

# BIONEERS



## INDIGENITY PROGRAM

### 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

#### **BRINGING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES TO GLOBAL CONVERSATIONS**

Indigeneity is a Native-led Program within Bioneers that promotes Indigenous approaches to solve the Earth's most pressing environmental and social crises. We produce the Indigenous Forum within the Bioneers Conference, original media, educational curricula and catalytic initiatives to support the leadership and rights of First Peoples, while weaving networks, partnerships and alliances among Native and non-Native allies.

# INDIGENITY PROGRAM TEAM



**Co-Director, Cara Romero** (Chemehuevi) is a nonprofit leader, communicator, change-maker, and award-winning artist. She brings special expertise in working directly with tribes, and in producing cultural events and gatherings. Prior to joining Bioneers in 2011, Cara served as the first Executive Director of the Chemehuevi Cultural Center and was an elected member of the Chemehuevi Tribal Council from 2007-2010. She served as the Chair of the Chemehuevi Education Board and the Chemehuevi Early Education Policy Council. With degrees in Cultural Anthropology and Fine Art Photography, Cara has won numerous awards for her photography, including the Southwestern Association of Indian Art's Best of Classification award (twice), has published in National Geographic, and is widely collected by public and private institutions worldwide. Cara joined Bioneers in 2010.



**Co-Director, Alexis Bunten**, PhD (Unangan/Yup'ik), is a writer, media-maker, and curriculum developer. After receiving a BA in Art History, Alexis returned to Alaska, where she worked at the Sealaska Heritage Institute and the Alaska Native Heritage Center. Subsequently, Alexis earned a PhD in Cultural Anthropology. She has published widely about Indigenous and environmental issues in academic and mainstream media outlets. Alexis has won several awards from the National Science Foundation, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Bristol Bay Native Corporation, New England Book Award, and the Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Book of 2023, *Rise: A Feminist Book Project List Selection*, among others. She has been with Bioneers since 2016.



**Program Manager, Nazshonnii Brown-Almaweri** (Diné) is a farmer and educator from West Oakland. She has served as a STEM tutor, media educator, and youth program assistant for the Indian Education Program at the American Indian Child Resource Center. Nazshonnii is passionate about STEM education and advocates for exposure and opportunities for historically excluded people, supporting Black and Native youth in the Bay Area. As an educator, Nazshonnii has provided middle and high school youth with the space to learn about STEAM at the intersection of ancestral knowledge and their lived experiences, creating space for youth to thrive in disciplines like engineering.



**Special Project Coordinator, Britt Gondolfi**, JD (Houma Descent) is a Louisiana lawyer, children's book author, community organizer, and mother. Britt has worked with the Bioneers Indigeneity Program since 2017 as a facilitator for the Intercultural Conversation Program. She joined the Bioneers Rights of Nature initiative as an intern while in law school and subsequently as a Special Projects Coordinator to bring together Tribal organizers, youth, and allies to advocate for the Rights of Nature in Indian Country. Her first Children's book, "[Look Up! Fontaine the Pigeon Starts a Revolution](#)," is a hilarious social commentary on digital distraction and nature's fight to save us from ourselves.

# LETTER FROM THE INDIGENITY CO-DIRECTORS

Dear Friends of Indigeneity:

With your generous support, we celebrated another banner year for the Indigeneity Program elevating Indigenous voices and solutions, bringing youth and communities together and producing Indigenous-focused content accessible to all people through our original curriculum and media.

The Bioneers Conference feels like a family reunion, where we get to be with long-term friends and relatives and make new ones. 2025 witnessed the largest Indigenous contingent ever at Bioneers, which we attribute to tending our relationships with love and respect. Bioneers has truly become an annual tradition across many Native communities.

We hosted the 18th annual Indigenous Forum which was standing room only for the 3rd year in a row! Between Conference Keynotes and the Indigenous Forum, we were blown away listening to speakers share – from the historical undamming of the Klamath River, to the power of art for intergenerational healing, the revitalization of traditional burning practices, and much more...

We screened the Oscar-nominated documentary, "Sugarcane," introduced by Impact Producer, Jade Begay, a Bioneers Native Youth Leadership alumna, and who currently serves on the Bioneers Board of Directors.

Our Native Youth Programming provided 160 youth with scholarships to attend the Bioneers Conference. Year after year, the youth consistently tell us how inspired they are to directly interact with movement leaders, access cultural teachings, and organize with each other outside of day-to-day pressures.

We are honored to share two of many successes catalyzed through our Indigenous Rights of Nature initiative. We provided resources, guidance and support for draft resolutions for the Rights of the Long Man drafted by Eastern Band of Cherokee Youth, and the Rights of the Colorado River, led by the Colorado River Indian Tribe.

We can't wait to see you in 2026!

Sincerely,

*Cara Romero Alexis Bunten*

Cara Romero and Alexis Bunten  
Indigeneity Program Co-Directors

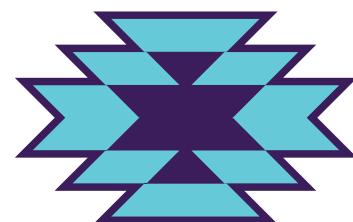
# INDIGENITY PROGRAM

## OVERVIEW

Since its inception, **Bioneers** has been fundamentally shaped and guided by Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, participants, and partners. **Indigeneity** is a Native-led Program within Bioneers that promotes Indigenous solutions to the Earth's most pressing environmental and social crises. The program also weaves networks and partnerships among Native and non-Native allies.

We contribute programming to the annual Bioneers Conference and produce the world-renowned Indigenous Forum, repurposing presentations into accessible media, including audio, video, and written content. Our Native Youth Leadership Program provides life-changing opportunities for youth by introducing them to new ideas, role models, and each other. And, our Indigenous Rights of Nature initiative supports Tribal citizens in leading movements to protect species and ecosystems through resources, educational opportunities and events.

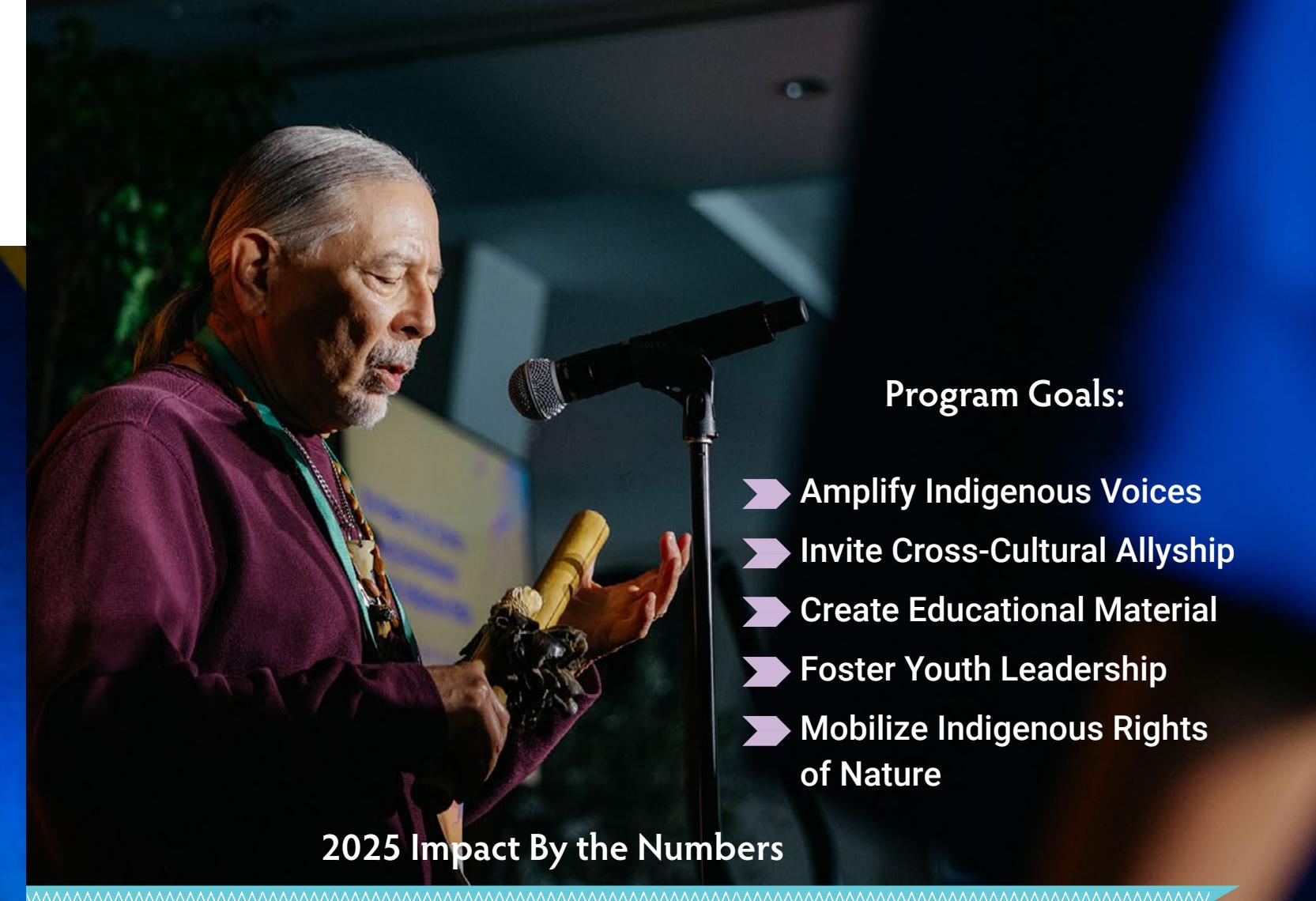
Increasingly, people recognize that "Indigenous issues" are challenges we collectively face, and that Indigenous pathways to community, spiritual, and ecological restoration can help solve our biggest global problems.



**Your funding makes it possible for us to carry out this critically important and unique work. We do not take corporate funding, and you – our Bioneers community – are vital to our ongoing success. Through your support, we can continue to amplify the leadership and voices of Indigenous Peoples to shape the future of Mother Earth for all humans and ecosystems interdependently.**



Amy Bowers Cordalis (Photo: Nikki Ritcher)



# BIONEERS CONFERENCE AND INDIGENOUS FORUM

Bioneers amplifies the voices of Indigenous leaders to connect people worldwide through shared wisdom, practices, movements, and solutions.



Left to right: Beverly Cook and Katsi Cook (Photo: Nikki Ritcher)

Opposite Page (clockwise from top left): Oren Lyons and José Barreiro (Photo: Boris Zharkov); Display by the Cultural Conservancy (Photo: Scott Roeder); Ali Meders-Knight and Elizabeth Page (Photo: Boris Zharkov); Indigenous Forum Audience (Photo: Boris Zharkov)

Indigenous perspectives are central to Bioneers' mission to restore people and planet. Indigenous leaders share knowledge, stories, and solutions throughout the Bioneers Conference, from the mainstage to afternoon panels, youth programming and the Indigenous Forum. You won't find such a diverse array of Indigenous presenters and presence in a welcoming, cross-cultural format other than at the Bioneers Conference.

The **Bioneers Conference** is today widely regarded as an annual tradition and gathering space to convene, learn, and spend time together. In 2025, this tradition continued as over 300 Indigenous participants representing over 164 distinct Tribal Nations joined us. Since moving the conference to Berkeley, Indigenous attendees have tripled. And, all conference goers, regardless of background, leave feeling inspired and equipped with knowledge to support Indigenous-led solutions.

## Indigeneity on the Bioneers Mainstage

### Opening Ceremony

Corrina Gould, (Lisjan Ohlone)

### Matrilineal World Making: Embracing for Impact

Katsi Cook (Wolf Clan Mohawk) and Beverly Cook (Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe)

### Spoken Word Presentation

Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek)

### The Water Remembers: Year Zero

Amy Bowers Cordalis (Yurok)

# INDIGENOUS FORUM



The Indigenous Forum is a Native-led space for sharing knowledge and frontline solutions with an intergenerational and multicultural audience. It is one of the most highly anticipated and attended spaces within the Bioneers Conference. The 2025 18th annual Indigenous Forum hosted 20 presenters from diverse Tribal backgrounds to a standing-room-only audience for the 3rd year in a row. Topics ranged from the Indigenous Roots of Democracy to the Rights of Fish and Aquatic Mammals, Art and Healing, Community-Building, and much more.



Erica Perez (Photo: Boris Zharkov) Coral Reef Alliance

## Panels

### How Indigenous Roots of American Democracy Can Regenerate the Practice of Self-Governance

José Barreiro (Hatuey/Taino) and Chief Oren Lyons (Haudenosaunee) and Baratunde Thurston

### Shifting the Tides of Justice: Advancing the Rights of Fish and Aquatic Mammals

Britt Gondofli (Houma Descent), Juliette Jackson, JD (Klamath), Raynell Morris (Lummi) and Erica Perez

### Art & Healing - A Conversation with Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek) and Cara Romero (Chemehuevi)

### Indigenous and Western Collaborations to Regenerate Land and Water

Aja Conrad (Karuk), Eriel Deranger (Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation), Ali Meders-Knight (Mechoopda), Elizabeth Paige (Cahuilla) and Jordan Reyes (Middletown Rancheria)

### Places and Spaces: Establishing Cultural Hubs for Native Communities

Ernie Albers (Yurok), Paloma Flores (Pit River) and Nazshonnii Brown-Almaweri (Diné)

### Worlds Within Us: Ancestral Wisdom, Courage and Healing

Loretta Afraid of Bear Cook (Oglala Lakota), Tekatsi:tsia'kwa Katsi Cook (Wolf Clan Mohawk) and Sarah James (Neets'aa Gwich'in)

# INDIGENITY FILM SHOWCASE



We launched the second Indigeneity Film showcase at the Bioneers Conference in 2025, screening the award-winning documentaries, Resident Orca and Sugarcane. Both focused on the tragic history of the forced removal of Indigenous people and relatives, introduced by the films' producers and closed with ceremony and song.



**Resident Orca** shares the unfolding story of a captive whale's fight for survival and freedom. After decades of failed attempts to bring her home, an unlikely partnership between Indigenous matriarchs, a billionaire philanthropist, killer whale experts, and an aquarium's new owner takes on the impossible task of freeing Lolita, captured 53 years ago as a baby, only to spend the rest of her life performing in the smallest killer whale tank in North America. When Lolita falls ill under troubling circumstances, her advocates are faced with a painful question: Is it too late to save her?



# CATALYTIC INITIATIVE

## ►►► INDIGENOUS RIGHTS OF NATURE



Amaya Balbuena (Photo: Eosten Tanimoto)

### Overview

Tribal Nations are leading one of the most significant legal paradigm shifts of our time: restoring the Indigenous worldview in which lands, waters, and natural beings have the inherent right to exist, flourish, and regenerate. IRoN's mission is to pollinate this movement across Indian Country by providing Indigenous youth and community activists with resources, strategic support, and spaces for intertribal collaboration.

Founded in 2016, our IRoN program has helped bring the values of kinship, reciprocity, and Indigenous guardianship into legal policies that honor the Rights of Nature.

### 2025 Rights of Nature By the Numbers

70 Indigenous community members received travel scholarships to attend the 2025 Bioneers Conference.

Over 100k distributed to Native youth-led groups since 2023.

Indigenizing the Law, a self-paced course, was made available on the Bioneers Learning platform.

7 Rights of Nature presentations given to youth groups across the country.

**Our Indigenous Rights of Nature Initiative (IRoN) is a Native-led program that supports Tribal Nations, particularly their youth, in advancing sovereign, culturally grounded legal frameworks that recognize ecosystems as rights-bearing relatives.**

### Native Youth Ambassador Program

Bioneers' Indigenous Rights of Nature Initiative supports youth-led movements to protect ecosystems and defend tribal sovereignty. We provide community-organizing grants and travel scholarships for our annual convening, educational resources, personnel support, and networking opportunities for youth working to "Indigenize the law."

This initiative was inspired by a group of Mashpee Wampanoag youth organizers, who passed the first-of-its-kind Rights of Herring emergency resolution. Bioneers played a pivotal role in their story, and we felt compelled to provide the same level of support to other Indigenous youth groups. As the climate crisis worsens, an increasing number of Indigenous youth feel a strong calling to take action. Our mission is to foster a revolution rooted in the heart of nature, and we recognize that Native youth are at the forefront of this movement.



Mashpee Wampanoag Native Environmental Ambassadors (Photo: Cheryll Toney Holley)

In partnership with Native-run organizations, the Native Youth Ambassador Program supported Indigenous youth leaders of the following Tribal Nations:

Mashpee Wampanoag (MA), Herring Pond Wampanoag (MA), Fort Yuma Quechan (CA), Chemehuevi (CA), Cahuilla (CA), Luiseño (CA), Native Hawaiian (HI), Lummi (WA), Wintu (CA), Pit River (CA), Nooksack (WA), Tulalip (WA), Skway (British Columbia, Canada), Eastern Band of Cherokee (NC), United Houma Nation (LA), Occaneechi-Saponi (NC), Winnebago Tribe (NB), Ho-Chunk (WI), Havasupai (AZ), Lenape (DE)

*"The youth are working really hard to figure out how to protect the herring, how to protect the river from the damage that's being done from things like nitrogen and chemical runoff, from the oil that's coming out of these boats, and the invasive species that the boats sometimes carry in. They rinse off, they leave behind these species in the pond. We're trying to address all of those pieces, and the big story is that we're all related. They're related to the herring, we're related to this water, this water has a spirit, and it is all as well.*

*The whole goal is to figure out how to stay connected to all those things, how we can all live sustainably. We look after those things, and the kids are not just learning that, they're figuring out how to do that as people. With the help of groups like Bioneers and other allies, their goal is to bring our way of life back.*

*We had this way of life that was symbiotic, that everybody could thrive. But we all need to work together so that we can continue to thrive. And if they die off, we die off, and we're seeing that. There's a big need to tend to these relatives in a good way."*

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Rennee Lopes, Mashpee Wampanoag Nation

# IMPACT STORIES



Junior NAIWA Daughters; Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (Photo: Kimberly Smith)

## Eastern Band of Cherokee Youth Lead the Rights of the Long Man Resolution

In 2024, a group of young women from the Eastern Band of Cherokee attended our Indigenize the Law course, where they were introduced to the Rights of Nature framework. Inspired by the course, they attended the 2025 Bioneers Conference through our Native Youth Ambassador Program where they shared a meal with youth from the Mashpee Wampanoag Nation, who drafted and passed a resolution for the Rights of Herring.

Over dinner, the Cherokee youth asked the Mashpee group how they had navigated Tribal politics, gathered their elders' stories, and rooted their environmental work in ancestral wisdom. That conversation lit a spark. When the Cherokee youth returned home to the mountains, they gathered their elders and began shaping a Rights of the Long Man resolution to honor and protect the streams and river systems that sustain their people.

**It passed**, becoming the second Rights of Nature resolution in the US written and led entirely by youth advocates. What began as an exchange between youth over dinner has now grown into a movement—one where young Indigenous women are writing law rooted in cultural responsibility, community care, and the living spirit of their homelands.

*"I stand here today to speak about the why, not the logistics, not the policy, but the heartbeat. The part of this resolution that lives in our stories, our memory, in our Nation. . . This is not a modern idea; this is not a trend. This is something we have carried inside us since time immemorial."*

*This is memory. This is identity. And this is Cherokee. Our Ancestors knew that the land and the water are not resources. They are ancient relatives.*

*They understood that when the river suffers, our people suffer. When the land is harmed, our nation is harmed. They understood that without the sacred balance that sustained them - without our land, who are we as Cherokee people?*

*When we forget the land, we forget ourselves. But we stand here today because we refuse to let our people forget. Our Ancestors fought for these places. They protected them. . . They stood beside these rivers and called them Longperson. They prayed for us before we existed.*

*When we speak today, we do not speak alone. We speak with the fire of every Ancestor who has walked before us. . . Because this resolution is not just policy. It is an act of remembering who we are as Cherokee people in a commitment to protect what our Ancestors entrusted to us.*

*To be Anikituwah means to speak for our nonhuman relatives, who cannot walk into this room and advocate for themselves. We do this work because our Ancestors did this work for us. They knew that protecting the land, they were protecting our shared identity. And we must honor that truth and the choices we make that will affect future generations."*



Jasmine Panther, NYA participant from the Eastern Band of Cherokee

## Colorado River Indian Tribe Passes Rights of the Colorado River

Our "Rights of Nature in Indian Country" guide has been widely distributed across Indian Country, with over 1,500 hard copies passed out at 10 Indigenous gatherings over the past two years. One of these guides reached an associate attorney from the Colorado River Indian Tribe's Attorney General's Office, who then shared it with the Tribe's Chairwoman. In response, the Tribe issued a call for community engagement and collaborated with their Attorney General's office and a water attorney to develop a first-of-its-kind "Rights of the Colorado River Resolution."

This resolution aims to rewrite the Tribe's water code, recognize the rights of the River and the Tribe's authority to advocate for and protect it. In addition to the resolution, the Tribe will establish a riparian restoration and a cultural access trust fund, financed by surcharges on all future water leases. This fund will be dedicated to honoring the rights of the river by funding the repair of riparian ecosystems, creating access points for the Tribe to conduct cultural practices along the river, and supporting educational opportunities for Indigenous youth regarding the historical and spiritual significance of the Colorado River.

# NATIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP



We know that youth are the most powerful advocates for change. Our Native Youth Leadership Program cultivates leadership among youth from diverse backgrounds through educational opportunities guiding them to address the dire challenges they face growing up today.

The [Native Youth Leadership Program](#) (NYLP) creates opportunities for Native youth to participate in, network at, and be empowered by attending the annual Bioneers Conference and year-round curated events. NYLP coordinates several initiatives and year-round experiences including attending the Bioneers Conference, special events, youth-led projects, and virtual talking circles.

We invite all NYLP participants to come together at the annual Bioneers Conference through need-based scholarships to cover registration, transportation and lodging. In addition to experiencing all that the broader Conference offers, we curate a special track of presentations, discussion and activities designed to nurture experiential learning, leadership and friendship.

*"My favorite part of Native Youth Leadership Track was Ms. Jessie's bear grass weaving and pine nut processing workshop. Our cultural arts give us, the younger generation, hope. It tells us there's still a chance to gain cultural knowledge and that we are very powerful."*



Bayou Youth Leadership, 12th Grade

*"Joining the program was the best decision I've ever made in my life; it changed my life completely. Most of the reason I'm in college now."*



Intercultural Conversations Alumus  
(United Houma Nation)

## 2025 Impact By the Numbers

**110**

Native Youth Leadership Attendees



**93**

San Francisco Bay Area Youth



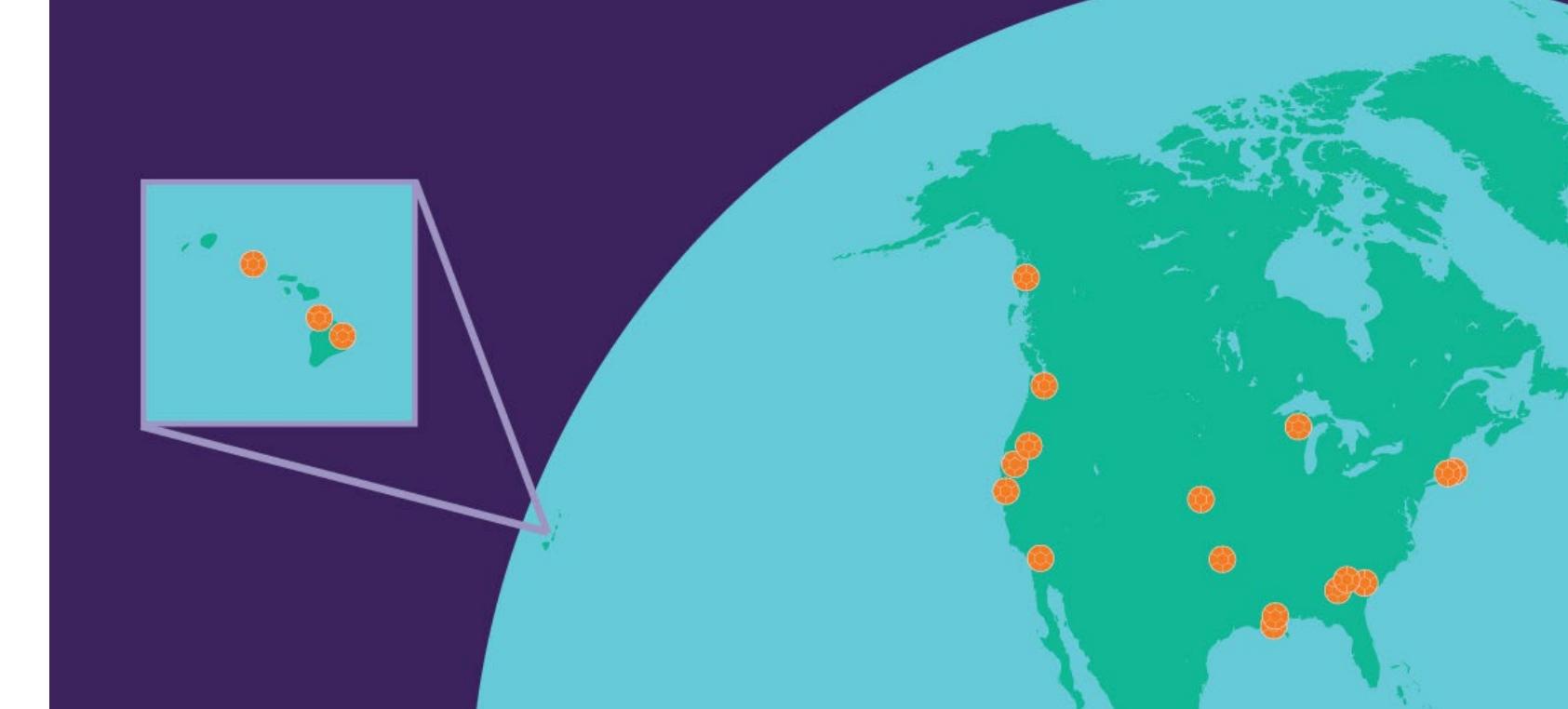
**67**

Native Youth Ambassadors



**4**

College Fellowship/Internships



## Highlighting Youth Leadership

Here's a sample of stories about youth who have led meaningful change in their communities, supported by mentorship, funding, partnerships, and gatherings through the Native Youth Leadership Program.

[Youth Lead the Way: Mashpee Gathering Sparks a Movement for the Rights of Nature](#)

[Youth from Hawaii and Louisiana Unite to Tackle Plastic Pollution](#)

[Young & Indigenous at Bioneers: Powerful Conversations from the 2025 Conference](#)

## Native Youth Leadership Programming

Orientation with Bioneers Young Leaders Program

East Bay Solidarity Tour with Acacia WoodsChan and Ethnic Ties

Nurturing the Tree/Hoop of Life with Dallas Chief Eagle (Rosebud Sioux) and Rebecca Chief Eagle (Oglala Lakota)

Na leo o Kohala: Voices of Kohala "Mo'olelo" Storytelling with Voices of Kohala and Kuliamai Aveiro-Kalaniopio (Kānaka Maoli)

Medicine: California Pine Nuts and Bear Grass Braiding with Jessie Rouse (Illmawi Band of the Pit River Nation/Wintu/Hupa)

Zine Making with Neetz (Chamorro) and Anna (Zapotec)





Indigenous rights activist, Jade Begay (Tesuque Pueblo and Diné), participated in Bioneers Native Youth Program in 2015, attending the annual conference and Indigenous Forum. There, she found a vital space for networking, mentorship, and empowerment. Years later in 2023, on an epic journey that took her all the way to the White House, she returned to Bioneers as a keynote speaker. She shared her insights on how far Indigenous leadership has come and what can be done to strengthen and embolden the young leadership that is integral for our survival on planet Earth. Today, she serves on the Board of Bioneers.

Jade's specific path is unique to her, but her larger story is an echo of the thousands of youth who have experienced the vision and power of the Bioneers community over the years.



Left to right: Bayou Youth Leadership Program (Photo: Kasha Clay); Youth participants (Photo: Arnaldo James); Intercultural Conversations participants (Photo: Jessie Rouse-Whipple)

## INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATIONS (IC)

**Intercultural Conversations (IC)** fosters youth leadership and facilitates cross-cultural exchange between Native and non-Native youth via Indigenous-centered discussions and original curricula developed by Indigenous people.

Celebrating 9 years of programming, Intercultural Conversations has exceeded its goal of serving 400 youth by 2026. In 2025, we partnered with 7 groups serving youth from across the nation.

*"The program has been the most important part of what I've done in high school. I think this cohort has been the most transformative and most impactful group that I've participated in."*



The New School, 12th Grade

*"From the speakers, I've learned that small actions will be impactful, and while we might feel that it's small, it's still an impact. So we need to work together and make a difference, no matter what party, no matter what beliefs, or race, or color, the color of our hair, or the color of our eyes. We are all one people, the human race, and we need to unite to fix the issues that we see in the world, and I want to encourage that."*



Bishop O'Dowd, 11th Grade



# BIONEERS MEDIA AND CURRICULUM



From left to right: Haley Rapada, Wykeklyaa CurleyBear and Santana Rabang (Photo: Roy Nicol)

The Indigeneity Program is an incomparable source for **Native-produced media** seldom found anywhere else. For over 36 years, we have built a vast archive of original content—Native voices speaking for, among and about our own communities.

This unique collection includes videos, podcasts, radio shows and articles, all distributed with the free, prior and informed consent of contributors. To produce our media, we leverage presentations and interviews shared at the Bioneers Conference, extending Indigenous perspectives far beyond the event itself.

This past year, we partnered with the **Children of the Setting Sun's** Young and Indigenous (YAI) Podcast. Together, we recorded 16 original podcast interviews with visionary culture-bearers and movement leaders, an unprecedented storytelling effort that blended Bioneers' platform with YAI's youth-led media vision.

## Media Published in 2025

**25**

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Posts

**6**

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Articles

**3**

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Podcasts

**2**

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Newsletters

**1**

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Radio Show

## Top 3 Articles in 2025

[Becoming Earth: Experimental Theology with Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)

[Claudia Peña and Erin Matariki Carr on Reconnecting with the Earth and Each Other](#)

[Oren Lyons - To Survive, We Must Transform Our Values](#)

## Curriculum



Bayou Youth Leadership Program participants (Photo: TrimTab Media)

To support the use of Bioneers' original content in the classroom, we make educational materials drawing from our original media. Our curriculum reaches thousands of people each year, replacing erasure and stereotypes with accurate portrayals of Indigenous Peoples, histories, cultures, and sciences.

These curricula are designed to reach learners of all ages and backgrounds. Our K-12 "bundles" are aligned to Common Core standards, and include teacher instructions, activities, assessments, and extensions. Resources for post-secondary education span our media collection, sharing first-hand knowledge on Indigenous issues and perspectives.

We are also dedicated to continuing to provide rich educational opportunities for lifelong learners via the Bioneers Learning online course platform. Prior classes offered include "Being a Good Relative: Allyship with Indigenous Peoples" and "Indigenizing the Law." We are currently developing a Youth Leadership Course and an Allyship Course Workbook on Bioneers Learning to accompany our upcoming 2026 allyship course.

If you are moved by what we accomplished in 2025 and want to see our groundbreaking initiatives flourish, we invite you to support our game-changing initiatives to the highest level you can. Together, we will amplify Indigenous solutions to restore, revitalize, and regenerate our planet for the ecosystems and people that depend on it.

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We also wish to thank all of the individuals who have donated their time, talents and financial resources to support the Bioneers Indigeneity Program. Your support makes all the difference.