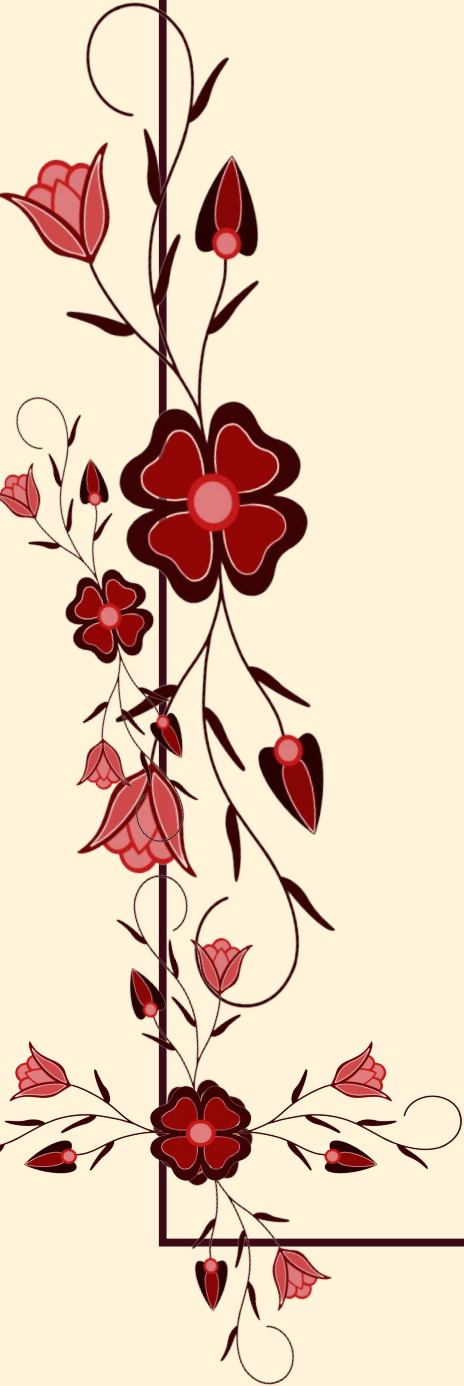




Recommendations to
address the Missing and
Murdered Indigenous
Women, Girls, and Two-
Spirit epidemic.





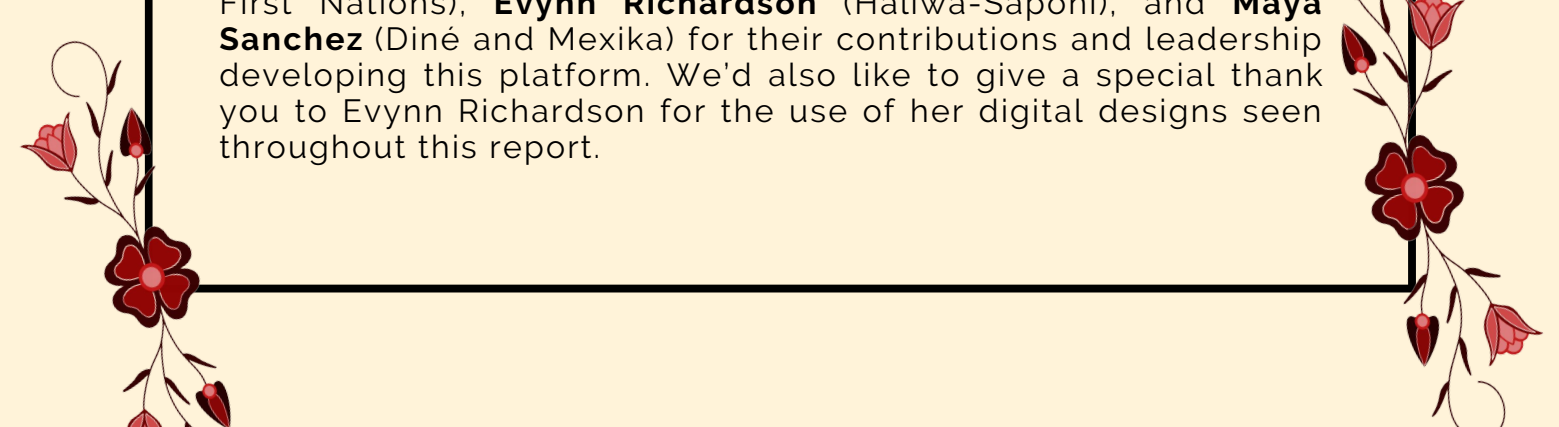
About the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute

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. Our approach to this work is to seek input and guidance from our youth stakeholders and ensure youth are leading the change they wish to see in their communities.

The **Remembering Our Sisters (ROS) Fellowship** is a virtual storytelling and digital arts program that empowers young Indigenous women and femme-identifying leaders (ages 18-24) to raise awareness, advocate for better policy, and to honor our sisters and families affected by the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirits+ (MMIWG2S+) epidemic. Indigenous women, girls, trans, and two-spirit people experience violence, sexual assault, go missing, and are murdered at the highest rates of any ethnic group. According to the Urban Indian Health Institute, murder is the third leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native women and girls ages 10-24.¹ The memories of our missing and murdered Indigenous sisters inspired the creation of the Remembering Our Sisters Fellowship.

Throughout the fellowship, Remembering Our Sisters Fellows created digital art and digital storytelling projects that bring attention and awareness to MMIWG2S+. Fellows are equipped with resources, peer-to-peer learning, technical assistance, mentorship, and a platform to share and elevate their projects. This initiative had the primary goals of increasing visibility and action to end the MMIWG2S+ epidemic and advance policy to end violence against our Indigenous relatives.

This document reflects the recommendations and priorities of the inaugural cohort of Remembering Our Sisters Fellows to address this epidemic. We would like to thank **Gracie Aragon** (Pueblo of Acoma), **Cordelia Falls Down** (Apsáalooke Nation and United Keetoowah Band), **Lily Painter** (Kiowa and Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), **Lauren Poterek** (Ojibwe and Walpole Island First Nations), **Evynn Richardson** (Haliwa-Saponi), and **Maya Sanchez** (Diné and Mexika) for their contributions and leadership developing this platform. We'd also like to give a special thank you to Evynn Richardson for the use of her digital designs seen throughout this report.





Remembering Our Sisters Fellows Recommendation

Transformation of Oppressive Systems

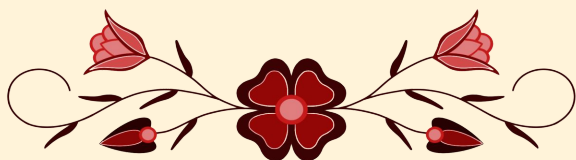
It is paramount our nation takes action to address the ways interconnected systems directly impact tribal communities. Fellows have identified key “isms” that act as contributing factors to the MMIWG2S+ epidemic, including capitalism, racism, and sexism. Youth recognize systems, including child welfare, healthcare, education, and the incarceration system, affect the safety and well-being of their people.

Strengthening Tribal Sovereignty

The United States must uphold the power of tribal sovereignty and self-governance. Fellows are working to combat a legacy of forced assimilation, lack of investment and infrastructure, and failure to support tribal authority. Youth leaders identify that equity among tribal governments and state bodies is necessary for effective governance to prevent MMIWG2S+. This includes upholding tribal jurisdiction, repatriation of lands, and enhancing federal, state, and tribal relationships in government. Fellows recognize the vital need for a new, culturally driven approach to justice and ensuring tribal nations have extensive resources to support their people.

Representation and Narrative of Indigenous Communities

The historic misrepresentation of tribal nations, particularly Indigenous women, cannot be understated. There continues to be a national narrative that perpetuates biases, stereotypes, and fetishization that directly influences how Indigenous women are seen, valued, and protected. This overt sexualization and racism continues to fuel physical and sexual violence across the nation. The media fails to provide contemporary representation of Indigenous peoples, upholding colonial narratives that ultimately fails tribal communities.






THE REMEMBERING OUR SISTERS FELLOWS PLATFORM AT-A-GLANCE

The Remembering Our Sisters Fellows identified core contributing factors to each policy pillar below.

Pillars	Underlying Factors
Transform Oppressive Systems	Capitalism Colonialism Education System Patriarchy Racism
Strengthen Tribal Sovereignty	Colonial legacy Lack of investment Federal and state tribal relationships
Representation and Narrative of Tribal Communities	Sexualization of Indigenous women Lack of contemporary representation Social perception of Indigenous women



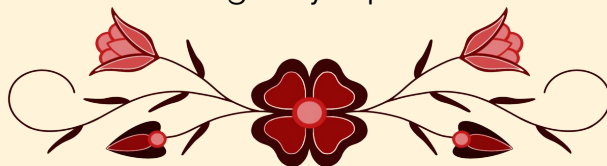


Pillar One: Transform Oppressive Systems

Indigenous Peoples are at the frontlines of some of our most pressing social challenges. From environmental justice to access to higher education, the current social system directly impacts the health and safety of Indigenous women, children, girls, and two-spirit relatives. A key challenge fellows identified was our current societal structure was not designed for Indigenous Peoples, but center Western views and approaches. These oppressive systems intersect and often create barriers for communities to thrive. To build collective liberation with communities of color, the fellows advise:

A. Center Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Indigenous communities have been leading in the protection of their people since time immemorial. Federal agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Justice have a critical role to play in the investment in community-led solutions. These solutions include allocation of resources for alternative forms of justice, culturally driven healthcare, and mental health support. Fellows recognize the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems to prevent violence against women, children, and girls. It is paramount that culturally informed care is given to survivors, their families, and the broader community following instances of violence.

B. Develop Intersectional Policies. The effects of systemic oppression impact communities and individuals in unique and overlapping ways. Fellows want to see intersectional policies that tackle the various manifestations of systemic violence. Political and organizational leaders must design policies with communities of color in mind to best meet their needs. Policies targeted towards Indigenous communities must be grounded in cultural knowledge systems to be most effective. We must trust Indigenous approaches of justice and leadership. Through the creation of cultural, intersectional policies, our nation can move towards a system that promotes equity. To create these policies, we must ensure that policy makers are reflective of our country. Fellows advise the development of accessible pipeline programs into government and federal employment pathways. In particular, the Department of Interior has an opportunity to ensure increased Indigenous representation as the agency upholds Federal trust responsibilities across the US.





Pillar One: Transformation Oppressive Systems

C. Consistent Standards of Education. Data from the Reclaiming Native Truth project found that 87% of schools do not teach about Native communities past 1900.ⁱⁱ This lack of fundamental knowledge is detrimental to safety, perception, and investment in Indigenous People. Fellows identified the responsibility of the Department of Education to provide resources, curriculum, and increased standards for effective education on Indigenous communities in North America. An accurate, fact-based curriculum is key to address historical implications of racism and colonization. Fellows call for these curriculums to be done on a state-by-state basis in consultation with tribal nations. By ensuring our nation builds a collective understanding of our history, we can combat harmful stereotypes and biases that surround Indigenous People.

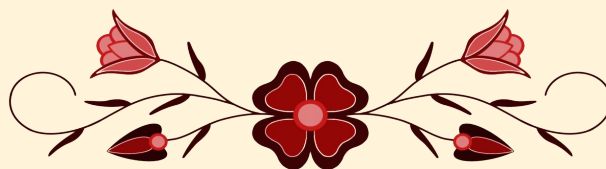




Pillar Two: Strengthen Tribal Sovereignty

Indigenous communities maintain self-sufficient governments that are building power for their people, their culture, and future generations. When Indigenous People maintain their autonomy, their people and cultures can thrive. The fellows identified the long-term negative impact federal policies had on their people's family structures and ability to govern. Policies like Civilization Fund Act of 1819, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 played a critical role in shaping the perceptions of tribal sovereignty. The United States has a responsibility to uphold treaty rights, which act as the foundation of federal Indian law. Fellows identified key changes that could continue to uphold tribal sovereignty and strengthen the response to MMIWG2S+. This includes:

A. Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Fellows identified the extensive misinformation that surrounds the impact of colonization. The legacy of forced assimilation and genocidal actions have left an intergenerational mark on Indigenous People. Within our nation's history, we must recognize the long-term influence the introduction of patriarchy has had on tribal communities and violence against women. In the face of immense resiliency, communities are upholding their culture and value systems for a better future. Fellows see the power in creating a common truth to transform misperceptions that continue to further harm. Local, state, and federal governments must invest in creating a new narrative that is grounded in accurate truths to create additional avenues of healing. This work must be led intergenerationally, with Indigenous voices, needs, and wants at the center. The Department of Justice must invest significant resources in cultural support services for survivors, including families impacted by this epidemic. Fellows advise this work be done in tandem with the Department of Interior to maintain tribally led partnerships.

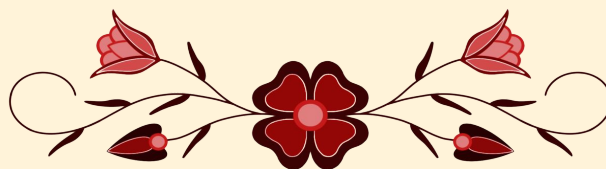




Pillar Two: Strength Tribal Sovereignty

B. Exercise of Local Control. All tribal nations should be governed autonomously for their people, by their people. Tribal nations must maintain jurisdictional authority over their lands to prevent non-Indigenous perpetrators harming their communities. The United States government must increase transparency in the data collection of missing Indigenous persons cases that occur across the U.S., including those occurring in urban, rural, reservation, and village geographic areas. It is paramount that state and local governments recognize that many Native Americans do not live on tribal lands or reservations. According to the Census, 78% of Native Americans live in urban areas, which often exist beyond tribal authority.ⁱⁱⁱ This drastically alters the support, resources, and information available to those impacted by this epidemic. Fellows advise better coordination between law enforcement at the state, local, tribal, and federal agencies to respond to this crisis. With this local control, fellows recognize the critical importance of defining justice in a way that is aligned with tribal values. The way our nation defines justice is framed in western culture, which is often punishment based. Fellows recommend in partnership with law enforcement officials, their communities seek avenues for culturally informed grounds for justice and retribution for those impacted by MMIWG2S+.

C. Investment in Indian Country. Adequate investment in tribal nations can directly combat the MMIWG2S+ epidemic. Fellows call for increased investments in social services, public safety, and justice programs from the federal government. These resources can directly go to holistic, culturally competent initiatives that ensure the well-being of children, women, and elders. Fellows advise adequate hotlines, resource centers, and response teams to both prevent and respond to missing persons cases or violent crimes. Fellows identified the critical role nation building and infrastructure development plays in the safety of their people. Indian Country can continue to thrive by building economic and climate resilience, while enhancing infrastructure like broadband access, roads, and food systems.





Pillar Three: Representation and Narrative of Indigenous Communities.

Historical narratives continue to be a modern problem facing Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit relatives. Biases and stereotypes are grounded in colonial legacy, which was used to reinforce and justify forced removals, violence, and cultural destruction. Narratives have the power to shift perceptions, culture, and spark action within our most powerful institutions. On an individual level, narratives surrounding groups impact how we engage, who we protect and advocate for. Data from the Reclaiming Native Truth project shows, “95 percent of images that appear in internet searches of “Native Americans” are antiquated, pre-1900 portrayals of Native peoples.”^{iv} Their data also shows that Native people represented in TV and film is less than .04 percent.^v Through their digital storytelling initiatives, fellows learned firsthand the power of reclaiming their narratives. Fellows advise:

A. Increased Coverage of Indigenous People. Fellows have pinpoint the role media biases play as many outlets fail to cover Indigenous movements and missing persons cases. Youth recognized that in many cases when Indigenous People are discussed, deficit narratives and stereotypes are utilized. Fellows are calling on media outlets to equitably report on missing persons cases across communities of color. Youth advise increased resources to train and hire Indigenous storytellers to shift the current narrative that is often rooted in inaccurate portrayals of their people. Through increased representation, fellows know this will have a direct impact on MMIWG2S+.

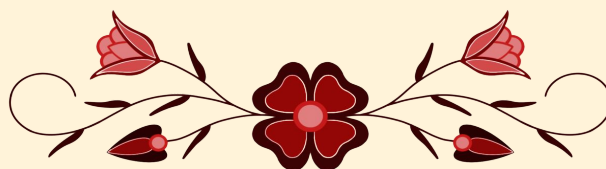




Pillar Three: Representation and Narrative of Indigenous Communities.

B. Contemporary Representation: The historic representation of Indigenous women and girls promotes hyper sexualization and antiquated social perceptions. Through the creative arts of film, music, and television, creators have an opportunity to transform the narrative to one that is strengths-based. Indigenous creators must have more control over their personal narrative in all forms. The ability to share their culture and most importantly, visions for the future, shifts the traditional power dynamic between Indigenous Peoples and media. Youth recommend clear pathways into the film and entertainment industry to increase visibility behind and in front of the camera.

C. Increased Accountability on Social media: Our world has continued to be influenced and shaped by social media. Our nation is grappling with rampant disinformation, often shared through a variety of social media platforms. Beyond challenges of this misinformation epidemic, we also must recognize how little current content guidelines reflect anti-Indigenous rhetoric. Behind these platforms often come individual moderators, responsible for the various community guideline violations that occur across social media. Fellows believe that these moderators must engage in extensive diversity, equity, and inclusion training. These media platforms have a responsibility to ensure moderators are diverse and representative of their users. Our government has a responsibility to update laws and policies reflective of our technological advancement. We must as a nation reckon with our response to algorithms that influence or amplify hate speech, conspiracy, and disinformation. Fellows advocate for a defined responsibility for the harms and consequences of social media on public health, with a particular emphasis of how social media impacts the mental health or depiction of Indigenous Peoples.





End Notes



The inaugural cohort (featured left to right); Evynn Richardson, Lauren Poterek, Lily Painter, Gracie Aragon, Maya Sanchez, and Cordelia Falls Down

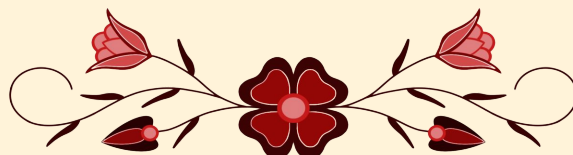
i Lucchesi, A., & Echo-Hawk, A. (2018). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls. Urban Indian Health Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.uihi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Missing-and-Murdered-Indigenous-Women-and-Girls-Report.pdf>

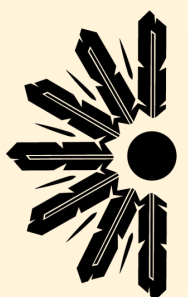
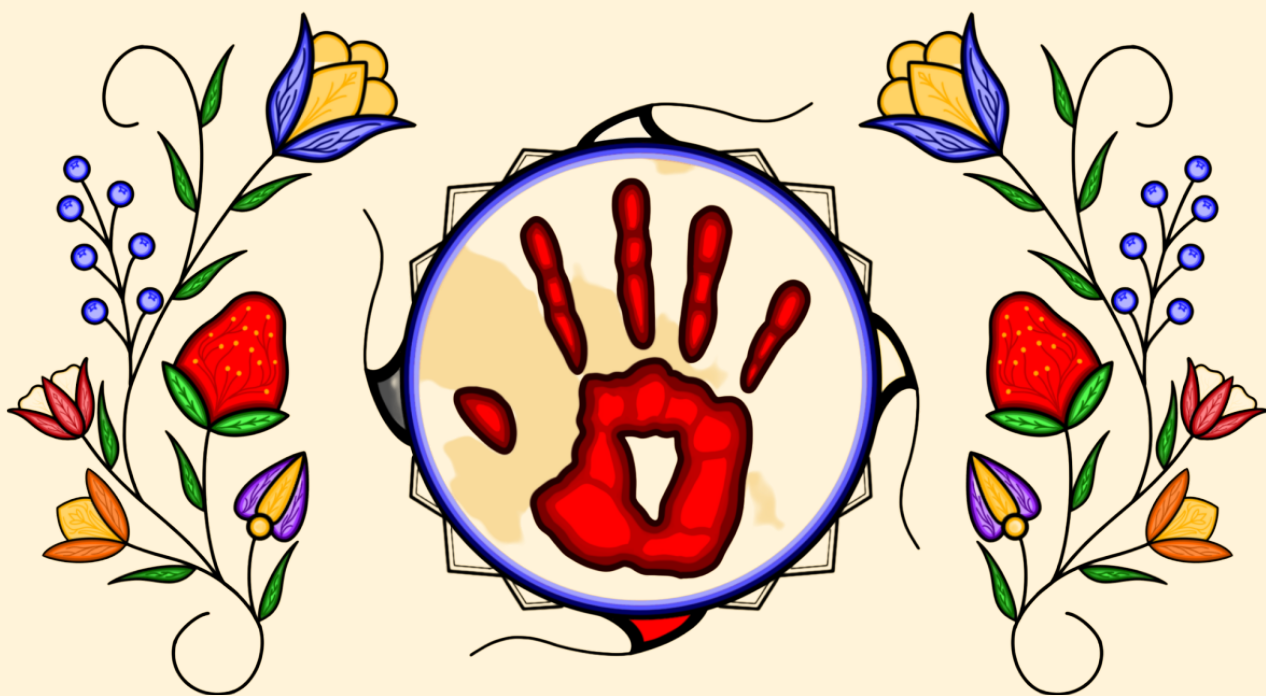
ii First Nations Development Institute, & Echo Hawk Consulting. (2018). Reclaiming Native Truth. Retrieved from <https://illuminatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/FullFindingsReport-screen-spreads.pdf?x12844>

iii U.S. Census Bureau (2012). The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010. Retrieved from [census.gov/history/pdf/c2010br-10.pdf](https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/c2010br-10.pdf)

iv First Nations Development Institute, & Echo Hawk Consulting. (2018). Reclaiming Native Truth. Retrieved from <https://illuminatives.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/FullFindingsReport-screen-spreads.pdf?x12844>

v Ibid.





**CENTER for NATIVE
AMERICAN YOUTH**

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The Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) at the Aspen Institute

CNAY is on traditional territories of the Nacotchtank (Acostian) &
Piscataway land

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