



New President and CEO to Lead the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development as it Marks 50th Anniversary

Chris James, a veteran of the U.S. Department of the Treasury and U.S. Small Business Administration, begins his new role immediately

MESA, AZ – Ahead of its 50th Anniversary this year, the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (National Center) is excited to announce a new President and CEO will lead the longest-running Native American economic development organization. Chris James, who has shared the National Center's mission to put Indian Country to work over his nearly two decade career, will assume the role immediately. Mr. James brings a professional record that spans small business operations, tribal economic development, and senior positions in the federal government.

Most recently, Mr. James served as Associate Administrator at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), where he was a Senior Executive Service (SES) appointee of President Barack Obama overseeing both the Office of Field Operations, Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, and the Office of Native American Affairs. His extensive portfolio included Native American outreach, program management, and tribal consultation. Prior to his more than six years at the SBA, Mr. James served as a program manager at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, specifically within the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund.

"Chris James has the perfect combination of experience, knowledge, and personality to take the reins of an organization whose mission is to create economic opportunity for Indian Country," said National Center Board Chairman Derrick Watchman. "Mr. James has deep roots in Native American business and economic development, and he has risen to become one of the most effective and tireless advocates for our communities while working in the highest levels of the federal government. He will now bring his skills to bear on behalf of the National Center

as we approach our 50th Anniversary, with a focus on growing the economic power of tribal communities. We look forward to formally introducing Chris at the Reservation Economic Summit (RES) Las Vegas in March.”

While at the U.S. Small Business Administration, Mr. James’s responsibilities included representing the SBA at White House events and in state, local, and congressional affairs, as well as serving as a liaison to domestic and international corporate partners and stakeholders. He also established and oversaw SBA’s Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. As the head of the Office of Field Operations, he managed a workforce of over 800 people with an annual operating budget of over \$200 million, and worked on programs and services that affected all 50 states and every U.S. territory.

Among his accomplishments was the creation of Startup in a Day, which worked with cities and Native American communities to create streamlined platforms to allow entrepreneurs to apply for all relevant business permits in an expedited manner. Over 100 communities took a public pledge agreeing to simplify the business formation requirements for entrepreneurs in their areas. He was also the agency lead on the SupplierPay program, which encouraged private companies to quickly reimburse their suppliers. Nearly fifty Fortune 500 companies have taken the pledge thus far.

“It is an honor to be trusted to lead the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development and build on its tremendous 50-year track record of creating business opportunity for Indian Country,” James said. “I have worked side by side with the National Center for many years and have seen firsthand its powerful and direct impact on tribal businesses and countless lives. I am energized to join a group that’s helping to change the economic development conversation in Indian Country. I look forward to seeing familiar faces and new colleagues at RES Las Vegas.”

Mr. James has worked extensively in Native American policy and programs throughout his career. At SBA, he served as the officer on record for Tribal Consultation, and worked with the White House and senior cabinet officials to craft best practices for accomplishing economic development in Native American communities. While at the U.S. Department of the Treasury (2009-2011), Mr. James acted as liaison between the CDFI Fund, Native American tribal governments, and other federal government agencies and approved over \$120 million dollars in funding to deserving applicants. In part thanks to his leadership, the number of certified Native CDFIs increased by 30%, and the Native American CDFI Assistance Program saw an increase in applicants. He was an active member of the White House Council on Native American Affairs, the White House Rural Council, White House Community Solutions Task Force, and the White House Interagency Group on Insular Affairs.

Prior to his work in government, Mr. James was the Associate Director for the Cherokee, NC-based Sequoyah Fund. While there, Mr. James was responsible for the daily operations of the fund, which is a Native American CDFI and an enterprise of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. He has a B.A. in Communication Studies from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and a Master of Entrepreneurship from Western North Carolina University.

Mr. James is originally from Cherokee, North Carolina - home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians – and is of Cherokee descent. His family has owned small businesses on the Qualla Boundary for more than 50 years. He lives in Alexandria, Virginia with his wife and three children, ages 9, 9, and 11, but will relocate to the Phoenix metro area in the coming months as he takes the reins of the National Center.

Mr. James will be leading the National Center at its next signature event – the National Reservation Economic Summit, which is taking place at the Mirage Hotel in Las Vegas from March 13-16. For more information about how you can sign up for the largest economic development gathering in Indian Country, [please click here](#).

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About the National Center: *The National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. With over 40 years of assisting American Indian Tribes and their enterprises with business and economic development – we have evolved into the largest national Indian specific business organization in the nation. Our motto is: “We Mean Business For Indian Country” as we are actively engaged in helping Tribal Nations and Native business people realize their business goals and are dedicated to putting the whole of Indian Country to work to better the lives of American Indian people- both now... and for generations to come. For more information, please visit www.ncaied.org.*