Indian Country Counts and Native Vote: Taking Action in 2020

This year is a big year for civic engagement in Indian Country. With the 2020 Census underway and with various elections sprinkled throughout the calendar, tribal census and Native Vote advocates were poised and ready to ensure American Indian and Alaska Natives from across the nation were both counted and heard. Springtime gatherings, events, powwows, and more were arranged and the stage was set to raise awareness on how tribal participation in both these civic activities would impact our communities for years to come. And then, well, coronavirus happened.

The world changed seemingly overnight as tribal nations, states, and countries began implementing physical distancing measures and closing nonessential businesses and their borders in an effort to prevent the transmission of Coronavirus (COVID-19). While the world felt like it came to a standstill, dedicated tribal census and Native Vote advocates knew it would become a greater challenge to reach our communities. The time has come to creatively adapt our strategies and double down our efforts to take action. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) knows that, too. And that’s where our Civic Engagement Team comes in.

By now I’m sure you’re wondering, “Sure, that’s great – but who are you?” My name is Yawna Allen and I am a citizen of the Quapaw Nation of Oklahoma and a descendent of both the Cherokee Nation and Yuchi peoples. I have worked at NCAI for three years, most recently as the Director of Communications, where I worked closely with civic engagement on preventing and reducing disinformation surrounding the Census. Now, at a time when communication strategies for community engagement are more important than ever, I’m honored to join NCAI’s Civic Engagement department to lead our fantastic team and I’m excited to get to know each of you.

In the several weeks since I began this work, I have already seen the passion, creativity, and unwavering commitment of civic engagement advocates from across the country. Your willingness to find a way – no matter the obstacle – continues to inspire and motivate our team to prepare as many quality resources as we can to address these barriers and support your efforts. YOU are the change-makers in your communities and we are honored to partner with you in this important work.

As we look forward to the busy months ahead, it is our goal to stay connected, to continue developing practical tools and resources to aid you in the field, to fortify each other’s efforts, and to share and uplift our collective success stories. We know this time will present a multitude of challenges, but we can make a difference. Our unified desire for Indian Country to be both visible and heard binds us together in this work; and so, in 2020, together we take action.

In Solidarity,

Yawna Allen
Director of Civic Engagement and Special Projects