Lessons Learned:
Spinning Out a New Nonprofit to Strengthen Native Nation Building
Native Governance Center Creation
First Things First

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We invest in great IDEAS and the PEOPLE who power them.
We serve Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and the 23 Native nations that share that same geography.
Native Nation Building.
Strengthen tribal governance.
By 2018, all 23 sovereign Native nations that share the same geography as Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota are exercising self-determination and actively rebuilding the infrastructure of nationhood.
Established relationships with elected tribal leadership across the region
Provided grants and other resources to numerous tribally-driven nation building projects.
In partnership with NNI, offered many on-site nation building educational sessions
Created over six cohorts of Native Nation Rebuilders (110 participants so far)
Driving Forces for Change

• By 2013 demand for programs outpaced our own capacity and that of our key partners.
• We’d built relationships, trust and an alumni network.
• It became clear that this work would take far longer than a decade.

"It’s hard to keep a foundation’s attention for generations. We didn’t want the initiative to be vulnerable to changing staff, board and interests. We saw an opportunity to create lasting support and infrastructure outside the foundation, and for the work to really be owned by the Native community."

— Jennifer Ford Reedy
President, Bush Foundation
The Opportunity

We saw and responded to three key opportunities:

**Longevity**
*How can we continue the work beyond our ten year commitment?*

**Capacity**
*How can we build regional capacity to meet the demand for this work?*

**Partnership**
*How can we continue building other funders and partners’ interest in and support for this work?*
Our Response

**Define the Opportunity**
- Assess the Landscape and Demand
- Identify Trends in Indian Country
- Consider the Focus, Structure, Scope and Reach, Service and Support Delivery, and Values for Future Strategy

January - June 2014

**Select the Model Method**
- Review Precedent Models
- Identify the How and Who of Each
- Develop Alternatives
- Reconcile the Goals, Model, and Method
- *Evaluate and Select an Option*

June - October 2014

**Build the Business Plan**
- Design the Organization
- Outline a Transition Timetable
- Document the Plan
- Frame the partnership between Bush and the entity

November 2014 - May 2015
What We Did

• Gathered ideas and insights.
• Sought advice from a five-member advisory group.
• Visited and learned from Native communities.
• Looked at case studies.
Findings

- Timing was important.
- Developing and supporting future leaders mattered.
- Relational approach would be important to success.
- Affirmed need and demand, but no consensus about what the entity should do or how it should be organized and led.
- This work would be inherently risky, hard to measure, and fragile under even the best of circumstances.
What We Decided to Do

In an effort to build long-term regional assets, the Bush Foundation is working to create a stand-alone nonprofit organization whose purpose is to promote, strengthen, and support tribal governance.
What the Organization Will Do

This new organization’s purpose will be to build long-term regional assets that promote, strengthen, and support Native nation governance.

It will seek to do this in four key ways:

1. **Inspire and celebrate Native nation rebuilding in the region.**
2. **Build the human capital to lead and support tribes in their work.**
3. **Work side-by-side with tribes to create and implement solutions.**
4. **Provide a conduit for resources between tribes and funders.**
Building the Business Plan

• The board created an ad-hoc committee to oversee the business planning and make sure we addressed the board’s key concerns:
  • Leadership: board and executive director
  • Sufficient communication and engagement with tribes
  • Developing risk amelioration strategies for the transition and ongoing relationship
• All supported by CLA and a cross-functional staff team.
Assembling the Pieces

- Drafting legal documents to establish the entity
- Recruiting the board of directors
- Naming the organization and building brand assets
- Identifying physical space
- Starting a search for the executive director
- Getting basic systems and infrastructure set up
Capitalization Strategy

- Enduring in perception and reality.
- Sufficient scale of programs and building of its own capacity.
- Growing broad base of support.
- Ability to pass IRS public support test.
10 Lessons Learned

1. Don’t be afraid to take risks.
2. You can’t do this if people don’t already trust you.
3. Get the expertise to do this well.
3. The process wasn’t fast, but we wouldn’t have gone any faster.

4. Engaging all the people we needed to trust and believe in the work mattered.
10 Lessons Learned

6. Funding amount and structure is tricky.

7. Getting the infrastructure up-and running for the organization may be a double-edged sword.
10 Lessons Learned

8. Engaging governance in a meaningful way (throughout) was critical.

9. Striking the right balance of control and autonomy is hard.

10. You have to be prepared not to see immediate results.
Interested in learning more?

BUSH FOUNDATION LEARNING PAPERS

bfdn.org/learning

Lessons From the Process of Creating the Native Governance Center
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