

Indigenous Leadership Academy Fall 2024 Cohort

Phoenix, Ariz. — The [American Indian Policy Institute](#) (AIPI) is thrilled to announce the Fall 2024 cohort of the [Indigenous Leadership Academy](#) (ILA)! With a focus on emerging leaders, there is no other leadership program like this in the country. Twenty-two of the sixty applicants have been accepted into the cohort. Their demographics represent 16 tribes from 12 states. All participants demonstrated a strong passion for working with and for Indigenous communities. Some topics the participants are passionate about are civic engagement, education, environment, healthcare, policy, and technology and communication. Past cohorts have focused on themes of imposter syndrome, sovereignty, and the Supreme Court. For this cohort, the focus will be on civic engagement. We are excited to have such a diverse group of participants. The AIPI is delighted to see what wonderful things this cohort will accomplish. Please read about each cohort member below.



Rene Begay

Rene Begay is Diné (Navajo). She is Big Water, born for the Red Bottom People clan. Her maternal grandfather's clan is Red Running into Water and her paternal grandfather's clan is Towering House. She has a Masters in Clinical Science from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. She was trained as a geneticist studying the association between genetic variants and heart muscle disease. She also holds a Masters in Public Health with a concentration in Food Systems and Obesity from Johns Hopkins University and was also a Bloomberg Fellow. Currently, she is a Senior Professional Research Assistant at the Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health within the University of Colorado School of Public Health. Her work focuses on helping the VA create suicide prevention and mental health wellness tools for rural Native American Veterans. Her main research

interests are assessing the Ethical, Legal, Cultural, Clinical, and Social implications (ELCCSI) and concerns related to genomics research conducted with Indigenous communities. Currently, she leads discussions on the creation of a Navajo genetics research policy, as the nation has a current ban on genomics research. Her ultimate goal is to increase health equity for Indigenous people within the genomics field.



Dr. Kelly Berry

Dr. Kelly Berry is an enrolled citizen of the Apache Tribe of Oklahoma with affiliations to the Kiowa and Choctaw Nations. He is a Mellon Impact Postdoctoral Fellow/Lecture at the University of Oklahoma in the Department of Native American Studies. Prior to his academic appointment at OU, he served as the Indigenous Initiatives Research Associate, instructor, and curriculum advisory team member for the Indigenous Education Leadership Certificate Graduate Program at Kansas State University. Dr. Berry has served as faculty at Upper Iowa University, Bacone College, Cameron University, and Comanche Nation College and is a certified 5-12 social studies teacher in Oklahoma and Kansas. He is a past fellow of Harvard University's Management Development Program and current fellow in the University of

Arizona Native Nations Institute Tribal Professional Governance Program. He is a University Council for Educational Administration Barbara L. Jackson Scholar and currently sits on the American Educational Research Association Indigenous Peoples of the Americas Special Interest Committee. Dr. Berry holds a Bachelor of Science in sociology from OU, a Master of Public Health from the OU Health Sciences Center, and holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from Kansas State University.



Vanessa Bowen

Vanessa Bowen (they/them) is a Diné (Navajo) product designer committed to creating equitable experiences. As principal of Bowen Creative LLC, they fuse Indigenous wisdom with innovative design to develop impactful solutions. Bowen is passionate about amplifying Indigenous voices and driving social change through their work. Beyond design, Bowen is a dedicated athlete and advocate. As a Küat Racks and Chamois Butt'r ambassador, they inspire Indigenous communities to embrace cycling through the *Get Native Kids on Bikes* initiative. Competing in races like Rez Gravel, Tour of the Gila, Westfjords Way Challenge, SBTGRVL and AIDS/LifeCycle, Bowen is a visible force for Indigenous representation in cycling.



Martha Brito

Martha “Bajacu” Brito is an enrolled tribal member of the Taino Guainia Tribe. She is a liaison for the United Confederation of Taino People (UCTP). She had been fulfilling that role for the past 5 years. Martha earned her master’s degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Capella University in 2010. Martha has extensive experience working with Native populations. She worked for the Oneida Nation of WI as a psychotherapist for 9 years. Providing mental health counseling to youth, adults, couples, and teens. Martha has been trained in historical trauma and somatic archeology approaches specific to Native American. In her work with the Native community, she educated medical providers in suicide prevention in Indian country.

Martha was raised in the Taino ways since young age by her grandmother. Who was a “curandera”. She gained knowledge of medicinal plants, herbs and

mental health healing which influence her practice in psychotherapy.

She is bilingual in English and Spanish. Her ability to speak Spanish led Martha to be invited to be a monthly radio guest speaker. Educating the Latino community about issues related to mental health. The show was done fully in Spanish to reach members of the Latino community of limited English language.



Hope Craig

Hope Craig, a proud Mvskoke of the Muscogee Nation of Oklahoma, is a dedicated professional and community leader. She is part of the Contracts Administration team at the University of Southern California. Hope is married with two adult children: her husband is the Director of IT Security at UCLA Anderson School of Management, her daughter is an attorney specializing in Federal Indian Law, and her son is an artist specializing in character and content creation for gaming and web development. Currently, Hope serves as the Board Chairwoman of the United American Indian Involvement. With over 15 years of experience, she has worked extensively with Urban Indian Communities, Organizations, and Tribal Nations in policymaking, community-building, leadership, and tribal governance. A graduate of the University of Arizona with a Bachelor of Arts in Law, Hope will continue her

legal education at Sandra Day O’Connor Law School at Arizona State University in Fall 2024, focusing on Tribal Self-Governance. Her goal is to become a Tribal Judge to further her advocacy for Indian Country. Hope is committed to advocating for Natives living in urban centers and strengthening partnerships with Tribal Nations, Urban Indian Organizations, and Native Organizations.



Brooke Curleyhair

Brooke (Diné) is a Research Analyst for the American Indian Policy Institute. With experience in K-12 classrooms and a background in navigating educational policy, she advocates for equitable opportunities within diverse learning environments. Previously, Brooke served as a Program Coordinator for the Office of Indian Education at the Arizona Department of Education, where she advocated for Indigenous children, families, communities, and Tribal Nations of Arizona through capacity building, technical assistance, and strategic partnerships. With a desire to enhance educational opportunities, she's passionate about researching and analyzing academic policy to ensure success for Indigenous students through graduation and into careers. Influencing her desire to advocate for equitable opportunities for all learners, Brooke brings a comprehensive understanding of local, state, and federal

education policy which fuels her passion to navigate intricate educational landscapes. Brooke received her Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education with an emphasis in English Literature from Arizona State University, and a Master of Education in Educational Policy which has equipped her with the tools to dissect structural barriers and supports within postsecondary education.



Deedra Dallas

Deedra Dallas, an enrolled member of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) with ties to the Hopi Tribe, has dedicated her career to advocating for cultural sovereignty, ethical representation, and improved access to information and communication technology. Growing up on the rural Hopi Reservation in Arizona, Deedra witnessed the significant digital divide that limits access to critical information, such as public safety, legal rights, and educational opportunities. This inspired her to ensure that marginalized communities have equal access to information. With a Master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Arizona, Deedra excels as a Communications and Marketing Specialist for SRPMIC. Her expertise in information management ensures that accurate and timely information is accessible, fostering transparency in government communications. Deedra's

strong research and analytical skills drive effective, data-driven communication strategies that address public needs. Her commitment to cultural competency and inclusivity ensures that communication efforts are relevant and accessible to diverse communities. Beyond her professional role, Deedra actively supports community organizations through strategic planning and consultations. Deedra's work is not just a career—it's a passionate endeavor to bridge the information gap, protect cultural integrity, and advance equitable access to communication technologies for future generations.



Jermaine Delgado

"My name is Jermaine Delgado. I am the Chairman of the Oneida Enrollments Committee. I have served on this committee for two years. The committee is in charge of enrollments and the investment of our trust. The trust funds the disbursement of yearly stipends along with funding other programs such as education grants. As the current chair I oversee the department's interfacing with our government, organization, and members at large. I attended Harvard University this spring and received an Executive Certificate in Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities. I received my Bachelor's from the University of Minnesota in International Business. I grew up on the reservation and graduated from our tribal high school in 2005."



Valerisa Gaddy

Valerisa Gaddy, PhD, is originally from the Navajo Nation and of the Navajo (Diné) people. Gaddy is a dedicated advocate for Tribal water resources and climate advocacy in Arizona. She holds a Ph.D. and M.S. in Environmental Microbiology from the University of Arizona and received her B.S. in microbiology from New Mexico State University. Currently, Gaddy, is the community conservation director at Watershed Management Group (WMG) where she is committed to advancing environmental justice in historically underserved communities through the WMG mission. Gaddy's professional journey includes over a decade of research at the University of Arizona. Her research and extension interests focus on developing and validating methods to assess water quality and communicating environmental issues through various resources. Gaddy leads the program *Irrigation Resources Reaching*

Indigenous Growers and Tribal Entities (IRRIGaTE), which was recognized as a winner at the 2022 MIT Solve Finals, aimed at providing resources to Tribal farmers. Additionally, Gaddy is a senior fellow of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health through their Agent of Change in Environmental Justice program. Outside of her professional endeavors, Gaddy enjoys spending quality time with her family, hiking, bouldering, and playing with Legos with her son and husband.



Troy Littledeer

Troy is a Cherokee Nation citizen and a former long-time employee of the Cherokee Nation. His most recent stints with the tribe were as a PR Coordinator for Cherokee Nation Communications and a Multimedia Specialist for the Cherokee Phoenix. He has worked as the Director of Public Relations and Media for the City of Stilwell. Now he's currently the Media Director for the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. Troy is also in his last year of service of his first term on the Dahlenegah School Board of Education. Troy has been a contributor to various news publications. He's also worked as a freelance sports photographer that's covered the NBA, the WNBA, NCAA and high school sports for over two decades. He's a member of the Indigenous Journalists Association. Troy is an Oklahoma Press Association award winner as well. Troy was a candidate for district 8 of the Council of the

Cherokee Nation in 2023 and still advocates for the services and rights of Keetoowah/Cherokee people in his community. He and his wife, Novena, have two boys, Tobias and Sequoyah. They still live on his family allotment in the Candy Mink Springs community south of Stilwell, Oklahoma.



Chamisa Radford

Chamisa Radford, a member of the Spokane Tribe of Indians and descendant of the Laguna and Kewa Pueblos, holds a Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning. With a distinguished career spanning Tribal Government and private enterprise, Chamisa now focuses on developing community leadership skills and embracing her cultural roots. She is dedicated to preparing for her ancestral role as a family matriarch, blending her professional expertise with a deep commitment to her heritage and community.



Jayden Robles

Jay is Šmuwič (Barbareño) Chumash and a descendant of the Cahuilla and Ohlone peoples of California. On their father’s side they are California Native and Okinawan, and on their mother’s side they’re of scottish, danish, and english descent. Jay is a storyteller, multi-media artist, filmmaker, public health professional, and community organizer, known for incorporating Indigenous futurist thought and generating healing restorative justice within Two-Spirit, Trans, and Queer BIPOC and Native communities. He is currently living and working on Duwamish, Muckleshoot, and Snoqualmie lands. Jay received his Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Western Washington University, where they studied settler and diasporic societies, art, and religion through media (film, art, social etc), merging intersectional frameworks of critical Indigenous, race, disability, and queer studies. They embody multiplicities and their art and

community work transcend the contemporary colonial form to encourage us all to remember something collectively familiar, our Indigenous ways of knowing, being. Fueled by Two-Spirit grounded normativity and honoring the gifts from our ancestors, Jay’s goal is to tell the stories of Two-Spirit lifeways and contribute to the improved holistic health and wellbeing of our peoples.



Czarina Salido

Czarina Salido is an advocate for Indigenous STEM education, dedicated to breaking barriers and fostering empowerment. Born in Nogales and raised in Tucson, Arizona, her journey reflects resilience, determination, and a commitment to inclusivity in STEM. Czarina holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with a focus on Physics from the University of Arizona. She served as President of the Philosophy Club and has participated in NASA Social events and prestigious conferences, showcasing her enthusiasm for academic exploration. Her Mestiza identity connects her to her Purépecha and Yoeme Indigenous and Mexican heritage, inspired by her grandparents, Felix and Dolores Avalos. She founded Taking Up Space, a non-profit that empowers Indigenous girls by integrating Indigenous stories with STEM education. As an Indigenous LatinX female, Czarina has overcome numerous obstacles,

shaping her into an "unconscious rebel." As director of Taking Up Space, she envisions participants achieving great things for their communities. Additionally, Czarina is a co-author of the upcoming children’s book, *First Flight*, with astronaut Capt. Robert “Hoot” Gibson, illustrated by space artist Michelle Rouch.



Nate Sayas-Porter

Nate (White Earth Ojibwe, Tarahumara, Chiricahua Apache, Aztec) is a Tribal community organizer and advocate for Indigenous rights and equity. Born and raised in the woodlands of beautiful Wisconsin, and currently residing on the Navajo Nation in New Mexico, his love for his people and culture is the driving force behind his work. As a strong believer in the strength and potential of Native people, he has committed to supporting them through the avenues of social activism, environmental justice, political organizing, and community outreach. Through his efforts, Nate hopes to contribute in a way that benefits odinawemaaganidag - all his relations.



Delanie Seals

Delanie Seals is from Oklahoma and is a proud member of the Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Sac and Fox Nations. She received her Bachelor’s in Legal Studies and Master’s in Water Resource Policy Management from East Central University. Her career in advocacy blossomed in high school where she successfully changed her school’s dress code policy. Some of her proudest accomplishments include writing an undergraduate thesis over *McGirt v. Oklahoma*; joining the City of Ada Multiculturalism Committee; writing a Juneteenth proclamation for her city council; organizing discussions over criminal justice reform in Oklahoma; being chosen for the Udall Congressional Internship Program, ASU Pathway to Law, Harvard Future Leaders in Law Program, and the Honor the Earth Science Warriors Fellowship. Delanie has

an extensive professional career in many political and legal organizations. She has interned for Oklahoma Representative Mauree Turner, USAID, the Chickasaw Nation District Court, the Chickasaw Nation Office of Natural Resources, Oklahoma Indian Legal Services, the Udall National Center, and for U.S. Representative Melanie Stansbury. She is currently an adjunct professor at ECU, but plans to go to law school soon. In her small amount of free time, she likes to study languages, read books, and make beaded jewelry.



Joshua Shumak

Joshua Shumak is the State of South Carolina's Native American Affairs Coordinator, where he plays a pivotal role in advancing the interests of Native American communities across the state. As an elected member of his tribe’s Executive Council, Joshua is deeply committed to enhancing the well-being and recognition of the Wassamasaw Tribe and other recognized tribes of South Carolina. Joshua holds an MBA from the University of South Carolina, equipping him with the expertise to navigate the complexities of Native American affairs with both strategic insight and cultural sensitivity. In addition to his administrative and advocacy work, Joshua is a celebrated artist whose achievements are complemented by his active involvement in cultural programming, contributing to the promotion and preservation of Native American heritage. Through his dedicated efforts, Joshua continues to foster

collaboration and development among the state’s Native American communities, working tirelessly to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met.



Leroy Silva

Leroy “Buster” Silva is a community mover and shaker from the Pueblo of Laguna (NM). He is the Executive Director at the Laguna Community Foundation, whose mission is to generate resources and charitable support for initiatives that strengthen the Pueblo of Laguna. He is also the founder of the social-enterprise: Family+Indigenize+Thrive “an intergenerational movement to revitalize the spirit of wellness through active community connections and partnership building.” A committed leader, Buster partners with local and national leaders to address community challenges in various spaces. He is equally dedicated to honoring the strength and genius of Kawaika’meh, both within and beyond the Pueblo of Laguna. With a strong foundation in community wellness, education, and non-profit work, Buster is a versatile and effective bridge-builder across diverse communities. When not immersed in

community work, Buster cherishes quality time with his family. He and his wife are passionate about instilling healthy lifestyles, strong cultural values, and positive relationships in the next generation.



Olivia Trujillo

Olivia Trujillo, a member of the Diné Nation, is Áshjiji (Salt People Clan), born for Tsin sikaadnii (Clamp Tree Clan). Her maternal grandpa is Kiyaa'aanii (The Towering House Clan), and her paternal grandpa is Bit'ahnii (Within His Cover Clan). She is a Senior Program Associate within the National Coordinating Center for Public Health Training Program. She supports key programmatic work in the National Network of Public Health Institutes Tribal Programming. Olivia hopes to utilize the power of knowledge, compassion, and dedication to uplift underserved communities, especially Indigenous populations. Her passion for improving the health and well-being of her people continues to drive her forward. She is committed to creating positive change and serving as a guiding light for future generations. Prior to joining NNPHI, Olivia was a Training Program Coordinator with the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous

health, playing an instrumental role in developing and implementing a pathway that facilitated Native American scholars' pursuit of higher education. She holds her Master's in Public Health degree with a concentration in Maternal & Child Health and Health Communications from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore, MD.



Cora Tso

Cora Tso is a Senior Research Fellow at Arizona State University (ASU)'s Kyl Center for Water Policy at Morrison Institute. In this role, Cora researches, analyzes and develops recommendations related to Tribal water policy, including analyzing Tribal nations' interests, needs and opportunities in regulatory and legislative processes and aims to collaborate with Tribal leaders, government agencies and other stakeholders in connection with the Arizona Water Innovation Initiative. Previously, Cora has worked with governmental, private and non-profit organizations focused on Indian law and environmental law and policy matters including the Navajo Nation Department of Justice and Western Resource Advocates. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and minor in American Indian Studies from Barrett, the Honors College at ASU and her Juris Doctorate degree from the

Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at ASU with a Certificate in Indian Law. Cora is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. She is of the Reed People clan and born for the Black Streaked Wood clan. Her maternal grandparents are of the Bitterwater clan and her paternal grandparents are of the Red House clan. She was born and raised on the Navajo reservation and is originally from Shonto, Arizona.



Monique Tsosie

Monique Tsosie is a Program Manager at Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc., responsible for the American Indian Research Center for Health (AIRCH) Program and supports the Arizona Indian Education initiatives, previous Climate Resilience Projects, and Ending the HIV epidemic program. Prior to joining ITCA, Ms. Tsosie was the Research Field Staff for Southwest Research and Information Center and University of New Mexico on the Navajo Birth Cohort Study/Environmental Influences on Child Health Outcome Project. Her background is community-based participatory research, tribal health advocacy, youth mental health first aid training, motivational interviewing, and administering mental behavioral health measurement tools. She serves as a member of the AIRCH Community Action Committee, a Community Advisory Board member for Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health Asdzaan

Be'eena' Female Pathways Program, and a Board Associate on Population Health and Public Health Practice at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Monique is Bijn bitoodnii, Deer Spring People, born for the Ta'neeszahnii, Tangle People. She is the maternal grandchild of the Tsi'naajinii, Black Streak Wood People, and the parental granddaughter of the Tótsohnii, Big Water People. She is originally from the Navajo Nation and grew up in Tuba City, Arizona.



Raphael Wahwassuck

“Bozho, I am very grateful to serve in the position of Tribal Council Member for the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. With an educational background in Organizational Management and Leadership, I have a strong commitment to continuous learning and building effective teams. I recently completed the prestigious Harvard Business School Tribal Leadership Executive Education Program. This experience provided an exposure to effective leadership strategies and decision-making. With extensive experience in Tribal judicial systems and Grant Management, I experienced valuable insights and a profound understanding of the intricate workings of our community. These experiences continue to contribute to further development of my management skills and strategic vision, which I apply to the advancement and prosperity of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation.”



Delores Williams

Dr. Delores L. Williams, an enrolled member of the Ma-Chis Lower Indian Creek Tribe of Alabama, is a distinguished academician and a leading expert in tribal and community relations. Serving as a Councilwoman, Dr. Williams has spearheaded groundbreaking initiatives in cultural preservation, opioid awareness, and the integration of artificial intelligence within tribal communities. Her leadership has been instrumental in shaping policy and advancing governance for Indigenous populations. Dr. Williams holds a Ph.D. in Business with a specialization in Cultural Tourism from George Washington University, complemented by advanced degrees and certifications from Harvard University, Wayland Baptist University, University of Montevallo, and Campbell University. Her academic accomplishments are matched by her visionary contributions, notably as one of only nine individuals selected to

design the logo for the U.S. Army Credentialing Assistance Program, a pivotal initiative enhancing educational opportunities for Service Members. An award-winning tribal grant writer, Dr. Williams is also a prolific author, contributing regularly to *Stars and Stripes*. Her work continues to inspire as she leads the development of the Creek Cultural Center in Enterprise, Alabama, a future hub for global and American Indian art, history, and culture, dedicated to driving innovation in agriculture and sustainability within her community.