

Foundation and Kids Voting Arizona Offer Grants to Arizona Tribal Communities for Collaboration on Kids Voting Curriculum

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In support of **Native American Right to Vote Day on July 15**, the Arizona Foundation for Legal Services & Education and Kids Voting Arizona are offering grants to Arizona tribal communities to help ensure the continuation of a strong Native American voter turnout through voter education opportunities aimed at children in grades K-12.

It was almost sixty years ago, on June 15, 1948, when the Arizona Supreme Court issued an opinion stating, "To deny the right to vote, when one is legally entitled to do so, is to do violence to the principles of freedom and equality." This declaration authored by Justice Udall, overruled a previous Arizona court decision denying Native Americans the right to vote in Arizona.

Although Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924, extending American citizenship to all Native Americans, four years later, many Native Americans still struggled for the right to vote. In 1928, Peter H. Porter and Rudolph Johnson, members of the Gila River Indian Reservation attempted to vote in Pinal County and were denied the right to vote. This denial of rights was affirmed by the Arizona Supreme Court.

It was not until 1948, that the Arizona Supreme Court overruled its previous decision. Frank Harrison and Harry Austin from the Mohave-Apache Indian Tribe, residing on the Fort McDowell Indian Reservation, attempted to vote in Maricopa County and were denied the right to vote. Like the case before theirs, the Harrison and Austin case went up to the Arizona Supreme Court. This time, unlike the previous case, the Arizona Supreme Court vehemently defended the Native American Right to Vote. "[I]t has ever been one of the great responsibilities of supreme courts to protect the civil rights of the American people, of whatever race or nationality, against encroachment." Driven by a belief in equality, the Arizona Supreme Court overruled its previous decision, leading the way for Native Americans in Arizona to have the right to vote.

In recognition of the strength of Peter Porter and Rudolph Johnson from the Gila River Indian Reservation; Frank Harrison and Harry Austin from the Mohave-Apache Indian Tribe, and all other members who consistently fought for their rights to vote at the polls, the Foundation and Kids Voting are proud to offer this opportunity to continue to increase Native American voter turnout and empower children to vote in both their tribal communities and in Arizona elections.

The Foundation and Kids Voting will continue to follow a successful history of collaboration with the Gila River Indian Community. In 1993, the Gila River Indian Community tribal election was the first Kids Voting local election. Through the assistance of the community's leaders and teachers, the Kids Voting curriculum was adapted to meet the needs of the tribal culture. At the first election, more than 500 students went to the polls. Tribal leaders attributed a 7% increase in adult voter turnout to the Kids Voting program.

By educating children in the principles of democracy, as well as the Constitution and Bylaws of

each unique tribal community, we can help empower the younger generation through a lifetime of civic involvement as voting adults. It is only when future generations are prepared and empowered to vote, have we succeeded in passing down both the history and the tools necessary to ensure an equal and just society.