



NDN COLLECTIVE



2024

COMMUNITY VOICES PROJECT

Mniluzahan Development Input & NDN Headquarters Impact

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Voices Project is a qualitative study examining the impact of NDN Collective’s headquarters building and collecting community input on ongoing development work in Mniluzahan (Rapid City, SD). Specifically, the report seeks insights into the **impact of the NDN Collective headquarters** building developed by NDN Holdings in Mniluzahan. It also collects **community input** on the vision for community development around the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy. The interview questions were crafted collaboratively with the NDN Holdings team. Five interviews were conducted involving 11 community members. Thematic qualitative analysis of transcripts was performed, focusing on identifying significant concepts and emerging themes. The NDN Holdings team reviewed the findings for accuracy and clarity.

The results of the interviews indicated that the NDN headquarters building serves as a **welcoming** and **empowering** space that is often considered a second home by visitors and fosters a **sense of pride** and hope among Indigenous youth. Its prominent physical location and participation in **community events** amplify NDN Collective’s visibility, making the Native presence more pronounced in Mniluzahan. The organization’s advocacy for Indigenous rights provides **support and protection** for Native people.

When asked about finding housing in Mniluzahan, individuals described challenges due to racism, affordability issues, and a lack of financial literacy. **Discrimination** during the application process and home maintenance adds to these difficulties. **Housing costs** often exceed incomes, exacerbating housing insecurity. **Housing insecurity** among youth and families was of specific concern. Interviewees felt that addressing these challenges requires expanding affordable housing options and **improving financial literacy** within the Indigenous community to support sustainable housing solutions.

The community vision described by interviewees emphasized **safety** through measures like well-lit pathways and community-led safety councils rooted in Lakota values. Additionally, a need for a comfortable **gathering space** for cultural events and celebrations, promoting connections without financial pressure, was highlighted. **Reconnecting with the land** through outdoor activities and growing traditional medicines emerged as a priority. Additional priorities included incorporating Indigenous culture into the space, designating areas for cultural activities, and honoring Indigenous leaders. Advocacy for the presence of the **Lakota language** throughout the environment reflects its significance in preserving culture and identity. Furthermore, there is a call for **recreational areas** supporting physical activity, particularly for Native youth, and a desire for **Native-owned businesses**, including a grocery store and café serving Indigenous cuisine, with support for an incubator space to nurture Indigenous entrepreneurship.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The Community Voices Project arose from the need to gather community feedback to understand NDN Collective's impact on the communities they serve. This work aligns with the organizational strategic goal of soliciting community feedback and creating systems for feedback loops from communities we engage with in an Indigenized way. This report specifically seeks to understand how NDN Holdings, the community development entity of NDN Collective, is impacting the community through its development work at the NDN Collective headquarters in Mniluzahan (Rapid City, SD). A secondary goal of this project is to collect community input on their vision for the community development that NDN Holdings is directing on the land it has acquired in north Mniluzahan where the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy (OSCA) will be located. This project intentionally centers the Indigenous voices that have historically been excluded from community development work in Mniluzahan. This project supports ongoing efforts to ensure the development work NDN Holdings does is community-driven.





Figure 1: NDN Collective Headquarters in Mniluzahan

The first NDN Collective headquarters office was located in downtown Mniluzahan. However, the organization initially faced constraints when renting that space, as the landlord refused permission for a mural on the exterior of the building. This obstacle prompted NDN Collective to consider purchasing a building to give them ownership and control. Their vision extended beyond just creative autonomy; they sought a space reflective of their organization's needs and values. The decision to acquire and develop a headquarters is also aligned with a strategic move towards financial sustainability. Rather than paying rent to a third party, they could redirect these funds back toward the community by paying rent to NDN Holdings, the organization's community development arm. The NDN Collective headquarters building was purchased and the building renovations, including the mural on the exterior, were completed in 2021 (Figure 1).

The story of how the OSCA and development of the surrounding land stem from a similar drive for self-determination among the Native community in Mniluzahan. A group of community activists saw a need for traditional cultural teachings to be included in the education system to better support Native students. This work that originated in the community is also supported by research that indicates that incorporating cultural elements into education, alongside fostering educator engagement with the community, positively influences the academic performance of Native students.¹ NDN Collective started by supporting education equity organizing work that tried to update the public school curriculum in South Dakota to include Native perspectives and history.

Getting legislation passed proved challenging in the current political environment so Native community organizers and educators decided to start their own Indigenous school based on the Oceti Sakowin Seven Essential Understandings (Figure 2). NDN Holdings decided to purchase a site in north Mniluzahan. The site was originally not zoned for a school so NDN Collective worked with the city council to approve new zoning that would allow a school on the site. After purchasing the land NDN Holdings realized that there were additional community needs that could be met with the surplus of land purchased. Through their work in the community, they knew there was a large need for affordable housing in Mniluzahan. They decided that they would develop the surplus land around the school into affordable housing, community spaces, and places for retail businesses.



Figure 2: Seven Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings

METHODS

The interview purpose and questions were crafted collaboratively with the NDN Holdings team. A process was initiated to determine the topic area suitable for exploration to ensure alignment with NDN Holdings' community input requirements for ongoing development projects. Given the long-term nature of NDN Holdings' work, the focus was assessing the impact of a completed project, namely the NDN Collective headquarters. Subsequent questions were structured to gather insights relevant to the ongoing planning and development efforts on the land acquired near the future site of OSCA in Mniluzahan.

The Research & Evaluation team drafted the questions and then invited the NDN Holdings team to provide feedback. The final interview guide was approved by both teams and included the following questions:

IMPACT QUESTIONS

1. How much time have you spent at the NDN Collective headquarters in Rapid City?
2. What are some of the reasons you visit NDN headquarters?
3. How do you feel when you visit NDN headquarters?
(Example: do you enjoy it, does it feel intimidating? Like chore? etc.)
4. How has the presence of NDN Headquarters in Rapid City affected how the city feels to Indigenous Peoples?
(Example: how welcoming, not welcoming, Indigenous presence in the city, etc.)

COMMUNITY INPUT ON DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS

1. What do you think about existing community spaces for Indigenous Peoples to gather in Rapid City?
2. What are some ways traditional teachings are integrated into the design of community spaces for Indigenous Peoples in Rapid City?
3. What other services should be located in or near the school to support Indigenous families and the community?
(Example: community event spaces, mental health services, dental clinic, etc.)
4. What is it like for Indigenous Peoples to find housing in Rapid City?
5. What type of housing units are most needed in Rapid City for Indigenous in your opinion?
6. What makes an area desirable for Indigenous Peoples to live in?

The interview protocol, including the full list of questions, can be found in the appendix.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was utilized to select interviewees capable of providing insights relevant to the project's objectives. Potential interviewees, all with pre-existing affiliations with NDN Collective, were identified by NDN Holdings staff. The aim was to conduct a maximum of five interviews, each involving no more than three participants.

In January 2024, potential interviewees were contacted by the NDN Holdings team and invited to participate in a 45-minute in-person interview at the NDN headquarters or their existing office. In total 5 interviews were conducted with 11 individuals. All interviews were conducted by the same interviewers and included staff from the Research & Evaluation team as well as NDN Holdings. Interviewees who agreed to share their name and/or organization included:

▶ **Oceti Sakowin Community Academy**

Mary Bowman, Genevieve GrowingThunder & Naomi LastHorse

▶ **South Dakota Education Equity Coalition**

▶ **He Sapa Otipi**

Cante Heart & Bobbi Koch

▶ **Community Members**

*Jade Red Bear, Matt Red Bear, Sunny Red Bear
Kim Tilsen Brave Heart & Shannon Burnette*



Interviews were conducted in Rapid City from January 23, 2024 - January 25, 2024. Four of the interviews took place at the NDN Collective headquarters and one took place at the office of the South Dakota Education Equity Coalition. Two interviews took place during a mealtime and during those interviews, food was provided to both interviewees and interviewers. A small thank you gift was mailed to each of the participants a few weeks after the interview.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Rev.com transcription services. Transcripts were then uploaded to MAXQDA, a qualitative analysis software, for organizing, coding, and analysis.



A thematic qualitative analysis was done on each interview transcript, aiming to assign codes to significant concepts and identify emerging themes. Initially, transcripts were coded and analyzed according to the questions outlined in the interview protocol. At the same time, a logbook was maintained to record recurring themes observed across the questions and interviews. Subsequently, the coded sections were revisited for the thematic analysis, with a focus on identifying overarching topics spanning multiple interviews. During this phase, portions of transcripts were coded according to themes across interview questions and transcripts. Sections coded with both themes and questions were then cross-referenced using the MAXQDA code relations feature to quantify the occurrence of each theme within individual questions. The findings of this analysis are included in a table in the appendix.

The data from the cross-referenced questions and themes was then used to outline a draft of the results section. This outline was reviewed by the NDN Holdings team to gather initial input on important topics to highlight and feedback on how to organize the results section. Each section was drafted to summarize the collective responses to each of the questions. The draft of the results section was reviewed again by the NDN Holdings team to provide feedback and clarification before undergoing a final revision process.

RESULTS

IMPACT OF NDN COLLECTIVE HEADQUARTERS

NDN Holdings focuses on long-term projects that typically span multiple years. Among these projects stands out the successful completion of the NDN Collective headquarters in Mniluzahan (Rapid City, SD). As part of our Community Voices Project, we sought community feedback on the NDN Collective headquarters to understand the impact of this significant initiative.

VISIBILITY

When asked about how it feels to visit NDN Collective headquarters the responses were **overwhelmingly positive**. Interviewees reported feeling **welcomed** and feeling generally good about visiting the headquarters. One shared that it felt like a second home for them and their children. Others mentioned they found the space very **professional** or **collaborative**. However, one interviewee shared that they had heard that others in the community have not always had a positive experience when visiting NDN Collective headquarters for the first time and stressed the **importance of welcoming new people** into the space in a good way.

Multiple people shared they had **family or friends who work at NDN Collective** and that had been a primary reason they visited headquarters. Another interviewee shared that they had visited NDN Collective headquarters for many different reasons including **work partnerships** and **community events** like voting rights organizing or to collectively mourn the loss of a relative in the community.

“So when I come to headquarters, it feels like coming to see your relatives, like your family. And I really love coming here because it just has a good energy. You can come and just laugh with your friends and it’s a fun hangout spot and it’s really welcoming and everyone’s always happy to see you and it’s just a really welcoming energy.”

- Interviewee

An additional topic that interviewees brought up when talking about NDN Collective headquarters was how it served as a model of **Indigenous abundance**. One interviewee reflected on how NDN Collective headquarters serves as a physical manifestation of what is possible for a Native-led organization and how many Indigenous Peoples and organizations have been **accustomed to settling for less in the past**. This sentiment was also reflected in a story shared by an interviewee about their experience when they brought youth to visit the NDN Collective headquarters. They shared how some of the youth were teary eyed while walking around the space, looking at the murals, and finding out that Natives built and owned the building.

VISIBILITY

When asking interviewees about the impact of having the NDN Collective headquarters in Mniluzahan a common topic that emerged was the visibility of NDN Collective in the community. They felt that NDN Collective's visibility increased the overall **visibility of Native people in Mniluzahan**. One interviewee shared that this visibility helped them **feel safer** in Mniluzahan by knowing that there was an organization that shares the same values as them.

"I think that's really important for people to know that Indigenous People are here. This was our land first and there's things that need to be addressed in our community and I think this kind of serves as that reminder." - Interviewee

The physical location of NDN Collective also contributes to visibility. It sits at a busy intersection immediately adjacent to the Interstate. One interviewee recalls how when they visited Mniluzahan for the first time and saw the NDN Collective headquarters from the highway they thought how awesome it was to see that Native people were here and there was an organization that shared the same values as them.

"You get on the interstate and you see a [Native] woman with a megaphone painted on a building. I think that's remarkable and that for me, is important" - Interviewee

Another aspect that contributed to the visibility of NDN Collective among interviewees was the **billboards** that NDN Collective sponsored around Mniluzahan. Multiple interviewees mentioned liking seeing the billboards and one spoke about how it helps Native people in Mniluzahan feel like somebody is listening to them and representing their voice. There was a sense that the billboards contributed to the "big presence" that NDN Collective has in the Mniluzahan community.

This visibility is aided by NDN Collective's presence in the community beyond the building itself. Interviewees described how the headquarters served as a **space for organizations to meet** or for community events like handing out applications for services or programs. They also described how they have seen NDN Collective show up for community events outside of the headquarters.

Another large part of the visibility of NDN Collective in the Mniluzahan community seemed to be the **NDN swag**, such as LANDBACK hoodies, NDN Collective tee shirts, and other wearable items with NDN Collective's branding on them. Multiple interviewees mentioned seeing community members wearing NDN Collective merchandise at the gym or school. One interviewee shared how when they went to pick up their child from school the other day they counted 50 LANDBACK sweaters on kids from a school that isn't even a majority Native.

DEFENDING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Interviewees expressed that NDN Collective being in Mniluzahan makes Native people feel **supported and protected** like they have someone looking out for them. Interviewees noticed how NDN Collective **takes care of unhoused relatives** in Mniluzahan and recognized that protection and care extend to them as well.

*“I think if you ask Indigenous People and allies, they think this place is great, this is wonderful. What I’ve heard Indigenous People say is - ‘Finally, somebody sticks up for us.’
-Interviewee*

Multiple interviewees also expressed that they felt **excited** about the good work NDN Collective was doing and felt **proud** to have friends or relatives working at NDN Collective. One interviewee shared how it feels powerful to have an organization advocating for Native people in a city where Native people have historically faced a lot of racism and discrimination.

Several interviewees noted that NDN Collective’s reputation as a defender of Indigenous rights in Mniluzahan led to **non-Indigenous individuals feeling threatened** by NDN Collective’s work, particularly those who are white, and institutions within the community. They recounted instances where non-Native colleagues or acquaintances made disparaging remarks about NDN Collective. Some interviewees perceived this hostility as stemming from a lack of understanding regarding NDN Collective’s mission or as a reaction to its efforts to challenge white supremacy.



EXISTING COMMUNITY SPACES

We also asked about existing community spaces available for Indigenous Peoples to gather in Mniluzahan. The purpose of these questions was to understand what spaces were available for Indigenous Peoples to use for gathering in Mniluzahan and what they did or did not like about those spaces.

Multiple interviewees shared that they couldn't think of any obvious space that existed for hosting events for the Indigenous community. For the spaces that some interviewees did mention, they often share how some aspects or **rules of the space weren't comfortable, clean, or culturally respectful**.

"I think that we aren't welcome into a lot of spaces here in Rapid City, and so that's why we need a space. But the places that are existing, they're pretty small. There's not enough room for everyone. And so we are really grateful for the spaces that are existing. However, I think we definitely need a larger space." - Interviewee

Some of the non-church-affiliated spaces that interviewees mentioned included **Oaye Luta Okolakiciye (OLO), Oyate Health, and Wambli-Ska**.

Churches were a type of space that multiple interviewees mentioned when talking about community spaces for Indigenous Peoples to gather in Mniluzahan. Some interviewees mentioned churches wanting to work on reparations and offering their space for events. Interviewees shared that there used to be many

community events hosted at a space called **Mother Butler** which is owned by the Catholic Church. But more recently, Indigenous Peoples started having bad experiences and feeling **unwelcome** in some community spaces. In addition to previously used spaces becoming unaffordable. One interviewee felt like the kitchen at one community space was unclean and that they had to "walk on eggshells" while they were helping with an event.

There was also mention of a **general discomfort in church spaces** for Indigenous Peoples. One interviewee mentioned that being at a church scares them and another shared they feel unwelcome in church spaces. Another referenced how they noticed that being in a church brings out aspects of intergenerational trauma in Indigenous Peoples in that space and expressed a desire for an Indigenous-centered space. In addition to the connection between the historical trauma committed by the church, there was also the feeling of generally feeling unwelcome in some of the existing community spaces owned by churches.

Several interviewees mentioned feeling discomfort due to the space **not respecting or accommodating cultural protocols** during Indigenous community gatherings. Interviewees shared examples of how traditional cultural practices around mourning have not been honored. One interviewee expressed that this experience makes it feel that "they want to tell Indian people how to mourn". Another interviewee mentioned how the space they use is part of a church and doesn't allow smudging.

Although most of the interviewees had a difficult time thinking of general community spaces for Indigenous people to gather, they did think of **more spaces where Indigenous youth tend to gather**. Some of these spaces where Indigenous youth gather include Club for Boys, Girls Inc., Rural America Initiatives, and the local mall.

HOUSING

When speaking about their experience finding housing in Mniluzahan, all interviewees brought up challenges they faced when locating housing. Finding affordable and desirable housing as an Indigenous person in Mniluzahan is difficult for many reasons. The most common reasons shared were **racism discrimination, affordability, and financial literacy**.

One of the most common challenges shared by interviewees in finding housing was **racism and discrimination**. This racism showed up in multiple ways. One interviewee described it as having to “jump through more hoops” to get a decent rental just because they are Native. Interviewees shared that they would get denied rentals without explanation if they put their last name on applications or once they showed up in person and it became clear that they were Native. One interviewee described how they were able to get an affordable lease signed and the owner didn’t realize they were Native until after they moved in. But once they were moved in they kept getting fined for trivial things like having dirty laundry on the floor or unwashed dishes.

Others recounted the additional hurdles they encountered when attempting to purchase a home, highlighting how the **bank made the process exceedingly difficult** despite their excellent credit score, ample down payment, and savings. The interviewee characterized their home-buying journey as “soul crushing” due to the discrimination they experienced based on their race.

Affordability of housing in Mniluzahan, especially for rentals, was also a common challenge faced by Indigenous Peoples when seeking a place to live. Interviewees shared that the average **cost of rentals far exceeded the median income** for jobs in the Mniluzahan area. Even interviewees with relatively good jobs shared that they also sometimes struggle to afford housing. One interviewee shared that it is cheaper to purchase a house in the long term but it can be hard for Native people to qualify for a home loan with banks in the area.

“I think that houselessness isn’t talked about enough in our community, especially the houseless children too. They don’t talk about the kids at school that are houseless. They don’t talk about the families that are all bunched up together in one home.”

-Interviewee

Due to these housing challenges, interviewees noted that they saw a lot of **unhoused individuals or housing-insecure families and youth**. One shared how Native Americans made up the majority of the unhoused population in Mniluzahan and how this means they don't qualify for some social services that require an address. Multiple interviewees brought up the issue of housing insecure families and youth. They spoke about how youth and families may not live on the streets but in motels or with other relatives where one family is split up between multiple homes.

HOUSING NEEDS

All interviewees agreed on the pressing **need for more affordable housing** across various types, encompassing single-family homes, apartments, and housing tailored for elders. Some expressed reservations about apartment living, suggesting that members of the Native community **might be hesitant to reside in apartment buildings**. They cited concerns about elevated crime rates within current apartment complexes in Mniluzahan and expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of privacy compared to other housing options.

"We need mixed-use housing for young people, need apartments, need single-family homes, townhomes, elder housing, we need it all."

- Interviewee

Interviewees also spoke about the need for **supportive housing for specific populations** such as elders or relatives who were previously unhoused or incarcerated. Some ideas that interviewees shared included tiny houses for people transitioning into homes after being unhoused.

They also spoke about different models of supportive housing for elders including townhomes that included a space for caretakers to live or duplexes that were set up to encourage a sense of community among the elder residents.

One interviewee shared that when thinking about supportive housing for elderly community members the biggest priority should be preserving their dignity.

Financial literacy was another housing-related need that interviewees spoke about. They saw a need for more education in the Native community about things like building a credit score, filling out rental applications, and reading all the details of a lease. One interviewee shared that while growing up they didn't have anyone to teach them about or model financial literacy. These were things that they had to learn as an adult when they realized they needed more financial security. One interviewee also mentioned that resources to support homeowners with home upkeep and maintenance could also be beneficial, especially for first-time homeowners.



COMMUNITY VISION FOR DEVELOPMENT

When we asked interviewees what would make a community desirable for Indigenous people to live in they shared an abundance of ideas. Interviewees reiterated a need for community space and a desire for **culture to be front and center** throughout. There were also suggestions for important **amenities** such as a **gym and sports space**, good access to **public transportation**, and a **grocery store**. Another important topic to interviewees when discussing their vision for this space was ensuring that it was **safe** for the Indigenous community to live, learn, and play in.

SAFETY

A **desire for a safe space** was a big concern that multiple interviewees brought up when asked about their hopes for this new development. Some of the suggestions concerned infrastructure, such as making sure walking paths had **lights** or **emergency response buttons**. Another interviewee spoke of how vegetation and green spaces can provide safety from over-policing as well as privacy. Interviewees also brought up how developing an internal **community-led safety council** would be important to create a sense of security so the community wouldn't have to rely on the Rapid City Police to respond to incidents. Interviewees suggested that this community-led safety council could be based on traditional Lakota values and practices like the systems created at Standing Rock.

Many respondents shared they would hope to see **strong culture and community in creating a sense of safety**. For example, one interviewee stated that **strong leadership** would be important to building safety. In addition, being rooted in traditional values was another practice that interviewees felt could bring safety along with building a feeling of community ownership and accountability amongst the residents. The example that one interviewee gave was that an individual probably wouldn't vandalize a mural if they knew their cousin was the one who painted it.

"But that community building and being able to hold each other accountable and know that the person down the street is going to also look out for your kid just as much as you, I think is important in fostering safety in a community."

- Interviewee

Concerns **about the safety of Native women and children** were also brought up by interviewees. Since the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy will be a part of this development the interviewees stressed the importance of creating a safe school environment for the youth. Interviewees shared that having a place for children to gather staffed with trusted adults is critical for creating a safe space for youth. One interviewee expressed concern over having unhoused relatives whose background may not be known in the community close to the school and youth. They acknowledged that it may be an unpopular comment and reiterated that they supported initiatives to serve the unhoused but felt that should not be done in a way that compromises the safety of vulnerable populations.

COMMUNITY SPACE

When envisioning elements of this development the importance of having a **comfortable space for the community to gather** was a common element across interviews. This community space could be utilized for services, celebrations, and community gatherings. One interviewee mentioned the importance of the space being suitable for **music** such as drums and singing.

"I think it's important that we have a gathering space that we can have meals and not only wakes and funerals, but celebrations. I think it's important that we need more celebrations than we need funerals and things that are more positive, especially for our children and safe spaces for them."

- Interviewee

One interviewee expressed the desire to have **sober friendly places** to gather and sit with family and friends. They shared how people would buy a drink at Starbucks just to sit in the space and wanted a space that could **facilitate connections** between people without needing to spend money.

TIME ON THE LAND

Interviewees emphasized a desire to reconnect people with the land and promote spending more time outdoors. One interviewee reminded us that our ancestors spent 80-90% of their time outdoors. They stressed the importance of land-based learning and incorporating traditional plants and gardening practices, such as traditional food gardens and spaces for growing sage and sweet grass. The intention is to create an environment that reflects their cultural connection to the land, including elements like movement of water, spaces for stargazing, and integration of Indigenous flora. They highlighted the significance of creating welcoming outdoor spaces that are beautiful, safe, and accessible to everyone, particularly emphasizing the importance of providing greenery and natural elements like trees and grasses that resonate with Indigenous Peoples' connection to the land.

CULTURAL ELEMENTS

When discussing the vision for the community development work, the idea of incorporating different cultural elements into the space came up often. There is a desire for a space in Mniluzahan where Indigenous people can be **unapologetically Indigenous**. In addition to having a space that respects cultural practices in its policies, like allowing relatives to mourn overnight during a funeral service, there were other ideas shared by interviewees to ground this development work in Indigenous culture.

According to interviewees, the space should be conducive to cultural activities such as **powwows, sweats, ceremonies, and celebrations**. They emphasized the importance of having dedicated areas for these practices to ensure cultural preservation and community connection. Additionally, interviewees highlighted the need for space designated for **cultural art**, specifically for activities like tanning hides, beading, or quillwork. This emphasis on traditional crafts and gatherings underscores the desire for the space to serve as a hub for cultural sharing and community activities.

The community expressed a desire to **celebrate cultural history** within the space. One interviewee suggested incorporating statues or tributes along the walking path to honor Indigenous leaders and matriarchs. This would provide a visible representation of significant historical figures such as Crazy Horse, as well as modern leaders like the matriarchs of North Rapid who were involved in more recent advocacy. The process of identifying and honoring these leaders could involve the community, ensuring inclusivity and representation.

Finally, interviewees also expressed the idea that culture is healing. Therefore, by having a space that allows all these cultural practices to thrive, it also becomes a **space of healing**.



INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE

Interviewees expressed a strong desire for the **presence of the Lakota language** across the space, emphasizing its crucial role in fostering a sense of place and belonging. They reminded us that language is central to culture and identity. Additionally, interviewees highlighted ongoing efforts at the school located on the site to promote the Lakota language, indicating a commitment to incorporating these elements into the broader community space.

“So collectively it’s spaces where we could all be Indigenously proud of having our kids laugh and where the language is heard and where the people are all getting along. They’re sharing knowledge and come over anytime. We harvest and eat food together.”

- Interviewee

SPACE FOR MOVEMENT

There was also a desire among interviewees for the space to **support physical recreation**, especially for Native youth. They emphasized the importance of having multiple parks, outdoor courts, and shelters, with well-lit areas to accommodate various sports and activities, including basketball, roller skating, and gaga ball. Permanent fixtures like cornhole pits were also suggested, alongside the idea of a **fitness center** offering memberships incentivized through non-monetary means, such as academic achievements or volunteer work. The goal is to create a **welcoming environment** where everyone, especially **Native youth**, can come to exercise while feeling comfortable and accepted. Providing such a space would offer them a place to be themselves, fostering a sense of belonging and community alongside promoting a physically healthy lifestyle.

NATIVE OWNED BUSINESSES

All interviewees emphasized the importance of specific businesses that would improve the appeal of the development for Indigenous residents. A key desire stated was for an **affordable grocery store**. Interviewees shared they would prefer the store be Native-owned or run under a cooperative model and offer access to fresh, healthy food. Additionally, there was a call for a business offering **art supplies** suitable for regalia and other cultural arts like beadwork. Another suggestion was the establishment of a **Native-owned café** to celebrate and highlight Indigenous cuisine in Mniluzahan. Finally, to address the barriers that Indigenous Peoples face when trying to start a business, some interviewees proposed including an **incubator space** as a part of the development to support Indigenous-owned businesses.

TRADITIONAL TEACHINGS IN SPACES

During these interviews, we asked interviewees about ways traditional knowledge and teachings were or could be incorporated into the design of existing spaces in Mniluzahan. Our hope for this question was to get ideas and inspiration on how to include these teachings into the design of the community development work NDN Collective is undertaking in Mniluzahan.

Many of the ways interviewees saw traditional teachings being implemented in existing spaces was **through the activities that took place in the space**. Examples shared included space for ceremonies, dancing, games, and funerals. One interviewee spoke about the need for a space with policies that allowed them to conduct important cultural practices.

Interviewees also noted that incorporating **traditional teachings can also contribute to safety in a community**.

Calling people back to traditional values could potentially create a culture of safety and accountability within the community. They also suggested that conducting a very community-driven process in the planning and development of a space, also helps community members feel ownership of that space and increases their desire to care for it.

“I think being really rooted in our Lakota values. I think when you’re more rooted in your values, you make better decisions and you live better amongst your community.” - Interviewee

Ideas suggested by interviewees for incorporating traditional teachings into the physical environment include **utilizing circles and circular spaces** in design elements, **orienting doors towards the east** where the sun rises, and displaying **artwork** by Indigenous artists. Additionally, interviewees proposed integrating **traditional medicinal plants** into outdoor spaces to improve accessibility to plant medicines.

FAMILY SERVICES

Some of the services that interviewees would like to see made available at or near the site NDN Collective is developing include:

- ▶ Lakota language classes
- ▶ Mental health services, especially for youth
- ▶ Land-based programs and learning
- ▶ Office for Community Advocates where people go if they need help navigating challenges like discrimination at school, avoiding eviction, or dealing with medical bills
- ▶ Services for unhoused relatives
- ▶ After-school youth programs
- ▶ Meal programs for youth

DISCUSSION

IMPACT

Interviewees spoke about the increased visibility of Indigenous people in Mniluzahan in a positive light. This was a consistent theme illustrated by both the feelings expressed by interviewees and the stories they shared. The experiences shared of how interviewees saw NDN Collective showing up in the community for events and to serve the Indigenous population underscored the impact that NDN Collective is having beyond the walls of its headquarters and in the streets of Mniluzahan. This sentiment that NDN Collective is standing alongside the community and responsive to its needs was deeply connected with the perceived impact of NDN Collective headquarters among interviewees.

An important component of impact is the sentiment that Indigenous Peoples are defended in Mniluzahan because of NDN Collective. This sentiment highlights the important work that the NDN Action team and local organizers do out in the community. Although NDN headquarters may be the physical space they are based out of, much of the work that the interviewees noticed happens outside of the headquarters. That work may be providing services to unhoused relatives or simply listening to the concerns of a community member.

All of this work that interviewees noted is impacting positive change and contributing to the improved conditions for Indigenous people in Mniluzahan for future generations.

HOUSING

The findings around a tight rental and housing market where wages don't match the average cost of housing align with findings from another large study on housing challenges in Mniluzahan.² The same study also found more desire for single-family homes above other housing types, which is what was reflected among interviewees in this project as well. The housing challenges faced by Indigenous people in Mniluzahan are likely to become exacerbated by the expansion of the nearby Air Force base. A local newspaper reports that the Ellsworth Air Force Base expansion in nearby Box Elder will lead to an increase in population and likely increase pressure on the housing market in the region.³

Stories of discrimination that interviewees shared were also reflected in the aforementioned study. Some of the survey responses included stories of being denied housing or facing extra challenges finding housing because of their race. This indicates that although our sample size for this interview project may have been small, the issues brought up would still likely be prevalent if we were to have asked the same questions of a larger sample size.

In addition to the data collected through this project and previous studies, NDN Collective knows from its work and the experience of its employees that discrimination and racism against Native people are still being perpetuated in Mniluzahan. One only has to look at the civil rights lawsuit the Department of Justice filed against the Grand Gateway Hotel to see a current example of racial discrimination.⁴



COMMUNITY VISION

Discussion within and with community members outside of NDN Collective has highlighted the importance of offering community resources and training on financial literacy. This need has been recognized as essential within the community, a sentiment reinforced by the findings of these interviews. Moreover, the discussion surrounding financial literacy has emerged in the context of housing, underscoring the interconnectedness between enhanced financial literacy and increased housing stability.

Although we did not specifically ask community members about the benefit of having the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy (OSCA) in the development, it became clear through these interviews that the cultural teaching that the school will already bring into the development is a huge asset. By having OSCA co-located in this development there will already be Lakota language and culture present due to the activities taking place at the school. Although there are only a limited number of students, educators have witnessed that the benefits of having a single student at a school can spread to their family as the student shares cultural teachings and the language learned at the school. We believe that having the OSCA in the space will bring lots of language and culture back to the land and the development overall.

NEXT STEPS

The next steps for this project involve sharing these results with the community in Mniluzahan, including those who participated in these interviews. These results may also be shared with other groups or entities that NDN Holdings might work with on this ongoing development project such as funders or city council. This project and findings demonstrate intentional efforts to engage the Indigenous community of Mniluzahan in this development project. learned at the school. We believe that having the OSCA in the space will bring lots of language and culture back to the land and the development overall.

Additional steps also include continued efforts to engage and educate the community about the development plans through ongoing engagement initiatives such as a broader community survey. As future decisions regarding various aspects of the development arise, the NDN Holdings team can refer back to this document to better grasp community input and preferences. Additionally, there are plans to continue collecting community feedback to inform the development process as construction on the site progresses.

By engaging with community members to ask about their vision for the development of land around OSCA, this project gathered valuable insights and anchored this development work in the vision articulated by the community it aims to serve. To our knowledge, no other project has actively sought out and documented the desires of the Indigenous community in Mniluzahan concerning development efforts. In doing so, this report aligns with the mission of NDN Collective and NDN Holdings to do work for Indigenous Peoples, by Indigenous Peoples.



APPENDIX

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT - INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Updated December 13, 2023

CONSENT

My name is _____, and I'm the Research and Evaluation Manager at NDN Collective.

This conversation is one of a series of conversations we are having with individuals who are involved in and/or affected by the community development work that NDN Collective is doing in Rapid City. We want to get a sense of the extent to which the community development work we do at NDN has affected you and/or your community. We are also asking questions that we hope will inform the direction of these projects.

We use these conversations to reflect on our work internally. The notes and information you share with me in this conversation are confidential within the Research and Evaluation team at NDN, so I invite you to share as much or as little as you feel comfortable. I would like to record this conversation for notes purposes and to ensure that I can accurately recall what you shared. We will delete the recording after it is transcribed and you can ask me to stop the recording at any point in time.

Do I have your permission to start the recording?

What we'll share outside of our team is a synthesis of what we hear across these conversations, which our organization will use to inform our work and may be shared externally as well, including with all who participated in the interviews. Nothing you say will be directly attributed to you. We would, however, like to list you and/or your organization at the end of the report as someone we spoke to. Are you comfortable with that?

This interview is completely voluntary, you can choose to stop at any time. We estimate that it will take a maximum of 45 minutes.

What questions do you have before we get started?

Do you still agree to participate in this interview?

- Yes
- No

1. How much time have you spent at the NDN Collective Headquarters in Rapid City?

- a. If they have visited NDN Headquarters
 - i. What are some of the reasons you visit NDN Headquarters?
 - ii. How do you feel when you visit NDN Headquarters?
Example: Do you enjoy it? Does it feel intimidating? Like a chore?
- b. If they have not visited NDN Headquarters
 - i. What are some of the reasons you have not visited NDN Headquarters?
 - ii. How do you feel about visiting NDN Headquarters?
Example: Do you want to? Does it feel intimidating? Like a chore?

2. How has the presence of NDN Headquarters in Rapid City affected how the city feels to Indigenous People?

(If they need an example: how welcoming, not welcoming, Indigenous presence in the city, etc.)

3. Now we would like for you to think of existing community spaces for Indigenous Peoples to gather in Rapid City. What do you think about these existing spaces?

- a. What do you like or don't like about them?
- b. What are some ways you would improve them?
- c. In what ways do you utilize them?

4. What are some ways traditional teachings are integrated into the design of community spaces for Indigenous Peoples in Rapid City?

- a. What do you like or don't like about them?
- b. What are some ways you would improve them?
- c. In what ways do you utilize them?

5. One of the projects that NDN Collective supports is the Oceti Sakowin Community Academy, a school with a curriculum based on traditional Lakota knowledge. In addition to providing education for students, what other services should be located in or near the school to support local Indigenous families and the community?

(Examples to provide: community event spaces, mental health services, dental clinic, etc.)

- a. What additional ways should the school and surrounding land be utilized to serve the Indigenous community in Rapid City?

6. What is it like for Indigenous Peoples to find housing in Rapid City?

- a. What are the most common challenges to finding a place to rent?
- b. What are the most common challenges to finding a place to buy?

7. What type of housing units are most needed in Rapid City for Indigenous Peoples in your opinion?

(Example: apartments, townhouses, stand-alone homes, rentals, tiny houses, ADUs)

- a. What types of housing units are needed for Indigenous families?
- b. What types of housing units are needed for Indigenous Elders over the age of 65?

8. What makes an area desirable for Indigenous Peoples to live in?

- a. What resources should be available in the area?
(Example: grocery store, child care, coffee shops, playgrounds, walking trails, gathering places)
- b. What aspects of the natural environment or green space are most important to a neighborhood?
- c. What transportation needs should be considered?
- d. What is needed to make an area feel safe to live in?
- e. What considerations should be made to make a neighborhood accessible?

9. We would like to send a small gift as a token of appreciation for your time. If you are able to accept it, what is a convenient address to send it to?

ENDNOTES

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2. "Rapid City Housing Market Study." Prepared by MSA Professional Services. Rapid City Strategic Housing Coalition. 2023. Rapid City.
3. Louder, Tyler. "Preparing for a Population Boom." KELOLAND Local News and Weather, 12 Feb. 2024, <https://www.keloland.com/news/local-news/preparing-for-a-population-boom/>. Accessed 4 Apr. 2024.
4. "Justice Department Files Lawsuit Challenging Policy Barring Native Americans From Accessing South Dakota Hotel and Sports Lounge." Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Justice, 19 Oct. 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-lawsuit-challenging-policy-barring-native-americans-accessing-south>.



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