DEMOCRACY IS INDIGENOUS

FIVE YEAR IMPACT REPORT
Prepared by the National Urban Indian Family Coalition

RECLAIMING OUR VOICE.
RECLAIMING OUR POWER.
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MISSION

The NUIFC elevates a national voice for American Indians and Alaska Natives living in urban communities and sustains Indigenous values and culture through a strong network of urban Indian organizations.
INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the National Urban Indian Family Coalition has been building urban Native civic engagement infrastructure by investing in the capacity of our member organizations of American Indian-led, community-based nonprofit organizations located in the largest Native communities in the country. These investments have allowed these critically important organizations to foster local community capacity to engage in civic and electoral work and build a foundation for independent political and policy influence. The NUIFC and our member organizations recognize that in order to transform and improve the lives of our urban Native communities that we must become dedicated to increasing civic participation and work towards policies that level the playing field, provide equitable redistribution of resources and recognize that we all need a government that works for all citizens.

In 2018, NUIFC and its members spearheaded a groundbreaking initiative to mobilize the American Indian and Alaska Native populations residing off-reservation. These populations represent over 70% of the total AI/AN population and are usually overlooked by conventional voter turnout campaigns. In the last five years, this initiative has empowered these Native communities to have a significant impact on multiple electoral outcomes.

We are thrilled to share the five-year Democracy is Indigenous Native Vote Report, which celebrates the impact of NUIFC’s Native civic and electoral work. The report showcases the results of our efforts in the last three major elections and Census, explains our ambitious plan behind the creation of our member cohort and its rapid growth, and highlights a few of the organizations that demonstrate the power of these investments.

URBAN NATIVE DEMOGRAPHICS

- The unemployment rate of urban American Indians is 11.2% compared to 4.9% of non-Hispanic whites in urban areas.
- American Indian populations have the highest poverty rates (24.1%) – almost twice the national rate (12.8%)
- 32.1% of AI/AN Individuals below the poverty level are under the age of 18.
- $127,000 is the median value of owner-occupied homes among AI/AN households, while White (non-Hispanic) households occupy homes with a median value almost 40% higher of $174,600.
- According to the 2020 Census there are now over 9 million AI/AN people in the U.S. – of those, nearly 70% (6.3mil) live off reservation.
THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS WORK

The NUIFC was established twenty years ago to address a significant gap in our national discourse. Urban Native communities are among the most underrepresented and underfunded in the nation, making them one of the least visible groups. This lack of visibility and resources has inevitably led to deep-seated, multi-generational disparities.

As we look at the latest data, it’s disheartening to note that the disparities within social determinants of health for urban Native individuals remain alarmingly consistent over time. However, despite the odds stacked against urban Native communities, we persist. Our members constantly organize and advocate for the necessary resources, proper representation, and the inherent dignity of our communities. While there have been slight changes in various parts of the country, we recognize that without amplifying our voices, the challenges faced by our youth, families, elders, and communities will persist, further deepening the generational disparities experienced by our urban Native populations.

This realization underscored the importance of the “Democracy is Indigenous” initiative, a pivotal move towards fortifying community strength and influence to confront these enduring imbalances. Through this initiative, the NUIFC has directly aided 30 organizations across 19 states, bolstering civic engagement frameworks and rallying urban Native grassroots influence that resonates throughout every tier of government.

INVESTING IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Despite their proven records of success and delivering outcomes outsized to the level of investments from funders, urban Indian nonprofits are overlooked by funders in both the philanthropic and government sectors.

Philanthropic Investment

In 2018, the NUIFC received a $500,000 investment from the Wallace H. Coulter Foundation (WHCF) for urban Native voter and civic engagement. This initial investment was the first significant investment into urban Native democracy work in history and would set the table for the entirety of our Democracy is Indigenous initiative. In 2018 there was less than $30,000 dedicated to urban Native democracy work, as WHCF encourages investment into grassroots and community facing organizations, we were presented with the opportunity and directive to invest that $500,000 directly into our member nonprofits. What resulted was what we call the “five week miracle” – in 5 weeks, our redistribution of resources into 17 urban Native nonprofits yielded over 70k event attendees, thousands of calls and door knocks and over 8million social media engagements. We knew then that our trust in community facing nonprofits was not only warranted, but it also resulted in unprecedented engagement.

Since then, with our philanthropic partners, the NUIFC has invested $7,589,600 into these organizations to support local civic engagement work over the past five years. This report will articulate the tremendous return on that investment in the form of historic community civic engagement, voter turnout and highlight the creativity and brilliance of the urban Indian nonprofit sector.
NUIFC FUNDING BY REGION 2018-2023

MIDWEST: $2,087,850:
Minneapolis, St. Paul, Indianapolis, Detroit, Kansas City, Bismarck, Chicago, Milwaukee, Rapid City, Cincinnati

SOUTH • SOUTHWEST: $2,660,700
Phoenix, Albuquerque, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, Tucson, Houston, San Antonio, Oklahoma City, Dallas, Raleigh

WEST: $1,658,750
Seattle, Portland, Spokane, Anchorage, Denver, Oakland, Los Angeles, Tacoma, Idaho

EAST • NATIONAL: $1,182,300
Boston, Buffalo, National

29 Cities directly • 2 National Organizations

TOTAL: $7,589,600
# NUIFC Funded Organizations 2018-2023

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<th>Organization</th>
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<td>American For Indian Opportunity</td>
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<td>American Indian Center of Houston</td>
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<td>American Indian Center of Indiana</td>
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<td>American Indians in Texas</td>
<td>San Antonio, Texas</td>
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<td>Center for Native American Youth</td>
<td>Washington DC</td>
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<td>Chicago American Indian Center</td>
<td>Chicago, Illinois</td>
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<td>Chief Seattle Club</td>
<td>Seattle, Washington</td>
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<td>Dallas Indian Mission</td>
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<td>Denver Indian Center</td>
<td>Denver, Colorado</td>
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<td>First Alaskans Institute</td>
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<td>He Sapa Voter Initiative</td>
<td>Rapid City, South Dakota</td>
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<td>Kansas City Indian Center</td>
<td>Kansas City, Missouri</td>
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<td>Las Vegas Indian Center</td>
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<td>Washington DC</td>
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<td>Native American Community Development Institute</td>
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<td>NAYA Family Center</td>
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<td>Nez Perce Tribe</td>
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<td>North American Indian Association of Detroit</td>
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<td>Oklahoma Rock the Native Vote</td>
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<td>Phoenix Indian Center</td>
<td>Phoenix, Arizona</td>
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<td>Sacred Pipe Resource Center</td>
<td>Mandan, North Dakota</td>
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<td>Santa Fe Indigenous Center</td>
<td>Santa Fe, New Mexico</td>
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<td>Tahoma Indian Center</td>
<td>Tacoma, Washington</td>
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<td>The Native Project</td>
<td>Spokane, Washington</td>
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<td>Tlingit &amp; Haida</td>
<td>Seattle, Washington</td>
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<td>Triangle Native Association</td>
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A TIMELINE OF DEMOCRACY IS INDIGENOUS

Over the past half-decade, the NUIFC’s civic engagement initiatives have not only been pivotal but have also shown remarkable growth. Although strategies and branding have undergone transformations, our core principle remains unyielding: ensuring that ‘Democracy is Indigenous’ thrives by positioning urban Indian non-profits as authoritative and trusted voices in civic engagement.

2018

Dubbed the “six-week miracle,” the NUIFC’s 2018 voter and civic engagement initiative was nothing short of a groundbreaking endeavor. We swiftly funded 17 urban Indian non-profits across 16 states right on the cusp of election time. Securing and allocating this funding by mid-September, our cohort showed unparalleled adaptability, making decisive choices on how best to channel these newfound resources. Notably, for many of these organizations, this was their first dedicated funding for civic engagement, marking a monumental shift in their capacity to focus on civic and voter engagement in their communities.

Before this bold initiative, many of our member organizations, constrained by budgetary limits, often had to sideline civic engagement to “when time permits,” which typically translated to seldom, if ever. By stepping in and directing essential resources, the NUIFC not only addressed a colossal void but also catalyzed a transformative shift in the American political landscape. We didn’t just provide funds; we seeded transformational change and affirmed our commitment to shaping a more inclusive and active democracy.

Despite these challenges, what happened was nothing short of a miracle. We built coalitions, assisted in providing resources, created marketing plans and efforts, engaged with organizers on the ground, and convened all grantees from each of the 17 cities.

The primary lesson learned was very simple: Our organizations have the strategic ability, creativity, and access to community to accomplish remarkable results in very little time.

2020

Building on our initial venture into civic engagement, the NUIFC took proactive steps in anticipation of the 2020 presidential election, launching our “Democracy is Indigenous” initiative. In 2020 alone, we channeled over $2 million directly to 26 urban Indian organizations across 17 states, solidifying a grassroots movement that underscored the critical role of Native voters in the democratic process.

Throughout the year, this sustained effort empowered our organizations to craft robust civic engagement strategies, ensuring their involvement well in advance of election season. However, the unforeseen challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic mandated that our organizations recalibrate their strategies to prioritize community safety. Undeterred, our partner centers
showcased their typical ingenuity, innovating to ensure their communities were both safe and heard.

Swiftly transitioning to the digital landscape, our cohort emphasized online engagements, from social media campaigns and virtual rallies to candidate forums on Zoom and culturally resonant graphics. But the digital realm was just one facet. The “Democracy is Indigenous” members also orchestrated a series of adaptive in-person events nationwide, from get-out-the-vote parades and open-air candidate forums to community voter registration drives and even ice cream socials, ensuring community engagement remained vibrant yet safe.

The impact of the NUIFC’s 2020 initiatives was undeniable, particularly in crucial states like Arizona and Nevada. Regions where we mobilized witnessed a surge of nearly 2 million votes compared to 2016. After decisively influencing one of the most pivotal elections in U.S. history, our focus and commitment was to sustaining this momentum for the upcoming midterms.

2022

After two successful election cycles, the NUIFC and the DII cohort looked toward the 2022 midterms. While many analysts and pundits projected turnout would plummet due to historical trends and negative political headwinds, we understood that the infrastructure we built would be able to overcome those expectations. By working with 24 organizations across 17 states, we helped turn out voters and proved once again the power of the urban Indian electorate.

The NUIFC’s escalating commitment in this domain is evident in the scale and scope of our initiatives, and our ability to adeptly navigate both digital and traditional spheres. In 2022, we amplified our emphasis on in-person organizing. Concurrently, we seamlessly engaged audiences across varied social media platforms, crafting messages specific to each channel’s audience. Our engagement metrics, encompassing Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, reveal a compelling connection with nearly 10 million online users.

Parallel to our robust digital outreach, the NUIFC’s in-person initiatives also achieved unparalleled reach. With the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic receding, we prioritized direct, tangible engagements, forging invaluable connections and sparking insightful discussions.

Our integrated strategy resulted in a significant uptick in voter registration and ballots cast across various cities, complemented by an expansive array of events. Specifically, we achieved:

**COMBINED FIVE YEAR IMPACT 2018–2023**

- 480,156 in-person interactions
- 32.9 million people engaged in social, print, or other media
- 683 events
- 60,444 voters registered
2018 VOTER ENGAGEMENT

- 70,650 in-person interactions
- 6,851,255 people engaged in social, print, or other media
- 55 events
- Election of the native women, with Sharice Davids, Deb Haaland, and Peggy Flanagan all winning large elections

2020 VOTER ENGAGEMENT

- 77,212 in-person interactions
- 16.2 million people engaged in social, print, or other media
- 321 events
- 25,797 voters registered
- Most Native Americans ever elected to congress in 2020
- 21% increase in voter turnout in NUIFC Cities from 2016
The ability to re-emphasize in-person organizing included all of the following activities:

- Community forums
- Powwow
- Halloween parties
- Art competitions
- Visits to college campus
- Indigenous People Day events
- Civic engagement bingo
- Photo contests
- Get out the vote Information on billboards
- Outdoor movie nights
- Music concerts
- Phone banks
- Video public service announcements
- Radio advertisements
- Podcast interviews and explainers
- Transit advertisements
- Tailgate parties at sporting events
- Community raffles and giveaways
- Taco-About Voting event
- Voter education events
- Ballot parties
- Youth councils

Our cohort was also able to partner with different leaders and celebrities from across Indian country, including Lane Factor, star of the Reservation Dogs television show, and NBA player Lindy Waters III. They also distributed thousands of pieces of civic engagement “swag” including t-shirts, artwork, microfiber cloths, tote bags, and more.

Since the inception of this civic and voter engagement work in 2018, the NUIFC has emerged as the leading national Native organization dedicated to providing resources to community facing urban Native nonprofits in many of America’s largest cities. While our collective work in each election cycle has been impressive, we are also dedicated to changing how our Native people perceive civic engagement and connecting civic engagement and its importance to their day-to-day lived experiences.
To create lasting change we must expand our thinking around what constitutes civic engagement. A large amount of traditional thinking and resources go toward electoral work, but do not address all of the ways beyond voting in which we can be involved. To change this, the NUIFC invested over a million dollars into helping urban Indian America be counted accurately in the 2020 Census with our Statistically Significant campaign. We know that urban Native people are one of the most invisible populations in the U.S., which leads to our communities receiving less funding and holding less political power.

This investment paid off handsomely, as we saw more than 85% of the cities we were working in finish comfortably ahead of their states in Census response rate. When Census numbers were released, the American Indian and Alaska Native population (alone and in combination with another race) increased by a massive 86.5%. This means American Indian people represent 2.9% of the U.S population, at a raw total of 9.7 million.

Every state and city in which we organized saw an increase in the AI/AN population, with many states doubling that population from the previous Census. For example, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Texas each saw their AI/AN alone and in combination populations surge by more than 150%.

This growth was a testament to the work our centers did, making sure the urban Indian community understood the importance of the Census. Our centers distributed thousands of Census informational materials, tens of thousands of Statistically Significant marketing materials, and conducted countless outreach efforts to build awareness around the decennial count.

To support these efforts, the NUIFC worked with Comcast to create a national public service announcement that aired in more than 30 Comcast marketplaces with an in-kind value of more than $600,000. The ads were seen by more than 20 million people nationally.

We also continued this work into 2021, making sure to be heavily involved with the redistricting process, which uses information collected from the Census to draw political boundaries. This was the first time many of the partners had engaged in this work, so we hosted training, provided resources, and supported everyone in the cohort so they could organize their communities. We saw communities submit their own maps, attend meetings where districts were drawn, and provide testimony about the urban Native population, all of which broadly impacted the redistricting process. We also provided our cohort with breakdowns of the Census information that was released for each of their states, cities, and counties so they could better understand the demographic changes they helped bring about.
2020 CENSUS RESPONSE RATES
Grantee City >> State Response Rates vs 62.1% National Response Rate

#STATISTICALLYSIGNIFICANT
#2020CENSUS

We Are Here. We Will Be Counted
Learn More At: www.nuifc.org/census
As we continue to reimagine what civic engagement can look like, the NUIFC and our cohort launched the Thriving Cities speaking series, which is meant to bring officials from around the political spectrum for conversations around the biggest issues facing our communities. We created this initiative because we want to keep political pressure on our elected officials and so that we can continue building our Democracy is Indigenous infrastructure even when there isn’t an election at the end of the year.

In the inaugural year for Thriving Cities, we were joined by a U.S. senator, the Minnesota lieutenant governor, state legislators, city mayors, non-profit leaders, and many other local elected officials. These events were led by organizations with deep community roots built up from years of working and supporting the urban Native population in their cities.

The NUIFC is planning to continue to develop this series to create a national movement that community leaders can build their calendars around. We know how easy it is for political movements to lose steam after an election is won, which is why this new speaking series gives our cohort members something to focus on during off years. Our organizations remain the best advocates for the urban Native community, and we are excited to help them make Thriving Cities a larger part of our shared civic engagement portfolio.

These investments into the urban Indian non-profit space have been transformative for the organizations with whom we’ve partnered. The NUIFC has always known that we are only as strong as our member organizations, so it has been truly an honor to watch how much of an impact these urban Indian nonprofits are making with the Democracy is Indigenous funding. This section highlights some of the best examples of our civic engagement work. These groups have taken this funding and used it to become trusted leaders in their cities and leverage that power to make tangible improvements in their home regions.

Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) Portland, Oregon

The Native American Youth and Family center works with one of the largest Native communities in the Northwest, with a population representing over 380 distinct tribal nations. NAYA’s voter engagement and voter turnout effort focused on convening community events, providing information to community members, and wielding their hard-earned political power.

After proving how much impact they can have with traditional get-out-the-vote efforts – such as ballot parties, community events, voter outreach to their affordable housing properties, and helping lead the Coalition of Communities of Color in the Portland area – NAYA also launched a first of its kind 501c4, called the NAYA Action Fund – which was designed to engage in political advocacy and build electoral power in partnership with the Native community throughout Oregon and Washington. This entity has allowed NAYA to expand its influence and become even more involved in the local and regional political ecosystem. In the past five years, NAYA has turned from a strong community-based organization into a political powerhouse in the region.
Among its accomplishments, NAYA has:

- Hosted nearly 100 voter engagement events, ranging from powwows, candidate forums, and ballot lunches, to Portland-sponsored Movie in the Park nights.
- Played a key role in passing the Portland Clean Energy Fund, working along with the Coalition of Communities of Color, a collective advocacy organization made up of 19 culturally specific organizations.
- Hosted Oregon’s senior U.S. Senator Ron Wyden at one of NAYA’s affordable housing properties for its Thriving City event.
- Launched a 501c4 to help promote legislation and ensure that elected officials are keeping their commitments to the urban Native community.

**Rock the Native Vote (RNV) Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**

Created to improve urban Native voter turnout in Oklahoma City, Rock the Native Vote has quickly turned into one of the leading organizing forces in the community. RNV has become one of the most recognizable organizations in Oklahoma City, working tirelessly to have a presence at nearly every community event while also making sure to build out its own events. This work has greatly increased RNV’s profile, as they’ve been able to work with the local NBA team, the Oklahoma City Thunder, and also stars from the hit FX show Reservation Dogs like Lane Factor for their civic engagement work.

A prime example of this organizing work RNV has done comes from National Voter Registration Day, which has become synonymous with the organization in Oklahoma. Starting in 2020, RNV held a party downtown with traditional Native dancers, food trucks, a ferris wheel, and a proclamation from the mayor of Oklahoma City to declare the day an official city holiday. Building off this in 2022, RNV turned the celebration into a statewide effort with more than 10 events happening concurrently around Oklahoma. In the past five years, RNV has created one of the strongest civic engagement machines in the country.

Among its successes, RNV has:

- Worked closely with Voto Latino to increase voter turnout and helped elect the first Latino to the Oklahoma City Council.
- Hosted more than 100 community events focused on civic engagement over the past few election cycles.
- Organized a network of events around the state to celebrate National Voter Registration Day.
- Pursued a visible public media strategy by purchasing billboards and bus signs in prominent local areas that were seen by hundreds of thousands of people.
Las Vegas Indian Center (LVIC) Las Vegas, Nevada

Working in what is quickly becoming one of the most watched states in the political world, the Las Vegas Indian Center has been able to scale up its work and become one of the leaders in the non-profit civic engagement space. By helping lead the Silver State Voices network, a coalition of community-based non-profits, LVIC has been able to elevate itself into one of the most trusted messengers in the community.

Through this trust, LVIC focused on making election material digestible for everyone by helping people understand what the statewide ballot initiatives meant, which offices were up for election, and how their vote could impact the future of the state. They were also omnipresent in the community, setting up voter registration tables at large events and coordinating a classic car parade down the Las Vegas strip to encourage voter turnout. In the past five years, LVIC has shown how important being a trusted messenger is for civic engagement work.

During this time LVIC has:

- Distributed its own Las Vegas Indian Center Voting Guide, which helped people understand what was on their ballot and how the offices up for election could impact their lives.
- Opened a new community garden that they turned into a civic engagement event, referred to as "Rock the Vote."
- Worked to become an official polling location for the Navajo Nation, which helps connect tribal elections with urban politics.
- Conducted extensive phone bank and canvassing initiatives to help reach urban Native Voters and get them to turn out.

Phoenix Indian Center (PIC) Phoenix, Arizona

One of the oldest American Indian non-profits of its kind in the United States, the Phoenix Indian Center has been supporting Natives for more than 75 years. As one of the original members of the NUIFC, PIC has been a champion for urban Native people and one of the leaders in the civic engagement space. In the past five years, they’ve helped grow one of the most impressive voter turnout machines in the country.

As part of this, PIC has:

- Distributed tens of thousands of Native Vote swag items and goodie bags that provided information about registering to vote and creating a voting plan.
- Conducted door-to-door canvassing across different affordable housing complexes with large Native American populations.
- Worked directly with more than 20 different organizations to help increase the voice of communities of color.
- Held nearly 200 community events with a civic engagement component and tallied more than 250,000 social media interactions over the past five years.
Sacred Pipe Resource Center (SPRC) Bismarck, North Dakota

Founded in 2007, the Sacred Pipe Resource Center shows how urban Indian non-profits are uniquely equipped to step into a community and quickly become trusted messengers. The founders of the organization committed to the mission of maintaining a home-away-from-home for off-reservation American Indians living in the Bismarck-Mandan area and addressing the needs of Native people and families who are living away from their homelands, while respecting the sovereign nature of their individual Tribal citizenship.

Due to SPRC’s commitment to grassroots organizing, it has seen its influence in the area grow exponentially. Its success highlights how nonprofits can leverage civic engagement organizing into tangible resources that improve the community. In the past five years, SPRC has reimagined what community organizing can look like in North Dakota.

Among its activities, SPRC has:

• Held events around North Dakota, sometimes traveling up to 250 miles from one city to another to make sure everyone in the state felt seen.
• Knocked on thousands of doors to make sure residents were prepared to vote and that they had the proper identification to deal with North Dakota’s onerous voter laws.
• Launched a Native Vote in Style initiative, which had voters get picked up by a Hummer limousine to take them to early voting.
• Hosted a monthly civic engagement bingo game that has helped explain to people why voting is so important.
• Held a Native voters summit for Thriving Cities, bringing different elected officials from state, county, and tribal governments to discuss how they could support the urban Native community.

CONCLUSION AND LOOKING FORWARD

When the NUIFC launched our civic engagement work, we entered a space that had been overlooked for decades. So much of the traditional GOTV infrastructure, even when considering Native voters, overlooks the unique experiences of urban Native voters and was failing to find pockets of citizens that could help decide elections. The work undertaken over the last five years has been invaluable and has reiterated the truth that we’ve always known, the urban Native voter bloc can be the swing vote.

As we build on this work through this decade, our dedication to continue supporting our cohort of urban Native nonprofits will remain the centerpiece of fulfilling our mission. Each one of the organizations in our Democracy is Indigenous cohort is in a position to mobilize their community in ways that no other organization can. These creative and brilliant nonprofits have shown time and time again, that when provided resources, they can not only engage this hard to reach population, they engage our people in the transformational work necessary to improve outcomes for all of us.

Over the last five years, the Democracy is Indigenous voter & civic engagement initiative has grown into a foundational piece of the NUIFC’s mission and work. Our commitment to improving our shared Democracy is grounded in the understanding that when we are organized, we can elevate a national voice for American Indians and Alaska Natives living in urban communities and sustain Indigenous values and culture through a strong network of urban Indian organizations.
VISION
Thriving American Indian and Alaska Native urban communities supported by a robust, powerful, and influential ecosystem of Native-led Nonprofits.

MISSION
NUIFC elevates a national voice for American Indians and Alaska Natives living in urban communities and sustains Indigenous values and culture through a strong network of urban Indian organizations.

VALUES

ACCOUNTABILITY. NUIFC’s approach to working with its members and Urban Indian communities is rooted in accountability, relationship, and respecting the unique inter-tribal diversity, histories, and experiences of those communities.

RELATIONSHIP. Our relationship and work with our members is rooted in transparency, trust, inclusion, and a commitment to do no harm to a community.

RESPONSIBILITY. Future success and prosperity of our Urban Indian communities relies upon our unified voice and shared responsibility to advocate and work toward our vision – thriving American Indian and Alaska Native urban communities.

RECIPROCITY • REDISTRIBUTION. NUIFC is committed to redistributing resources, knowledge, relationships, and funding to our member organizations.

For questions, please contact Janeen Comenote, Executive Director at: jcomenote@nuifc.org
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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