



Accelerating Indigenous Tourism Development *Building on NATIVE Act Success*

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

Distinguished Indigenous Leaders Lecture Series

George Washington University
December 12, 2023



International Institute
of Tourism Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



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Introduction

The Event

Demonstrating their commitment and vision to enhance the educational, career and economic development opportunities for Indigenous students and entrepreneurs throughout the U.S., the Americas, and the world, the George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies and the Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas (ITCA) launched a “Distinguished Indigenous Leaders Lecture Series” in December, 2023. The inaugural event was held on the George Washington University campus at the James Morton Auditorium on December 12, live streamed to virtual participants throughout the Americas and [recorded for viewing](#).

The topic of the inaugural Indigenous leader lecture series was “Accelerating Indigenous Tourism Development – Building on NATIVE Act Success.” Indigenous tourism leaders, Federal agency leaders and Indigenous tourism supporters were invited to speak on what has been accomplished under the 2016 law and what remains to be done to fully realize NATIVE Act potential.

In addition to the NATIVE Act theme, an international panel discussed support for collaborative and innovative Indigenous tourism projects in the Americas.

The Event Hosts

For more than 30 years, the George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies at the GW School of Business has been a global leader in tourism education and research. As thought leaders in education and research, International Institute of Tourism Studies collaborates with leaders in government, business, academia and nonprofits working to build a sustainable industry that balances visitor interests with destination well-being.

The GW International Institute of Tourism Studies offers professional certificate programs in [destination management](#), [event management](#), and [cultural heritage tourism](#), preparing the next generation of doers, leaders and thinkers in these growth fields.

Students enrolled in the [Master of Science in Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management](#) enjoy applied learning opportunities in popular U.S. tourist destinations, as well as the Indigenous Americas, Indonesia and Europe. We provide graduate students with the opportunity to go beyond the classroom and make a difference.

The Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas (ITCA) The Organization of American States and the GW International Institute of Tourism Studies, in partnership with the Office of Indian Economic Development, hosted the first-ever Indigenous Tourism Forum of the Americas in 2020, bringing together 300 Indigenous tourism organizations, travel companies, and representatives of governments, nonprofits, and academia from Canada, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and the United States to discuss development challenges Indigenous peoples face post-COVID and the role of tourism in driving sustainable economic development in Indigenous communities.

The 2020 Forum, a virtual event, inspired the creation of a network of 90 Indigenous leaders and private industry and government champions who joined forces to create the hemispheric Indigenous Tourism Collaborative of the Americas. Today, ITCA is a network of 100+ representatives from Indigenous tourism and tourism industry organizations throughout the hemisphere as well as Indigenous communities, travel companies, ministries of tourism, state tourism offices, tourism nonprofits, individual tribes and Tribal and non-Indigenous colleges and universities. The network identifies mutual Indigenous tourism goals and drives ITCA's projects and programs to accelerate Indigenous tourism development success.

ITCA is steered by the Organization of American States, the Office of Indian Economic Development and GW International Institute of Tourism Studies.

ITCA's first collaborative project is an extensive **Indigenous tourism eLibrary**, an easily accessible, ever-expanding, comprehensive inventory of tools and information to help Indigenous people, stakeholders and partners contribute to and benefit from sustainable tourism. For more information on the ITCA and to access the Indigenous tourism eLibrary visit: <https://indigenoustourismamericas.org/>



Tourism Disrupts Native Invisibility

by Kathy Baird, Chief Communications Officer, Washington Post

One of my great passions is raising the visibility and the voices of Native people in the United States. I am an advisor to IllumiNative, the organization begun by Native women in the U.S. to build power for Native peoples by amplifying Native voices, stories and issues. Justice, equity and self-determination for Native people will come when Natives are fully visible, so we have to break through whenever and wherever we can with the truth about Native people. At IllumiNative, we organize to disrupt the invisibility of Native peoples, to re-educate Americans about Native America and mobilize public support for Native issues.

What is Indigenous tourism development if not a powerful disruption of Native invisibility? Native tourism is an important ingredient in the re-education of Americans about who Natives are and what they can do and contribute.

Native tourism is direct contact and direct conversation with Native people – in their home, on their lands – telling their histories, offering their special hospitality, talent, humor and warmth, which cannot help but smash old stereotypes and tropes.

Native tourism is in an important moment, and I am glad to support it.

The Native Act, when it passed and was signed by President Barack Obama in 2016, reminded the tourism industry and national tourism strategists that we are still here, have so much to offer, many people around the world want to visit us, many tribes are anxious to develop tourism that they can control and manage, and tribes continue to strive to provide jobs, improve their capacity and reinforce their cultural traditions.

My heritage is Sicangu Lakota and Oneida from the Rosebud reservation in South Dakota. I am proud to know that North Dakota and South Dakota tribes are among the leading tribes in organizing themselves and collaborating in alliances with states, industry and nonprofits to create tourism programs, infrastructure, and products that lead the nation in Native tourism.

Natives of the Plains are, like Natives in all regions, intensely creative, intelligent, resilient people and their stories, oral histories, cultures and natural resources, once heard and seen and understood, will become invaluable to all Americans. Native tourism is images, voices, histories, languages and emotions breaking through with brand new insights for everyone of us.

You have noticed, I know, that Native peoples in the United States are currently enjoying a “bump” in visibility through exceptional Native movies, TV shows, plays, histories, novels, cuisine, fashion design, fine arts and athletes. We need to capitalize on this bump and make it a lasting trend, building on its momentum to propel us into a new age of Native visibility.

Native tourism can seize this day and extend the invitation to travelers to visit, to learn more, and receive the gifts of Native experiences, cultures, languages and landscapes.

I am happy to be in the growing circle of supporters for Native tourism development. I thank you for your work.

Ed Hall, who stepped in to be emcee of the Lecture Series, reading a statement from Kathy Baird, who was unable to emcee the event due to illness.



Executive Takeaways

Greatest NATIVE Act Successes to Date

EDUCATION, PROMOTION AND MARKETING

The American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association, through a cooperative agreement with the Office of Indian Economic Development has developed a well-established tribal tourism conference, an excellent tribal destinations website, offers year-round webinars and has created a tribal tourism database.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND ALLIANCES

The greatest successes in Native tourism development on a statewide basis have been [North Dakota](#), [South Dakota](#), [Montana](#) and Virginia.

Foundationally, their success has depended on modest NATIVE Act funding and technical assistance from academic institutions specializing in sustainable tourism including SWOT analysis, alliance facilitation, building Tribal capacity and product development.

WHITE HOUSE ACTION

The [White House Council on Native American Affairs](#), through their [Economic Development, Energy and Infrastructure Committee](#) established a NATIVE Act subcommittee to better coordinate and encourage the implementation of the NATIVE Act by federal agencies in 2022.



“We have a duty to revitalize Tribal languages, cultures, economies, and lands to address the harms that past policies have inflicted on Indigenous peoples.”

– Brian Newland, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs



CALL TO ACTION



As much as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Commerce have accomplished since 2018, it is not enough to satisfy the mandates of the NATIVE Act and ensure that all tribes near federal assets are enjoying the investment from federal agencies called for in the Act.

On behalf of the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, I call on all federal agencies who have a stake in the economic development and the preservation of cultural heritage in Native Nations to join us in the full implementation of the NATIVE Act.

– Wizipan Garriott, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs



MORE MONEY NEEDS TO BE DEVOTED TO BOTH TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE LIKE WE GOT, NOT JUST FOR FEASIBILITY AND PLANNING.

– Darian Morsette, President, North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance and Board Member, American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association

COME TO TURTLE MOUNTAIN. IT'S AN OPEN INVITATION. YOU'LL BE SHOCKED AND AMAZED.

– Jamie Azure, Chairman, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, North Dakota

COME AND VISIT US, SEE US. WE WILL SHOW YOU WHO WE ARE.

– Tamara St. John, Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Oyate Historian, South and North Dakota

NATIVE Act of 2016 – Summary

NATIVE Act – Public Law 114-221 – Federal Agency Mandates

All federal agencies “*Shall update their respective management plans and tourism initiatives and strategies to include tribes, tribal and native hawaiian organizations*” in order to:

- Integrate Native tourism with US tourism
- Advance the National Travel and Tourism Strategy
- Increase collaboration between Federal tourism assets like National Parks, forests, lakes, monuments, national conservation areas and wildlife refuges—and their nearby tribes
- Improve self-determination and self-governance
- Provide grants, loans, and technical assistance to spur important infrastructure development, increase tourism capacity; and elevate living standards
- Improve travel and tourism data collection and analysis and align Federal agency Web sites and publications to NATIVE Act goals
- Identify programs that could be used to support tourism capacity building and help sustain tourism infrastructure in Native American communities
- Develop visitor portals at parks, landmarks, heritage and cultural sites, and other assets to showcase and respect the diversity of the Indigenous peoples of the United States
- Share local Native American heritage through the development of bilingual interpretive and directional signage
- Provide technical assistance through a MOU or cooperative agreement with a national nonprofit organization to identify and deliver technical assistance in areas of need identified by tribes
- Depending on availability of appropriations, the head of each Federal agency shall obligate funds to cover any administrative expenses from carrying out the NATIVE Act

The Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Commerce are directed to keep track of their progress, provide metrics for the effectiveness of any and all cooperative agreements, and deliver a report to Congress on how they are doing with their obligations under the Act.

Actions each head of agency is directed to take to help Natives to showcase their heritage, foods, traditions, history and continuing vitality:

- Identify and maintain traditions and cultural features important to sustain the distinctiveness of the local Native American community
- Provide visitor experiences that are authentic and respectful
- Provide interpretation that connects Indigenous peoples of the United States and the national identity of the United States
- Promote understanding and respect for diverse cultures, enter into appropriate MOUs and establish public-private partnerships to welcome domestic and international travelers arriving at airports and ports of entry in a way that both showcases and respects the diversity of Native American communities.

Mandates for Grant-Making Agencies

- The grant-making agencies – Administration for Native Americans, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities and ALL heads of grant-making agencies with assets or resources relating to travel, recreation, or tourism promotion or branding are directed to:
- Support efforts to tell the story of Native Americans as the First Peoples of the United States;
 - Use the arts and humanities to help revitalize Native communities, promote economic development, increase livability, and present and celebrate the uniqueness of the United States.
- Directs the SMITHSONIAN through its Advisory Council and Board of Regents to establish long-term partnerships with tribal, Native Hawaiian and nonprofit organizations to share collections, exhibitions, interpretive materials, and educational strategies, and conduct joint research and collaborative projects.

The NATIVE Act – Passed by Acclamation – An Overwhelming Mandate

Signed into law on September 23, 2016, the NATIVE Act is one of those rare bipartisan laws that everyone in Congress was for and no one was against. The NATIVE Act passed in the 2016 session in both the Senate and the House by acclamation – the vote was unanimously in favor.

U.S. Senate Sponsors

Senators and House sponsors and co-sponsors included the current Chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee and Vice-Chairman of Senate Indian Affairs – Senators Brian Schatz of Hawaii (D) and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska (R). Additional sponsors were Senators John Thune from South Dakota (R), Jon Tester from Montana (D), Mike Rounds from South Dakota (R), Al Franken from Minnesota (D), Tom Udall from New Mexico (D), Dean Heller from Nevada (R), Dan Sullivan from Alaska (R), John Hoeven from North Dakota (R) and Gary Peters from Michigan (D).

U.S. House of Representatives Sponsors

Oklahoma Senator Markwayne Mullin (R), who was then a Congressman, sponsored the NATIVE Act in the House of Representatives. The co-sponsors included the late Don Young of Alaska (R), Kevin Cramer of North Dakota (R), now a Senator, Dina Titus from Nevada (D), Tom Cole from Oklahoma (R), Jared Huffman of California (D), Kristi Noem from South Dakota (R), Mark Amodei from Nevada (R) and Betty McCollum from Minnesota (D).

The Success of the NATIVE Act : Keynote Highlights



Wizipan Garriott

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs

NATIVE Act Success Stories

Answering the NATIVE Act mandates, the Office of Indian Economic Development has engaged in significant Tribal tourism support efforts through the great work of Denise Litz and Onna LeBeau in the Office of Indian Economic Development.

The NATIVE Act, through Congressional appropriations to OIED, has funded the work of American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) since 2018, including their annual tourism education conferences, their excellent Native Travel marketing website, cultural heritage trainings, as many as 42 development webinars, trainings for tribes in international marketing and promotion, and the creation of a tribal tourism database.

OIED has demonstrated that technical assistance to tribes and tribal tourism alliances is the key to developing tourism in Indian Country. In 2021, OIED began a Tribal Tourism Grant Program assisting 18 tribes with tourism development feasibility studies. This year, OIED provided \$3 million to fund 30 tribal tourism grants to tribes supporting feasibility studies and business plan development.

Other pilot projects have funded technical assistance to statewide tribal alliances developing comprehensive strategic sustainable development plans and products. That technical assistance has been supplied by academic institutions – George Washington University, Virginia Technical University, Arizona State University.

South Dakota Success

With the active involvement of tribal leadership and strong support from South Dakota's Department of Tourism, the GW International Institute of Tourism Studies facilitated the development of the [Native American Tourism Development and Management Plan - South Dakota](#). This initiative led to the establishment of the [South Dakota Native Tourism Alliance](#) (SDNTA), serving as a pivotal regional body for Indigenous tourism in the state. The SDNTA is instrumental in crafting new cultural tourism experiences and forging market connections.

In 2023, the SDNTA collaborated with Destination America and Trafalgar to launch a unique nine-day tour titled "National Parks and Native Trails of the Dakotas." Due to its success, Trafalgar will continue to offer the tour in 2024. This groundbreaking tour exclusively focuses on tribal lands, bridging South Dakota and North Dakota.

Comprising over 30 members, including nine tribes and the South Dakota Tourism Department, the South Dakota alliance plays a vital role in promoting Indigenous tourism and fostering partnerships for sustainable growth.

North Dakota Success

Since 2013, the George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies has provided technical support to tribes for tourism planning, management, and product development. By funding GW in this work, the Office of Indian Economic Development has aided the development of two successful state-wide Native tourism alliances in North Dakota and South Dakota.

Credit goes to The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, whose chairman Jamie Azure is a Lecture Series speaker. They received a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation in the Pathways to Prosperity Program and that grant research identified tourism as an area of economic development, which led to a contract with George Washington and the creation of the [North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance \(NDNTA\)](#).

GW assisted the NDNTA with planning, training and preparing for the formal launch of Native American Cultural Tours, its tour operation arm. The tours bring NDNTA one step closer to establishing itself as a major regional Native American tourism powerhouse.

The NDNTA is now an independent organization that has secured \$600,000 grant for ongoing work.

Montana Success

Seeing the success in the Dakotas, the [Montana Indigenous Tourism Alliance \(MITA\)](#) was created and ratified by the Rocky Mountain Tribals Leaders Council 2020. All Montana's Tribes except one are involved in MITA. They are assisted in their planning and development by the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, known as Virginia Tech.

MITA was recognized in 2023 at the Montana Governor's Conference on Tourism for Excellence in Tribal Tourism Development.

The Success of the NATIVE Act : Keynote Highlights

Virginia Success

Through OIED grant funding, Virginia Tech has also helped six tribes in Virginia with tourism and grant writing capacity building. Virginia Tech works with each Virginia tribe to launch a Native Virginia Heritage Trail.

Additional tribes around the country benefited from tourism grants from Indian Affairs in 2021 through their Tribal Tourism Grant Program. To review the 2022 BIA Native Act congressional report, visit the Office of Indian Economic Development tribal tourism website. www.bia.gov/service/indigenous-tourism

White House Coordination

OIED is collaborating with the White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNA) in a NATIVE Act subcommittee to the Economic Development, Energy, and Infrastructure Committee. Federal agency participants include the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Transportation, Labor, Interior, and DOI's Office of Native Hawaiian Relations (ONHR). The first convening in 2022 established the top priorities:

- Coordination of Federal and non-governmental partners for more effective implementation of the NATIVE Act.
- Provision of funding resources, capacity-building tools, and technical support to Tribes to develop and manage sustainable tourism while enhancing culture and community.
- Provision of education and training to increase Tribal capacity to plan, implement, administer, and sustain tourism infrastructure projects.
- And to report to and work with Congress to further develop Federal support and delivery of services for Tribal tourism capacity building.
- Kudos to Denise Litz and Onna LeBeau for their excellent work in bringing back emphasis on the NATIVE Act within the Office of Indian Economic Development.



The Success of the NATIVE Act : Keynote Highlights



Shawn Deschene,
Director of Native
American Business
Development, U.S.
Department of
Commerce

Before I discuss the many programs in Commerce that work for tribes pursuing tourism development, I want to point out the access to capital clearinghouse, which the White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNA) launched in 2023 – a searchable repository of up-to-date federal funding opportunities available to Tribal Nations and Native businesses. [Access to Capital Clearinghouse](https://www.bia.gov/atc) – <https://www.bia.gov/atc>

U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) – Work Complementing the NATIVE Act

- One out of every 20 jobs in the U.S. are in tourism and hospitality. It follows that several DOC agencies pursue missions and offer programs that support tribes pursuing tourism.
- **Capital Readiness Program** provides \$125 million annually in technical assistance to help underserved entrepreneurs grow and scale their businesses.
- **Minority Business Centers** support innovation and entrepreneurship, strategic planning, becoming export-ready and transformative projects. Minority-owned firms seeking to penetrate new markets – domestic & global – and growing in size and scale, can access business experts at a MBDA Business Center. Tribal success is a priority.

Example: The Minority Business Center in Billings, MT, supports the economic recovery, growth, and global competitiveness of American Indian Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian (AIANNH) artists (Art-preneurs) and tourism operators in the Rocky Mountain Region. The project is developing a pilot entrepreneurship training program in partnership with Tribal Colleges.

- **International Trade Administration** partners with AIANTA to promote tribal tourism using outbound visitor survey information conducted by the [National Travel and Tourism Office data](#).
 - One in twenty jobs in Indian Country is in tourism and hospitality, generating \$7.4 million in jobs income in 2022.
 - We know that the U.S. gets about 90 million visitors annually but we need more research than we already do about what portion visits Indian Country.
 - The U.S. Commercial Service promotes U.S. tribal tourism abroad and assists AIANTA in training activities.
- **Bureau of Economic Analysis** is working to map tourism data in the same way that the U.S. Census Bureau maps census data so that tourism and outdoor recreation are more accurately represented in tribal economic data.

I saw the term “radical tourism” used in your event materials, the definition being an emerging speciality market for travelers which incorporates the political and social structures and the history of the place being visited. I wanted to say that I agree, it’s important for Native peoples to share our histories along with our cultures. It’s not just an opportunity to share all we have contributed but also a time to educate an often under-informed public about the history underlying the complex state of our current circumstances.

Check out the White House Council on Native American Affairs Sacred Sites [Best Practices Guide](#)



The Success of the NATIVE Act : Keynote Highlights



Milo Booth

Director of Tribal Affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Transportation

Transportation Responds to Tribal Leadership

What I just said in my own language is: my heart is good to see you. My presence as Director of Tribal Affairs in Secretary Buttigieg's office is the result of tribal consultation, through listening to tribal leadership. They have asked for more clout in the Department of Transportation, and we are delivering.

Roads = Visits

Our work is complementary to the NATIVE Act because transportation infrastructure is key to tourism development. We are in our fourth year of the five year [RAISE Discretionary Grant program](#) for community infrastructure – \$180 million is available to tribes in 2024 – and the deadline is February 28.

“I look forward to our continued engagement with you and NATIVE Act agencies on the transportation needs of Indigenous tourism.”

“My main message today is Apply, apply, apply.”

RAISE GRANTS 2023

- Standing Rock Reservation \$10 million
North Dakota Tribal Trail received \$9.8 million.
- Navajo Nation – \$20 million
 - Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation – \$17 million
 - Omaha Tribe – \$2 million
 - Ramah Navajo Tribe – \$21 million
 - Choctaw Nation – \$25 million.
 - Pine Ridge – \$10 million
 - Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe – \$25 million
 - Shoalwater Bay Indian Tribe (WA) – \$25 million



Federal NATIVE Act Success Stories

This speaker panel was moderated by Ed Hall, Indigenous Economic Development and Tourism Executive in Residence, George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies.

The combined NATIVE Act programs of our panelists from OIED and USFS have benefitted hundreds of tribes across the country—from Alaska to Florida, the Dakotas to Louisiana, New Mexico to New York, California to Virginia. They've done it with relatively small amounts of appropriations – \$3.4 - \$5 million annually for the Office of Indian Economic Development and \$1 - 2 million for the U.S. Forest Service. If two agencies can make that kind of impact, think what all of the federal government could do if they fully implemented the NATIVE Act, using their existing resources and creating programs that attract more funding. – Ed Hall



K. Denise Litz
Chief, Division
of Economic
Development, Office
of Indian Economic
Development

Key NATIVE Act Accomplishments

Wizipan Garriott covered many of the key OIED accomplishments in his keynote but briefly: since 2019, \$11.4 of NATIVE Act appropriated funds allowed OIED to provide grants to 67 tribes and assistance and follow-up to 25 additional tribes who didn't receive funding. NATIVE Act funds made it possible to perform a wide range of Native tourism services, including funding tribal tourism pilot projects – a cooperative agreement with AIANTA to provide education and technical assistance services to tribes, creation of tribal tourism alliances in South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana and Virginia and the awarding of NATIVE Act Tribal Tourism Grants to 48 tribes for feasibility studies and business plan development. OIED also partnered with the Office of Native Hawaiian Relations (ONHR) to develop a five year heritage tourism project in Hawaii. We offered workshops to tribes on how to acquire tourism grants in the future.



Working with the White House

We have high expectations for the work of the NATIVE Act subcommittee created by the White House Council on Native American Affairs. In those meetings, agencies identified in the NATIVE Act from across the government will discuss how to strengthen the NATIVE Act and fulfill the mandates of the law.

Advice for Accelerated Development

OIED has so far funded many tourism project feasibility studies, and year by year, depending on funding, we hope to progressively offer NATIVE Act Tourism grants for the successive steps after feasibility is determined – to do development and business planning and continue forward in future years by helping to fund tourism projects and products.

To view the [NATIVE Act Tourism Projects grant program](#) and other useful OIED programs. [FY2024 OIED/AIANTA Native Act Capacity Building Grants information](#)

Federal NATIVE Act Success Stories



Toby Bloom
National Program
Manager, Travel, Tourism
and Interpretation, U.S.
Forest Service

Sharing Economic Benefits

U.S. National Forests receive 170 million visitors a year. Outdoor recreation surpasses all other forest uses, recreation is our biggest revenue generator, and U.S. outdoor recreation has the same GDP as the pharmaceuticals and communications sectors. Sharing the benefits of those huge numbers with our gateway (nearby) communities is important to us and to them. We improve the visitors' experience by offering them additional hospitality and cultural opportunities found in communities near national forests.

USFS Success Story

In 2021, we began a highly successful grant program through AIANTA (USFS has no direct granting authority) to support tribal projects on and off National Forests. Through those, we are doing a better job working with tribes to promote authentic interpretation and respectful visits to Native heritage sites and create innovative public land partnerships.

We Steward NATIVE Land

USFS lands were managed by tribes for thousands of years before we were entrusted with the land stewardship. The NATIVE Act funding has given us an opportunity to repair tribal relationships and partner our technical and financial assistance with tribal goals, including a larger role in their representation on USFS managed land.

Projects Tribes Care About

Tribes are achieving success in projects involving USFS visitor centers and on the land itself – the renaming of features with Native languages, interpretation, trail management, any and all aspects that tribes care about. We have a database of over 410,000s sacred sites on USFS-managed lands and that number grows every day with new discoveries of sites and new excavations.

Key to Funding

We have many more tribal proposals than we have money to fund them. So we share our success stories with Congress. If you can tell a good concise story that they understand and speaks to their hearts, they remember it and continue to fund it in the future. Tell the stories about the wonderful things that are possible – about improving lives and relationships and reinvigorating histories so that people know tribes are still here and operating in the present day, that tribes can often offer the richest visitor experiences. That's my vision about how we put our thumb on the scale.

More Help from USDA

[Rural Development at USDA](#) acts basically as a big loan bank for rural America. If they were a country, they'd be the 6th largest economy in the world. There is funding and opportunity there because most tribes are rural and tribal tourism is rural development. The Land Grant University program offers extension agents, including a specific pool called the [National Extension Tourism Network](#). Rich opportunities exist there and we need to introduce tribes to these agencies and agents. In my experience, all it takes for good things to happen is for those of us who understand the huge, complicated federal government to connect people seeking help with the people who can help them. Those of us doing work in tribal tourism need to do more to facilitate those introductions.



Federal NATIVE Act Success Stories



Curt Cottle

Senior Policy Analyst,
National Travel and Trade
Office, International Trade
Administration

National Tourism Strategy Calls for a Holistic Approach

As Shaun said in her keynote, the Commerce department has numerous agencies engaged in Indigenous tourism development, which is adjacent if not directly because of the NATIVE Act mandates. And as she said, Commerce and the whole federal government is trying hard to support tribes more holistically. Through several Commerce agencies, we offer technical assistance, grants, visitor research, advisory board representation and minority business development support. But we know it is confusing to navigate our many agencies, so we urge tribes to use the clearinghouse to sort out what's available. [Access to Capital Clearinghouse.](#)

Critical Tribal Tourism Data

In my office, the National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO), a division of the International Trade Administration (ITA), we do special data runs that benefit tourism tribes. [We gather this data through surveying outbound visitors to the U.S. about their visits to tribal reservations and the resulting data is on our website.](#) We understand and encourage the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) to match survey data to census data so that tourism and outdoor recreation are more accurately represented in tribal economic data. That will help improve the visitation information we can produce for tribes.

Advice to Accelerate Indigenous Tourism Development

- Tribes are identified in 114 actions in the [National Tourism Strategy](#), so please take a look at it.
- Give [Brand USA](#) more information about tribes and advocate for more emphasis on Indian Country information and promotion. Brand USA was established by the Travel Promotion Act of 2009 as the nation's first public-private partnership to spearhead a globally coordinated marketing effort promoting the United States as a premier travel destination.



Indigenous Tourism – U.S. Regional Development Progress

Our tribal panel of speakers, including the moderator Darian Morsette, come from statewide tribal tourism alliances in South Dakota, North Dakota and Montana. Statewide alliances are a new phenomenon championed by the tribes themselves along with academic institutions that have acted as the facilitators of those alliances. They have succeeded in getting tribes to work together on their tourism aspirations and respect their own diversity, leverage their collective clout, and attract nonprofit, state and federal government support.
– Ed Hall, MC



Alliances are the New Model for Native Tourism Development

Our alliance, the North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance, was the first statewide alliance and is the most advanced at this point in time. The original idea came from a Youth Summit at Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, led by one of our panelists today, Jamie Azure. The youth identified tourism development as a goal and they wanted the tribes to work together. We were helped to reach our initial goals by the GW International Institute for Tourism Studies and AIANTA. I feel more money needs to

be devoted to both training and technical assistance like we got, not just feasibility and planning. Thanks for our continuing success goes to the Bush Foundation whose support helped us become a nonprofit and continue our work on tour development.

– Darian Morsette



Darian Morsette

President, North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance and Board Member, American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association, moderator



Indigenous Tourism – U.S. Regional Development Progress



Jamie Azure
Chairman, Turtle Mountain
Band of Chippewa Indians,
North Dakota

What is Tribal Tourism?

Tourism is not just economic impact, not only job creation, it's pride.... Tourism allows us to tell our own stories from our perspective and share our community pride, our pride in being a tribe with a rich history and culture. With a focus on our youth and the future, we are showing others our land and telling them our stories, and through that, building economic opportunity and community pride. That is what tourism means to me.

Why are Native Tourism Alliances Effective?

Alliances break down silos. Working with state and federal officials helps us think past the silos between tribes and between tribal people and helps them think past their own government silos. It's not an easy thing! We are all at different levels of tourism development, but if we figure out a way to build each other up, that will attract support, and then the sky's the limit. But it isn't easy. It takes time and work and trust.

Beyond the NATIVE Act, tribes are coming together and working together and succeeding. Why should support be limited to Interior and the Forest Service? Why can't other forms of federal funding be put to work on building the internal capacity of Native nations? That's the discussion we need to have. How do we get to the next level of government-wide support?

Advice to Tribes

Reach out to other tribes, first within your state then beyond, to come together as Native Nation. That's a superpower across the world."



Tamara St. John
South Dakota State
Representative, Tribal
Historian, Sisseton
Wahpeton Sioux Tribe

Tourism is an Expression of Sovereignty

As a tribal historian, I know tourism needs accurate history that guards culture and spirituality. I see tourism as an expression of sovereignty by taking control of our cultural history, defining our own narrative and telling our stories as only we can tell them.

The North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance

It has come such a long way and attracted support outside the government. We're beginning to see the results from the development of bus tours that include multiple tribes.

Where Support is Lacking

The main problem in tourism is finding money to initiate a tribal tourism program. Most funding is for projects, not programs. Individual tribes need more support.

In every federal government meeting, I hear: apply, apply, apply. How do tribes do that if there's no tourism program, no

dedicated person working every day to move the tourism plan forward? That's the next level of pilot funding needed.

The South Dakota Native Tourism Alliance

In South Dakota, you have to give a shout out to Secretary of Tourism Hagen, who has been our excellent partner and advocate in tribal tourism development – providing materials like updated visitor guides that include tribal input, marketing support and strong participation in creating a South Dakota Native sustainable tourism development plan.

Advice to Tribes

Take the GW's Indigenous Tourism Studies certification course. I learned so much from taking it, especially that collaboration is the key, so don't compete, and that through Indigenous tourism and sharing its many successes around the world, we can lift our economies at the same time we address our environmental concerns.

Indigenous Tourism – U.S. Regional Development Progress



Jennifer Finley

**Council Member,
Confederated Salish Kootenai
and Member of the Montana
Indigenous Tourism Alliance
(MITA)**

The Importance of MITA to Montana and My Tribe

Montana Indigenous Tourism Alliance has opened up a line of communication with the state government that didn't exist before. The state has consequently helped us get advertising for our PowWows – a main source of tribal visitors – on billboards and on radio throughout Montana. The state of Montana has helped my own tribe (Confederated Tribes of Salish Kootenai) build a new visitors' center after our museum burned down.

Montana is a very big state and the tribes in Montana are different from each other in language, culture, and their goals for tourism development. MITA helped tribes focus on the really positive things about each other. Alliances like ours put different tribes on the same team where we don't compete but collaborate.

Statewide tribal alliances work because they leverage the influence of tribes with their states. In Montana, it gave us a seat at Montana's tourism table where the tourism money and expertise is.



Advice to Tribes Starting Alliances

Find the right people to navigate and facilitate the relationships between tribal, state, federal and industry. It takes special people to manage all that plus tourists.



The Future of Indigenous Tourism Collaboration in the Americas

This speaker panel was moderated by Dawnielle Tehama, Executive Director, Willamette Valley Visitors Association, Oregon

Indigenous Tourism Collaboration in the Americas

Our three panelists are currently in talks about how they can collaborate to offer additional assistance to Indigenous tourism communities and their leaders throughout the Americas, and they are encouraged in their collaboration by the White House Council on Native American Affairs. Indigenous communities the world over undertake tourism development activities to alleviate poverty, revive their cultures, mitigate climate issues and create intercultural awareness. Tourism growth brings jobs and career opportunities for Indigenous people at all skill levels.

Indigenous communities need collaborators and partners who are experienced in development, planning, capacity-building and management so no one has to reinvent the wheel. Simultaneously, there is a profound acknowledgment that the challenges and requirements among Indigenous communities are very similar throughout the hemisphere. – Dawnielle Tehama, moderator



Nikki Enerson
Indigenous Peoples Team
Lead & Development Hub
Deputy Director, USAID

The Work of USAID in the Indigenous Americas

USAID's objective is to increase economic opportunities and relieve poverty globally. We work in about 100 countries through our embassies. I'm the Deputy Director of Inclusive Development and I support the Indigenous Peoples team. We build projects with Indigenous communities through co-creation and development of projects. They are usually multi-million dollar projects intended to have a lasting impact and last five years. They take a long time to develop while the agency and the community decide together what to do and how to do it.

Tourism is usually not the goal but the vehicle to reach the goal. My team doesn't start by saying "let's do a tourism project." It's often the result we want, though, the thing that helps us reduce poverty or reverse the effects of climate change, the main objectives usually identified by our grantees.

Current Opportunities

- We are looking for the next agency-wide Indigenous Peoples coordinator, so anyone interested in the position, please contact me.
- We are in a period of co-creation development around Indigenous-led tourism and we are seeking ideas on where we can collaborate across the U.S. and the tourism work being done here and the work that we're doing abroad.

Creative Tourism Collaboration

- Recently I observed an exciting COVID-recovery project in Guatemala on Lago de Atitlan, a community of 5000 that came together to revive tourism through the painting of 900 murals on building facades throughout the community. The distribution of the art and inclusion of all the businesses, including those less-trafficked, attracted and distributed visitors, including former residents and friends. It led to training guides to give local tours, the opening of workshops and a cultural center and local coops organized to sell handwoven textiles. USAID jumped in to sponsor a food festival at the local university.

Global Lessons

We surveyed eight of our community co-creators to find out what we could do better.

- Governments are hard to work with and communities need intermediaries, facilitators.
- Resources are required for co-creation to facilitate collaboration outside the community, write the grants and set up and manage financial systems.
- From a co-creation project in Columbia, we learned to not assume we know what Indigenous communities want, to take the time to harmonize the various language differences and perspectives (local, government, agency, nonprofit) and to constantly communicate, learn each other's processes, and honor traditions.

The Future of Indigenous Tourism Collaboration in the Americas



Jessa Rae Growing Thunder
Indigenous Exchange Advisor,
Inter-American Foundation (IF)

The [Inter-American Foundation](#) is a nimble and transformative U.S. government agency that invests in community led development across Latin America and the Caribbean. IF directly engages local leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs in underserved areas to create more prosperity, peace, democracy and community. Created by Congress in 1969, our portfolio is 100% localized with nearly 430 grants in 27 countries, all designed to be implemented by organizations based in the communities.

- Our work has inherently supported Indigenous communities. In 2023, we funded 119 grants to organizations who work in and with Indigenous communities, which was 28% of our grant portfolio.
- In 2021, invested nearly \$900,000 in trade-based tourism and 85% of the funds went to Indigenous-led or Indigenous-serving communities.



Seleni Matus
Executive Director, GW
International Institute of
Tourism Studies

There are four main ways academia can become a valuable partner in Indigenous-led tourism.

Research – supplying examples of best practices and practical guidelines.

- In partnership, G Adventures and the GW International Institute of Tourism Studies created [Indigenous People and the Travel Industry: Global Good Practices Guidelines](#), practical guidelines for the tourism industry working with tribes.
- ITCA's [Indigenous Tourism eLibrary](#), a searchable repository of Indigenous tourism resources and tools

Capacity Building – such as the professional certificate program Indigenous Sustainable Tourism Development, offered by GW and AIANTA. The GW International Institute of Tourism Studies has trained more than 300 Indigenous tourism professionals in the 4+ years the program has been available. Arizona State University and AIANTA offer a degree-bearing program as well.

- The community-based tourism work is focused on the arts, conservation and wildlife observation, visitor education, food security, Indigenous knowledge and volunteerism.
- One example of what can be accomplished through community-led tourism is ten Indigenous communities in Columbia that have used traditional practices to create sustainable farms with lodging for 30 visitors, food service, auditorium, and ceremonial baths that generate enough income to cover all employees and operating costs. They have also protected 50 acres of forest land. They have protected their way of life and protected the environment that sustains them.

Technical Assistance – such as GW students and faculty assisting with Indigenous tourism development planning and creating demonstration projects that have become the North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance and the South Dakota Native Tourism Alliance. Similarly, faculty and students from Virginia Technical University have supported the formation of the Montana Indigenous Tourism Alliance. Since many Tribal Nations lack tourism programs, these regional alliances are pivotal in advancing Indigenous tourism at the state level.

Moreover, academic institutions can serve as reliable sources of capacity-building and technical support, fostering trust and collaboration among Tribal Nations, state agencies and private sector.

Policy Advocacy – such as constantly advocating partnership and radical collaboration with government agencies to link resources. We need and coordination between state tourism and tribal offices and federal and tribal governments, and GW has modeled the success of that kind of approach by assisting the statewide Native tourism alliances.

Note: Some attributions in this report were modified or paraphrased for clarity.

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