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## **Major initiative is launched to transform society's views of Native Americans**

*Two-year project will conduct research and develop strategies for perception-changing campaign*

LONGMONT, Colo. – An unprecedented national project was announced today to bring Native Americans out of the shadows of public consciousness. ***Reclaiming Native Truth: A Project to Dispel America's Myths and Misconceptions*** is a two-year research and strategy-setting effort to create a long-term, Native-led movement that will positively transform the image of and narrative on Native Americans.

Led jointly by First Nations Development Institute and Echo Hawk Consulting, *Reclaiming Native Truth* is funded by a \$2.5 million grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF).

“Native Americans and their communities are blocked from reaching their full potential by harmful stereotypes, misperceptions, and lack of awareness,” said Michael E. Roberts (*Tlingit*), president and CEO of First Nations Development Institute and co-director of *Reclaiming Native Truth*. “This cultural indifference and injustice pervades our entire country, from the media and entertainment industry to thought leaders and pop culture overall.”

In recent decades, American society has made significant strides in viewing various racial, ethnic and social groups more accurately and respectfully. However, Native peoples have been largely left out of this overall trend of greater acceptance and inclusion.

Project co-director Crystal Echo Hawk (*Pawnee*), president and CEO of Echo Hawk Consulting, explained the goals of *Reclaiming Native Truth*. “Over the next two years, this project is focused on understanding the true extent of society’s negative and inaccurate perceptions of Native Americans and finding the best means of overcoming them,” she said. “Only then will we have the knowledge we need to design a broad campaign to solve this problem.”

A 20-person Advisory Committee comprised of Native leaders, influential stakeholders, and racial equity experts will offer oversight, expertise and leadership to guide the project. To date, confirmed committee members include:

- Cheryl Crazy Bull (*Sicangu Lakota*), president, American Indian College Fund

- Ray Halbritter (*Oneida*), Oneida Indian Nation representative and CEO of Oneida Nation Enterprises
- Jacqueline Pata (*Tlingit*), executive director, National Congress of American Indians
- Sara Kastelic (*Alutiiq*), executive director, National Indian Child Welfare Association
- Dr. Adrienne Keene (*Cherokee*), scholar, writer, blogger, and activist
- Judith LeBlanc (*Caddo*), director, Native Organizers Alliance
- Denisa Livingston (*Navajo*), community health advocate, Diné Community Advocacy Alliance
- Nichole Maher (*Tlingit*), board vice-chair, National Urban Indian Family Coalition, and president, Northwest Health Foundation
- Erik Stegman (*Assiniboine*), executive director, Center for Native American Youth
- Mark Trahant (*Shoshone-Bannock*), editor of *TrahantReports*
- Nick Tilsen, (*Oglala Lakota*), executive director, Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation

“The Kellogg Foundation is committed to supporting efforts that express more complete and authentic stories of all children, families and communities,” said La June Montgomery Tabron, WKKF president and CEO. “It is our hope that this project will share the truth in narratives of the first people, and ultimately improve the lives of our country’s five million Native Americans and their descendants.”

At the conclusion of the two-year project, Native leaders will develop a national campaign to improve awareness of and respect and equality for Native Americans. This campaign will seek to secure greater inclusion of Native Americans in government decision-making; address disparities in grantmaking to Native Americans; improve the accuracy of Native Americans’ portrayal in the media and entertainment; ensure the inclusion of accurate Native American history in educational curricula; and implement other solutions to the predominant bias.

#### **About First Nations Development Institute**

First Nations Development Institute is the only Native American-controlled nonprofit dedicated to building healthy economies in Indian Country based on putting Native American communities in control of their assets. Through mid-2016, this 36-year-old economic justice organization has successfully managed 1,162 grants totaling more than \$25.95 million to Native American projects and organizations in 39 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territory American Samoa. For more information, visit [www.firstnations.org](http://www.firstnations.org).

#### **About Echo Hawk Consulting**

Echo Hawk Consulting offers expert services in executive nonprofit leadership, philanthropic giving, program design, fundraising, and marketing to tribes, grantmakers, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic individuals focused on strategic growth, social change, and investment in Indian Country. For more information, visit [www.echohawkconsulting.com](http://www.echohawkconsulting.com).

#### **About the W. K. Kellogg Foundation**

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal pioneer Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life. WKKF is based in Battle Creek, Michigan, and works throughout the United States and internationally, as well as with sovereign tribes. Special emphasis is paid to priority places where there are high concentrations of poverty and where children face significant barriers to success. WKKF

priority places in the U.S. are in Michigan, Mississippi, New Mexico and New Orleans; and internationally, are in Mexico and Haiti. For more information, visit [www.wkkf.org](http://www.wkkf.org).

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