

# America's Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model



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## Features

### Weaving a Stronger Economy in Native Communities



Theresa Secord, Executive Director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance, with one of her baskets.

Can the rich cultural assets of Native American tribes be harnessed as a force for economic growth in some of the most isolated communities in America? Yes, says First Peoples Fund, a South Dakota-based organization working with native communities across the country to help artists build successful businesses.

Nearly a third of Native Americans are involved in traditional arts such as basketry, quilting, and beading, according to a [new report](#) by the Fund. Many of these artists run informal home-based businesses, but they lack the business skills,

## In Brief

### BREAKING NEWS: Home Care Workers Win Federal Labor Protections

The Obama administration [announced](#) this week that it will be extending minimum wage and overtime protections to nearly two million home care workers. [Years of organizing](#) by Caring Across Generations and countless others helped to achieve this important victory. Congratulations!

### Join Us: All-In Local and State Policy Webinar

When it comes to equity, local leaders are innovating the way forward. Join us on Tuesday, September 24 from 12 to 1 p.m. Eastern, for the next webinar in the *All-In Nation* series, featuring [Sandré Swanson](#), [Brad Lander](#), and [Leslie Moody](#) sharing policy strategies that are promoting equitable growth from California to New York. Learn more about [All-In Nation](#) and register [here](#).

### Anchors for Shared Prosperity

Universities and hospitals spend \$1 trillion each year and employ 8 percent of the U.S. labor force. So

resources, and distribution networks to create and sustain viable ventures.

"Many emerging artists are basically going door to door, selling their work through tribal offices, or setting up a table along the road during high tourist season," said Lori Pourier, president of First Peoples Fund. "It's a very limited lens on what is possible."

### **Manifesting the business potential of culture and community**

Through partnerships with local arts groups and a growing number of native community development financial institutions (CDFIs), the fund is bringing critical business assistance and support to tribal artists in some of the most distressed places in America. Unemployment on reservations averages [50 percent](#) and reaches 80 percent in some communities. Eight of the 10 poorest counties in America are in Indian Country.

Tribal artists need the same things that any entrepreneur needs to jumpstart a business — access to capital, mentors, and markets, and nuts-and-bolts training on everything from bookkeeping to pricing. But they often face significant and unique barriers in obtaining these things. For instance, because Indian land is held not by individuals but in trust, tribal artists cannot use their homes as collateral to secure bank loans, making access to credit through commercial banks difficult.

And because most reservations are remote, and isolated further by underinvestment and infrastructure challenges like dirt roads, artists have found it difficult to connect with larger markets or promote their work unless they move to a native arts hub, like Santa Fe. When artists have to leave communities to earn a living, communities lose revenue and a priceless repository of traditional cultural assets.

The First Peoples Fund is proving that business training, coaching, and access to financing through microloans and grants can turn things around. With the Fund's support, artists are able to access new markets, including online ones, and diversify and expand their revenue base. While 61 percent of emerging native artists report annual household incomes of less than \$10,000, less than 8 percent of fund-supported artists report incomes at that level. The average price of an item sold by emerging native artists is \$587; for Fund-

how do we leverage the economic strength of these institutions to drive local community prosperity?

Check out new [a series of tools](#) from the Democracy Collaborative — including community impact indicators and policy briefs highlighting best practices — to assess and strengthen anchor institutions' commitment to low-income communities and communities of color.

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### **Inner-City Economic Summit**

Learn about what works to transform urban economies at the 2013 Inner City Economic Summit in Cleveland on October 23-24, 2013. The summit will emphasize how government, business, and nonprofit leaders can work together to create a vibrant economic climate for all. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

supported artists, it's \$2,337.

With the tools and resources to succeed, some young artists are staying on the reservation as they build their businesses. Others are now returning to reservations from the cities where they grew up, because they're confident they can earn a living and they're committed to teaching art and business know-how to the next generation.



*Theresa Secord*  
Basket created by Jeremy Frey.

### Reaping the rewards

The Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance has revived the ancient art of basketry by training a new generation of tribal weavers in the craft and helping them build successful businesses. At its founding in 1993, the Alliance counted 55 native basket weavers statewide, with an average age of 63. Now there are 200, with an average age of 40.

Nationally award-winning Passamaquoddy artist Jeremy Frey represents this next generation of weavers. Now age 35, his is a story of a remarkable 10-year rise from drug abuse and poverty through the Alliance's weaving programs to becoming a 2010 United States Artists Fellow and winning Best of Show awards at the storied Heard and Santa Fe Indian markets in 2011.

But translating individual artist achievements into economic

success for the group has proved difficult. "That was the missing piece," said Theresa Secord, an Alliance founder and executive director. "How could we encourage the next generation to do the incredibly hard work that goes into basketmaking if they couldn't earn an equitable living?"

The First Peoples Fund filled in that missing piece, chiefly by facilitating a strong relationship with the state's native CDFI, Four Directions Development Corporation. Before the Fund stepped in, "we were challenged to work with our CDFI on issues of artisan entrepreneurship," Secord said. "They were well versed in tribal housing and mortgage issues but they had little experience in financing and counseling tribal artist-entrepreneurs."

Now the Alliance and Four Directions share a staff person, jointly plan training and workshops, and collaborate on branding strategies and promotion. In October, Four Directions will launch a website showcasing the state's native arts for a global audience — a step toward boosting the fortunes of the artists themselves, the tribal communities, the state's tourism industry, and the Maine economy as a whole.

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## Fast Food Nation: Why Higher Wages for Workers Benefit Us All

From New York to San Diego, thousands of fast-food workers have gone on strike for higher wages and the right to form unions. Roughly three million people — disproportionately people of color — work in fast food, earning a median wage [of \\$8.94 an hour](#). Better pay would not only benefit them and their families; it also would strengthen the U.S. economy. Here's why:

1. **Increase consumer spending.** Every \$1 increase in the minimum wage increases a household's consumer spending by \$2,800 a year, estimates [the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank](#). Multiply that by three million fast-food workers, and the nation would see tens of billions of dollars in new consumer spending.
2. **Create better-paying jobs in low-income neighborhoods.** Fast-food establishments [tend to cluster](#) in low-income neighborhoods where there are few other employment

options, including in [poor suburbs](#). Raising wages for fast-food workers would provide better employment opportunities, helping to revitalize neighborhoods while we continue to work to improve food choices in these communities.

**3. Reduce strain on our public assistance programs.**

Restaurant workers, including fast-food workers, are on public assistance programs like food stamps at twice the rate of the rest of the U.S. workforce, [according to](#) Saru Jayaraman from Restaurant Opportunities Centers United. More than [80 percent](#) of fast-food workers earn less than \$10.10 an hour, or \$18,500 per year, which means they are eligible for food stamps if they're in a family of two or more. Raising the wage would allow our public dollars to go toward necessary investments in infrastructure and education, rather than subsidizing employers of low-wage jobs.

**4. Raise the floor for all.** Higher wages for fast-food workers would put upward pressure on other low-wage industries that hire from a similar pool of workers, such as the restaurant and retail sectors. Restaurant, retail, and service occupations are projected to have the [largest employment growth](#) in the economy, and even though many who work in these occupations have some college education, these are among the few jobs that do not require a high school diploma. Raising the floor for these jobs is an essential step toward rebuilding a middle-class economy.

**5. Create better opportunities for the next generation.** [More than one in four](#) fast-food workers struggle to support at least one child. [Research](#) from the Partnership for America's Economic Success shows that an increase in household income to 150 percent of the poverty line (roughly \$14 an hour) during early childhood can lead to increased earnings — by as much as \$200,000 over that person's lifetime.

Learn more and sign the petition to support fast-food workers at [fastfoodforward.org](http://fastfoodforward.org).

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an economic imperative. It is produced by Chris Schildt, Sarah Treuhaft, Fran Smith, and Ana Louie. To learn more, visit the *America's Tomorrow* [webpage](#).

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