



National Congress of
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Contact: **Brendan White**

540.371.5615

Inadequate Financial Education Hinders Access to Financial Services in Native Communities *National Coalition Outlines Strategies for Increasing Financial Skills in Native Communities*

GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY, Phoenix, AZ – Adult and youth financial education are critical in improving access to affordable capital and financial services in Native communities, according to a report released today by the Native American Financial Literacy Coalition. *Financial Education in Native Communities: A Briefing Paper* includes these and other preliminary strategies for increasing financial education and improving the overall economic health of Native communities.

Presented today at the National Congress of American Indians' (NCAI) Mid-Year Session, *Financial Education in Native Communities* is the first comprehensive analysis of financial education on Native land. The paper discusses financial education as one strategy to increase access to affordable financial services in Native communities; examines current efforts underway to help close existing gaps; and identifies five areas for further work to promote financial education in Native communities.

“Leaders in the economic development field, including Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan, have underscored the importance of financial education in promoting access to capital and financial services for traditionally underserved markets,” says Jennifer Malkin of the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), author of the paper and member of the Coalition. “While efforts to promote financial skills in Native communities are growing, only recently have Native communities begun to benefit from the increased national attention to and investments in financial education enjoyed by other communities.”

The preliminary strategies outlined in the paper are part of a national action plan that will be developed and implemented by the Native American Financial Literacy Coalition to increase the availability of financial education resources in Native communities. The strategies were agreed upon at a recent national policy development forum co-hosted by NCAI, First Nations Development Institute (FNDI), the Federal Reserve System and CFED. The strategies focus on the following five areas:

- Youth Financial Education: Increase the number of Native youth who are able to demonstrate strong financial management skills.
- Adult Basic Financial Education: Increase the number of adults who are able to demonstrate strong financial management skills.

- Consumer Protection: Develop more knowledgeable and informed borrowers throughout Native communities.
- Housing Counseling: Increase the number of Native people able to obtain affordable housing.
- Entrepreneurship Development: Build the number of Native entrepreneurs who are able to develop and sustain successful individual enterprises.

“Financial literacy education will give our communities the knowledge we can use to build the foundation of strong, healthy Native economies,” says Joe Garcia, first vice president of NCAI.

“The Coalition decided to present this paper at the NCAI conference to inform tribal leaders about resources available for financial education and to explain how investing in financial education can empower Native individuals and promote economic development in their communities.” says Elsie Meeks, executive director of First Nations Oweesta Corporation and chair of the Coalition. “It is our hope that Native organizations across the country will learn about this work and join our effort to build the financial health of Native communities.”

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Financial Education in Native Communities: A Briefing Paper was co-sponsored by First Nations Development Institute, a national intermediary with the mission of assisting Native communities in controlling their assets and building capacity to direct their economic future, and the National Congress of American Indians, the oldest and largest national tribal government organization in the United States, and the Corporation for Enterprise Development, a national, nonprofit, economic development organization. To obtain a copy of the paper, visit www.ncai.org, www.cfed.org, or www.firstnations.org. To get more information about the Native financial education initiative, contact Joanna Donohoe, coalition coordinator, at joanna@donohoeconsulting.com or 561.626.9700.

FNDI facilitates the Native American Financial Literacy Coalition and will oversee the development and implementation of the action plan. The Coalition, created in October 2000, is comprised of local, regional and national organizations and government agencies working together to promote financial education in Native communities. Its mission is to increase awareness of the need for personal finance skills, build the capacity of tribes and other Native organizations to provide financial education, and support each others efforts through information sharing and collaboration.

ⁱ Elsie Meeks, Executive Director, First Nations Oweesta Corporation.