



The Center for Native American Youth Native Youth Policy Recommendations for Biden/ Harris Administration

The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute is an education and advocacy organization with the mission to improve the health, safety, and overall well-being of Native American youth. In support of our mission, CNAY seeks input and guidance from our youth stakeholders through our Youth Advisory Board. Annually, the CNAY Youth Advisory Board provides strategic recommendations and priorities to improve the lives and visibility of Native youth. This document reflects the vision and priorities of the CNAY Youth Advisory Board.

CNAY is proud to house the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) National Native Youth Network. Launched during the Obama/ Biden Administration, Gen-I created a movement for Native American youth across the country to commit to better their communities. This initiative takes a comprehensive, culturally responsive approach to ensure all young Native people can reach their full potential by providing Native youth a platform to connect, engage, and access opportunities. This network is instrumental in facilitating opportunities for Native youth leaders to strategically align on the issues impacting their communities. For the past four years, CNAY has created fellowships, opportunities and initiatives for youth to continue to engage youth leaders.

Native Youth Policy Recommendations

- A. Recommit to Initiatives like *Generation Indigenous (Gen - I)* and *My Brother's Keeper*.** Launched during the Obama Administration, the Center for Native American Youth played a key role in the creation of the Generation Indigenous Network and Challenge. The Gen-I initiative focuses on improving the lives of Native youth through new investments and increased engagement. Both My Brother's Keeper and Gen-I improve the lives of young people by promoting a national dialogue, and policies and programs to mobilize the next generation of leaders. While CNAY has supported Native youth in leading this movement, there is a national call for enhanced resources and long-term investment in Generation Indigenous that the Administration can offer.
- B. Commit Resources to Generation Indigenous.** To effectively invest in tribal communities, Native youth must be not only included, but lead these efforts. Native youth have identified the critical importance for long-term investment in the Generation Indigenous Network. Youth are seeking continued engagement on a national platform with initiatives like the Gen-I Challenge, to continue positive change throughout Indian Country. Native youth leadership have identified the long-term impact of consistent White House Tribal Youth Gatherings (WHTYG) in Washington, D.C. Bi-annually convening Native youth from across the country to connect with federal agencies and national leadership has a profound impact on the life trajectory of young people. These gatherings provide opportunities for internships, networking, and access to those often underrepresented in government.
- C. Improve Access & Availability of Data to Indian Country.** To ensure the success and well-being of Indian Country, accurate, reliable, and transparent data is of the utmost importance to Native youth. Native youth leaders demand enhanced data collection across



all federal departments, that accurately reflects their identity. Native youth are seeking enhanced data sharing with tribal communities and recognition of tribally collected data. These efforts must be rooted in culturally relevant data collection and be led by Indigenous peoples for their communities.

- D. Appoint Tribal Liaisons at each Federal Agency.** Native youth recognize the challenges their communities face in navigating federal funding and access to representation in the government. The appointment of a tribal liaison at each agency would act as the point of contact for not only tribal leadership but build rapport with Native youth by hosting quarterly listening sessions. These sessions would effectively engage young people in the federal government and enhance relations between Indian Country and the Administration.
- E. Address Climate Change in Partnership with Native Youth.** Tribal nations are at the forefront of the fight for climate justice. Native peoples are disproportionately impacted by climate change and extractive industries. Convening Native youth annually with the Climate Nominees and Appointees identified by the administration will be critical to ensure young voices are included while addressing one of the most pressing challenges of their generation.

Agency Recommendations

- A. Rapidly distribute COVID-19 relief funding to Indian Country.** Indian Country has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. It is of the upmost importance for this administration to provide unrestricted funding for tribal communities. Native youth recognize the need for resources to address the digital divide and collect independent data on their communities. The unique needs of tribal nations must be address when discussing how to best respond to COVID-19.
- B. Increase support for holistic, accurate educational opportunities.** Many Native youth have identified the critical need for accurate representation in national curriculums. The Department of Education has an opportunity to address historical underrepresentation and call on states to correct historical inaccuracies. Increasing resources for the Department of Education to invest in tribal colleges, including promoting equity in congressionally authorized support. Youth are calling on enhanced, long-term collaborations with Tribal College leadership to improve infrastructure and ensure funding resources.
- C. Create long-term support for Indigenous languages.** We recognize the critical intersections of access to cultural practices and health outcomes for Native people. Tribal communities need sustainable investments in tribally led language programs. These programs are vital to the protection and preservation of traditional languages, which are key for community health. Native youth are calling on the establishment of an advisory committee within the Department of Education to develop a national revitalization plan to support communities across Indian Country. This committee will serve as experts to the current barriers and challenges in accessing resources for current language programs across Indian Country.

- D. Increase relationships between Department of Interior and tribal communities.** Tribal communities have an innate connection with land, water, and sacred sites. This dynamic connection extends into the cultural, spiritual, and medicinal practices. Tribal communities must build collaborative relationships with National Park Service to better preserve lands and waterways. Recommendations include the creation of an advisory group that includes youth to coordinate efforts to increase Indigenous presence across national parks. Investing in national roundtable discussions with Native communities annually will be key to educating the broader public's understanding of the importance of public lands. Finally, Native youth identified the importance of strategically funding in tribally led conservation programs to protect lands for future generations.
- E. Reform the Department of Justice approach to Indian Country.** The National Institute of Justice found that 84.3% of Native American and Alaska Native women will experience violence in their lifetime, while Native men also experience high rates at 81.6%. It's important to understand that due to lack of accurate documentation and challenges with jurisdiction, there is currently no accurate count for how many Indigenous people have experienced violence or have gone missing and/or murdered. This pressing issue has led for Native youth to request a reform of the Department of Justice (DOJ) reporting process of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People, including the critical responsibility of information sharing. Tribal communities must be granted access to government collected data and be given pathways to share their own. Factored into this reform must be altering the DOJ to act as proactive measure, rather than a punitive measure by investing in tribal initiatives and re-entry programs. The DOJ must expand the prosecution of non-Native perpetrators on Native land to ensure tribal communities can act within their inherent right to sovereignty. Finally, this administration must invest in the juvenile justice system by providing culturally relevant counseling, chemical dependency support, and occupational training.
- F. Expand resources within Health and Human Services Administration SAMHSA branch.** Native youth expressed the importance of providing culturally grounded mental health resources and intervention methods for their communities across the nation. This includes those who live in urban, rural, reservation, village, and suburban areas to have equitable access to care. Young people recommend developing a program within SAMHSA to train Native youth on mental health first aid. Additionally, these trainings can provide information and insight as to how young people can become mental health professionals for their communities. It is recommended that this administration expand its investment and resources for mental health support, along with substance abuse prevention and treatment.
- G. Increase rural development within the Department of Agriculture.** Traditional foodways and practices have long been interconnected to all other areas of Indigenous lifeways. Many parts of Indigenous food systems have been disrupted following colonization. The challenges to Native food sovereignty have significantly changed the food landscape in tribal communities, both rural and urban. This shift in diet, along with food insecurity, has contributed to large health disparities for many Native peoples. There



must be a significant investment in the development and expansion of sustainable food systems in rural communities. Indigenous farming occurs both in rural, reservation, village, and urban areas. Native youth are calling on resources for tribally led food systems and the creation of farming initiatives. This includes micro-loans to begin farming, subsidies, and empowering tribal communities to become autonomous in their food production.