are organizations or community-initiated collaboratives whose presence makes other plants stronger – feeding the soil, holding the structure, sheltering what grows around us.

**Apply at Synergize if** your organization or collaborative has the capacity, staffing, and reach to hold systems-moving investment, and the community recognizes your work as nourishing more than itself.



## CHOOSING YOUR TIER HONESTLY

**Tier is not the ambition of your work.** Ambition lives in the zone you locate yourself in — squash, beans, or corn. Tier is the growth stage your organization is in: **what you can hold, deploy, and steward right now.**

A young corn-zone collective may be doing systems-level work and still be in its first seasons as an organization — Seed is the right tier, and a \$25,000 investment is what fits the work this year. A long-established squash-zone organization may apply at Synergize because the depth and reach of its specialized work warrants it, even though the work lives within a single bundle. **These are two different acts of self-knowledge. We want both of them to be authentic.**

Reviewers assess each application at the tier requested. Choosing the tier that matches the growth stage your organization is actually in is the strongest position for your application.

## ELIGIBILITY

**You should apply if:**

- Your work is Native-led and/or Native-serving and accountable to Indigenous community
- Your approach is grounded in cultural values
- Your work centers Native youth in a primary way — as leaders, as participants, as those served, or as the mechanism through which change happens
- You can locate your work within at least one of the five bundles
- You understand your work as part of a larger ecosystem of community health and self-determination
- You are willing to define your own success metrics and return to youth grantmakers to share what you learned

## THE APPLICATION

The application asks you to do three things: **tell us about your work through three questions, complete a supplemental budget template, and provide the standard organizational information requested by the JustFund platform.**

Your plant-zone — squash, beans, or corn — is named **inside your answer to Question 1.** Your tier — Seed, Sustain, or Synergize — is indicated **on the supplemental budget template** linked below.

### TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORK: THREE QUESTIONS

Each question has a consideration to help you assess whether your approach fits the framework. Suggested length per response: **400–500 words.**

#### Question 1: The work and where it lives in the garden

*Identify which of the Three Sisters describes your work and how it moves one or more of the five bundles in Native communities. Which bundle or bundles does your work engage, and what specific results has it produced? How does your community recognize and respond to those results?*

In your response, clearly name your plant-zone AND the bundle(s) you hold — **squash** (specialized work in a single bundle), **beans** (intersectional work holding two or more bundles together), or **corn** (systems-level work affecting the whole ecosystem). If your work is beans or corn, name the intersection or system you hold in your own words and tell us what would be lost if any one dimension were removed.

**Consider:** Can you articulate this connection in words that a 14-year-old from your community would recognize and understand as accurate?

#### Question 2: Youth in the work

*Young people have real authority in ITF because impacting youth thriving is the foundational purpose. Describe how youth are a defining factor in your work — as leaders, participants, decision-makers, or those whose sustained wellbeing the work is designed to serve. What sustains youth participation, and what accountabilities exist to ensure youth voices influence how the work evolves?*

**Consider:** What would change about your work if youth were not involved at all, and why would that change be a problem?

### Question 3: Accountability and ecosystem

*ITF seeks to partner with organizations that understand interdependence and holistic community wellbeing. Describe how your work is accountable to and grounded in Indigenous communities. Who in the community is asking for this work to exist, and how do they know it's working? How do you and your community define what success looks like for this work, and how do you know it's working – what do you notice, observe, or hear from your community that tells you the work is contributing to youth wellbeing in Indigenous communities? What information, support, or decision-making does your work depend on from community members or other organizations?*

**Consider:** Can you name specific things your work depends on others doing in order for the work to be successful and impactful?

### INDICATE YOUR TIER: THE SUPPLEMENTAL BUDGET TEMPLATE

Tier is requested on a supplemental budget template that you will download, complete, and upload as part of your application. The template captures your funding tier request alongside a simple budget for how the grant would be used.

**Download the supplemental budget template here:** [ITF Budget Template 2026](#)

#### To complete the template:

1. Open the link above and make a copy to your own Google Drive (File → Make a copy), or download it as an Excel file (File → Download → Microsoft Excel).
2. Indicate the tier you are requesting: **Seed (\$25,000), Sustain (\$65,000), or Synergize (\$100,000).**
3. Complete the budget fields to show how the grant would be used.
4. Briefly describe – in 2–3 sentences – why this tier matches your current capacity. This is not about the ambition of the work (that's covered in Question 1). This is about your organization's current capacity to absorb and deploy the grant over the course of a 12-month period: staffing, infrastructure, and track record.
5. Upload your completed template to your JustFund application.

**A reminder as you choose your tier:** Tier is independent of zone. Any of the Three Sisters may apply at any tier. Choose the tier that matches the growth stage your organization is actually in – what you can hold, deploy, and steward right now. Reviewers assess each application at the tier requested.

## HOW YOUTH REVIEWERS READ APPLICATIONS

Native youth reviewers (ages 14–24) read applications **together**. They discuss and assess applications across multiple dimensions in conversation, and their judgment is final.

Reviewers assess each application across the following dimensions, and other criteria as determined by youth participants:

**Zone Fit:** Does the self-located zone match the work described?

**Demonstrated Impact:** Does the work described show real outcomes, or aspirational ones?.

**Organizational Capacity:** Is the tier request proportionate to organizational capacity and the scope of work described?

**Youth Centrality:** Are Native youth a defining factor in the proposed work?

**Community Accountability:** Does the organization understand itself in relationship to a larger community ecosystem?



## LEARNING & EVALUATION- HOW WE LEARN ABOUT WHAT THE GARDEN IS GROWING

A garden is evaluated by its harvest – and the people who know whether the harvest is good are the ones who planted it, who tend it, and who eat from it. The communities doing the work are the ones who know whether it is working. Our role as a fund is to listen well, to gather what grantees share, and to let what we learn shape how the garden is tended in future seasons.

ITF will use a culturally-grounded, relevant, and responsive evaluation plan to learn about the impacts and metrics of the work in grantee communities. Grantees will define what success looks like in their own work, and tell us the story of what they are seeing.

ITF will engage grantees at least twice over the course of 12 months to learn about the grantee's work and community and, with permission, share that learning with ITF's youth leadership.

### WE USE WHAT WE LEARN IN THESE WAYS:

**To honor the work.** Stories of learning are returned to the cohort and the broader ITF community in methods grantees consent to – through a learning gathering, through a public report, or through anonymous synthesis where grantees prefer privacy. The garden is tended in part by letting grantees see what other grantees are growing.

**To strengthen the strategy.** What grantees teach us shapes how future cycles are designed. If grantees consistently point to something the framework is missing, the framework changes. The youth-authored strategy is meant to evolve as Native communities evolve, and grantee learning is one of the primary ways that evolution happens.

**To advocate within philanthropy.** With grantee permission, ITF uses what we learn to make the case to other funders for participatory, trust-based, community-defined evaluation. What grantees know about Native youth wellbeing belongs to grantees and their communities first – and where grantees want their knowledge to travel further, we will help carry it.

## KEY DATES & CONTACT

**Applications Open:** May 20, 2026

**Applications Close:** July 14, 2026 5pm PT

**Applicant Information Sessions:** May 28 & June 22nd

**Notifications:** October 2026

**Disbursement:** following notification

**Contact:** Savannah Baber, sbaber@nativephilanthropy.org

## APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Before submitting, confirm you have:

- Completed Question 1, naming your zone (squash, beans, or corn) and the bundle(s) your work engages
- Completed Question 2 on Native youth centrality
- Completed Question 3 on accountability and ecosystem
- Downloaded, completed, and uploaded the supplemental budget template, with your tier request and capacity rationale
- Provided the standard organizational information requested by JustFund



NATIVE AMERICANS  
IN PHILANTHROPY