



MEETING IN A BOX: Native American Heritage Month



In November, we celebrate the culture of the diverse communities in North America who identify as Native American and Alaska Native as part of Native American Heritage Month.

This Meeting in a Box is a valuable tool to share with employees as part of your organization's professional development and cultural competence educational resources. This month, we will highlight the contributions of the Indigenous community in the U.S. and the working world, as well as its people's resilience, history and vibrant cultures.



COVID-19 and the Future of Native Languages

Before the first documented case of COVID-19 in the U.S. made national headlines, Native American tribes faced a difficult battle to keep their languages and cultures alive.

Of the estimated 300 Native languages once spoken across what is now the United States, only 167 are still spoken — and in many cases by predominantly older members of the tribes. Navajo, the most widely spoken Native American language today with roughly 170,000 speakers, doesn't make it into the list of 25 most commonly spoken languages in the United States.

When Congress passed the Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act in 2006, it set aside an annual budget of \$12 million for tribes working toward preserving their languages.

While that is good, it's far from enough to cover what tribes around the country need in their quest to hang on to their heritage. The amount is also a drop in a bucket compared to what the American government has historically spent to eradicate tribal autonomy, education and culture.

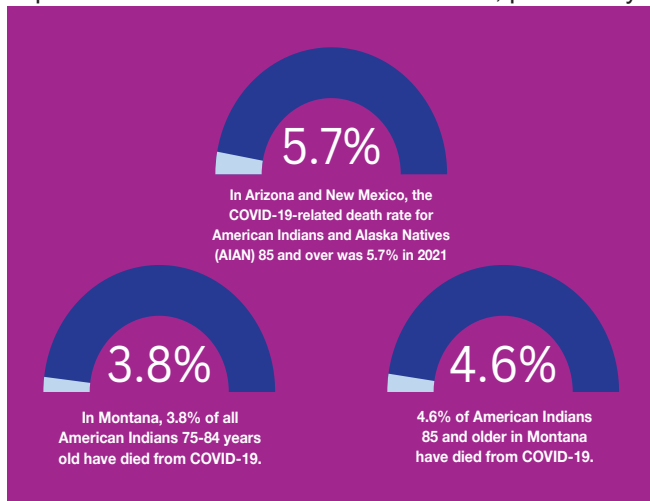
For a population segment that has spent the last few hundred years experiencing a great deal of uncertainty about what lies ahead, COVID-19 added yet another threat to their cultural future and their health and wellbeing.

The COVID-19 Effect

As COVID-19 ravaged communities across the world, few have been impacted quite like the Native American community. The population numbers are already so small that a loss of just 1% could be devastating. For example, the Northern Cheyenne tribe in Montana lost around 50 members in February 2021 — a significant number for a group with a population of 5,000. In proportion to the overall population of the United States, this figure would be the equivalent of losing 3 million Americans to the virus.

Given the dangers of the virus for people over the age of 65, there is also the double impact of wiping out tribe members who are the storytellers, cultural authorities and the most fluent in Native American languages.

According to the Brookings Institute, three disturbing trends have emerged that will have devastating impacts on Native American communities, particularly



In other words, AIAN people are dying of COVID-19 at a rate similar to white people who are 30 years older than them. As COVID-19 cases continue to ebb and flow across the country, the risk to AIAN cultures is significant.

In February 2021, The Guardian reported that 1 in every 475 Native Americans had died from COVID-19 since the pandemic started. In comparison, 1 in every 825 white Americans and 1 in every 645 Black Americans met the same fate. No community may face a more dire fallout from the pandemic-related deaths in the years to come.

What Can Be Done to Save Native Languages?

The timeline for saving Native languages is quickly approaching its end. The assimilation of Native peoples has been a long, ongoing process that cannot be undone in a single generation, never mind a legislative session.

A more significant state response with additional resources and support for Native communities is necessary but will not be enough to address this existential struggle on its own.

As The New Republic noted in 2019, “many of these languages are not even a full lifetime away from disappearing. They exist for as long as the heart of the elder who carries the words continues to beat.”

Access to medical services and vaccination rates among Native populations is helping. Improving the overall quality of data reported around COVID-19 infections and vaccinations by race, ethnicity and gender would provide better insight into the prioritization and urgency of resources.

Although there is a prevailing narrative of vaccine hesitancy amongst many communities of color, that simply isn't the case with Native communities.

A study published by the Urban Indian Health Institute indicated that 75% of Native Americans were willing to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, compared to just 56% of the broader U.S. population at that time. Despite this, roughly 45% of the Native American population in the U.S. remains unvaccinated.

Many states failed to report the racial makeup of people being vaccinated, but even the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) could not do so until May 2021, more than a year after the pandemic began. The lack of reliable data makes evidence-based changes to policies a challenge and public exposure of health disparities difficult to illustrate.

For Native American populations, the task of saving their culture can appear insurmountable. Community support and engagement from non-native groups around issues that threaten these cultures are direly needed. As you engage employees for Native American Heritage Month, consider the ways your company and the broader community can support the local tribes in your area.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



How can non-Native American populations support the teaching and spread of Native American languages?



Do you think Native American representation and narratives in media and politics is representative of that population?



What are some ways businesses can better support Native American communities during COVID-19?



TIMELINE

1824

The **Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)** is founded as part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The BIA was designed to subjugate and assimilate American Indians and Alaska Natives to U.S. society but has since changed its purpose to advocate for policies that promote Indian self-determination.

James McDonald, Choctaw, becomes the nation's first Native American lawyer. He goes on to represent the Choctaw tribe in negotiations with politicians on behalf of Native American rights.

1830

President Andrew Jackson signs the **Indian Removal Act**, which evicts Native American tribes east of the Mississippi River and forces them to move to plots of land in the west. This removal policy later becomes known as the Trail of Tears because of the deaths during the forced migration.

1851

Congress passes the Indian Appropriations Act, which creates the Indian reservation system. It does not allow Native Americans to leave their reservations without permission.

1871

The **Indian Appropriations Act** dissolves the status of tribes as sovereign nations.

1879

Carlisle Indian Industrial School — run by the government's BIA — opens in Pennsylvania. It forces Native American children to assimilate into white U.S. culture. It goes on to exist for 39 years.

1887

The **Dawes Act** gives the president authority to divide up land allotted to Native Americans on reservations.

1889

Susan La Flesche Picotte, Omaha, becomes the first Native American woman to earn a medical degree in the U.S. She goes on to open her own hospital on the Omaha reservation, the first hospital built on Native American land without government assistance.

1890

About 300 Sioux are killed at **Wounded Knee** in the last battle between U.S. troops and Indians.

1907

Charles Curtis, whose ancestry included Kaw, Osage and Potawatomi lineage, becomes the first Native American U.S. Senator.

1916

New York becomes the first state to celebrate American Indian Day.

1929

Charles Curtis becomes the first Native American vice president under President Herbert Hoover.

1934

The Indian New Deal is introduced to help Native Americans rediscover and revitalize their cultural heritage and traditions. Central to this deal is the Indian Reorganization Act, which sought to promote tribal self-governance. Though many tribes accepted it, many rejected it out of fear of more federal intervention.

1941

About 25,000 Native Americans serve in World War II, and 40,000 others work in wartime industries. Some Native Americans fighting in the war served as "code talkers" who represented over 14 tribes and used their native languages to convey secret messages.

1944

The **National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)** is formed. It goes on to be the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization advocating for the interests of tribal governments and communities.

1956

The **Indian Relocation Act** establishes vocational training to encourage Native Americans to move off reservations.

1968

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the **Indian Civil Rights Act**, which finally grants Native American tribes rights included in the Bill of Rights.

N. Scott Momaday, a Kiowa writer, publishes *House Made of Dawn*, his first novel about a young veteran returning to his Kiowa pueblo after serving in the U.S. Army. The novel wins the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1969 and is regarded as a progenitor to a Native literature renaissance. He goes on to earn a National Medal of Arts, a Guggenheim Fellowship and 12 honorary degrees.

1972

More than 500 Native American activists travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to establish ways to address treaty violations. Guards of the BIA building attempt to turn the activists away, but they begin a weeklong siege of the building. The BIA agrees to review the demands and transport the activists back home.

The Indian Education Act establishes funding for bilingual and bicultural education programs.

1975

The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act simplifies Indian access to federal funds and gives tribes help in meeting the educational needs of children.

1980

In *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, the Supreme Court rules that the Sioux land seizure at the Black Hills violated the Treaty of Fort Laramie. Sioux Indians are offered a total of about \$106 million but refuse the money. To this day, the money sits in a trust fund, collecting interest.

1981

The Lakota Times is first published. To this day, it is the only official South Dakota Native American newspaper on tribal land, based on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota.

1985

Wilma Mankiller becomes the first woman to be elected chief of the Cherokee Nation. Despite threats, she advanced education, job training, housing and health care for her people. She also doubled annual Cherokee Nation tribal revenue and tripled tribal enrollment. President Bill Clinton awarded Mankiller the nation's highest civilian honor, the Medal of Freedom, in 1998.

1988

Minneapolis Native Americans host the **first Two-Spirit Gathering**, which honors LGBTQ Native Americans who identify as “two spirits” (a culturally distinct form of gender-fluid identity, of having a masculine and a feminine spirit). Richard LaFortune, a Native American LGBTQ activist, organizes this meeting.

1989

The American Indian College Fund is founded to support Native American people's access to higher education.

1990

The Native American Languages Act makes it a U.S. policy to preserve and protect Native languages.

Jo Ann Kauffman, Nez Perce, founds Kauffman & Associates, Inc., a management consulting firm dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable populations.

The Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) of 1990 promotes Native American artwork and small businesses.

President George H.W. Bush designates November as National American Indian Heritage Month. “Two-Spirit” becomes the appropriate label to encompass the spectrum of gender identities within Native American communities.

1992

The first **Indigenous Peoples' Day** is celebrated in opposition to Columbus Day.

Ben Nighthorse Campbell, Northern Cheyenne, is elected to serve Colorado in the U.S. Senate. Some of his notable achievements included passing legislation to secure Native American water rights, protect wilderness areas, prevent fetal alcohol syndrome, create Colorado's Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site and establish the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.

1996

President Clinton authorizes a **White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities** to support and develop tribal colleges.

1997

Charlene Teters, Spokane, an artist and activist who protested against the use of Native Americans as mascots, is profiled in Jay Rosenstein's documentary “In Whose Honor?”



2002

John Bennett Herrington, a Chickasaw member, becomes the first Native American in space.

2008

The Coquille Indian Tribe in Oregon becomes the first to openly adopt marriage-equality policies.

2009

The Federal government agrees to a **\$3.4 billion settlement** with Native American tribes who say they were defrauded out of royalties overseen by the Department of the Interior since 1887.

2014

Keith Harper is confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to United Nations Human Rights Council, becoming the first American Indian ambassador.

2016

Native Americans from the **Standing Rock Sioux Tribe** in North Dakota protest the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, which is set to run through their sacred tribal land. In 2017, their motion in court is denied, but they are still fighting to try to halt construction.

2018

Sharice Davids, Ho-Chunk, of Kansas and **Deb Haaland**, Laguna Pueblo-American, of New Mexico, become the first Native American women elected to Congress.

2019

Sioux Tribal Council Member Cody Two Bears founds "**Indigenized Energy**," a nonprofit organization that opens a 300-kilowatt solar farm on the Standing Rock Reservation and educates young people about ancestral ecological knowledge.

2020

Native Americans advocate within their tribes for people to fill out the **Census** to ensure sufficient resources are allotted to areas where they live.

2021

President Joe Biden issues the **first-ever presidential proclamation commemorating Indigenous Peoples' Day in the United States** — 40 years after it was established.

2022

Mohegan Chief Marilyn "Lynn" Malerba is sworn in as the first Native American Treasurer of the United States. Her signature will now appear on U.S. currency along with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



What can be done to help improve living conditions for Native American communities in the face of tremendous historical oppression?



What more could be done to protect native cultures from being whitewashed?



Health equity is a major issue for Native American communities due to a lack of health resources, funding and culturally competent care. What can be done to improve healthcare in Native American communities?

FACTS & FIGURES

THREE MOST POPULOUS TRIBES IN 2019



1 in 6 Native Americans, or 1 million people, at least partially identified as Cherokee, making it the largest tribal identity

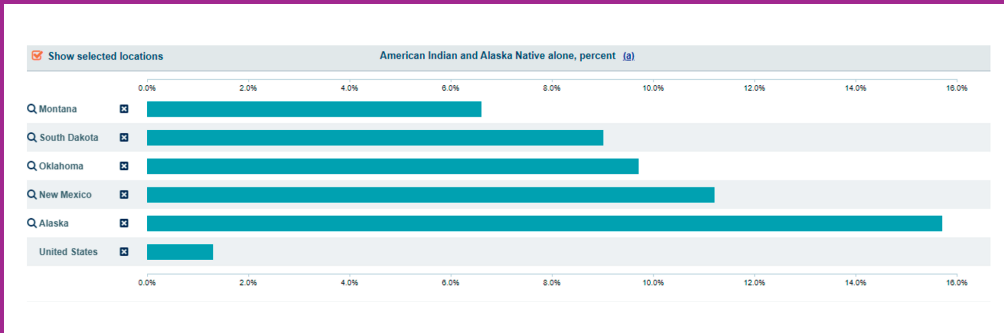
The second-largest group was the Navajo Nation, with over

418,000

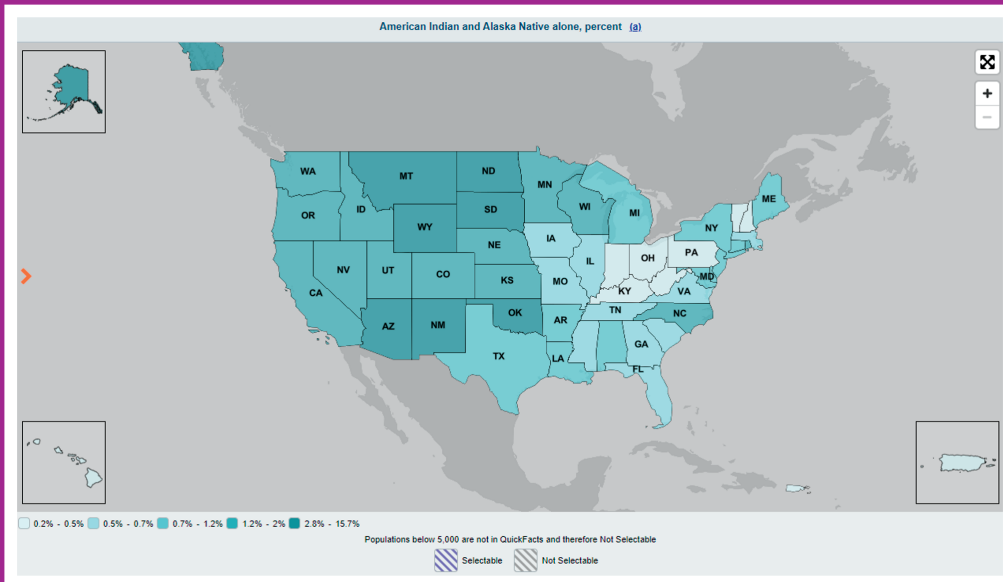
followed by Choctaw, with

255,000

STATES WITH THE HIGHEST NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION PROPORTION, 2021



NATIVE AMERICAN POPULATION IN US, 2021



FACTS & FIGURES

US Buying Power*, by Race/Ethnicity, 2000-2025 billions

	2000	2010	2020	2025
White	\$6,425.0	\$9,479.0	\$14,191.0	\$17,350.0
Black	\$611.0	\$979.0	\$1,574.0	\$1,978.0
Asian	\$278.0	\$614.0	\$1,297.0	\$1,802.0
Multiracial	\$60.6	\$149.2	\$286.4	\$396.8
Native American	\$40.0	\$84.0	\$140.0	\$178.0
Total	\$7,415.0	\$11,306.0	\$17,489.0	\$21,705.0
—Hispanic**	\$496.0	\$1,044.0	\$1,950.0	\$2,599.0

Note: numbers may not add up to total due to rounding; racial group figures add up to total, while a separate breakout for non-Hispanic is not shown; *defined as disposable personal income, meaning the share of total personal income available for personal consumption, personal interest, payments, and savings; **"Hispanic" is an ethnicity rather than a race, and can be of any race

Source: Selig Center for Economic Growth, Terry College of Business, and The University of Georgia, "The Multicultural Economy 2021," Aug 11, 2021

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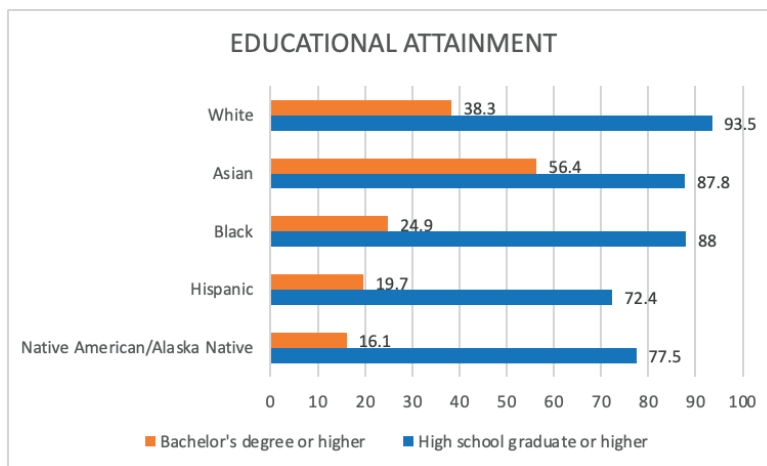
2021 US MEDIAN INCOME (DOLLARS)

\$70,784

2021 NATIVE AMERICAN MEDIAN INCOME (DOLLARS)

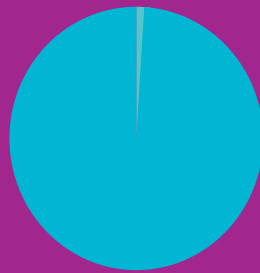
\$51,282

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT



NATIVE AMERICANS ON FORTUNE 500 BOARDS

> 1%



Less than 1% Native Americans on Fortune 500 boards

Less than 1% Native Americans as new independent directors on Fortune 500 boards

Boardroom Diversity at S&P 500 Firms

Diversity Group	New Independent Directors	All S&P 500 Directors
All racial/ethnic minority groups	47%	21%
Black	33%	11%
Latinx/Hispanic	7%	5%
Asian American	7%	5%
Native American/Alaska Native	<1%	<1%
Two or more races	<1%	<1%
Female	43%	30%

FIVE INFLUENTIAL NATIVE AMERICANS IN 2022

Joy Harjo Muscogee (Creek) Nation

Harjo has received acclaim for her poetry collections, including becoming the first Native American poet laureate in U.S. history.

Harjo has a diverse background, but she's been a member of the Oklahoma-based Muscogee tribe since the age of 19. Her work confronts and dismantles long-held stereotypes around Indigenous people.

In addition to poetry, she's a musician and playwright whose activism goes beyond just Native American issues to support women's rights and equality. Her creative works often focus on land rights for Native Americans and the gravity of the disappearance of "her people." Harjo is a vocal critic of Native American stereotypes formed from stories of the Wild West and old narratives that helped colonialism erase Native American histories.



Sharice Davids Ho-Chunk Nation

Elected in 2019, Davids is one of the first two Native American women elected to a Congressional seat and the first openly lesbian person to represent Kansas

She is pursuing initiatives to boost economic growth and community development for Native Americans locally while also supporting efforts to expand access to healthcare, voter protections and resources for small business owners nationally.

A graduate of Cornell Law School, Davids is the only Democrat from Kansas' Congressional delegation. Her political career follows a brief period as a professional mixed martial artist (MMA) in the 2010s.



Jessie Little Doe Baird Wampanoag

A renowned linguist, Baird has become known as a specialist in Indigenous language preservation. Her work to revive the language of the Wampanoag nation has received a great deal of attention. She received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 2010 for developing a language database of written records, religious texts and government documents.

Her work led to the production of a dictionary with more than 11,000 terms and a grammar book for the layperson to accompany the dictionary. She has worked to educate language teachers and developed a curriculum to teach the Wampanoag language to children of the tribe. She serves as the vice-chairwoman of the Mashpee Wampanoag Indian Tribal Council.

Tommy Orange Cheyenne and Arapaho

Orange is the author of the 2018 novel, *There There*, which received the 2019 American Book Award and was one of the finalists for the 2019 Pulitzer Prize, among other honors. A graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts, Orange's novel focused on the lives of indigenous people living in Oakland, California, and the experiences they've had with urban life. His goal was to challenge antiquated ideas about Native Americans.

Orange has spun the book's success into writing for various magazines and newspapers like *Esquire* and *McSweeney's* while also working on the sequel to *There There*.



Deb Haaland Laguna Pueblo

A 35th generation member of a Laguna Pueblo tribe, New Mexico's Haaland was the other Native American woman elected to Congress in 2019. She's worked as an environmental activist and strongly advocates for increasing tribal autonomy over their lands.

In 2021, Haaland took on a new responsibility when she became the first-ever Native American Cabinet secretary, taking the role of Secretary of the Interior under President Joe Biden.

Thus far, she has approved a new constitution for the Cherokee Nation, created an initiative to investigate abuse at now-defunct residential boarding schools housing Native American children and established a new unit in the Bureau of Indian Affairs to investigate cases of missing and murdered Native Americans.

