



STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR NATIVE ARTISTS

SISNA THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2026-2029 National Implementation Plan

**Ford
Foundation**

A T A L M
Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, & Museums



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Strengthening Institutional Support for Native Artists 2026–2029 National Implementation Plan

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FOUNDATIONAL STATEMENT

SISNA exists to help institutions become stronger partners for Native artists, Native communities, and Native cultural futures. By strengthening institutional systems, relationships, accountability, and investment, SISNA seeks to help create a healthier and more sustainable ecosystem in which Native creativity can thrive across generations.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **Strengthening Institutional Support for Native Artists (SISNA)** initiative is a national effort to improve how institutions support Native artists, authors, performers, and culture bearers.

SISNA emerged from a growing recognition that Native artists frequently encounter institutional systems that:

- are not designed with Native communities in mind,
- lack cultural understanding,
- create unnecessary barriers,
- underinvest in Native creativity,
- and fail to build long-term reciprocal relationships with Native communities.

At the same time, Native artists continue to sustain:

- cultural knowledge,
- language,
- identity,
- intergenerational learning,
- tribal sovereignty,
- community wellness,
- and cultural continuity.

SISNA recognizes that stronger institutional systems are essential to strengthening Native cultural futures.

Rather than functioning primarily as a direct artist-service initiative, SISNA focuses on institutional transformation and systems change.

Through national frameworks, practical toolkits, institutional readiness standards, peer-learning cohorts, recognition systems, partnerships, and policy advocacy, SISNA seeks to help institutions become stronger and more accountable partners for Native artists and Native communities.

II. HOW THIS PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

This strategic framework was informed by:

- national needs assessment activities,
- listening sessions,
- surveys,
- tabletop exercises,
- working groups,
- Summit discussions,
- and ongoing feedback from Native artists, tribal leaders, Native arts organizations, cultural institutions, funders, and community partners.

The SISNA process included participation from:

- Native artists,
- tribal governments,
- Native arts organizations,
- museums,
- libraries,

- archives,
- universities,
- arts councils,
- funders,
- and government agencies.

The 2025 SISNA Summit identified recurring themes including:

- institutional readiness,
- funding inequities,
- relationship-building,
- artist compensation,
- accountability,
- policy barriers,
- infrastructure needs,
- and the importance of long-term systems change.

This framework is intended to remain **collaborative, iterative, and responsive**.

SISNA will continue incorporating:

- participant feedback,
- pilot testing,
- artist perspectives,
- and evolving field priorities throughout implementation.

III. WHY INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT MATTERS

Native artists are not simply contributors to the arts sector. They are:

- cultural practitioners,
- knowledge holders,
- language keepers,
- educators,
- innovators,
- community leaders,
- and caretakers of living traditions.

Their work sustains:

- cultural continuity,
- intergenerational learning,
- community identity,
- Indigenous knowledge systems,
- and tribal sovereignty.

Yet many institutions remain underprepared to:

- work respectfully with Native communities,
- compensate artists fairly,

- support Indigenous cultural practices,
- or build reciprocal relationships with Native communities.

Institutional support for Native artists is therefore not simply a cultural initiative. It is:

- infrastructure development,
- relationship-building,
- and investment in Native cultural futures.

IV. SISNA’S UNIQUE ROLE IN THE NATIVE ARTS ECOSYSTEM

SISNA recognizes and honors the longstanding work of Native artist-serving organizations, tribal cultural programs, Native arts markets, Native-led nonprofits, and Native arts initiatives that directly support Native artists.

Organizations such as:

- Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries & Museums
- First Peoples Fund
- Native Arts and Cultures Foundation
- Southwestern Association for Indian Arts
- Institute of American Indian Arts

and many others provide critical leadership through:

- artist fellowships,
- direct grants,
- exhibitions,
- mentorship,
- artist development,
- markets,
- and creative opportunities.

SISNA does not seek to replace or compete with these efforts. **SISNA focuses on strengthening the institutional systems surrounding Native artists.**

SISNA ECOSYSTEM MODEL

Sector	Primary Role
Native artist-serving organizations	Direct artist support
Tribal governments	Sovereignty & cultural investment
Museums/libraries/archives	Cultural engagement & interpretation
Arts councils	Regional coordination & grantmaking
Funders	Long-term investment
Government agencies	Policy & public support
Universities	Education & research partnerships
SISNA	Institutional transformation & readiness

V. SISNA GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All SISNA activities will be guided by the following principles:

- Native-led decision-making
- Artist-centered planning
- Relationship-based engagement
- Cultural sovereignty
- Accountability & transparency
- Equity & accessibility
- Reciprocity
- Collaboration rather than competition
- Respect for tribal diversity
- Shared learning
- Long-term sustainability

VI. THE CARE IMPLEMENTATION LENS

As ATALM synthesized Summit findings and national feedback, several recurring implementation themes consistently emerged.

To help organize these themes into a practical implementation structure, ATALM developed the CARE Lens as an internal planning and systems framework.

The CARE Lens is intended to support:

- toolkit development,
- institutional readiness assessments,
- training systems,
- cohort learning,
- and strategic planning.

C — CAPACITIES

The staffing, infrastructure, governance, funding systems, training, and operational support institutions need to effectively support Native artists.

A — AREAS FOR GROWTH

Communities, institutions, and systems requiring additional investment, development, or support.

R — RELATIONSHIPS

The trust-based partnerships and collaborative systems necessary for long-term success.

E — ENVIRONMENT

The broader policy, funding, cultural, and systemic conditions shaping Native arts ecosystems.

VII. STRATEGIC APPROACH

SISNA will operate as a national field-building initiative.

Rather than immediately building large regional operational systems, SISNA will focus on:

- national frameworks,
- practical tools,
- learning systems,
- institutional standards,
- peer exchange,
- and strategic partnerships.

This approach allows SISNA to:

- scale sustainably,
- maximize national impact,
- avoid unnecessary infrastructure burdens,
- and strengthen existing organizations rather than duplicate them.

VIII. THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC GOALS

GOAL 1: Establish National Institutional Readiness Standards

Develop:

- SISNA Institutional Readiness Framework
- artist-informed standards
- accountability measures
- institutional growth pathways

GOAL 2: Launch the SISNA Seal of Approval

Create a nationally respected recognition system for institutions committed to ethical and artist-centered support of Native artists.

GOAL 3: Build Practical Toolkit & Training Systems

Provide institutions with practical tools that improve:

- policies,
- artist relationships,
- consultation,
- governance,
- and accountability.

GOAL 4: Create National Learning & Peer Networks

Support institutions through:

- cohorts,
- webinars,
- working groups,
- peer exchange,
- and convenings.

GOAL 5: Advance Policy & Systems Change

Support national dialogue around:

- funding equity,
- institutional accountability,
- operational support,
- and long-term infrastructure investment.

GOAL 6: Increase Investment in Native Artists, Native Artist-Serving Organizations & Native Cultural Infrastructure

Advance:

- equitable funding systems,
- operational support,
- Native-led investment strategies,
- and long-term sustainability for Native arts ecosystems.

IX. CORE SISNA INITIATIVES

1. SISNA INSTITUTIONAL READINESS FRAMEWORK

Purpose

Define institutional readiness and establish national guidance for supporting Native artists.

Components

- readiness assessments
- institutional standards
- accountability indicators
- artist relationship practices
- growth pathways

Outcomes

- shared national standards
- institutional guidance
- systems change framework

2. SISNA SEAL OF APPROVAL

Purpose

The SISNA Seal of Approval is intended to recognize institutions that demonstrate meaningful commitment to ethical, accountable, and artist-centered support of Native artists and Native communities.

The Seal is designed to:

- encourage institutional transformation,
- strengthen accountability,
- promote stronger artist relationships,

- and recognize institutions actively working to improve support systems for Native artists.

Possible evaluation areas:

Institutions seeking the Seal may be evaluated on areas such as:

- consultation practices,
- Native representation,
- equitable funding practices,
- cultural competency,
- partnership ethics,
- accountability systems,
- and long-term institutional commitment.

Important principle

The SISNA Seal is not intended to suggest perfection. Instead, the Seal recognizes institutions that demonstrate meaningful commitment, accountability, and ongoing institutional transformation in support of Native artists.

Renewal & accountability

To maintain accountability and encourage continued growth, the SISNA Seal may require:

- periodic renewal,
- updated documentation,
- and continued participation in institutional learning and improvement activities.

Recognition Models

There are two forms of recognition models under consideration. One is the **SINGLE NATIONAL RECOGNITION MODEL** and the other is a **TIERED MODEL**.

Under the **SINGLE MODEL**, Institutions either:

- meet SISNA standards,
- or continue participating in learning and readiness development until they are prepared for recognition.

This approach is intended to:

- maintain clarity,
- strengthen credibility,
- reduce administrative complexity,
- and support sustainable implementation.

Under the **TIERED MODEL**, possible recognition levels include:

Level	Description
Participating Institution	Engaged in SISNA learning
Developing Institution	Building readiness systems
SISNA Recognized Institution	Demonstrating strong practices
SISNA Leadership Institution	National model institution

3. SISNA TOOLKIT & TRAINING SYSTEM

Purpose

Help institutions move from intention to implementation.

TOOLKIT SERIES

Tribal Government Toolkit

Focus Areas

- tribal arts infrastructure
- cultural policy
- artist support systems
- artist registries
- cultural sovereignty
- economic development

Potential Resources

- sample resolutions
- policy templates
- artist compensation standards
- funding models
- cultural protocols

Native Arts Organizations Toolkit

Focus Areas

- sustainability
- governance
- artist services
- partnership systems
- technical assistance
- organizational growth

Arts Councils Toolkit

Focus Areas

- equitable grantmaking
- outreach systems
- Indigenous evaluation
- partnership development

Museums, Libraries & Archives Toolkit

Focus Areas

- consultation
- artist relationships

- exhibition standards
- collections guidance
- cultural protocols
- institutional accountability

Funders Toolkit

Focus Areas

- funding equity
- trust-based philanthropy
- multi-year support
- operational funding
- Indigenous evaluation
- Native-led investment

Government Agencies & Universities Toolkit

Focus Areas

- institutional barriers
- partnership ethics
- community engagement
- procurement systems
- accountability standards

4. SISNA LEARNING COHORTS

SISNA will build peer-learning systems through:

- virtual cohorts,
- workshops,
- peer exchange,
- pilot groups,
- and collaborative learning.

THE ATALM COHORT MODEL

SISNA builds on ATALM's successful cohort-based learning approach emphasizing:

- peer support,
- relationship-building,
- technical assistance,
- practical implementation,
- and iterative learning.

POSSIBLE COHORTS

- Tribal Governments
- Native Arts Organizations
- Arts Councils
- Museums & Cultural Institutions
- Funders
- Government Agencies

- Universities

5. POLICY & ADVOCACY INITIATIVES

SISNA will support national conversations around:

- Native arts funding equity,
- reduced administrative burdens,
- Indigenous evaluation methods,
- artist compensation,
- operational funding,
- cultural sovereignty,
- and institutional accountability.

PRIORITY POLICY AREAS

- Funding Equity
- Multi-Year Support
- Operational Sustainability
- Reduced Reporting Burdens
- Indigenous Evaluation Methods
- Native Representation in Decision-Making
- Cultural Infrastructure Investment
- Traditional Materials Access
- Institutional Accountability

6. SISNA NATIONAL INVESTMENT INITIATIVE

Purpose

Increase sustained investment in:

- Native artists,
- Native artist-serving organizations,
- Native cultural infrastructure,
- and institutional readiness systems.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

National Funder Roundtables

Convenings with:

- foundations,
- Native-led philanthropy,
- public agencies,
- tribal funders,
- and institutional partners.

Funding Equity Recommendations

Development of guidance around:

- equitable grantmaking,
- trust-based philanthropy,

- Indigenous evaluation,
- and operational support.

Investment Partnerships

Encourage:

- collaborative funding,
- pooled funds,
- Native-led investment strategies,
- and long-term infrastructure support.

Long-Term Possibilities

Potential future exploration of:

- Native Arts Infrastructure Fund
- SISNA Investment Collaborative
- Native cultural facilities support initiatives

X. RELATIONSHIP TO NATIVE ARTS ORGANIZATIONS

SISNA is committed to collaboration rather than competition.

SISNA WILL:

- recognize existing Native arts leadership,
- amplify Native artist-serving organizations,
- promote partnership opportunities,
- share visibility,
- and strengthen institutional ecosystems that benefit Native artists nationally.

SISNA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS:

SISNA will actively pursue collaboration with:

- Native arts organizations,
- tribal cultural programs,
- Native arts markets,
- Native-led nonprofits,
- artist collectives,
- and Indigenous cultural leaders.

POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIP AREAS

Area	Examples
Toolkit review	Artist-serving expertise
Training	Shared webinars
Recognition	Peer review participation
Advocacy	Joint policy priorities

Area	Examples
Convenings	Shared programming
Visibility	Cross-promotion

XI. GOVERNANCE & IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

SISNA implementation may include:

Group	Role
National Leadership Council	Strategic guidance
Steering Committee	Initiative oversight
Working Groups	Toolkit & initiative development
Toolkit Advisors	Technical expertise
Artist Advisors	Artist accountability
Cohort Facilitators	Learning coordination
Seal Review Panels	Recognition review

XII. RESPONSE & ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

SISNA is committed to transparency, responsiveness, and collaborative development.

ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICES MAY INCLUDE:

- annual reports,
- participant feedback cycles,
- public updates,
- open comment periods,
- “You Said / We Did” summaries,
- and evaluation reviews.

XIII. SUSTAINABILITY & RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SISNA is envisioned as a long-term national initiative requiring:

- sustained coordination,
- staffing,
- partnerships,
- technical development,
- and phased growth.

CORE PRINCIPLE

SISNA will prioritize **strategic growth aligned with organizational capacity.**

The initiative will intentionally phase development in ways that:

- build strong foundations first,
- avoid unsustainable expansion,

- leverage partnerships,
- and support long-term sustainability.

INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

During the first three years, SISNA will focus on:

- framework development,
- toolkit creation,
- pilot cohorts,
- virtual convenings,
- strategic partnerships,
- and institutional learning systems.

SISNA will intentionally avoid prematurely building:

- large regional operational systems,
- complex administrative structures,
- or high-overhead infrastructure.

PRIMARY RESOURCE NEEDS

Staffing

- project coordination
- communications
- toolkit development
- cohort facilitation
- partnership management
- evaluation

Learning Systems

- webinars
- convenings
- workshops
- peer-learning cohorts

Toolkit Development

- writing
- design
- pilot testing
- digital platform development

Seal Development

- assessments
- peer review systems
- artist feedback processes
- recognition infrastructure

POTENTIAL FUNDING STRATEGIES

Strategy	Examples
Foundation Support	Systems-change philanthropy
Government Support	Arts/humanities agencies
Strategic Partnerships	Shared initiatives
Sponsorships	Convenings & publications

IMPORTANT NOTE

SISNA will seek to balance **accessibility and sustainability**.

Participation costs should not create barriers for:

- tribal communities,
- Native arts organizations,
- or under-resourced institutions.

XIV. THREE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

YEAR ONE (2026–2027) FOUNDATION & FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Focus

Framework development and pilot preparation.

Major Activities

Institutional Readiness Framework

- finalize readiness framework
- develop assessments
- establish standards

SISNA Seal Development

- design recognition structure
- develop review process
- create feedback systems

Toolkit Development

Develop pilot resources including:

- consultation guides,
- readiness checklists,
- institutional templates.

National Council Activation

- working groups
- listening sessions
- virtual convenings

Partnership Building

Establish relationships with:

- Tribal governments
- Native and non-Native arts organizations
- funders
- agencies
- institutional partners

YEAR ONE DELIVERABLES

Deliverable	Outcome
SISNA Framework	National readiness model
Draft Seal System	Recognition structure
Toolkit Prototypes	Initial implementation tools
Learning Cohorts	National peer-learning structure
Strategic Partnerships	Cross-sector collaboration

YEAR TWO (2027–2028) - PILOT IMPLEMENTATION & NATIONAL LAUNCH

Strategic Focus

Testing, refinement, and national visibility.

Major Activities

Seal Pilot Cohort

- readiness assessments
- artist feedback
- peer review

Public Launch

Launch:

- SISNA Seal
- online portal
- institutional directory
- toolkit library

Expanded Training

Offer:

- webinars,
- workshops,
- cohort learning,
- readiness labs.

Institutional Recognition

Recognize inaugural SISNA institutions.

Funding Advocacy

Convene:

- funders,
- agencies,
- Native organizations,
- tribal leaders.

YEAR TWO DELIVERABLES

Deliverable	Outcome
SISNA Seal Launch	National recognition system
Toolkit Platform	Public resource system
Recognized Institutions	Initial leadership network
Expanded Cohorts	National learning system
Funding Advocacy Agenda	Shared priorities

YEAR THREE (2028–2029) - EXPANSION & LONG-TERM INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Focus

Expand influence and prepare for long-term infrastructure growth.

Major Activities

Expand SISNA Participation

Increase:

- institutional participation,
- Seal recognition,
- cohort membership,
- partnerships.

Advanced Toolkit Development

Develop:

- advanced modules,
- Indigenous evaluation tools,
- institutional case studies,
- implementation guides.

Institutional Leadership Network

Recognized institutions become:

- mentors,
- trainers,
- peer leaders,

- demonstration sites.

Regional Infrastructure Exploration

Explore future:

- regional hubs,
- host organizations,
- partnership structures,
- sustainability models.

IMPORTANT

Regional systems will emerge strategically over time rather than through rapid expansion.

Native Arts Investment Strategy

Develop a long-term national strategy to increase:

- support for Native artists,
- funding for Native artist-serving organizations,
- operational support,
- and Native cultural infrastructure.

ACTIVITIES MAY INCLUDE

- funder education,
- philanthropic partnerships,
- policy recommendations,
- investment convenings,
- national advocacy initiatives.

YEAR THREE DELIVERABLES

Deliverable	Outcome
Expanded SISNA Network	National reach
Institutional Leadership Corps	Peer mentorship system
Advanced Training Platform	Sustainable learning system
Regional Infrastructure Plan	Long-term growth roadmap
Native Arts Investment Strategy	Funding expansion framework

XV. LONG-TERM GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Future SISNA growth may include:

- regional hub systems,
- technical assistance partnerships,
- Native arts investment initiatives,
- policy coalitions,
- artist leadership institutes,
- and expanded Native arts infrastructure.

Regional systems will be explored strategically based on:

- capacity,
- sustainability,
- partnerships,
- and demonstrated need.

XVI. MEASURING SUCCESS

SISNA will measure institutional transformation and ecosystem growth.

KEY METRICS

Area	Examples
Institutional Change	Policies adopted
Artist Experience	Trust and satisfaction
Funding Growth	Increased investment
Visibility	Recognized institutions
Partnerships	Cross-sector collaboration
Capacity Building	Toolkit usage
Equity	Reduced institutional barriers

XVII. FINAL VISION

Within three years, SISNA will become:

- a respected national framework,
- a trusted Seal of Approval,
- a practical toolkit and training system,
- a national learning network,
- and a catalyst for increased support of Native artists and Native artist-serving organizations.

Most importantly, SISNA will help create a future in which Native artists encounter stronger, more accountable, more culturally grounded institutions wherever they engage.