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Fund Launched to Help Tribal Communities Hit Hardest by COVID-19

Tribal, philanthropic, state and community groups join forces to raise money for a
Native American Relief Fund for Tribal Communities in New Mexico

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO — Tribal communities in New Mexico are among the hardest-hit in the U.S. by COVID-19. To help provide emergency relief—a team of funders and community leaders have joined forces to raise \$3 million for COVID-19 relief for Navajo, Apache and Pueblo Nations in New Mexico—and they need your help.

The Native American Relief Fund, launched this week, will provide emergency grants to organizations serving the state's hardest-hit communities. A number of funding partners have joined in this effort, including the New Mexico Foundation, Santa Fe Community Foundation, and Thornburg Foundation and champions such as Congresswoman Deb Haaland, State Secretary of Indian Affairs Lynn Trujillo, State House Representative Melanie Stansbury, and the New Mexico United soccer club.

The Navajo Nation and several Pueblos, including Zia, San Felipe, and Zuni, have seen soaring rates of COVID-19 over the last several weeks—leading to emergency situations in securing food, water, medical supplies and personal protective equipment. Statewide, 37% of New Mexico's confirmed COVID-19 cases have been identified in Native communities. New Mexico's tribal communities are seeing amongst the highest rates of COVID-19 of any tribes in the U.S. and in the case of the Navajo Nation are on par with those in New York. To respond to this crisis, Tribes and Pueblos have issued stay-at-home orders and many community services have been shut down in order to keep people safe. The impacts of this public health crisis are

compounded by food supply shortages, lack of available water in some communities, and difficulties in obtaining basic medical equipment, PPE, and household items.

The Native American Relief Fund was launched to help address emergency needs in concert with tribal and state emergency response efforts. “This fund will help our Pueblo and Tribal communities respond to the incredible challenges posed by responding to COVID-19,” said JoAnn Melchor, president and CEO of the New Mexico Foundation, which is the fiscal agent for the fund. “The New Mexico Foundation is proud to host this fund and work with our Tribal, state and philanthropic partners to help ensure we can get resources to communities and support their long-term recovery.”

Many of the challenges that families in these communities may already face, including food and income insecurity, lack of running water and electricity in some, and a maze of bureaucratic systems, are complicating emergency response on the ground. Some communities are far from urban centers. Lack of cell phone service and broadband access are slowing the sharing of information. In some areas water services and meal programs have closed to protect public health and families are having to drive hours to get food and water. And, in some in some areas of the Navajo Nation and elsewhere families may have to rely on non-potable water for drinking and household uses.

“We must get emergency resources to communities on the ground,” said State House Representative Melanie Stansbury. “This fund will help get dollars where they are needed most to bring food, water and medical supplies to communities. However, this is not just a one-time response—communities will be impacted for months and will need support in recovering over the long-term. We need everyone who can to rally and support this effort.”

“The Santa Fe Community Foundation is proud to work in partnership with our sister Foundation and other community-led entities for the deployment of these crucial dollars,” said Bill Smith, president and CEO of the Santa Fe Community Foundation. “Leveraging the help of our philanthropic and nonprofit partners will enable us to respond rapidly to meet the immediate needs of our families and also protect our communities from further exposure.”

About the Native American Relief Fund

The Native American Relief Fund was launched by the New Mexico Foundation, in collaboration with the Santa Fe Community Foundation, Navajo-Hopi Families COVID-19 Relief Fund, and a growing list of funding partners, nonprofits and government partners. This week the Thornburg Foundation announced a grant of \$50,000 to help jump start the fund along with donations and pledges from the LANL Foundation, Water Foundation, and Sacred Wind Communications. The Fund is seeking contributions of all kinds, including corporate and individual gifts, grants and bequests.

The Fund will support tribal and state governments’ efforts to deliver emergency supplies--including food, water, medical supplies, personal protective equipment, and personal items such as diapers, toilet paper, hand soap, sanitizer and other essentials--to communities impacted by COVID-19. It will also help resource long-term recovery efforts.

Tax-deductible donations can be made at <https://nmcf.org/programs/native/> or by calling (505) 356-4110. Those in need of support from the Fund can also call this number.

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