

Role of Tribal Nations in Local, Regional, and National Economies

This briefing paper provides success stories and data to show how Tribal Nations contribute to economic growth to the benefit of all. *The Administration should view Tribal Nations as partners in economic efforts.*

Tribal Nations Are Inherently Sovereign Governments and Play a Critical Role in Our Federal System. Tribal Nations are sovereign governments that exercise inherent sovereign authority. The U.S. Constitution recognizes Tribal Nations' unique relationship with the federal government, just as it sets out the federal government's relationship with the states. This constitutionally recognized sovereignty establishes Tribal governments as partners in the American system—distinct, yet deeply interwoven. Tribal Nations govern via sophisticated legal frameworks, constitutions, laws, and codes, ensuring self-determination over our lands, citizens, and futures.

Tribal Governments Positively Impact Local, Regional, and National Economies. Tribal governments and enterprises are powerful economic engines that drive job creation, regional development, and infrastructure investment. At the end of the first Trump term, conservative estimates indicated that Tribal governments and enterprises directly employed nearly 350,000 workers, indirectly supported another 600,000 jobs, and generated \$40 billion per year in wages and benefits, in addition to a \$9 billion spillover benefit to state and regional economies.¹

Data Demonstrates Positive Impacts on State Economies. Tribal impacts extend beyond reservations and Tribal lands, strengthening both rural and urban economies across the United States.

- ▶ In Arizona, a 2021 report noted that more than \$819 million in Tribal gaming revenue went directly to state and local governments, while Native farms sold \$67 million worth of agricultural products, which accounts for about 2% of the state's total agricultural commodities.²
- ▶ In Idaho, Tribal Nations are responsible for more than 12,000 jobs and have a direct impact of nearly \$1.5 billion on the state economy.³
- ▶ In Montana, from 2003 to 2009, Tribal Nations collectively contributed \$1 billion per year to Montana's economy and provided programs and services benefitting all Montanans, Natives and non-Natives alike.⁴
- ▶ In Oklahoma, Tribal Nations significantly boosted the state's economy in fiscal year

2019, with an annual collective impact of more than \$15 billion, supporting more than 113,000 jobs.⁵

- ▶ In South Dakota, the state's connection to Native American history and heritage helped the tourism industry reach a \$7.6 billion economic impact in 2022.⁶
- ▶ In Washington, Tribal Nation governments and businesses contribute \$6.6 billion in gross state product, including \$1.2 billion in local and state taxes, while directly employing more than 37,000 people and ultimately being responsible for one out of every 86 jobs in the state.⁷

Tribal Enterprises Span Diverse Industries.

- ▶ **Energy and Natural Resources.** Tribal lands play a strategic role in enhancing the energy independence of the United States by producing substantial amounts of oil and natural gas while balancing cultural and ecological preservation. With over 56 million acres of Tribal lands spread throughout the United States, energy development on Tribal lands reduces reliance on foreign oil, strengthens the national energy supply, and supports economic growth. For example, in 2023, energy production from Tribal lands accounted for more than \$1 billion in revenue.⁸ This production helps reduce America's reliance on unstable foreign markets. Tribal energy production also supports thousands of jobs in both Tribal and non-Tribal communities, all while generating tax revenue for federal, state, and local governments.
- ▶ **Agriculture and Farming.** Tribal governments play a vital role in the U.S. agricultural sector, managing tens of millions of acres of farmland, ranchland, and natural resources. Many Tribal Nations are major cattle and bison producers, with large herds on Tribal lands across states like Montana, South Dakota, and Oklahoma. Tribal Nations and our citizens also operate farms that grow wheat, potatoes, corn, soybeans, wild rice, alfalfa, and other specialty crops, contributing to food supply chains and local economies. For example, the Ak-Chin Indian Community operates one of the largest and most successful farming operations in Arizona. Overall, Tribal governments generate millions of dollars in agricultural sales annually, both through direct production and land leasing to non-Tribal farmers. Additionally, Tribal governments provide safe and affordable access to water for the region. For example, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe's Mni Wašté Water Company provides up to one million gallons of fresh drinking water each day for agricultural, residential, and municipal use over an area roughly the size of Connecticut.
- ▶ **Fisheries.** Many Tribal governments engage in commercial fishing operations, providing employment opportunities and contributing to the seafood supply chain. For example, the Lummi Nation operates one of the largest shellfish aquaculture programs in the United States—catching, processing, and distributing high-quality wild-caught salmon, crab, and shellfish for restaurants, grocery stores, and distributors.

- ▶ **Gaming and Hospitality.** Tribal gaming facilities generated \$41.9 billion in 2023.⁹ For many Tribal Nations, gaming revenue provides the necessary funding for Tribal government functions, essential government programs, and infrastructure development, each of which benefit Tribal and non-Tribal communities across the country.
- ▶ **Technology and Cybersecurity Firms.** Tribal ventures contribute to innovation in emerging industries. For instance, the Navajo Nation, through its enterprise Diné Development Corporation, has established multiple subsidiaries specializing in information technology, engineering, and environmental services.
- ▶ **Economic Partnerships.** Tribal governments also contribute significantly through taxation, revenue-sharing, and memoranda of agreement related to services supporting local, state, and national economies. For instance, in 2019 alone, Tribal Nations in Oklahoma provided \$84 million to local school districts, municipalities, and counties to support various community initiatives.¹⁰ In another example, the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin generates an average of \$89 million annually in government revenue, with \$33.4 million going to local and state governmental entities through various taxes and fees.¹¹

The Administration Should View Tribal Nations as Partners in Economic Growth.

Tribal Nations are **sovereign governments**, and how we choose to exercise that sovereignty can have **significant economic consequences**. As Tribal Nations continue to strengthen our ability to exercise self-governance, we use this right to design and grow Tribal economies in ways that not only work best for our citizens but also have substantial positive impacts on local, regional, and national economies. History has shown that, when the federal government properly invests in Indian Country, reduces paternalistic bureaucratic red tape, and fully recognizes Tribal governments as sovereign, the resulting economic benefits are enjoyed by all citizens—Native and non-Native alike.

¹ Patrice H. Kunesh, [The Power of Self-Determination in Building Sustainable Economies in Indian Country](#), Econ. Pol'y Inst. (June 15, 2022).

² [Forging a Prosperous Future for American Indians in Arizona](#), Maricopa Ass'n of Gov'ts (Oct. 13, 2021).

³ Clark Corbin, [Study Shows Idaho's Native American Tribes Have Nearly \\$1.5B Economic Impact](#), Idaho Capital Sun (Aug. 20, 2024).

⁴ Imani Kindness-Coleman, Mont. Budget & Pol'y Ctr., [2023 State-Tribal Legislative Impacts](#) (July 2023).

⁵ [Economic Impact: The Influence of Tribal Nations](#), United for Okla. (last visited May 2025).

⁶ Makenzie Huber, [Native-Led Tourism Alliance Launches 'Economic Catalyst' Tours on Reservations](#), S.D. Searchlight (June 20, 2023).

⁷ Jonathan B. Taylor, Wash. Indian Gaming Ass'n, [The Economic & Community Benefits of Tribes in Washington](#), at 2 (May 2022).

⁸ Press Release, Dep't of Interior, [Interior Department Announces \\$18.24 Billion in Fiscal Year 2023 Energy Revenue](#) (Nov. 9, 2023).

⁹ Press Release, Nat'l Indian Gaming Comm'n, [NIGC Announces Record \\$41.9 Billion FY 2023 GGR](#) (June 2024).

¹⁰ Morgan Taylor, [OK Tribal Finance Consortium Releases Findings on Tribes' Economic Impact](#), Mvskoke Media (Mar. 24, 2022).

¹¹ [Oneida Nation Had \\$744 Million Impact on Region, Study Shows](#), WBAY (May 16, 2018).