

# Maawanji'iwewin: Indigenous Family Health

***Strategic Plan Theme: DEI***

***Funding Level: More than \$5 million***

***Facility Needs: Adjustments to existing facilities will be needed***

***Submitting Unit: University Outreach and Engagement***

***Collaborating colleges/departments/units involved with this proposal.***

University Outreach and Engagement, American Indian and Indigenous Studies, Native American Institute, College of Social Science, College of Veterinary Medicine, College of Human Medicine, College of Nursing, College of Education, and College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

***What is the proposal's big theme or idea?***

Understanding what it means to be a land-grab university, MSU, like many other institutions of higher-education, has struggled with understanding the best way to fulfill its obligations to Indigenous communities whose lands have been expropriated. This proposal is but one way that MSU can support this obligation while also providing an environment conducive to academic rigor and impactful scholarship.

The proposed initiative would involve the co-creation of an interdisciplinary gathering place to foster, retain, and sustain a critical mass of Indigenous leaders and Indigenous serving scholars researching and learning how to promote family health and well-being in ways that meet the scientific needs defined by Indigenous communities. Several peer institutions have Indigenous health centers, including the Center for American Indian Health at Johns Hopkins University and Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health at the University of Colorado. These centers are better able to attract and retain Indigenous faculty and graduate students, and these faculty and graduate students are better supported to collaborate successfully on grants and produce scholarship. Equally important, these centers provide the infrastructure needed to support long-term partnerships with Indigenous communities locally, nationally, and internationally. We posit that a unit with a focus on Indigenous health and well-being initiatives seated outside any one of MSU's colleges would advance the interdisciplinary work already being conducted by MSU faculty, staff, students, and Indigenous community partners.

This university-wide proposal, given the name Maawanji'iwewin by our Michigan-based community partners, would bring together the knowledge and expertise both on campus and off campus to co-develop the mission, goals, and infrastructure for an Indigenous family health and well-being-focused research entity. Maawanji'iwewin, which is the noun form of "gathering" in Anishinaabemowin, highlights the importance of having a space and the infrastructure to support connections and collaboration. We ground this work by recognizing Indigenous placemaking and the space we occupy here at MSU and then extending the invitation to research, learn, and share our understandings of health and well-being with our Indigenous colleagues around the world. This work will center the health and well-being of families and family structures as these serve as a foundation for healthy communities. Maawanji'iwewin will bring together partners who are doing innovative work to support culturally grounded and family-centered health research conducted in partnership with Indigenous communities. We will also work to support Indigenous partners at international institutions to increase capacity building and deepen cross-cultural coalitions that could be supported by large grants such as Fulbright, USAID, and NIH to provide connections and collaborations to improve Indigenous health globally.

***What is the proposal's goal?***

The goal of Maawanji'iwewin is to increase the presence of Indigenous faculty, students, and staff, promote inclusive, ethical, and culturally appropriate research activities, and eliminate health disparities in Michigan, the U.S., and globally. Through Maawanji'iwewin, MSU will create a space to be occupied by both academic and community scholars working collaboratively to conduct innovative and meaningful family health-focused research. Having this space on campus will support our ability to attract and retain emerging academic and community scholars. The research, following the spirit of Indigenous research methods, the tenets of community-based participatory research, and Tribal Participatory Research, will lead the way in foregrounding knowledge that has historically been ignored, misrepresented, or misunderstood.

***Define the significance, or impact of your big idea.***

Currently, this work exists in pockets on campus and in the community, and while collaboration does happen, the work is hampered by three issues. First, it is difficult to attract and retain Indigenous and Indigenous focused faculty conducting family health related research in collaboration with community. We have few faculty whose work is dedicated to supporting Indigenous communities and fewer whose work focuses on family health. Second, there are no positions on campus parallel to faculty or academic staff for Indigenous community scholars. As described by the NIH in its guidelines for reviewers of research in the health sciences, this is an area of unique context in which diverse "cultures, experiences, and sovereign statuses of tribal nations... require unique research or administrative partnerships, exceptions to existing NIH policies, and alternative strategies to ensure that research is conducted in an ethical and meaningful manner that will benefit AI/ANs." In our own projects, we have seen the critical significance of community scholars as full collaborators in the research process as it prioritizes multiple ways of knowing that generate successful interventions to promote well-being. Third, the research support systems in place at academic institutions do not function in ways that best serve research conducted in partnership with Indigenous communities. Community, faculty and staff need support to work collaboratively in both community and academic spaces.

The team proposes that MSU support Maawanji'iwewin to employ both academic scholars and community scholars as faculty. The model for academic and clinical/practitioner faculty lines exists in the medical colleges and could serve as a model for community faculty positions. Transformative health equity work cannot happen without intentional building and maintaining of relationships that value multiple knowledge frameworks. Shifting the focus of our work away from a colonialist mentality of expansion into community, Maawanji'iwewin will provide the structure and supports for a movement toward equity within true collaborations focused on establishing and nurturing meaningful relationships.

Given the divide between practitioners and researchers and the lack of Indigenous and Indigenous focused scholars on campus, Maawanji'iwewin has the potential to impact the MSU community by truly supporting a gathering place for academic and community scholars to conduct research that will change the world alongside global partners. There is a significant need for MSU do more than be welcoming to Indigenous and Indigenous focused students and scholars. This proposal provides MSU with a concrete plan that will demonstrate steps toward the decolonization of academic spaces and grow the capacity to support Indigenous scholarship and learning. By building this infrastructure, MSU will support collaborative, culturally grounded research that will support Indigenous family health and wellbeing.

***Who will be impacted?***

Faculty, staff, students, and Indigenous communities located in Michigan, the United States, and around the world.

***What does sustainability for your proposal look like?***

Maawanji'iwewin would represent just one part of MSU's long-term commitment to Indigenous students, scholars, and communities. Maawanji'iwewin is complementary, rather than duplicative, of existing Indigenous-focused efforts on campus and will work in concert with the Native American Institute and the American Indian and Indigenous Studies program to bring about long-term change in the campus environment, while

also securing grants and funding to carry-out Indigenous led family health and well-being research with global scholars and collaborators.