

Dentons Global Smart Cities & Connected Communities Think Tank

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Challenges and Opportunities in Developing Tribal Energy Projects

Wednesday, October 15, 2025

11:30am-1:00pm ET



Welcome: Linda Willard, Counsel – Energy practice and Executive Director of the Dentons Global Smart Cities & Connected Communities Think Tank, Dentons



Moderator: Suzanne R. (Susi) Schaeffer, Counsel - Regulatory, Public Policy & Government Affairs practice and Native American Law and Policy practice, Dentons



Dr. Crystal Miller
Head of Policy and
Government Relations,
Alliance for Tribal Clean
Energy
Panelist



Dr Crystal Miller is an enrolled citizen of the Walker River Paiute Tribe and a nationally recognized expert in Federal Indian Law, Tribal Governance, and Indigenous Policy Reform. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Arizona, where her research focused on Federal Indian Law and Policy, Tribal Constitution Reform, and strengthening Tribal governance structures through a decolonial lens.

Dr. Miller is a leading voice in national policy advocacy and government relations, regularly engaging with members of Congress, federal agencies, and intergovernmental bodies to advance Tribal sovereignty, environmental justice, and equitable resource distribution. Her work has directly influenced legislative and administrative actions, ensuring that the voices and rights of Native Nations are represented at the highest levels of government.

With a deep commitment to protecting Tribal lands, natural resources, and cultural integrity, Dr. Miller has played a central role in the development of Tribal consultation policies, environmental defense strategies, and Tribal law and order codes. She has testified before state legislatures, trained federal and state agencies on Tribal consultation best practices, and served as a trusted advisor to Tribal governments navigating complex jurisdictional landscapes.

Dr. Miller's expertise in reforming Tribal constitutions and governance frameworks is widely sought after. She has guided multiple Native Nations through transformative constitutional reform processes, aligning governance structures with Tribal values and principles while reinforcing sovereignty and self-determination. Her groundbreaking "Post-

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	<p>Acknowledgment Theory” offers a powerful critique of the colonial legacy embedded in federal recognition and has reshaped how Tribal governance reform is approached across Indian Country.</p> <p>As a scholar, policy strategist, and fierce advocate for Tribal rights, Dr. Crystal Miller continues to bridge academia, grassroots advocacy, and high-level policy arenas to advance justice, self-governance, and the inherent rights of Native Nations.</p>
 <p>Christian Weaver Vice President Shinnecock Holdings and Vice President, Philanthropy for GRID Alternatives</p> <p><i>Panelist</i></p>	<p>Christian Weaver is a dynamic leader and seasoned executive known for his strategic foresight and deep commitment to social impact. With over 20 years of experience, he has cultivated a career at the intersection of philanthropy, environmental justice, and Indigenous advocacy. He is the Founder and Managing Director of Shinnecock Power, a venture dedicated to building a sustainable future through renewable energy infrastructure. He also serves as Vice President of Philanthropy at GRID Alternatives, where he directs multi-million-dollar fundraising initiatives and expands the organization's reach.</p> <p>Christian's leadership journey includes influential roles such as Associate Vice President at the U.S. Soccer Foundation and Vice President of Development for the National Congress of American Indians. His foundational experience in organizational growth and resource development was built at the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and the American Indian College Fund.</p> <p>A respected thought leader, Christian is an alum of the Google Policy Fellowship and a Climate Justice Fellow at the University of Maryland. He holds a Master's in Indigenous Law from the University of Oklahoma and a Bachelor of Arts from Valdosta State University. An engaged member of his tribal community, the Shinnecock Nation, his work is further enriched by his passion for the arts and his personal commitment to philanthropy. He serves on the corporate boards of Shinnecock Sovereign Holdings, Eastwoods Power, and non-profit boards of the American Indian Cancer Foundation, the Shinnecock Community Fund and Ma's House.</p>
 <p>Joseph (Joe) McNeil Chief Executive Officer, SAGE</p> <p><i>Panelist</i></p>	<p>Joseph McNeil is an enrolled citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, bringing both leadership and dedication to his various roles within the community. As the CEO of SAGE Development Authority, also as the President of the Standing Rock Development Corporation, previous Manager for Rock Industries Corp. in Ft. Yates, N.D., he plays a substantial role in driving economic growth and development in the region. Married and a proud father of four children, Joe McNeil's commitment to his community and his advocacy for Indigenous rights are unwavering. His exceptional leadership qualities have earned him recognition, including the prestigious Bush Foundation Fellowship for his outstanding contributions to the field. He is also a distinguished recipient of the MIT Oceti Sakowin Fellows Tribal Community Innovation award. Joseph's academic journey led him to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Sitting Bull College. His commitment to community service is evident in his past roles, including serving as a former member of the Tribal Council for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and as Vice Chair of the Sitting Bull College Board. Additionally, his involvement with the Wind Energy Tribes United showcases his dedication to sustainable energy solutions. At present, Joe McNeil serves as the Chair of the Oyate Community Development Corporation, where his visionary leadership continues to drive positive change and community development. His multifaceted contributions make him a respected figure in both Indigenous activism and community economic development, embodying the values and aspirations of the Standing Rock Nation.</p>



Jesse Hopkins-Hoel
Chief Development
Officer,
Allium Renewable
Energy, LLC
Panelist

Jesse Hopkins-Hoel is the Chief Development Officer at Allium Renewable Energy, an Independent Power Producer based in Chicago, Illinois, where he leads the development of utility-scale wind, solar, and energy storage projects across the United States.

With a degree in Political Science and a minor in Community Development, Jesse has spent over 25 years building bridges between energy innovation and community priorities. His hallmark is a community-first approach that balances marketable, bankable projects with genuine partnerships rooted in trust and shared benefit.

That philosophy has fueled Jesse to play a leadership role in the development of 1,000 MW in now-operational renewable energy facilities and over 4,000MW of projects currently in various stages of development

Raised and rooted in Central Minnesota, where he now lives with his wife of 24 years, Jesse finds inspiration both in the beauty of the natural environment and in the strength of local communities. His career has also included service in local governmental planning focused on community revitalization and heritage preservation, giving him a unique vantage point on how civic engagement and resource stewardship intersect with large-scale project development.

Whether guiding cross-functional teams or navigating complex partnerships with tribal nations and local stakeholders, Jesse is committed to fostering durable relationships, sound project decisions, and lasting community benefits.



Stephanie Sfiridis
Counsel,
Dentons
Panelist

Stephanie Sfiridis is a member of the Regulatory, Public Policy and Government Affairs practice and the Native American Law and Policy practice, which serves clients on matters related to American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian issues. Stephanie has extensive experience advising and advocating for Native communities in Tribal, state, and federal forums, with a focus on land and realty, gaming and economic development, and federal acknowledgement.

Prior to joining Dentons, Stephanie served as Senior Counselor to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the US Department of the Interior (Interior). In this role, she helped lead policy and regulatory approaches on some of the most high-profile matters in Indian gaming, Tribal land acquisition and federal acknowledgment. Stephanie has substantial knowledge of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and Tribal-State gaming compact processes. Her expertise extends to fee-to-trust transactions for both gaming and non-gaming purposes, rights-of-way and trespass over Indian lands, and other lands issues. She helped draft the updated Class III Tribal State Gaming Compact Process regulations found at 25 C.F.R. Part 293; the Land Acquisition regulations found at 25 C.F.R. Part 151; and updates to the federal acknowledgement process. While at Interior, Stephanie also served as Acting Director of the Office of Federal Acknowledgement.

Stephanie previously served as an associate attorney at a Washington, DC law firm where she represented tribal clients on a wide range of issues including economic development, transactional matters, government affairs and policy, fee to trust, and litigation. She also served as Associate In-House Counsel for the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Gaming Authority where she worked on a variety of issues for both the Tribe's gaming authority and government.

Stephanie earned her JD from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University where she focused on the Indian Legal Program, earning CALI awards for both Federal Indian Law I and II. Stephanie is a member of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe.