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Native Arts and Community Development Organization, First Peoples Fund,
Receives Transformative $6 Million Dollar Gift

(Rapid City, SD) – First Peoples Fund — a national nonprofit uplifting Native communities by supporting artists and youth through entrepreneurship and cultural practice — was recognized Tuesday with a $6 million dollar investment from one of the world’s leading philanthropists, MacKenzie Scott. The donation, announced today in a Medium post, is part of a wider $2,739,000,000 gift to 286 high-impact organizations in categories and communities that have been historically underfunded and overlooked.

“We are profoundly humbled and honored to be among the organizations chosen to receive such a historic gift,” says First Peoples Fund President Lori Pourier, a member of the Oglala Lakota Nation. “At First Peoples Fund, we are guided by the belief that art and culture are essential to life. This investment will allow us to grow our work in helping Native communities heal and thrive by deepening our collective connection to both art and culture.”

This announcement comes at a time when philanthropic giving to Native communities has steeply declined over the years. Since 2006, only 0.4% of all philanthropic funding by large U.S. foundations has been directed to Native communities.

“Organizations serving Native communities need more support,” Pourier says. “This major gift helps showcase the vital work being done in Native communities across the country. And as one of the six organizations behind the Cultural New Deal, which among other things calls for deep investment in arts and cultural ecosystems for Black, Indigenous, and communities of color, we hope the broader philanthropic sector is inspired to invest more in all of our communities.”

Also receiving gifts from Ms. Scott are First Peoples Fund’s long-standing Intercultural Leadership Institute partners Alternate ROOTS, National Association of Latino Arts & Culture, PA’I Foundation and SIPP Culture. “We have a shared commitment to pursue cultural equity and to support artists, culture bearers, and other arts professionals as change-makers in each of our communities,” adds Pourier.
For the past 25 years, First Peoples Fund has connected Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian artists and culture bearers — artists and individuals who practice and carry forward cultural art forms and traditions — with grants, financial services and training to flourish as entrepreneurs and community leaders. Its programs help artists and culture bearers build their entrepreneurial skills, helping them gain greater access to markets and capital. Data shows that arts and culture are also a primary source of jobs and economic opportunity — over 40% of Native reservation-based households depend on art and culture for income.

“Supporting Native artists and culture bearers is integral to the livelihood of tribal communities,” Pourier says. “Art embodies Native peoples’ culture, history, and strength. From traditional weavers to contemporary fashion designers, the people who practice Native art forms help heal and support the communities around them, introducing additional sources of income, jobs, healing and strengthening of identity.”

First Peoples Fund will use this investment to scale its innovative grantmaking program model, supporting more artists and and culture bearers with grants and support for community development programs that strengthen cultural practice and increase access to financial resources. With this gift, FPF will expand on its decades of impact and success, increasing the number of artists and practitioners the organization funds, increasing the size of the grants that artists can receive, and expanding into additional tribal communities across the country.

“This investment in our mission comes at exactly the right time,” says Pourier. “This gift will help launch our Collective Spirit Legacy Fund campaign and is a major milestone for our mission, our work, and the Native artists and communities that we are connected with. We have a lot to be hopeful about for our collective future.”

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First Peoples Fund is a national nonprofit organization that helps tribal communities heal and thrive by supporting Native artists and culture bearers — artists and individuals who practice and carry forward cultural art forms and traditions. We connect Native American, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian artists and culture bearers with grants, financial services and training to flourish as entrepreneurs and community leaders. The work of FPF helps culture bearers and their communities strengthen the Collective Spirit, while establishing full, self-sustaining, artistic lives. Visit firstpeoplesfund.org.