



The following Land Acknowledgment was shared on the main stage at the opening of the CMF 51st Annual Conference in Detroit on November 6, 2023:

As we look ahead to the future of this community and how we will continue to live into the literal definition of philanthropy – advancing acts of love for humankind – we are also talking about our history as a sector, as a state and as a country. Understanding our past allows us to understand our present as well as our future. To move forward, we must understand our full history—and that must include the Indigenous Peoples, for they are our nation’s first philanthropists.

As we imagine the path 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.

As we observe Native American Heritage Month, we all have an opportunity now and all year 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.

We share this history and the exploitation of Native Communities and now I want to share an acknowledgement of the disparities and inequities of the past and those that still exist. And beyond our words, an invitation for all of us to engage in restorative actions.

We are currently gathering on the occupied land known as Waawiiyaatanong – the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Three Fires Confederacy – the Ojibwa, Odawa, Potawatomi – and Wyandot nations.

The name Waawiiyaatanong means “where the water goes around.”

This special place had a name before Antoine de Moth Cadillac came here in 1701. He is not the founder of Detroit. This place was already found. We acknowledge that this land was colonized via the Treaty of Detroit in 1807.

Waawiiyaatanong has been a central meeting place for Great Lakes Indigenous peoples. Detroit and the greater Southeast Michigan region continue to be the home of Indigenous Peoples. They are here, and to them and their land, we say thank you. 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 can be more than a moment to share a Land Acknowledgment with you and then move on. This can be a call to continued action.

CMF wants to be a supportive resource for you on this journey. Here are some of the actions we're taking:

We will continue to deepen our relationships and collaboration with partners like Native Americans in Philanthropy, who are here with us at this year's conference. We appreciate them hosting an insightful workshop earlier this afternoon on fostering authentic and meaningful relationships with Indigenous partners.

We will continue to grow the Curated Equity Resources on our CMF website, which includes information on land acknowledgments, national data insights and links to mapping tools to find Native-led and Native-supporting organizations.

We will continue developing opportunities for storytelling and shared learning that lift up the ways you are collaborating with Native communities and organizations.

We will create spaces to feature the voices of Native artists, musicians and leaders.

We commit to the continued equity journey of our CMF team to deepen our understanding and embrace of equity, and we will continue to support you on 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. I know during the course of the next two days at the conference that learning will continue.