



# MINNESOTA NATIVE AMERICAN ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS FOR EDUCATORS



**NATIVE GOVERNANCE  
CENTER**

# MINNESOTA NATIVE AMERICAN ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS FOR EDUCATORS

A PUBLICATION PROJECT OF THE SHAKOPEE MDEWAKANTON SIOUX COMMUNITY'S UNDERSTAND NATIVE MINNESOTA CAMPAIGN AND NATIVE GOVERNANCE CENTER



Project directed by Ramona Kitto Stately

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This publication takes its inspiration from and is modeled after other “essential understandings” documents published in a handful of other states. Tribal education leaders in Montana led the way, creating the *Seven Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians* in 1999. Similar efforts were followed by Native educators in California, Colorado, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, and South Dakota, along with the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian.

The idea of creating a Minnesota essential understandings document was recommended in *Restoring Our Place*, a groundbreaking report commissioned and published by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community’s (SMSC) Understand Native Minnesota campaign in 2022. That report, which provided a resource scan of teaching resources about Native American subjects in actual use in Minnesota K-12 schools, recommended six important strategies to improve the way Indigenous content can be learned by future generations of Minnesotans. The first and most fundamental foundation of those strategies was the creation of “essential understandings” which could serve as the basis for curriculum and textbook writing, professional development for educators, and classroom instruction.

The Understand Native Minnesota campaign was intent on realizing this recommendation and asked the Native Governance Center (NGC) to partner on a project to develop a Minnesota-centered publication. NGC was uniquely positioned to help with this work—it is Native-led, has a working relationship with tribal governments throughout Minnesota, and is focused on building human capital in Indian Country. It has also been the fiscal agent of We Are Still Here—Minnesota (WASH-MN), a grassroots Native organization working on narrative change. WASH-MN’s executive director, Ramona Kitto Stately, is a long-time Indian Education professional and chair of the Minnesota Indian Education Association; she was ideally suited to lead the project resulting in this publication. We are grateful for her work and the work of the many people who helped draft, review, comment on, improve, and design this publication.

We hope that a wide variety of readers will benefit from the following pages. For those in Indian Country, most or all of the material herein will be familiar—indeed, knowledge inherited since childhood. For non-Native Minnesotans, we sincerely hope that this distillation of essential knowledge about the Dakota, Ojibwe, and other Native peoples who reside in what is today Minnesota will establish a fundamental basis for relating to their Indigenous fellow Minnesotans and better understanding of the rich but too-often-ignored history of the original inhabitants of the state. This publication is by no means the final word in that knowledge; in fact, it is intentionally intended only as an introduction to that material. But we believe that it can serve as a concise, convenient, reliable, and readable launching point for a voyage of discovery about the Native experience in Minnesota.

The seminal Essential Understandings work by Montana continues to be updated periodically, with its latest edition of *Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians* published in 2019. It is our fervent hope that this first *Minnesota Native American Essential Understandings* will also be improved and updated in the future.



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Although Minnesota law has mandated for many years that American Indian history and culture be taught in schools throughout the state, most educators have encountered obstacles in fulfilling this policy. One problem is that the quality and availability of Native-related teaching resources are highly variable in quality, and few teachers know what reliable instructional materials they should consider using (a problem that *A Guide to Native American Teaching Resources for Minnesota K-12 Schools* [2024], another SMSC Understand Native Minnesota publication, attempts to solve). Another difficulty is that a large number of teachers feel professionally ill-prepared to teach Native topics and express the fear that they may “get it wrong,” doing so in a culturally insensitive way; this stems from the reality that few educators receive professional training in this area. But the biggest challenge for the state’s teachers is the most basic one of all: There has been no single source of authoritative information for them to get a fundamental grounding in Native people in all their contemporary, historical, ethnological, cultural, linguistic, spiritual, vocational, social, and economic dimensions.

This document was designed to present the most basic and important information about Native Americans in Minnesota to those involved somehow in K-12 education in the state: teachers, administrators, school support staff, those who train educators, curriculum developers, textbook writers, students, parents, education policymakers, and taxpayers—in short, any and all Minnesotans who care about the accurate teaching of the next generation of the state’s citizens.

In creating this publication, a key consideration was to present this information in a readable, easy, and comprehensible manner, especially for non-Native users who are unfamiliar with it. To truly accomplish our purpose, we took pains to not overwhelm the reader with too much detail or assume too much prior knowledge. We concentrated on what we deemed “essential” knowledge. This involved generalizing some information, even at the risk of conveying some nuances, and presenting facts as concisely as possible. We also organized this material into seven essential understandings, which we hope are logical groupings, even though our choices might have arbitrarily deemphasized the interconnectedness of certain facts about the Native experience.

The information herein was carefully selected and presented to be useful to a wide range of users. Some may disagree with our decisions on what to include or exclude. Some may wish we had characterized certain facts differently. However, we are satisfied that we struck an appropriate balance to lead those unfamiliar with this material reliably and authoritatively to greater knowledge.

We are grateful for the many Native experts who reviewed this content and provided improvements. In particular, I want to thank Wayne Ducheneaux, Angelique EagleWoman, Christopher Freeze, Tadd Johnson, Anton Treuer, and Odia Wood-Krueger for their thoughtful ideas and comments. I also want to thank the several members of the Tribal Nations Education Committee and tribal leaders who reviewed, commented on, and encouraged this work. I also want to thank Goff Public, the managing consultants of the SMSC’s Understand Native Minnesota campaign—specifically Chris Georgacas, Madeleine Rush, and Jenny Alvermann—for their help in drafting the manuscript. The SMSC Marketing Department deserves credit for its wonderful job of designing and preparing this for publication. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and Native Governance Center for giving me the honor of directing the project leading to this publication.

All of us involved hope the information herein will fulfill the basic needs of its many intended users. But we encourage everyone who reviews this document to dig deeper into the wonderfully varied contemporary experience and historical legacy of Native Americans in what is today Minnesota.

**Ramona Kitto Stately (Santee Dakota Nation)**

Director, Minnesota Native American Essential Understandings project  
Executive Director, We Are Still Here—Minnesota

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

### 1 Minnesota is home to Native Americans whose identities, cultures, and experiences vary greatly.

- Native Americans are an integral and important part of Minnesota society.
- Native American Minnesotans come from different ethnicities and tribal affiliations.
- The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples are the two Native ethnic groups who have resided continuously in what is now Minnesota since long before the United States became a country and the advent of European-American settlement.
- Some Native American Minnesotans are descendants of Native people who were exiled from present-day Minnesota.
- Besides the 11 tribal reservations in Minnesota, there are sizable Native communities in several Minnesota cities which include members from many different tribes—Ojibwe, Dakota, Ho-Chunk, and others.

### 2 The Dakota and Ojibwe people in Minnesota have distinct cultures.

- While the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples of Minnesota have distinct and separate cultures, they share similar values.
- The lifeways of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples stand as vital cornerstones of health and wellness, firmly grounded in the historical ties to their ancestral lands and their core cultural values.
- Pan-Indianism has contributed to the false perception that people of different tribal nations in the Americas are all culturally the same.

### 3 Native Americans have a strong and unique connection to the land of Minnesota.

- Present-day Minnesota is the ancestral homeland of Dakota and Ojibwe peoples.
- Many place names in Minnesota are derived from Dakota and Ojibwe names and place names.
- Beginning in 1805, treaties made between tribal nations and the United States government guaranteed perpetual ownership of lands to each tribe. In frequently coercive treaty negotiations, tribes were forced to relinquish large amounts of their ancestral lands and/or induced to do so by promises of payments, supplies, and other support—promises which were usually subsequently broken or unilaterally modified by the United States or Minnesota state government.
- Tribes in Minnesota have retained their hunting, fishing, and gathering rights guaranteed by treaties on many lands inside and outside of reservation boundaries.
- Tribes in Minnesota today engage in agriculture, forestry, commercial fisheries, wild rice harvesting and processing, and other land-based economic and cultural activities, just like their ancestors. These activities provide for their tribal members’ dietary needs, produce raw materials and energy for tribal use, generate income through commercial operations, and provide cultural continuity with ancestral lifeways.
- Tribes in Minnesota are active, effective stewards of natural resources, applying both traditional Indigenous and Western scientific methods.



- The preservation of ancient Native ancestral burial grounds and other sacred sites are of profound spiritual importance to Native people today.

#### **4 Tribes are sovereign nations, in reality and under the law.**

- Tribal nations have existed since before the arrival of European and American authorities in North America.
- The United States Constitution (Article 1, Section 8) recognizes that tribes are sovereign entities. Furthermore, the United States has a trust responsibility to each tribal government that includes the high moral obligation to protect the sovereignty of each tribal government.
- Tribal members are citizens of their tribe while also being citizens of the United States and the state of Minnesota. They have rights and responsibilities to their tribe, the state of Minnesota, and the United States granted to every citizen of each jurisdiction.
- Tribal governments are modern, democratic, and sophisticated.
- Tribal governments are responsible for many of the same functions as other American government systems.

#### **5 Native Americans in Minnesota have faced unique hardships throughout history which have resulted in long-lasting disparities.**

- Throughout the history of present-day Minnesota, there have been persistent and intentional efforts to eliminate and displace Native peoples from their ancestral lands, resulting in the loss of lives and culture, and profound lasting impacts on their nations.
- Native American communities in Minnesota continue to experience the traumatic effects of colonization through detrimental federal and state policies.
- The healing and reconciliation processes between Native American communities and wider American society are ongoing and involve a range of efforts to address historical injustice and long-lasting trauma.

#### **6 Tribes and Native people make important contributions to the well-being of other Minnesotans.**

- Native American Minnesotans share their rich culture and knowledge with non-Native Minnesotans.
- Tribal governments and their enterprises are major employers, provide important services, and contribute significantly to the economic prosperity of their regional economies, especially in rural Minnesota.
- Tribal governments cooperate with local units of government in a variety of ways. Many have mutual aid agreements relating to police and fire protection, conservation practices, snow plowing on public roads, public health, and more.
- Tribal nations, Native organizations, and individual Native Minnesotans practice great generosity. From volunteering for local initiatives to giving charitable donations, their actions reflect their traditional values of sharing with and helping others.

#### **7 Native American Minnesotans have a legacy of important accomplishments.**

- Native American Minnesotans are involved in a wide range of occupations and pursuits, from traditional Indigenous fields to the entire range of professions. In the process, they are individually and collectively strengthening their own Native communities and contributing to the health and prosperity of broader Minnesota society.
- Individual Native American Minnesotans have achieved distinctions in a variety of fields.
- Certain national movements and causes of importance to Indian Country were started in Minnesota.

**MINNESOTA IS HOME TO NATIVE AMERICANS WHOSE IDENTITIES, CULTURES, AND EXPERIENCES VARY GREATLY.**

**1.1 Native Americans are an integral and important part of Minnesota society.**

- 1.1.1 According to a 2022 U.S. Census Bureau estimate, 1.4% of Minnesota’s population identifies as Native American.
- 1.1.2 Although Native people are a small segment of the total population in Minnesota today, most of them have a unique historical, legal, and cultural connection to the place known today as Minnesota—their ancestors having been its original inhabitants.
- 1.1.3 Native people have often had their contributions to mainstream society go unacknowledged, which leads to invisibility. This is a product of an often-purposeful erasure through past public policies, educational treatment, and social practices.

**1.2 Native American Minnesotans come from different ethnicities and tribal affiliations.**

- 1.2.1 Native Americans come from different ethnicities and tribal affiliations.
- 1.2.2 Native Americans were the original inhabitants of present-day Minnesota. Many modern Native Minnesotans are ancestors of those original inhabitants. Some Native Minnesotans are descendants of Native Americans who lived in other parts of the present-day United States or North America and relocated to Minnesota.
- 1.2.3 Some are citizens (enrolled members) of federally recognized tribal governments; some are not, but still trace their ancestry to specific tribes or Native ethnic groups.
  - 1.2.3.1 Among those Native Minnesotans who are enrolled members of a tribe in Minnesota, many live on tribal reservations but some do not. Enrolled tribal members and verified descendants have a political status due to the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the United States and state governments.
  - 1.2.3.2 Enrolled members of a tribal nation are also simultaneously citizens of the United States and of the state of Minnesota. They are simultaneously residents of and voters in local jurisdictions (county, city, township, etc.).
- 1.2.4 Like other Minnesotans, many Native persons are of mixed ancestry. Some Native American Minnesotans are descendants of only Native ancestors; but many are descendants partially of Native and partially European, Black, or other ancestors too. A tribal member has a political status as part of a tribal government and may have a mixed ethnic heritage due to a history of intermarriage in their family.
- 1.2.5 Native people differ amongst themselves in many ways: family backgrounds, upbringing, religious or spiritual beliefs, cultural traditions, educational attainments, political affiliations, jobs/vocations, and more.

- 1.2.6 While it can be appropriate in some contexts to collectively refer to Native Americans as a group, they are not a monolithic group, but differ in ethnicity, tribal affiliation, and other respects. Native individuals are as varied from each other as individuals in any other general racial or ethnic category used today.

**1.3 The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples are the two Native ethnic groups who have resided continuously in what is now Minnesota since long before the United States became a country and the advent of European-American settlement.**

- 1.3.1 Indigenous people are believed to have inhabited present-day Minnesota for at least the past 12,000 years, based on archaeological evidence.
- 1.3.2 Dakota people are believed to have inhabited present-day Minnesota for more than a thousand years. As Ojibwe people began to inhabit present-day northern Minnesota in the 1600s, Dakota people primarily lived in central and southern Minnesota as well as present-day North Dakota, South Dakota, and parts of central Canada.

- 1.3.2.1 Dakota people in Minnesota today are descendants of Eastern Dakota (Isáŋthi, sometimes termed “Santee”) ancestors, who belonged to four different bands:

DAKOTA NAME	COMMON USAGE
Bdewákhąthųwąŋ—“Dwellers of the Spirit Lake”	Mdewakanton
Sisithųwąŋ—“Fish Village Dwellers”	Sisseton
Wąhpékħute—“Shooters Among the Leaves”	Wahpekute
Wąhpéthųwąŋ—“Dwellers Among the Leaves”	Wahpeton

- 1.3.2.2 Today, there are four federally recognized Dakota tribes in Minnesota, each with its own reservation, and descendant from the Mdewakanton band of Eastern Dakota:

DAKOTA NAME	COMMON USAGE
Čħąŋšáyapi	Lower Sioux Indian Community
Thíŋta Othúŋwahe	Prairie Island Indian Community
Bdewákhąthųwąŋ	Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
Phežíłħutazizi k’ápi	Upper Sioux Indian Community

Many of the members of these four tribal nations are descendants of Dakota people who avoided exile from Minnesota after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862.

- 1.3.2.3 The name Dakota/Dakhóta means “the friendly people” or “ally” in the Dakota language. The name Sioux (increasingly in disuse) applies to Dakota, as well Nakota (Yankton and Yanktonai), and Lakota (Teton) peoples. All the Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota tribes are collectively called Oceti Sakowin/Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, “People of the Seven Council Fires.”

**1.3.3** The Ojibwe people originally inhabited the eastern Great Lakes region but migrated west into present-day Minnesota. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they began to displace Dakota people from the woodlands of northern Minnesota. Today, Ojibwe tribes are located in northern Michigan, northern Wisconsin, northern Minnesota, northeastern North Dakota, and large portions of southern Canada.

**1.3.3.1** Today there are seven federally recognized Ojibwe tribes in Minnesota, each with its own reservation:

OJIBWE NAME	COMMON USAGE
Zagaakwaandagowiniwag	Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
Nagaajiwanaang	Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Gichi-Onigaming	Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag	Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
Misi-zaaga'iganiing	Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
Miskaagamiwi-Zaagaiganiing	Red Lake Nation
Gaa-waabaabiganikaag	White Earth Nation

**1.3.3.2** Six of these seven tribes (Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Mille Lacs, and White Earth) are bands of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, a centralized tribal authority. The Red Lake Nation is independent of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe.

**1.3.3.3** Alternative forms of the name Ojibwe are *Ojibway*, *Ojibwa*, and *Chippewa*. *Anishinaabe*, a term referring to Ojibwe and other linguistically related people, is in frequent modern usage.

**1.4 Some Native American Minnesotans are descendants of Native people who were exiled from present-day Minnesota.**

**1.4.1** After the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, most Dakota people were forced from the state to present-day South Dakota. The descendants of these Dakota exiles consider Minnesota to be their ancestral homeland. A number of them returned to Minnesota beginning in the 1870s and in larger numbers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**DESPITE CONTINUED EFFORTS TO REPEAL THE LEGISLATION, THE DAKOTA REMOVAL ACT OF 1863 IS STILL TECHNICALLY IN EFFECT TODAY.**

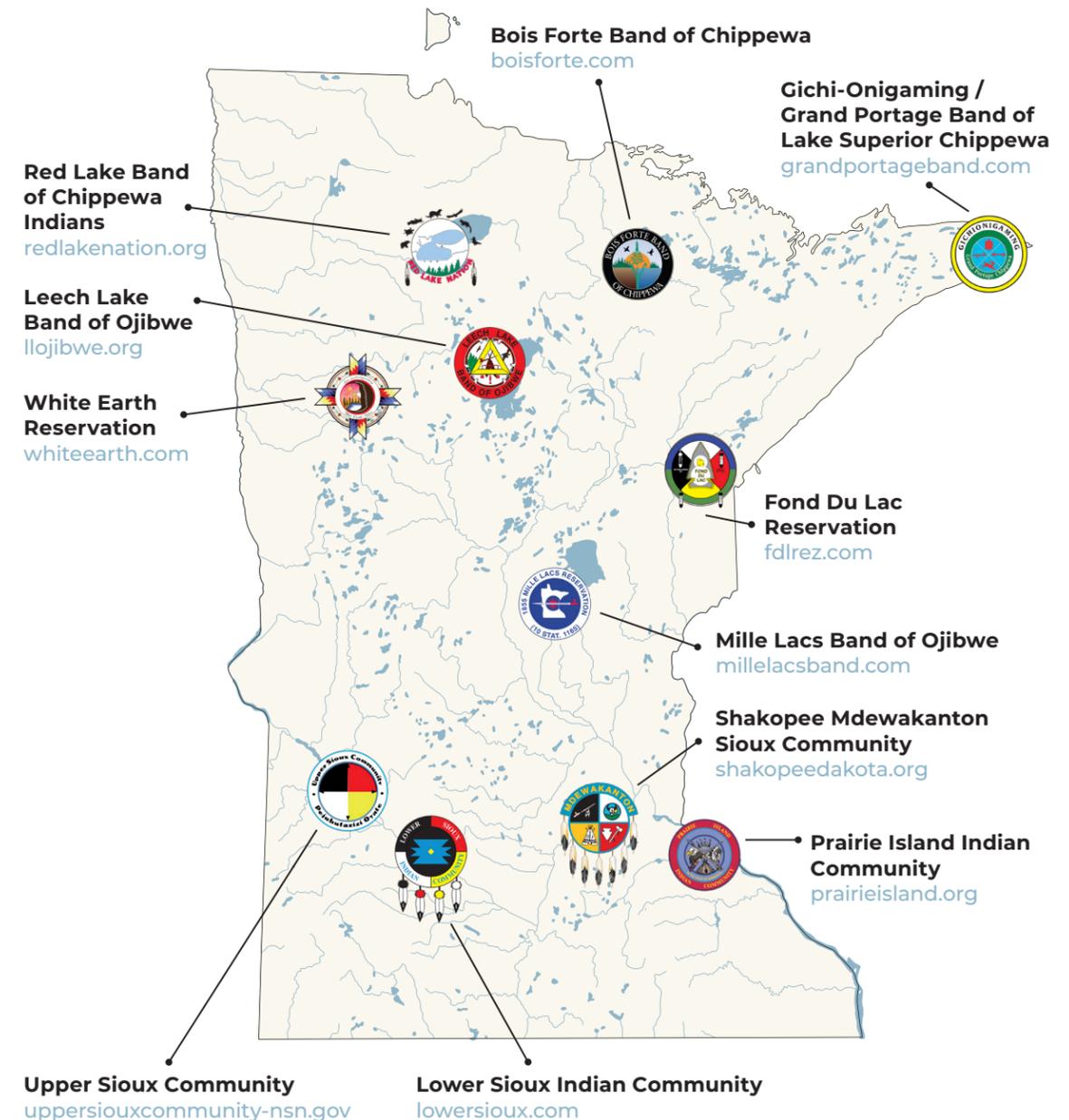
**1.4.2** Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) people lived in areas of southeastern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa before the arrival of European settlers. When Wisconsin and Iowa became states, the Ho-Chunk were moved to reservations in Minnesota: First to Long Prairie and later to Winnebago. They were expelled in 1863 from their reservation after the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, with most relocated to a new reservation in Nebraska. Eventually, some Ho-Chunk people returned to Wisconsin and a few to Minnesota.

**1.5 Besides the 11 tribal reservations in Minnesota, there are sizable Native communities in several Minnesota cities which include members from many different tribes—Ojibwe, Dakota, Ho-Chunk, and others.**

**1.5.1** The Twin Cities metropolitan area (especially Minneapolis), Duluth, Bemidji, and other cities near tribal reservations have significant Native populations, each with their own cultural events and social support organizations.

**1.5.2** Native communities in urban areas grew as a direct result of termination policies and the Indian Relocation Act in the 1950s to relocate Native Americans from reservations into urban areas.

**1.5.3** Native Americans of various tribal affiliations from neighboring states and across the United States live in Minnesota.



**THE DAKOTA AND OJIBWE PEOPLES IN MINNESOTA HAVE DISTINCT CULTURES.**

**2.1 While the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples of Minnesota have distinct and separate cultures, they share similar values.**

**2.1.1** The value systems of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples are based on close interaction with and respect for the natural world. They share a deep interconnectedness between their cultural heritages and the preservation of the environment.

**2.1.2** The Dakota and Ojibwe communities uphold important shared community values which exert a lasting influence on their ways of life and decision-making, predicated on their language. These values—honesty, humility, respect, wisdom, generosity, and compassion—guide both the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples in the present day.

**BOTH THE DAKOTA AND OJIBWE CULTURES EMBRACE A DISTINCTIVE SET OF CORE LIFE VALUES WHICH SERVE AS THEIR GUIDING PRINCIPLES.**

**The Seven Dakota values:**

DAKOTA NAME	VALUE
Wóčhekiye	Prayer
Wóksape	Wisdom
Wóhada	Respect
Wóokhiye	Generosity
Wówaḥbana	Humility
Wówaunšida	Compassion
Wówičakhe	Honesty/Truth

**The Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Ojibwe:**

OJIBWE NAME	TEACHING
Debwewin	Truth
Dabaadendiziwin	Humility
Manaadendamowin	Respect
Zaagi'idiwin	Love
Aakwade'ewin	Bravery and Courage
Gwayakwaadiziwin	Honesty
Nibwaakaawin	Wisdom and Intelligence

**2.2 The lifeways of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples stand as vital cornerstones of health and wellness, firmly grounded in the historical ties to their ancestral lands and their core cultural values.**

**2.2.1 Connection to land:** A profound connection to the land and nature is central to the cultural identity of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. [See EU3.]

**2.2.2 Language:** The Dakota and Ojibwe peoples possess distinct languages. Their languages serve not only as a vehicle for communication but also as a foundational cornerstone of their cultural identities and heritage.

- The Dakota language is part of the Siouan language family, specifically within the Mississippi Valley Siouan language branch.
- The Ojibwe language goes by several names, including Anishinaabemowin, Ojibwe, Ojibway, Ojibwa, Southwestern Chippewa, and Chippewa. It's classified as a Central Algonquian language.

**2.2.3 Kinship:** Kinship plays a pivotal role in Dakota and Ojibwe cultures, shaping their social fabric and daily lives. It serves as a bedrock for their communities, where relationships are not solely defined by blood relations, but also by shared responsibilities and respect.

- **Dakota:** Within Dakota communities, family and social structures follow a matriarchal, matrilineal framework.

- **Ojibwe:** In Ojibwe society, the social structure is organized around a patrilineal clan system, known as doodem.

**2.2.4 Food and diet:** The diets of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have been intertwined with the gifts of nature in their traditional homelands. But the historical dislocation and deliberate depletion of vital food sources under past federal policies have resulted in enduring dietary and health problems.

Under colonization, Native American diets shifted from staples like wild rice and natural, grass-fed, lean meats like elk, buffalo, and moose to processed alternatives. In recent years, many Natives have been working to restore traditional foodways for better health and to reconnect with important cultural practices.

**2.2.5 Medicine:** Native Americans have preserved their healing practices for centuries. Native Americans embrace and interweave ancestral traditions with contemporary Western science and practices.

In both Dakota and Ojibwe cultures, there are four basic medicines: cedar, sage, sweetgrass, and tobacco for traditional use.



**2.2.6 Oral traditions:** Both the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples have used oral traditions for thousands of years to preserve their cultures and histories. Oral traditions are the purposeful retelling of stories from one generation to the next in order to pass on history and life lessons.

**2.2.7 Social gatherings:** Social gatherings and events play an integral part of preserving Dakota and Ojibwe culture and traditions. Traditional games and team sports such as horse relays and lacrosse are common activities.

The word powwow/pauwaw is recognized by both the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples as a word for large social gatherings. The Dakota word for these is wačhípi, meaning “they dance,” while the Ojibwe call it niimi’idiwin.



**LACROSSE: “THE CREATOR’S GAME”**

- One of North America’s oldest team sports
- Originated with Native American nations
- Serving social and political purposes
- Played for fun, to resolve disputes, and to redistribute wealth
- In Minnesota, Natives continue to play the game on ancient fields, some over a mile in length
- Dakota: Thakápsiča—Making a ball bounce or jump
- Ojibwe: baaga’adowewin—To strike something repeatedly
- Organizations like Twin Cities Native Lacrosse play a crucial role in reviving this traditional sport among Native youth and offering professional-level instruction to boost participation and access to a white-dominated sport today.

**2.2.8 Music:** Music serves a diverse array of purposes, encompassing work songs, harvesting songs, courtship rituals, and compositions associated with hunting, agriculture, and warfare. Contemporary Dakota and Ojibwe musicians frequently blend traditional elements with non-Native musical influences, upholding their cultural heritage while forging innovative and unique musical styles.

**2.2.9 Dance:** Traditional dances are a means of expression, conveying narratives of cultural importance to the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. These dances nurture community engagement, encompassing the welcoming of guests, commemorating significant events, paying homage to the natural world, and facilitating inter-tribal gatherings. The choreography, movement, and regalia within these dances mirror elements of the natural world.

**2.2.10 Spirituality and beliefs:** Dakota and Ojibwe cultures both acknowledge the spiritual presence within the natural world and believe in the existence of a higher power. They do not consider themselves to have a “religion” so much as a way of life. They emphasize the importance of rituals, ceremonies, and connections to the spiritual realm to maintain balance, seek guidance in all things, and promote well-being.

In past centuries, Christian missionaries and European-American officials considered Native peoples to be “savage,” and used religion as a tool to assimilate and “civilize” them. Upon enactment of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Native Americans were finally allowed to openly engage in their spiritual lifeways again. Today, Native American individuals participate in a variety of faiths and religions, including Christianity—both despite and as a result of forced religious assimilation.

**Dakota:** The Creator, or Wakǰáŋ Tǎŋka is the most powerful being, creating the sacredness that resides in everything that has life.

**Ojibwe:** Gichi-manidoo is the Ojibwe name for The Creator and maker of all things.

**2.2.11 Ceremonies:** In both Dakota and Ojibwe cultures, ceremonies have long functioned as a means to commemorate pivotal life events, establish a connection with the spirit realm, and fortify cultural and communal identity. These rituals are indispensable for expressing gratitude, seeking spiritual guidance, and marking rites of passage. Ceremonies play a pivotal role in maintaining a robust connection with ancestors, spirits, and the natural world, fostering unity and a profound sense of belonging within their respective communities.

**2.2.12 Cultural visual expression:** The significance of cultural visual expression is clearly represented within the traditions of both the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. For the Dakota people, it served as a vital means of conveying their identity and spirituality, manifesting through meticulous beadwork, quillwork, and intricate designs adorning clothing and accessories. Similarly, the Ojibwe community maintains a rich tradition of creative visual expression, evident in the craftsmanship of birch bark canoes, beaded moccasins, and intricately woven baskets. These artifacts not only served practical functions but also served as reflections of their cultural values, age-old traditions, and a deep reverence for the natural world’s inherent beauty.

**2.3 Pan-Indianism has contributed to the false perception that people of different tribal nations in the Americas are all culturally the same.**

**2.3.1** Tribes are distinct from one another and internally diverse. Pan-Indianism is the tendency to homogenize the differences among Native tribes and peoples.

**2.3.2** No two Native American tribes are exactly alike. Each has its own land, traditions, history, and cultural practices.

**2.3.3** Individuals of Dakota and Ojibwe heritage are collectively and individually dedicated to the process of reconnecting with their cultural lifeways and language.

**NATIVE AMERICANS HAVE A STRONG AND UNIQUE CONNECTION TO THE LAND OF MINNESOTA.**

**3.1 Present-day Minnesota is the ancestral homeland of Dakota and Ojibwe peoples. [See EU1.3]**

- 3.1.1 Historical understanding and the basis of treaty making between the United States and tribes recognizes that all lands originally belonged to Native tribes.
- 3.1.2 Land acknowledgements are a recent practice by non-Native governments, organizations, and individuals to publicly recognize this historical fact and the usually coercive ways in which Native peoples were removed from their original lands.

**3.2 Many place names in Minnesota are derived from Dakota and Ojibwe names and place names.**

- 3.2.1 “Minnesota” comes from the Dakota word Mnísota, “land of the water that reflects the sky.”
- 3.2.2 Examples of place names adapting Dakota words or names include: Dakhóta → Dakota County, Mahkato → City of Mankato, Sakpe → City of Shakopee, Anokatanhan → Anoka County, Winona county and city, Kandiyohi County, Chanhassen, Chaska, Mendota, Minnetonka, Wayzata.

Examples of places names translating Dakota words or names include the City of Red Wing, Yellow Medicine County, and Blue Earth county, city, and river.

- 3.2.3 Examples of place names adapting Ojibwe words or names include: Mississippi River, Bemidji, Nisswa, Kanabec, Koochiching and Mahnomen counties, and Mesabi Iron Range.

Examples of places names translating Ojibwe words or names include Lake Vermillion, Red Lake County, and Leech Lake.

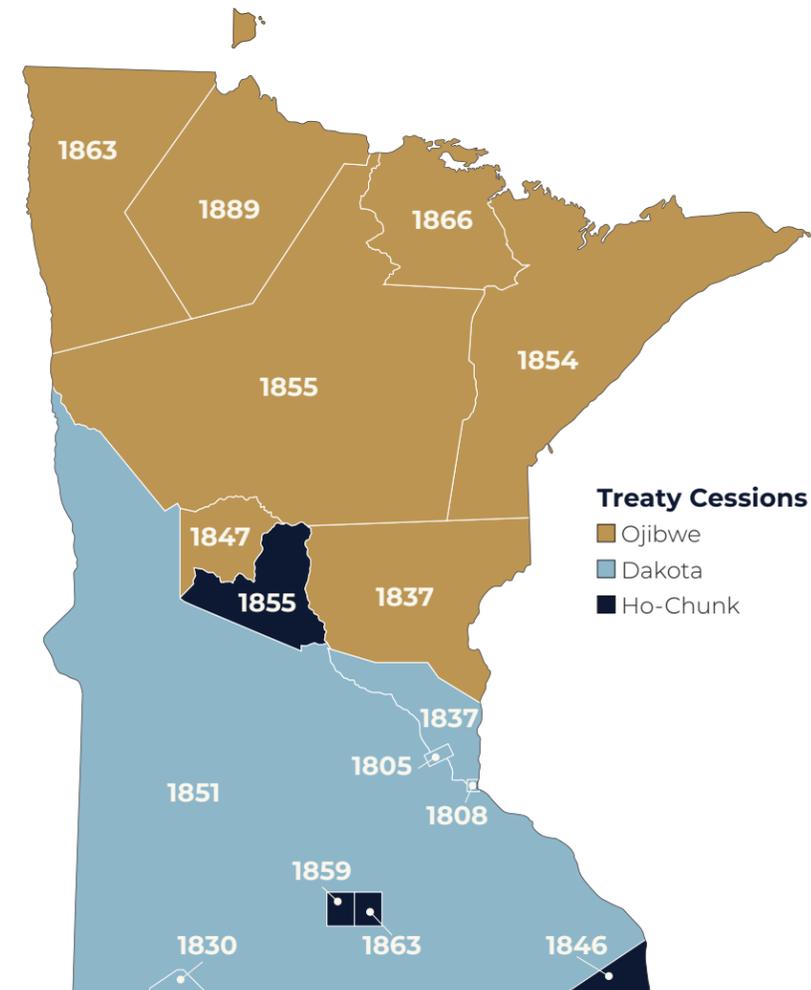
**3.3 Beginning in 1805, treaties made between tribal nations and the United States government guaranteed perpetual ownership of lands to each tribe. In treaty negotiations, tribes were coerced into relinquishing large amounts of their ancestral lands and/or induced by promises of payments, supplies, and other support—promises which were subsequently broken or unilaterally modified by the United States or Minnesota state government.**

- 3.3.1 Each of the 11 tribal reservations in Minnesota belong to their respective tribal nations and are guaranteed by the federal government’s trust responsibility.
- 3.3.2 Tribes own lands within their reservation boundaries in two forms:
  - Fee lands: Owned by the tribe.
  - Trust lands: Owned by the federal government on behalf of the tribe.
- 3.3.3 Some lands within tribal reservation boundaries do not belong to their respective tribes but instead to private owners or federal, state, or local governments. This resulted from earlier federal policies (the Dawes Act of 1887, the Nelson Act of 1889, and later actions into the 20<sup>th</sup> century) which broke up reservation lands into small land allotments and created a patchwork of “checkerboarded” Native- and non-Native-owned land parcels or parcels that were seized outright.

**3.3.3.1 Tribes are working to reacquire ownership of some of these lands, either through purchase or the return of land by governmental action.**

**RECENT TRIBAL LAND REPATRIATIONS**

- Bois Forte Band: 28,000 acres returned in 2022 by the Conservation Fund.
- Fond du Lac Band: 1.6-acre sacred burial sites returned in 2022 (Superior, Wisconsin).
- Fond du Lac Band: 3,400 acres to be returned by the University of Minnesota (Cloquet Forestry Center).
- Grand Portage Band: Lake Superior shore returned in 2022 (Chippewa City/Passion Pit Beach).
- Leech Lake Band: 11,760 acres returned in 2023 by the United States.
- Lower Sioux Community: 114 acres returned in 2021 by the Minnesota Historical Society.
- Prairie Island Indian Community: 3 acres of burial mounds returned in 2023 by Lake City.
- Upper Sioux Community: 1,400 acres to be returned by the State of Minnesota.



**3.4 Tribes in Minnesota have retained their hunting, fishing, and gathering rights guaranteed by treaties on many lands outside of reservation boundaries.**

- 3.4.1 Tribal leaders sought to provide for future generations by reserving in treaties the ability to hunt, fish, and harvest plants on lands sold to the United States, called “ceded lands.”
- 3.4.2 Off-reservation hunting, fishing, and gathering rights are perpetual, or never ending, and allow for tribal governmental regulation when tribal members exercise these types of treaty rights.

**3.5 Tribes in Minnesota today engage in agriculture, forestry, commercial fisheries, wild rice harvesting and processing, and other land-based economic and cultural activities, just like their ancestors. These activities provide for their tribal members’ dietary needs, produce raw materials and energy for tribal use, generate income through commercial operations, and provide cultural continuity with ancestral lifeways.**

**3.6 Tribes in Minnesota are active stewards of natural resources, applying both traditional Indigenous and Western scientific methods.**

- 3.6.1 Tribes practice ancestral values of preserving lands and waters for the use of future generations.
- 3.6.2 Tribal governments have modern, sophisticated natural resource departments. These tribal governmental agencies manage resources within tribal reservations; collaborate with each other through intertribal organizations (e.g., the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Intertribal Timber Council); and are involved in a number of joint management efforts of natural resources with federal, state, and local governments.

**3.6.3 Tribes are actively involved in the protection and reclamation of natural resources.**

- 3.6.3.1 Reclamation efforts include prairie restoration and the reintroduction of endangered or absent indigenous species (e.g., bison, lake trout, sturgeon, plants).
- 3.6.3.2 Tribes are often in the forefront of efforts to protect water and clean impaired bodies of water.

**3.6.4 Several tribes in Minnesota operate environmental protection facilities like wastewater treatment plants and recycling facilities, either jointly with or benefiting neighboring non-Native communities.**

**3.7 The preservation of ancient Native ancestral burial grounds and other sacred sites is of profound spiritual importance to Native people today.**

- 3.7.1 There are thousands of Dakota and Ojibwe burial mounds and cemeteries in Minnesota.
- 3.7.2 Federal and Minnesota state law requires that human remains and archeological artifacts unearthed by construction project excavations be examined for the presence of burial mounds and, if confirmed as such, be restored and protected. Tribal authorities, the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, and the Minnesota Office of the State Archeologist are involved in this work.
- 3.7.3 Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPO) engage with state and federal partners to ensure the proper processes are followed for off-reservation culturally significant places.



**TRIBES ARE SOVEREIGN NATIONS, IN REALITY AND UNDER THE LAW.**

**4.1 Tribal nations have existed since before the arrival of European and American authorities in North America.**

4.1.1 The practice of treaty making has always existed between tribal nations even before the arrival of settlers.

**4.2 The United States Constitution (Article 1, Section 8) recognizes that tribes are sovereign entities. Furthermore, the United States has a trust responsibility to each tribal government that includes the high moral obligation to protect the sovereignty of each tribal government.**

4.2.1 The United States of America and the state of Minnesota are required by law—upheld by federal and state courts—to interact with tribal governments as independent, sovereign powers, and not to be treated as subordinate units of American government.

4.2.2 The morally proper, respectful, and legal relationship between tribes and the various levels of American government is that of government-to-government dealings.

4.2.2.1 Tribes negotiate and enter into mutual aid agreements with the federal, Minnesota state, and local governments as sovereign, independent entities.

**4.3 Tribal members are citizens of their tribe while also being citizens of the United States and the state of Minnesota. They have rights and responsibilities to their tribe, the state of Minnesota, and the United States granted to every citizen of each jurisdiction.**

4.3.1 Tribal nations determine criteria for citizenship and enrollment for their nations.

**4.4 Tribal governments are modern, democratic, and sophisticated.**

4.4.1 Tribes have their own constitutions and enact their own laws. These documents lay the foundation for how nations govern themselves.

4.4.2 The governance structure of tribal governments varies from tribe to tribe, often combining ancient traditional Indigenous governance values and structures with contemporary American governance models. Some tribes delegate policy and decision making to a tribal council, others have systems with separate executive and legislative branches.

4.4.3 All 11 tribes in Minnesota have a Tribal Court and an Appeals Court process to settle disputes and enforce tribal laws.



Photo courtesy of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.

**4.5 Tribal governments are responsible for many of the same functions as other American government systems.**

4.5.1 Tribal governments provide essential services for their tribal members like public safety (police, fire protection), public health and wellness, education, natural resource conservation and environmental protection, and more.

4.5.2 Tribal governments also are involved in functions unique to their Indigenous heritage: cultural preservation, Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization, etc.

4.5.3 Tribal governments also operate various enterprises to generate revenue to fund these essential services, such as:

- Hospitality and entertainment (e.g., hotels, casinos, restaurants, golf courses, theater venues)
- Forestry
- Agriculture and fishing
- Financial services
- Professional services
- Retail

The revenue from these enterprises serves as the financial equivalent of the tax base on which other American governments depend.

**NATIVE AMERICANS IN MINNESOTA HAVE FACED UNIQUE HARDSHIPS THROUGHOUT HISTORY WHICH HAVE RESULTED IN LONG-LASTING DISPARITIES.**

**5.1 Throughout the history of present-day Minnesota, there were persistent and intentional efforts to eliminate and displace Native peoples from their ancestral lands, resulting in the loss of lives and culture, and profound lasting impacts on their nations.**

- 5.1.1 The arrival of European settlers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sparked a series of exploitative treaties that pushed the Dakota and Ojibwe from their ancestral lands and onto small reservations.
- 5.1.2 In 1862, the U.S.-Dakota War resulted in the forced expulsion of most Dakota people and the execution of 38 Dakota warriors—the largest mass execution in U.S. history.
- 5.1.3 Countless intentional and systemic acts of violence, perpetuated by the U.S. government, sought to obliterate the Dakota and Ojibwe people. State-sanctioned genocide: the purposeful devastation of the land and vital food sources; and complicity from everyday American citizens collectively aimed to annihilate the rich histories, cherished cultures, and vital livelihoods of the Dakota and Ojibwe communities.
- 5.1.4 Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, government policies aimed to assimilate and erase Native American cultures were implemented, including residential boarding schools, the removal of children from their families and communities, relocation, and termination of tribal reservation.
  - 5.1.4.1 This included the establishment of 16 government and church-run boarding schools across Minnesota from 1871 through the 1970s. Dakota and Ojibwe children were frequently taken from their families, and they endured severe punishments for embracing their tribal names, languages, and the lifeways that linked them to their cultural roots. Still today, families’ trauma of these boarding schools deeply impacts Native communities in Minnesota, underscoring the significance of recognizing and comprehending this painful history.

**5.2 Native American communities in Minnesota continue to experience the traumatic effects of colonization and detrimental federal and state policies.**

- 5.2.1 A large number of Native American individuals and communities experience wider disparities in health, housing, employment, education, and poverty than most other Minnesotans.
- 5.2.2 Native Americans have been consistently underrepresented in policy-making discussions, misrepresented in the media, and left out of data collections. This leads to the false perception that they and their disparities are not only marginal but even non-existent.

**5.3 The healing and reconciliation processes between Native American communities and wider American society are ongoing and involve a range of efforts to address historical injustice and long-lasting trauma.**

- 5.3.1 The journey toward healing and reconciliation starts with accurate historical understanding. This process encompasses a range of endeavors, from acknowledging historical trauma and injustice to dispelling inaccuracies, advocating for factual representation in K-12 education, and actively addressing the unique problems encountered by Native American communities.
- 5.3.2 The federal government, state of Minnesota, and religious institutions have taken steps in recent years to acknowledge the historic wrongs against Native American tribes, and the tragic, misguided policies of boarding schools, assimilation, tribal termination, and more.

**RECENT OFFICIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS OF HISTORIC INJUSTICES AGAINST NATIVE PEOPLES AND EFFORTS TO RIGHT HISTORIC WRONGS:**

- U.S. Indian Commissioner Kevin Gover apology, September 8, 2000
- Gov. Mark Dayton’s apology, August 16, 2012
- University of Minnesota TRUTH Project (Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing), 2020
- Gov. Tim Walz signed MN Stat. 10.65 which requires all state agencies to consult with tribes and take a course in Tribal State Relations, 2021
- Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Report, 2022

- 5.3.3 Narrative change is a proactive effort to tell the story of Native people with greater accuracy and completeness. By reclaiming their histories, the Dakota and Ojibwe strive to correct the dominant narrative. This transformative process is a vital step in reclaiming cultural identity and nurturing collective healing.
- 5.3.4 Today, tribal governments regularly assert their inherent sovereign rights as a way to partially redress historic wrongs against their peoples.
- 5.3.5 Federal and state laws have gradually been enacted to reverse bad policies toward Native communities, provide greater protection for Native American cultures and children, and increase economic self-sufficiency.

**LANDMARK FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO REVERSE HARMFUL POLICIES TOWARD NATIVE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES:**

- Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968
- Indian Education Act of 1972
- Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975
- Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978
- Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988
- Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990
- Native American Languages Act of 1990
- Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990
- Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013



**TRIBES AND NATIVE PEOPLE MAKE IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WELL-BEING OF OTHER MINNESOTANS.**

**6.1 Native American Minnesotans share their rich culture and knowledge with non-Native Minnesotans.**

- 6.1.1 Tribal reservations are collectively one of the largest tourism destinations in Minnesota.
- 6.1.2 Many cultural events and institutions—from powwows or wacipis to art exhibitions to Native museums—are open for all Minnesotans to learn from and enjoy.
- 6.1.3 Native environmental practices help inform conservation efforts by non-Native conservation agencies.
- 6.1.4 The restoration of Native narratives adds to the collective cultural identity of Minnesota.

**6.2 Tribal governments and their enterprises are major employers, provide important services, and contribute significantly to the economic prosperity of their regional economies, especially in rural Minnesota. [SEE EU 4.5.3]**

- 6.2.1 Ten of the 11 tribal nations in Minnesota are the largest employers in the counties in which they are located.
- 6.2.2 More than 20,000 Minnesotans are employed directly by tribes and tribal enterprises, the majority of whom are non-Natives.
- 6.2.3 Thousands of Minnesotans are employed by companies which support tribal enterprises (e.g., suppliers, contractors, professional services, financial services).

6.2.4 The secondary economic benefits of tourism at tribal nations helps other nearby businesses.

**6.3 Tribal governments cooperate with local units of government in a variety of ways. Many have mutual aid agreements relating to police and fire protection, conservation practices, snow plowing on public roads, public health, and more.**

**6.4 Tribal nations, Native organizations, and individual Native Minnesotans practice great generosity. From volunteering for local initiatives to giving charitable donations, their actions reflect their traditional values of sharing with and helping others.**

6.4.1 There are more than 65 Native-led nonprofit organizations in Minnesota, providing services to Native and non-Native Minnesotans.

6.4.2 Tribal governments of all sizes donate money, in-kind contributions, and tribal members' and staff time to local community groups and a wide variety of charitable causes.

6.4.2.1 The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community is the largest philanthropic benefactor for Indian Country nationally, one of the largest charitable givers in Minnesota, and provides economic development loans to other tribes.

**NATIVE AMERICAN MINNESOTANS HAVE A LEGACY OF IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS.**

**7.1 Native American Minnesotans are involved in a wide range of occupations and pursuits, from traditional Indigenous fields to the entire range of professions. In the process, they are individually and collectively strengthening their own Native communities and contributing to the health and prosperity of broader Minnesota society.**

**7.2 Individual Native American Minnesotans have achieved distinctions in a variety of fields.**

**7.2.1 In the arts:**

**Patrick DesJarlait (Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation)**

Watercolor artist with over 300 pieces of artwork. The artist of the redesigned Land O'Lakes "butter maiden."

**George Morrison (Ojibwe, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa)**

Celebrated abstract painter and sculptor.

**Marlena Myles (Spirit Lake Dakota)**

Digital artist, animator, fabric/fashion designer, and book illustrator.

**7.2.2 In media:**

**Leya Hale (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota and Diné Nations)**

Documentary director and producer for Twin Cities PBS and winner of multiple regional Emmy awards.

**7.2.3 In literature:**

**Louise Erdrich (Ojibwe, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa)**

Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

**Gwen Westerman (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota Oyate)**

Writer, educator, artist, and Director of the Native American Literature Symposium. Appointed by Governor Walz as Poet Laureate of Minnesota in September 2021.

**Diane Wilson (Dakota, Rosebud Sioux Tribe)**

Award-winning writer, speaker, and editor.

**7.2.4 In sports:**

**Charles Albert Bender (Ojibwe, White Earth Nation)**

Major League Baseball player during 1900s and 1910s. Elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1953.

**Henry Boucha (Animakee Wa Zhing 37 First Nation Ojibwe)**

National Hockey League and World Hockey Association player from 1971 to 1977. Silver medal-winner in the 1972 Winter Olympics.

**7.2.5 In cultural and language revitalization:**

**Ella Cara Deloria (Yankton Sioux Dakota)**

Yankton Dakota educator, anthropologist, ethnographer, linguist, and novelist. Winner of the 1943 Indian Achievement Award for her contributions to the study of Native American languages.

**Anton Treuer (Ojibwe, White Earth Nation/Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)**

Academic and author specializing in Ojibwe language and American Indian studies. Professor of Ojibwe at Bemidji State University and a 2008 Guggenheim Fellow.

**7.2.6 In culinary arts:**

**Sean Sherman (Oglala Lakota Sioux)**

Award-winning chef, educator, author, and activist. Recipient of the 2023 Julia Child Award.

**7.2.7 In academia:**

**Brenda Child (Ojibwe, Red Lake Nation)**

Award-winning historian, author, and Northrup Professor of American Studies at the University of Minnesota.

**Tadd Johnson (Ojibwe, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa)**

Member of the University of Minnesota Board of Regents, formerly professor and director of graduate studies, University of Minnesota, Duluth's Department of American Indian Studies.

**7.2.8 In the professions:**

**Kurt BlueDog (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota)**

Lawyer and tribal judge.

**Angelique EagleWoman (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota)**

Law professor, legal scholar, and Chief Justice on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Supreme Court.

**7.2.9 In politics and public affairs:**

**Peggy Flanagan (Ojibwe, White Earth Nation)**

Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota and currently the highest-ranking Native elected to executive office in the United States.

**Anne McKeig (Ojibwe, White Earth Nation)**

Associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, making her the first Native American woman to serve on any state Supreme Court.

**7.3 Certain national movements and causes of importance to Indian Country were started in Minnesota.**

**7.3.1** The American Indian Movement (AIM) was founded in 1968.

**7.3.2** The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) was founded in Minneapolis in 1969.

**7.3.3** Migizi was founded in 1977 in Minneapolis, becoming a model for other Native media outlets.

**7.3.4** The National Native American Boarding Schools Healing Coalition (NABS) was founded in Minneapolis in 2012.

**7.3.5** The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR) office, created in 2021 by the Minnesota Legislature, was the first of its kind in the United States.



**NATIVE GOVERNANCE  
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NATIVE  
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