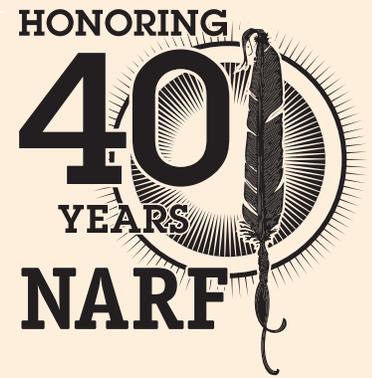


## Native American Rights Fund (NARF)

Boulder, CO

[www.narf.org](http://www.narf.org)

Established 1970



*NCRP: What are the most pressing civil rights issues facing Native American communities today? What is the Native American Rights Fund doing to address those issues?*

NARF: The Native American Rights Fund (NARF) is the national Indian legal defense fund, whose primary work centers on the preservation and protection of Indian rights and resources. NARF began its work in 1970 and through the years has grown into a reputable and well-respected advocate of Indian interests. Five priorities continue to lead NARF: preservation of tribal existence; protection of tribal natural resources; promotion of Native American human rights; accountability of governments to Native Americans; and development of Indian law and educating the public about Indian rights, laws, and issues.

Climate change is widely recognized as the number one threat to the well-being of humanity. Indigenous peoples, who historically have left a negligible carbon footprint, are suffering disproportionately from the effects of climate change. Because of the threat that climate change poses to indigenous peoples, NARF is committed to mitigating the effects of climate change and insuring that indigenous communities be given a voice and a seat at the table.

Indigenous cultures are woven from the many intricate strands of traditional stories that extend back to the beginning of time. Indigenous knowledge is grounded in oral traditions that recount the stories of their peoples throughout innumer-

able and multifaceted life experiences. These stories help constitute and structure the existence of indigenous nations and peoples. They tell how life came to be and how indigenous peoples are to conduct themselves as they interact with the physical and social world. These teachings show how people are to behave on the basis of spiritual and natural laws, with profound respect for the energetic basis and biological fabric of life. The stories of these respective indigenous nations and peoples contain vitally important knowledge and wisdom very much needed by the planet in this era of ecological deterioration, breakdown and decline.

Only recently has the realization dawned that the scientific knowledge of indigenous cultures holds information of tremendous importance for the planet. Mother Earth is definitely in crisis, and indigenous knowledge of ecosystems points the way to the paradigm shift and change in lifestyle that is needed at this time — a paradigm shift of healing and revitalization for all living things. In this way, the indigenous communities can become the natural guides to restoring balance and harmony in the world.

The strength of the indigenous perspective builds on thousands of years of accumulated observation of the environment. The oral histories of indigenous cultures are a tremendous resource because the histories preserve information that reaches into data-sparse time periods unavailable to many modern science techniques.

Because governments too often do not understand the knowledge and

wisdom of indigenous cultures, indigenous peoples tend to be left out of intergovernmental discussions and processes. The inclusion of the indigenous voice significantly strengthened the Working Group II report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the National Climate Assessment, and the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment reports. We feel that it is vitally important for indigenous people to be invited and supported to participate throughout the process. One unanticipated benefit may be that an indigenous perspective may help all those involved translate the science back into human terms.

In the meantime, the urgency of the issues requires that NARF continue to build bridges among indigenous and scientific communities, federal and state governments, and environmental organizations so that indigenous cultures can build their own research programs that build on the strengths of a rich and varied set of voices.

*NCRP: What advice does NARF have for grantmakers who want to be more supportive of Native American communities?*

NARF: NARF encourages grantmakers to become educated on tribal histories, tribal sovereignty, culture and the many different issues that affect our tribal communities. Invite tribal people and Native American organizations to meet with you to discuss the history of these issues and the resources that will be needed to resolve these issues. ■