



an Indigenous-led program of the [Northland Foundation](#)

## New Indigenous-led program launches in Northeast Minnesota offering grant funding to Indigenous communities

*Northland Foundation introduces Maada'ookiing to engage and partner with Tribal Nations and Indigenous people; first grant round opens May 1st*

The Northland Foundation announces a new program, [Maada'ookiing](#), created to partner with Northeast Minnesota Tribal Nations & Indigenous communities. Maada'ookiing means the 'distribution' in Ojibwe. In Indigenous community, the act of giving and sharing is recognized as a mutual act that benefits the entire community. It was in this spirit that Maada'ookiing was established.

"The program evolved from a desire by our Board of Trustees and staff to not only acknowledge the deep inequities that exist but to act on that knowledge," said Tony Sertich, President of the Northland Foundation. "This program has been two years in the making, and we are proud and thrilled to introduce this new path to partner with Indigenous communities in our region."

### INDIGENOUS GRANTMAKING

The program features [grassroots grants](#) up to \$2,500 to support creative solutions from Indigenous community. Northland plans three grant rounds in the next year, with the first round open to applicants starting May 1<sup>st</sup>. Grantmaking to individuals or informal groups rather than established nonprofit organizations, school districts, or governmental entities is brand new to the Northland Foundation and not widely practiced in philanthropy as a whole.

The eligible geographic service area includes the Tribal Nations of [Bois Forte Band of Chippewa](#), [Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#), [Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#), [Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe](#) (District I), and [Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe](#) (District II) and Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis County.

### INDIGENOUS DESIGNED and LED

The Northland Foundation entered into many conversations with Tribal elected leaders and Indigenous leaders in philanthropy, nonprofit, and other sectors to better understand how to build ongoing partnership. This exploration included a study of Northland's own history, the history of philanthropy to Tribal Nations and Indigenous-led nonprofits, and longstanding inequities in grant-making. Nationally, less than 0.3% of philanthropic resources go to Native Americans in the United States. The Northland Foundation worked in partnership with a Native-led design team to identify ways to increase resources that reach Indigenous communities in our region.

An Indigenous design team comprised of Tribal and other Indigenous leaders formed to dialogue about community strengths and best approaches. This Native design team helped create the structure, strategies, and guidance for a program they named Maada'ookiing.

In December, LeAnn Littlewolf joined the Northland Foundation staff as Senior Program Officer, with an emphasis on coordinating Maada'ookiing. Littlewolf brings 25+ years of experience in community organizing, nonprofit program design and management, and leadership development to this role.

A nine-member [Maada'ookiing Board](#) was established of representatives from the region's Tribal Nations and other Indigenous community leaders to oversee and guide the program. Two of the members also serve on the Northland Foundation's Board of Trustees. Members are:

- **Baabiitaw Boyd**, Misizaaga'iganiing Anishinaabe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- **Shane Drift**, District I Representative Bois Forte Tribal Council, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- **Mary Harrelson**, Gichionigaming Akiing Gichigami Anishinabeg, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- **Alexandera Houchin**, Fellow/Citizen of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- **Leanne Johnson**, ISD 701 Indian Education Program Director, Couchiching First Nation
- **April McCormick**, Secretary/Treasurer, Gichionigaming, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- **Jaylen Strong**, Bois Forte Heritage Center and Cultural Museum Director, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- **Melissa Walls**, PhD, Great Lakes Hub Director, Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, Bois Forte & Couchiching First Nation Ojibwe (1st generation descendent)

"Moving forward with grantmaking to individuals, our staff team knows we will have a learning curve. This is new ground for Northland. We're fortunate to have such esteemed leaders as LeAnn and an incredible Board guiding the work," said Director of Grantmaking, Erik Torch.

### LEARNING and CAPACITY BUILDING

In addition to grantmaking, Maada'ookiing will also involve ongoing relationship-building and convening on issues important to Indigenous people. Indian Education and Indigenous Economic Development are two such community-identified topics.

"Even after 35 years as a foundation in Northeast Minnesota and connecting with Tribal Nations and Indigenous-led organizations, we know we have more to learn about being in true partnership with Indigenous communities," said Tony Sertich. "This program is an exciting opportunity to grow our understanding, engage more effectively, and generate ideas and resources."

Anyone interested in discovering more about Maada'ooking and details of the grant opportunity is encouraged to visit <https://northlandfdn.org/special-initiatives/maada-ookiing.php> or email LeAnn Littlewolf, Senior Program Officer, at [LeAnn@Northlandfdn.org](mailto:LeAnn@Northlandfdn.org).