

Indigenous Leadership Academy Spring 2025 Cohort

Phoenix, Ariz. — The [American Indian Policy Institute](#) (AIPI), in partnership with Tufts University, is thrilled to announce the Spring 2025 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-five of the sixty-two applicants have been accepted into the cohort. Their demographics represent 18 tribes from 11 states. All participants demonstrated a strong passion for working with and for Indigenous communities. Some topics the participants are passionate about are behavioral health, education, healthcare, MMIWP, policy, and technology. Past cohorts have focused on themes of imposter syndrome, sovereignty, the Supreme Court, and Native Vote. For this cohort, the focus will be on education. 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.



Veronique Arguello

“Guw’aadzi,

My name is Vero, and I use she/they pronouns. I was born and raised in New Mexico. My grandmother is from the Pueblo of Acoma, and my late grandfather’s affiliations included Kewa Pueblo, Omaha, Winnebago, and Standing Rock Sioux. I graduated from the University of New Mexico in May 2020 with a BA in Environmental Planning and Design, concentrating in Community and Regional Planning. In May 2023, I earned an MS in Urban Planning, with concentrations in Environmental Planning and Heritage Conservation, from the University of Arizona. My upbringing and cultural roots in the Southwest taught me the importance of, and reciprocity with, the land and its resources. Through academia and Indigenous programming, I have traveled and collaborated with peers and tribal energy experts to conduct

interdisciplinary research on Indigenous food, energy, and water systems. I also authored a report titled *Tribal Renewable Energy Development: Strategic and Consensus-Based Planning* as an intern with Sandia National Laboratories’ Tribal Energy Program. In my professional outreach role, I have had the unique opportunity to connect with Tribes across the nation and support access to renewable energy sources. I am passionate about advancing Tribal Nations and their environmental goals through my outreach work and leadership.”



Jessica Austin

Jessica Austin is an enrolled member of the Navajo (Dine) tribe of Arizona. She is of the Zuni Edgewater clan, born for the Towering House clan. Her maternal grandfathers are of the Bitter Water clan, and her paternal grandfathers are of the Salt clan. She currently resides in Kayenta, Arizona with her 3 children and husband. She works as a third-grade teacher at Debbie Braff Elementary School, Kayenta Unified School District. She is the current team leader for her grade level and offers after-school tutoring to increase youth literacy skills. Jessica graduated from Arizona State University Summa cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in Elementary/Special Education. She also received her Masters degree from Northern Arizona University in ESL and Bilingual Education with Distinction. She is focused on increasing the overall literacy skills of the youth in her community by providing targeted support during and

after school. She understands the importance of reading proficiency in third grade because studies have shown that proficiency determines the overall success of children’s lives.



Tiffani Begay

Tiffani Begay is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation from Dilkon, Arizona. She is Totsohnii (Big Water) and born for Ashihii (Salt Clan). Her maternal grandfather is Todichihii (Bitter Water), and her paternal grandfather is Honaghanii (One That Walks Around), reflecting her deeply rooted Navajo heritage. She earned her Master's in Public Health from the University of Arizona and cultivated a commitment to advancing health equity and community well-being. She is a Research Associate at the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health, dedicating her expertise to addressing critical public health challenges facing Indigenous communities. Her work focuses on behavioral health, striving to create strength-based, culturally grounded prevention programs that honor Indigenous traditions and resilience. With a passion for improving the health and well-being of her people, Tiffani actively

collaborates with communities to develop solutions that uplift and empower individuals and families. Through her efforts, she aims to bridge the gap between modern public health practices and ensure that her work is impactful and respectful of her culture. Tiffani is a passionate advocate for Indigenous health and hopes to promote health equity among all Indigenous communities.



Alison Black

Alison Black is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma (Cheyenne) and is a descendant of the Ponca Tribe, Osage Nation (Gray Horse district), and Prairie Band Potawatomi people. Alison is dedicated to advocating for Native youth and has served on several Indian Education boards. She was elected to the National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Board of Directors and served on the Oklahoma Council for Indian Education for almost a decade. She is a former Oklahoma public school teacher and administrator. Recently, she was appointed to PFLAG's inaugural Indigenous Parents and Families Advisory Council and is co-chair for NCAI's Native Language Task Force. Currently, Alison serves as the Youth Leadership and Training Coordinator for the National Congress of American Indians overseeing Youth Leadership and the Empowering Leaders Program. She has earned an

AS from Northern Oklahoma College, a BS in Applied Sociology, and an MS in Curriculum Studies from Oklahoma State University. In 2019 she was selected as 40 Under 40 by the National Center for American Enterprise Development (NCAIED). She resides in Red Rock, OK with 2 of her 4 children and her husband of twenty-five years. Alison is a proud grandmother to her granddaughter.



Kenneth Bowen

Dr. Kenneth L. Bowen, a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, is a dynamic educator, leader, and advocate dedicated to advancing excellence and equity, particularly within Native American communities. A first-generation college graduate, he boasts a strong academic foundation, having earned a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from East Carolina University, a Master of School Administration, and a Bachelor of Arts in History from UNC Pembroke. Dr. Bowen's commitment to lifelong learning is evident in his diverse professional certifications, including Cybersecurity (Richmond Community College), Leadership & Communication (Harvard University), Mental Health in the Workplace (Walden University), Online Learning (Duke University), and AP US History (UNC Charlotte). This breadth of knowledge equips him to address the multifaceted challenges facing the communities he

serves. Dr. Bowen is an Assistant Professor and Master of School Administration Program Coordinator at North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University, where he mentors and inspires future educational

leaders. He also contributes to advancing Indigenous representation in STEM as Secretary of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) Board of Directors. Renowned for his impactful publications, inspiring presentations, and commitment to culturally responsive leadership, Dr. Bowen embodies the power of education to transform lives and communities.



Vanessa Brierty

Vanessa Brierty is from the Pueblo of Laguna. She serves as the District Director for the first and only California Native American Legislator, James Ramos. Prior to her role as District Director she was the Consultant California Legislative Native American Caucus. Vanessa holds a Bachelor's Degree in Health Education and Health Promotion, along with certification as a Health Education Specialist. She obtained a Master's degree in Indigenous Education, demonstrating her commitment to advancing Indigenous knowledge systems. Vanessa's primary focus is to amplify Native American voices in the spaces of education, mental health, and policy to accurately represent Tribal communities and their impacts across the state. She remains active in the community as a board member for Tribal and non-Tribal educational institutions, non-profits, and county entities. In 2021, Vanessa delivered a TedX talk sharing the

importance of incorporating traditional cultural practices in one's overall health and wellness. Rooted in her cultural and traditional beliefs, Vanessa finds inspiration and strength in her roles as a daughter, sister, and auntie. These familial ties ground her in her efforts to effect positive change and ensure lasting improvements in Tribal communities. Vanessa's journey is her commitment to empower Indigenous voices and create a brighter, more equitable future for all.



Patrick Burt

Patrick De?ilélegi? (Red) Burt is an enrolled member of the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California. He is the Vice-Chairman of the Washoe Tribal Council, and he also serves as the Chairman of the Dresslerville Community Council. Importantly, Burt is an Executive Board Member of the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada and an Alternate Delegate to the National Congress of American Indians. Burt holds a Bachelor of Arts in Native American and Indigenous Studies from Fort Lewis College, a Master of Arts in American Indian Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles, and a Master of Arts in History from Arizona State University. More recently, Burt joined the PhD in Anthropology Program at the University of Nevada, Reno. Informed by the aforementioned education and leadership experiences, Burt's ethos is derived from his upbringing in Dresslerville, NV, one of four Washoe Tribal

Communities. Rooted in culture and tradition, Burt is the Chief Executive Officer of the Red Writers: Indigenous Anthropological Research Group, LLC, an Indigenous-owned and operated firm in pursuit of the empowerment of Native Nations through the reclamation, revitalization, and renewal of Indigenous homelands.



Jamelyn Casoose

Jamelyn Casoose lives in Eastern Arizona and is a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe. Currently, she is an executive assistant for the tribal government. In 2024, she was inducted into the Gila Valley Leadership, earning special Congressional recognition. Most recently, Jamelyn used her passion for developing the youth in line with leadership through the facilitation of a 6-week Youth Leadership Cohort to foster the journey of tribal youth to become an authentic leader. She also oversees the coordination of a monthly elder luncheon, annual scholarship, and community newsletter on behalf of the San Carlos Apache Tribe's Office of the Chairman. For more than 12 years, Jamelyn has worked in higher education at both Tribal and corporate levels as an advisor. Her previous roles have included areas of public relations, strategic communication, project management, and event coordination, which align with

her passion for creativity and innovation. Jamelyn earned her bachelor's degrees in English and Native American and Indigenous Studies from Fort Lewis College, holds a certificate in Project Management, and

recently attended the University of Oklahoma, College of Law, Master of Legal Studies, Indigenous Peoples Law.



Jonathan Clark

Jonathan Clark, a distinguished Project Management professional and Information Technology industry leader with over 20 years of experience working in Tribal communities is an enrolled member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe. As the Project Management Director at Gila River Health Care, he spearheads transformative initiatives that enhance healthcare delivery for Tribal communities. Jonathan’s academic credentials include a BS degree in Network Communication Management and an Executive MBA from Arizona State University, complemented by advanced certifications from Cornell University and the Project Management Institute. Raised on the San Carlos Apache Reservation, Jonathan’s Apache culture instilled a lifelong commitment to service. Dedicated to giving back, he volunteers with nonprofits to uplift underserved communities through education, technology, and leadership

programs. He actively participates in community events and fosters inclusive opportunities that empower individuals and create lasting change, including his service as a Peace Corps Community Development Volunteer in Ukraine. Beyond his professional achievements, Jonathan has served on the Board of Regents for San Carlos Apache College and on the board of directors for several national nonprofit organizations. He empowers Native communities through education, technology, and leadership development, advocating for Indigenous representation and creating pathways for future generations.



Mary Descheeny-Reyna

A Diné entrepreneur who is Tsé Nahabíłnii, Ma’ii Deeshgiizhíinii, Todích’íí’níi, Honágháahnii, founder of Indigenous Workplace Solutions, LLC. Mary’s combined work experience in Human Resources-Employee Relations, Counseling, Tribal Executive Administrations and recently worked on various social services projects while employed with the Navajo Nation. With this combined knowledge, skillset, and passion, she’s gained an in-depth awareness and understanding of an array of workplace and social services challenges affecting our Indigenous Nations. Most meaningful to Mary is honoring our Ancestors who endured, fought, survived, and prayed for our generations to accomplish what we can for our People. As such, she contributes her drive and meticulous nature of her business work product and overall work ethic to her reservation upbringing and being a Long Walk

descendant, a granddaughter to a Navajo Code Talker, a daughter to a Special Forces Green Beret, a little sister to an Army Ranger, and niece to Activists of the American Indian Movement. Mary’s professional goal is to implement her skills, passion, and diligent work ethic to empower and strengthen our Indigenous communities & tribal organizations. Her entrepreneurial goal is to continue to aid in resolving workplace challenges objectively with her HR services that aim to re-create trustworthy, respectful work environments.



Cherylee Francis

Cherylee Francis, a tribal citizen of the Navajo Nation, is an award-winning filmmaker and entrepreneur. She owns CFproductions LLC, a company that collaborates with midsize to corporate businesses and organizations to create meaningful and original video content that uplifts Native American voices through a Native lens. In 2018, CFproductions LLC was named American Indian Business of the Year (Class 1) by the American Indian Chamber of Commerce of Arizona. With over 23 years of video/audio production experience, Cherylee is a seasoned project manager, producer, director, cinematographer, and editor. Her work has earned recognition from various Film Festivals, Best Shorts Competition, and the Communicator Awards. She is dedicated to advancing Native American filmmaking and empowering underrepresented voices in the media. An alumna of the University of Arizona and East-West Center’s Women’s Leadership Seminar, Cherylee co-founded

the Native Women Entrepreneurs of Arizona. She serves on Flagstaff's Indigenous Commission, is a board member of IndigeHub, and is a former board member of the Flagstaff Leadership Program. A passionate mentor and volunteer, Cherylee supports the Buddy Whitethorne Foundation, American Indigenous Business Leaders, and Operation Christmas Child. She is also a client of the National Center for American Indian Economic Development.



Aaron Golding

Originally from outside Detroit, Aaron Golding, a member of the Seneca Nation, Beaver Clan, has called Chicago home for over twenty years. Aaron currently serves as the Senior Program Administrator for the Gikendan Lab at Northwestern University and is also a co-chair for the Education Committee of the Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative. In these roles, Aaron pushes to ensure Native Americans have equitable education opportunities throughout their life course. Aaron views this work as an important step in the collective efforts to dismantle colonial systems designed to erase and assimilate Native communities. In addition, Aaron is a writer who centers the stories of people experiencing the tension of reconnecting with their culture and community, which mirrors moments from his own life. He believes storytelling has the power to support lasting change for Native communities and

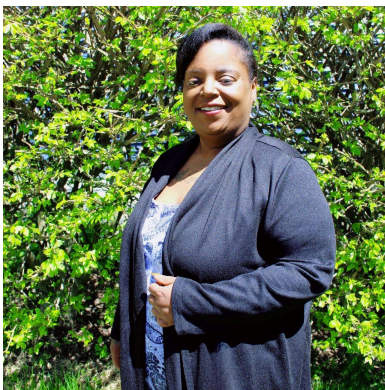
encourages others to share their unique perspectives to help shape the collective narrative available for future generations to learn from.



Jasmine Gurneau

Jasmine Gurneau (Oneida/Menominee) serves as the Director of Native American and Indigenous Affairs in the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion at Northwestern University. Jasmine leads the development and implementation of university-wide initiatives related to the inclusion of Native American and Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Her role includes facilitating stakeholder engagement, serving as a thought leader on campus, and building and sustaining partnerships with Native Nations, institutions, and communities. From Chicago, Illinois, Jasmine earned a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from DePaul University and a Master of Arts in Learning Sciences from Northwestern University. She currently serves as the Board President for

the Chicago American Indian Community Collaborative. She previously served two terms as a Community Representative of the Citywide American Indian Education Council for Chicago Public Schools and was a 2015 Fellow with the Cultivate: Women of Color Leadership program.



Johanna Hampton Dance

Johanna Hampton Dance was born in 1977 in Boston, MA. Johanna is the great, great-granddaughter of Octavia and George Walley. Johanna was raised in Worcester, MA. Throughout her life, Johanna has faced many trials and tribulations, which shaped her to become the pillar and community leader that the people in the city have grown to adore. Johanna has won awards for her work in the community, by way of the community Christmas Party called the Dear Santa Extravaganza that she has hosted for the past 7 years, as well as a NULA award for social justice and advocacy work that she has done over the years. Johanna has also run for public office in the city of Worcester, once for a District 2 seat, and once for an At Large Council seat. Although Johanna did not win, she has made a name for herself in the Worcester political scene among City Officials as well as State Officials. Johanna also sits on the

Affordable Housing Board of Trustees for the city of Worcester, in the effort to bring more affordable housing to the city. Johanna would like to be more of an advocate and voice for the Nipmuc community.



Ed Miles Harvey

Ed Miles Harvey earned a Bachelor's degree in Geographical Information Sciences from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque in 2018, supported by a rodeo scholarship. After graduation, Harvey joined the Navajo Nation Department of Agriculture as a Program and Project Specialist, where he developed and managed twelve critical agricultural programs funded by the Navajo Nation Drought Insurance initiative, directly benefiting the Navajo community. In 2023, Harvey served as the Fair Manager for the 75th Navajo Nation Fair, overseeing all aspects of the largest fair on the Navajo Nation. Recognizing challenges in agriculture and conservation, Harvey founded Plan Conservation, LLC, to assist farmers and ranchers with conservation plans and navigating complex BIA and Navajo Nation agricultural permitting processes.

Harvey also established "The Cottonwood Apple Tree," an orchard comprised of 300 fruit trees that supports the community by providing baby food, jams, jellies, and whole fruits to the Cottonwood Day School, Cottonwood Senior Center, and the Navajo Nation Diné Education "Growing in Beauty" Program, distributing locally grown foods across the Navajo Nation. Currently, Harvey is partnering with the USDA Southwest Regional Foods Program to support farmers and ranchers with funding opportunities. His work is focused on advancing sustainable agriculture and fostering Tribal sovereignty.



Kenneth House Jr.

TryCycle's cofounder, Ken House, is a member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. He earned an undergraduate degree from Georgetown University and completed a master's program in organizational leadership at The Graduate Institute. Ken has a long background in communications, governance, social services, and entrepreneurship. His life's work includes connecting people to opportunity and creating social mobility through social capital.



Aaron Lapointe

An enrolled member of the Winnebago Tribe, Aaron LaPointe is the CEO of Ho-Chunk Capital, a sub-division of Ho-Chunk Inc, where he oversees all operations for Ho-Chunk Construction, Ho-Chunk Capital, HCI Management Services, Ho-Chunk Trading Group, Pony Express, and Ho-Chunk Farms. With a focus on expanding the opportunities within these divisions, Aaron also shares his expertise in the agriculture industry with tribal programs and businesses. Holding a B.S. in Mechanized Systems Management from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, which he obtained in May 2016, Aaron sits on many boards and committees including the Nebraska State FSA Committee and Winnebago Tribal Food Sovereignty Committee. Furthermore, he earned a Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities Certification from Harvard

University in May 2022. He was a member of the 2022 Class of UNL Distinguished Alumni from the Chancellor's Commission on the status of people of color. He was also recognized by the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development by being awarded the "Native American 40 Under 40 Award".



Saxon Metzger

Saxon Metzger, MBA, is the Founder and President of Eighth Generation Consulting, LLC, and Polaris Ecosystems. An Osage Nation citizen, Saxon is a leader in sustainability, renewable energy, and circular economy practices, specializing in community engagement, workforce development, and decommissioning renewable energy assets, working to empower Indigenous and disadvantaged communities through education, entrepreneurship, and strategic partnerships. Saxon's career includes serving as a mentor, educator, and public speaker. He teaches graduate courses in sustainable business and economics at Wilmington University and has collaborated with organizations like MIT Solve and GRID Alternatives. Recognized as a 2024 MIT Solver and a GRID Alternatives Tribal Energy Innovator Fellow, Saxon has pioneered initiatives to integrate Environmental Justice and Energy Justice principles into

clean energy deployment. With expertise in grant writing, consulting, and municipal sustainability planning, Saxon bridges technical knowledge and community impact. He has developed accredited seminars with EUCI on solar PV decommissioning and recycling. Saxon brings a commitment to equity-driven leadership and a vision for sustainable, inclusive economic development. He looks forward to contributing to the ILA's mission of cultivating Indigenous leadership.



Crystal Miller

Crystal Miller is an enrolled citizen of the Walker River Paiute Tribe and a PhD © at the University of Arizona, specializing in federal Indian law and policy, Tribal constitution reform, and Indigenous governance. She holds an A.A. in American Indian Studies, a B.A. in Social Work with an emphasis on rural and Indigenous communities, as well as a M.S. in American Indian Studies (Indigenous Rights and Social Justice), where her groundbreaking research addressed sovereignty infringements on her Tribal Nation. Crystal is the CEO of Sovereignty First, an Indigenous-Women led Native consulting firm, and serves as the Deputy Senior Advisor of Policy, Tax, and Federal Government Relations for the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy. Crystal's research focuses on Tribal constitutions and the ways in which federal Indian law, policy, and Supreme Court decisions have steadily chipped away at Tribal sovereignty.

Through her work, she collaborates with Tribes to strengthen sovereignty by reforming constitutions and governing documents. Prioritizing the alignment of Indigenous values and ensuring they serve as tools of self-determination. Her advocacy and policy roles drive practical and actionable research, while her academic insights strengthen her ability to implement effective strategies for Tribes.



Cheyenne Robinson

Cheyenne, an enrolled member of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska, currently serves as the Secretary of the Omaha Tribe. A descendant of the InKe'Sabe (Black Shoulder Buffalo) Clan, Cheyenne is dedicated to advancing the interests of her tribe through effective governance and advocacy. Cheyenne holds a Master of Legal Studies – Indigenous People's Law degree from the University of Oklahoma and a Master of Business Administration degree from Bellevue University. Her expertise spans tribal administration, sovereignty enforcement, and community development. She has a particular interest in youth and economic growth, working to create opportunities and strengthen the well-being of her people. Since beginning her professional career in 2017 after graduating from Haskell Indian Nations University, Cheyenne has held diverse leadership positions within her tribal government and on various boards and

commissions. She also volunteers as a Youth Council Advisor for the Mika'e NiaShinga Youth Council of the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska. Cheyenne lives on the Omaha Indian Reservation in Walthill, Nebraska, where she balances her professional responsibilities with her newest role as a mother. Her leadership and dedication make her a strong advocate for the Omaha people and Indian Country.



Jaycee Salling

Jaycee Salling is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She serves as the Program Specialist at NAFOA, the Native American Finance Officers Association. At NAFOA, Jaycee manages the educational and professional development programs. Jaycee holds a BBA in Hospitality Management and an MBA in Management and Native American Leadership from Southeastern Oklahoma State University.



Lesah Sesma

Lesah Sesma holds a Bachelor's degree in Recreation and Tourism Management and is a proud member of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. Known for her resilience, Lesah has broken barriers as the first female tribal member to hold an executive role and is currently the most senior tribal female in her organization, serving as General Manager. Lesah is a true role model, opening doors and showing emerging tribal leaders that they can reach for the stars. Her resilience and determination have enabled her to forge a path to inspire so many more to follow. Lesah is a true pillar in the Tucson community, actively serving on several boards dedicated to building connections and better serving the tribe. Her commitment to lifelong learning is evident through her completion of various prestigious programs, including the University of Nevada's Executive Development Program in Strategic Leadership in the Gaming Industry, and the

Tribal Casino Operations Management Degree from San Diego State University. Lesah's journey is far from over. With her unwavering determination and passion for making a difference, she continues to inspire and lead by example. Her story is a powerful reminder that resilience, hard work, and a supportive community can help us achieve our greatest aspirations.



Bronwyn Smith

Bronwyn Smith grew up in Lechee, a small community on the Navajo reservation near Page, Arizona. Her clans are Tl'izi lani (Manygoats clan), born for Tábaqhá (Water's Edge clan), her maternal grandfather is Biih Bitoodnii (Deer Spring clan), and her paternal grandfather is Kiyaa'áanii (Towering House clan). Bronwyn earned her Doctor of Pharmacy degree at Roseman University of Health Sciences in 2017 and went on to complete a PGY-1 pharmacy residency with Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation (TCRHCC) in Tuba City, Arizona. Prior to receiving her Doctor of Pharmacy degree, she earned her Bachelor of Science in Engineering degree in Biomedical Engineering at Arizona State University in 2013. Bronwyn currently works as a board-certified clinical pharmacist at TCRHCC, specializing in diabetes and anticoagulation care in pharmacy-based clinics. Witnessing

healthcare inequities on the reservation, Bronwyn was inspired to pursue a career dedicated to improving access and equity. Guided by the philosophy of "for us, with us, is us," she views leadership as a collaborative effort rooted in cultural strength, collective responsibility, and shared purpose. She is committed to working alongside her community to create sustainable solutions that honor Indigenous sovereignty and promote health equity.



Trista Vaughn

Trista Vaughn is a proud member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma and a descendant of the Hualapai and Chickasaw Nations. With a passion for empowering Indigenous communities and amplifying their voices, Trista has built a career at the intersection of storytelling, digital engagement, and cultural advocacy. She currently serves as the Digital Engagement Manager at AISES, where she develops and executes campaigns to inspire and connect Indigenous STEM professionals and students. Additionally, she is the Community Engagement and Cultural Coordinator and a journalist for Verified News Network, crafting impactful narratives that foster allyship and elevate Native issues. Trista earned a Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies with an emphasis in Public Relations and a Master of Arts in Communication from Northeastern State University. She is

also a proud member of the Indigenous Journalists Association and a former Miss Keetoowah 2012-2013. Beyond her professional achievements, Trista is dedicated to raising her daughter, Ziya, while continuing to serve as an advocate for Indigenous representation, cultural preservation, and community growth.



Catherine Zingg

Catherine Zingg is an enrolled citizen of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin. She serves as the Tribal Policy Director for GRID Alternatives under their National Tribal Program which provides no-cost solar installations for Tribal communities. She has been serving as a tribal liaison, policy analyst, and researcher for the past 5 years. Her current advocacy focus is on clean energy regulatory spaces that she has been practicing in the last four years. She participated in the 2023 Arizona Public Service Company general rate case that advocated for funding to Tribal communities impacted by the closure of the Navajo Generating Station. After witnessing the immense opportunity in regulatory spaces for Tribal voices, she utilized her analytical skills to participate in the first rulemaking at the Colorado Public Utility Commission to propose definitions around significant sites and long-term resource planning

with the two state-based Tribes. Catherine envisions a future where Tribes robustly participate at state-level PUCs with more Native state commissioners in office. One of Catherine's goals is to become a lawyer specializing in Indian law, energy regulation and compliance to further her advocacy for Indian Country. As a committed writer, essayist, and policy advocate, Catherine believes that through the tool of writing, Indigenous freedom and sovereignty will be actualized. She is currently based in Brooklyn, New York.