

# Northwestern Buffett Disproportionate Impacts of Environmental Challenges Global Working Group Core Values

## Land and Sovereignty Acknowledgements:

Northwestern is a community of learners situated within a network of historical and contemporary relationships with Native American tribes, communities, parents, students, and alumni. It is also in close proximity to an urban Native American community in Chicago and near several tribes in the Midwest. The Northwestern campus sits on the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa as well as the Menominee, Miami and Ho-Chunk nations. It was also a site of trade, travel, gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Native tribes and the state of Illinois is still home to over 100,000 tribal members.

We recognize that the tribes we work with represent sovereign peoples. We respect the legal authority of tribal governments, as well as the community wisdom they represent, and are committed to protecting tribal rights to self-governance.

## Commitment to Data Sovereignty:

Tribes have an inherent right to protect and garner their data and are the owners of data which has been collected, with permission, regarding themselves. We are committed to the principle that all our research and data first serve tribal communities and be available and accessible to tribes throughout our research process. Our tribal partners are our co-authors and co-generators of our research questions, methods, and outputs, and we always recognize that partnership (for example, through authorship credits) in our publications. We are dedicated to building protocols with our partners to ensure their data sovereignty, privacy, and protection.

## About:

We are a group of transdisciplinary scholars, scientists, activists, and non-profit leaders dedicated to transdisciplinary, sovereignty affirming research dedicated to seeking justice for communities who have been disproportionately impacted by the “Triple Bind” of environmental challenges.

## Key Terms:

### *Transdisciplinary Research*

Leveraging the resources of a major university, alongside non-profit organizations, with a wide array of disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholars, we form equitable partnerships with communities facing major environmental challenges in order to help generate long term, sustainable solutions. Our process insists on listening to and prioritizing the needs and expectations of our community partners, directly

involving community members and leaders into our planning and research process, and providing accessible results to the communities we work with.

### *Triple Bind*

The “Triple Bind” reflects the realities that many communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental challenges as they are that the nexus of a series of historical, environmental, and geographical realities which make them particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. These three risk factors are:

1. The community is already facing major environmental challenges
2. The community has resources/potential solutions relevant to climate change
3. The community has been denied autonomy/self-determination by outside actors

### *Environmental Justice:*

Our understanding of environmental justice is focused on distributive justice, procedural justice, and recognitional justice. We recognize that the communities most affected by environmental injustice typically face a lack of resources or have resources/lands that are threatened by governments and/or nature. These communities are often excluded from decision-making processes or have their authority disregarded or overwritten. Finally, communities which are facing environmental challenges are often denied the respect incumbent with their knowledge of, investment in, and expertise regarding their homelands. Understanding these challenges, we know that true environmental justice can only be achieved by respecting communities, valuing their place-based knowledge, sharing decision making and long-term planning regarding the environment, and seeking to rectify the resource imbalances which damage these populations.

## **Core Values:**

### *We are committed to justice*

- Environmental justice
  - We recognize that environmental justice extends beyond protecting the environment. Indigenous communities have historically been denied the resources of their lands and had their legally protected lands and resources stolen from them. We know that, in considering questions of environmental justice, we must strive for **distributive justice** which deliberately allocates resources to indigenous peoples and seeks to reverse the harm done. We are committed to **procedural justice** which advocates transparency in decision making, and fairness in the outcomes of any environmental actions. Finally, we advocate for **recognitional justice** wherein we readily and firmly acknowledge the sovereignty of the peoples we work with, as well as the historical political, economic, social, and physical harm done to indigenous populations. We believe that only through understanding these histories and subscribing to holistic thinking and open communication and true **environmental justice** be achieved.
- Land Sovereignty

- We affirm our commitment to the sovereignty of the communities we work with, acknowledging the authority and legal rights of tribal governments, and both the legal and historical roles of tribes as caretakers of their lands. We both respect tribes' roles as sovereign governments and their rights to self-govern their legally afforded lands.

*We are committed to respect*

- We know that customs and cultures are a cherished and deeply held part of any community. We are committed to learning about the traditions of our research partners and seek to not only respect but honor these practices. We know the value of place-based knowledge and come to our work ready to learn and listen to the wisdom of those with whom we work.
- We understand that our research is collaborative by its nature, and we are dedicated to first learning about our community partners. Community priorities for research aims and processes are our priorities. We are dedicated to keeping our research process transparent so we can reach joint expectations and ensure that the results are beneficial for all parties. We walk into research partnerships with humility and respect knowing that our work can only be accomplished through honest conversation, listening, and collaboration.

*We are committed to the communities we serve*

- We know our research process, in order to address the needs of our partner communities, must be co-developed from start to finish. We seek tangible results that have equal input from all of our collaborators (both our initial research team and community partners). We constantly reevaluate our work and are open to critique so we can continue to improve our research methods and process. Finally, we understand that our work doesn't end at the conclusion of a particular research project but should instead be designed to provide long-term benefits beyond an individual collaboration.
- We recognize that the university resources we have access to must be open and accessible to communities who have been traditionally excluded from such institutions. We believe that our community partnerships must provide access to institutes of higher learning to the community and seek to generate other forms of educational and vocational advancement opportunities for our community partners. Finally, we promise to write and publish in ways which are legible to a broad audience. We will share our findings with our community partnerships openly, prior to publication, and make sure that community members are a part of the creation of knowledge we publish and are credited as such.

*We are committed to creating open systems of collaboration*

- We recognize that Western power structures (traditionally hierarchical and closed) are both exclusionary and disempowering. We are attentive to the colonial legacies of which the academy is a part and recognize higher education's history of disregard for native rights and customs. We are committed to understanding how our partner's power structures work and respecting these institutions. We aim to work with our partners to create egalitarian and representative systems where we are united in our aims and execution of goals. In forging

genuine partnerships, we strive to be attentive to our own group dynamics and seek to create models which are supportive, open, and egalitarian in nature. We know that while we seek positive conclusions through our research, the process by which we reach those conclusions is as important as the results: to this end we believe in collaboration through the creation of genuine partnerships that foster community creation at every step of our process.

- We believe that institution change requires transdisciplinary work. In this we are committed to full community partnerships with wide opportunities to bring in members of both the indigenous and academic communities we serve. We believe this is critical to challenge the hegemonical disciplinary thinking which runs across universities and will help us to create new ways of generating knowledge which are fairer and more just for all members of our research. Finally, we understand that is particularly critical to bring on young voices to this process and strive to include students, young scholars, and youth community members into our work.