

# Fellows for the 2025-2026 NCDFI Fellowship Pilot Program

Nine Fellows will participate in the  
first round of the Yellow Bird Fellowship



The Native Community Development Fellowship Program is a transformative professional development experience aimed at empowering Native leaders and advancing the future of the Native Community Development Financial Institution (Native CDFI) sector. This one-year fellowship program focuses on strengthening Native communities by supporting economic well-being and providing the skills, resources, and networks needed to create meaningful change. It is designed to be accessible, offering place based opportunities for Tribal members of all backgrounds, with a special emphasis on empowering Native women.

## Johanna Whiteplume



Johanna Whiteplume is an enrolled member of the Northern Arapaho Tribe. Johanna was born and grew up on the Wind River Indian Reservation. She joined the Wind River Development Fund in August 2023. Johanna graduated from Northwest Indian College with a Bachelor of Arts in Tribal Governance and Business Management, along with an Associate's Degree from Salish Kootenai College in Business Technology. After being away from home for seven years, Johanna looks to assist WRDF in serving her community and growing businesses on the reservation and surrounding areas. Johanna is the mother of two children and enjoys spending quality time with her family.

### ***What motivated or inspired you to apply for the fellowship?***

*"I like the idea that the Coalition is bringing this for loan officers and anyone interested in lending. Peer to peer support is a good way to learn because in business things are always evolving."*

*-Johanna*

## Zola Sellars



Zola brings a vast background in management and operations to her position as HR/Finance Specialist. She managed the Glacier Peaks Hotel & Casino and the Blackfeet Heritage Center in Browning and worked with Siyeh Corporation. She is also very active in cultural and community events and collections. Zola is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet tribe and enjoys camping, reading, traveling, nature, art, exploring new places, and spending time with her husband, children and grandchildren.

### **What are your main goals for the fellowship?**

*“I want to apply these skills and information to advocate for and make connections with the community. I want to be able to create change and have a broader impact.”*

*-Zola*

## Shila Aragon



Shila Aragon joined Wind River Development Fund in 2021. Shila is the office/ building manager. She is the first person who is in contact with clients and the community who comes into the office. Shila is an enrolled member of Northern Arapaho Tribe and descendant of Blackfeet Nation and grew up on the Wind River Reservation in the Johnstown Valley area. Shila has worked previously for numerous tribal programs where she saw the need for tribal members to become self-sufficient. She is passionate about making her community stronger and healthier. Shila is a mother of four children who she is raising with her husband. She enjoys singing in her car, traveling, and riding this roller coaster called LIFE.

### **What do you feel are your core strengths? and how do you feel these strengths will help you succeed in this fellowship?**

*“Relationship building - relationships are important and being able to form them is a skill. We truly care about our clients and want them to be successful and thriving in their communities “*

*-Shila*

## **Ginna Arguello**



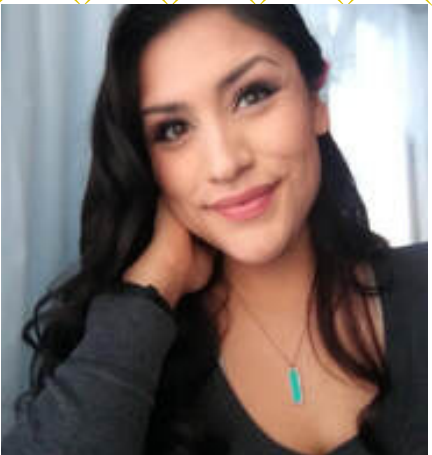
Ginna Arguello began her employment with NACDC Financial Services in September of 2024 as the Project Coordinator and her work involves workforce and professional development. Ginna was born and raised in Rapid City, SD and still currently resides there. She attended Oglala Lakota College and completed a bachelor's degree in human services and an associate's degree in chemical dependency counseling. She worked in the higher education field as an Academic Counselor and Assistant Director at a (TCU) Tribal College University for twenty years prior to joining the NACDC Financial Services team. She enjoys hiking, cooking and spending time with her family.

### ***Are there any specific skills or knowledge that you hope to gain during your time in this fellowship?***

*“Learning from peers who have different perspectives and lived experiences and seeing how they address similar challenges or issues in different contexts. I am also hoping to gain some personal growth and learn how to be more confident with my voice and my visions.”*

*-Ginna*

## **Shayla Vaile**



Shayla is an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Tribe and has been an employee with Native Cash since November 2022. Her duties include but are not limited to check cashing, Western Union services, customer Service, money services, updating OTIS files as well as balancing the daily intake for the check cashing and Western Union accounts. Shayla has attended cosmetology school and graduated in 2010 and returned to the Blackfeet Indian reservation where she became the co-owner of Hair Styles Beauty Salon for 14 years. With the experience gained operating a small business she began attending Blackfeet Community College to further her education in the Business Field. The thing that Shayla enjoys the most in her life is being a mother and one of the important things about working with Native Cash is the ability to maintain a work/life balance.

### ***What motivated or inspired you to apply for the fellowship?***

*“I am eager to learn more about lending.”*

*-Shayla*

## Emily Norum



Emily has been working with NACDC Financial Services since November of 2025 as the Workforce Project Assistant helping with workforce and professional development projects. Previously she was a Project Manager with Indigenous Impact Co. and worked on an organic produce farm in Arlee, Montana. Emily was born and raised in New York City and moved to Missoula, Montana in 2022. She attended Hamilton College in Central New York and completed a bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Mandarin Chinese. In her free time she enjoys trail running, fly fishing, mountain biking, gardening, and cooking.

### **What are your main goals for the fellowship?**

*"I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the NCDFI industry and the financial side of things. I also look forward to building relationships with my peers and learning from their experiences."*

*-Emily*

## Roberta Glenn



Roberta is the Business Support Specialist for Plenty Doors Community Development Corporation. Roberta is a member of the Apsáalooke Nation in Montana and grew up and currently lives on the Crow Rez. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from Rocky Mountain College in Billings, Montana and is working on a Master's Degree from Montana State University, Go Catz!!! Roberta works one on one with small business owners and entrepreneurs on and off the reservation, offering technical assistance. She provides to the communities one on one credit coaching along with other trainings i.e. QuickBooks, ServeSafe, Registering a business, business workshops.

### **How do you stay motivated or focused during times of uncertainty or challenge?**

*"My commitment to my people and my clients and the connection we have. In history we've had to tough it out and it has led to perseverance and figuring it out. I'll be in the trenches with them no matter what and we'll get it done."*

*-Roberta*

## **Genevieve Simermeyer**



Genevieve Simermeyer (Osage Nation) is the Programs Director at MPCDC. With a background in museum education, she has worked extensively at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, where she developed educational materials, led teacher trainings, and championed accurate, inclusive curricula. New to the finance and lending industry, she's excited to learn and grow in this field. Genevieve lives in Baltimore with her husband, Sequoyah, their three children, and their dog.

**What do you feel are your core strengths? and how do you feel these strengths will help you succeed in this fellowship?**

*"One of my strengths is understanding ways to make information accessible and retainable. It's exciting to think about how all of this will be implemented in Native communities."*

*-Genevieve*

## **Kylie Coby**



Kylie K. Coby is the Loan Intake Specialist at Montana Native Growth Fund and an enrolled member of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall, Idaho. She studied Tribal Governance and Administration at Salish Kootenai College, deepening her commitment to serving Native communities. Having personally utilized Native CDFI services, Kylie is passionate about helping others access the same opportunities. She lives in Browning with her partner, DJ, and their two sons, Marcus and Andreas.

**How do you stay motivated or focused during times of uncertainty or challenge?**

*"As someone who has utilized a cdfi to buy my own home I have realized how critical they are for communities and I want to be that person for someone."*

*-Kylie*

The Mountain | Plains Regional Native CDFI Coalition is a collaboration of nine Native CDFIs across a four state region (MT, SD, ND, WY). The Coalition prioritizes capacity building through peer-to-peer weekly mentorship, catalyzing agency to amplify organizational strength. While individual CDFI strength drives tribal economic change, Indigenous economies continue to be fluid and connect regionally. Community, culture, and capital link markets, opening greater regional opportunities and impacts. By unifying collective action, The Coalition recalibrates our regional Indigenous economies through collective strategies, shared resources and networked partnerships. However, it is also essential to consider long term impacts as the Coalition lives daily with systemic racial economic inequality. Consequently, reorganizing systems of allies and resources to sustain future generations is also a central strategic focus for the Coalition.



NACDC Financial Services, Inc. is a tax exempt, non-profit CDFI located in Browning, Montana on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, founded in 2010. They offer a range of services that are tailored to the needs of Native entrepreneurs including: Loan Products, small dollar, consumer, business, agriculture, artist line of credit, home loans.