

Land Acknowledgment

CMF President and CEO Kyle Caldwell gave the following Land Acknowledgment before our CMF community at the Grand Rapids Art Museum during the CMF 50th Annual Conference in November 2022.

With the celebration of our 50th anniversary this year, we are reflecting on our work together – the people in this community, the new practices we have embraced, the partnerships and policies we’ve developed, the way philanthropy has grown.

As we look ahead to the future of this community, and how we will continue to live into the literal definition for philanthropy – advancing acts of love for humankind – we are also talking about our history: as a sector, as a state and as a country. To move forward, we must understand where we’ve been.

For me, this begins with Indigenous Peoples, our nation’s first philanthropists.

As we imagine the path forward for thriving, equitable communities across Michigan, our conversations, our actions, must include engagement with the Indigenous Peoples who are here, whose ancestors have been here, for generations.

Michigan alone is home to 12 federally-recognized and 4 state-recognized Tribes. Thousands of Native Americans live and work across the state. Chairman Ron Yob of the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians – who generously talked with us about this region’s history – estimates there are as many as 3,000 Indigenous People in and around Grand Rapids alone.

November is Native American Heritage Month – a reminder of the opportunities we have all year round to show solidarity with Native Peoples. A reminder of the extraction and disposition of Indigenous lands, food, peoples, water and cultures that continues today. A reminder of Native American Peoples’ strength and resilience. A reminder that we can be a part of narrative change, truth-telling and healing that is so central to the work of equity.

I now want to offer a land acknowledgment in recognition of this history and the exploitation of Native Communities and to hopefully amplify conversation and continued understanding of disparities and inequities that still exist. And beyond our words, an invitation to engage in restorative actions.

As we gather here tonight on the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe people – the People of the Three Fires: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi – know that our conference takes place near the banks of the mighty Grand River that has and continues to serve as a natural resource to those whose lands we now occupy.

I invite us to all pause and identify the roles we can play to acknowledge, understand and honor the history of the unique Native Tribes in the regions where we live and work. I invite all of Michigan philanthropy to examine your grantmaking. National data shows less than 1% of all philanthropic funding today is directed to Native communities.

I encourage reflection on relationships with any Native-led or Native-serving grant partners you do have. National data shows that Native American nonprofit leaders report having less-positive experiences with their foundation funding partners than any other race or ethnicity group.

Let's consider whose voices are represented at the tables that you set and the tables where you sit – and whose voices are missing.

This is more than a moment to share a Land Acknowledgment with you and then move on. This can be a call to continued action.

We at CMF want to be a support and a resource for you on this journey. Here are some of the actions we're taking:

We will deepen our relationships and collaboration with partners like Native Americans in Philanthropy and the Native Justice Coalition. CMF is a member of the Coalition's Decolonizing Philanthropy Council together with a group of foundation and Native leaders, and that work is just beginning.

We will grow the Equity Resources on our new CMF website, which includes information on land acknowledgments, links to mapping tools to find Native-led and Native-supporting organizations and data insights from groups like Candid and the Center for Effective Philanthropy.

We will develop new opportunities for shared learning. We're eager to build on past programming and storytelling to lift up more examples of your collaboration with Native communities and organizations, as well as national resources from the field.

We will create spaces to feature the voices of Native artists, musicians and leaders – like Sarah Eagle Heart, who spoke at our last in-person conference. Like author Angeline Boulley – an enrolled member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and a storyteller who writes about her Ojibwe community in the UP. Angeline led a session earlier this year on finding your voice for Michigan youth leaders and our members.

We commit to the internal journey of our CMF team to deepen our understanding and embrace of equity, and we will continue to support you in yours.

Edgar Villanueva – an enrolled member of the Lumbee Nation and the founder and principal of Decolonizing Wealth – has shared, "For Native communities, our work is based on connection, relationship, and love. Philanthropy must work to heal divisions."

If we see the work of our sector as being part of solutions to dismantle systems of oppression, to be a convener and connector, to change existing systems, to deepen the impact of our work in environment, education, the arts and beyond – this is the time to build bridges of understanding.

During the coming year, we will be advancing new programming and resources dedicated to conversations we hope can serve to do just that – to name past and present injustices and inequity, to understand where we've been so that we truly can move forward better together through the next 50 years.