Tribal
Outreach
Project

PREPARED FOR:

PREPARED BY:

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
Native American Institute

Grassroots SOLUTIONS

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Acknowledgments and Appreciations

Chi-miigwech to all of those who participated in this process. We very much appreciate the warm welcomes and thoughtfulness everyone so generously offered to the Grassroots Solutions team. We also recognize the challenges to our process and the courageous conversations that were offered to our team and Michigan State University. These sharpened and shaped our work for the better. We endeavored to get an unbiased opinion of the Native American Institute, so we welcomed it all.

Our conversations also touched on a difficult and painful history which was challenging at times, but very important for institutions, like MSU to hear, know, and understand, as they hold a lot of power within the state and within the lives of its students, faculty and staff, and alumni. We are honored you entrusted us with your ideas, criticism, praise, and stories.

Introduction

The Native American Institute (NAI) engaged Grassroots Solutions to develop and implement an outreach project that would help it to gather and to document input from the twelve federally recognized tribes in Michigan, from Native American and Indigenous cultural, educational, and health organizations, and from the Native American and Indigenous community at Michigan State University (MSU). Prior to the appointment of the current interim director, NAI was operating amid distress, instability, and leadership transitions, so this process has been a practice of re-grounding. The primary use of the information would be to inform NAI's strategic vision and planning, and the hiring of a new director. The information gathering process also provided NAI with the opportunity to make new, repair, renew, and nourish existing relationships between it and the students, faculty, and staff, and tribal communities and organizations.

At the outset of our engagement with NAI, we asked staff to share motivations for undertaking this endeavor. We heard that the outreach project serves four main purposes:
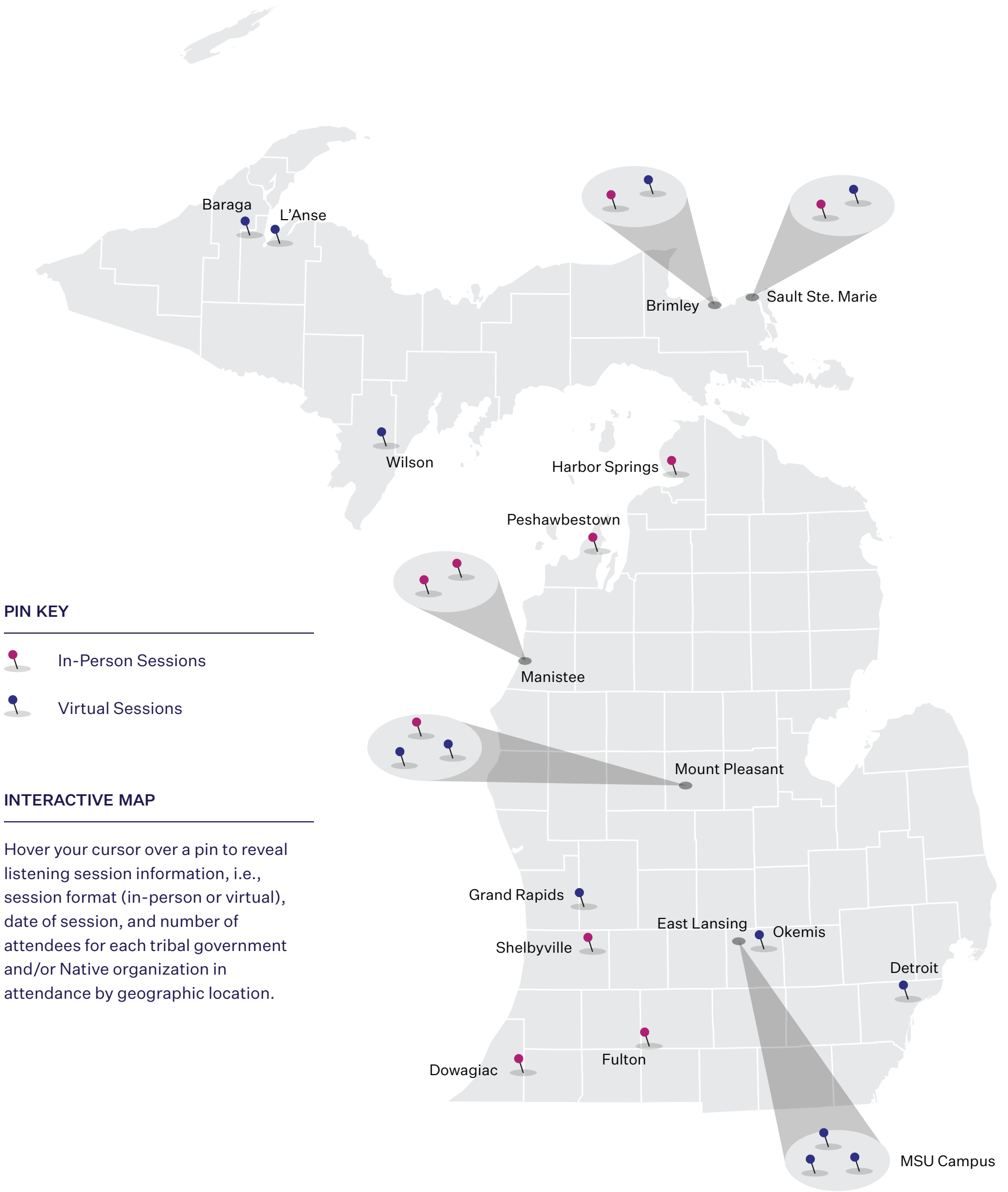
1 | To understand the Institutes' current standing within and the extent to which community members are aware of the institute and its work;

2 | To assess the priorities and needs of the tribal communities and organizations in Michigan;

3 | To develop or strengthen relationships between NAI and the tribal communities and organizations in Michigan, including potential partnerships; and

4 | To envision a role for the Institute and its new director.

These motivations became the main areas of inquiry that shaped the interview protocol for each of our conversations. Readers can find the list of participants in Appendix 1 on page 24.

Between April and mid-June 2023, we facilitated 23 virtual and in-person conversations, referenced as listening and visioning sessions. Our hope was to meet with all of the 12 federally recognized tribes in Michigan. In this time frame, we were able to meet with 11 of the 12 federally recognized tribes. We provide more details about the research plan in Appendix 2 on page 26.

The rest of this report summarizes what tribal communities and Native and Indigenous cultural, health, and education organizations shared with Grassroots Solutions and the staff of NAI. We have also included a brief summary of the history of NAI, land grant universities, key treaties between the tribes and the state of Michigan and U.S. Government. At the end of the report, we offer recommendations and strategic questions for NAI and the Office of Outreach and Engagement to consider as it moves forward with its hiring of a new director and strategic plan.

TRIBAL GOVERNMENT AND NATIVE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE TRIBAL OUTREACH PROJECT BY LOCATION


Map pins labeled: Baraga, L'Anse, Brimley, Sault Ste. Marie, Wilson, Harbor Springs, Peshawbestown, Manistee, Mount Pleasant, Grand Rapids, East Lansing, Okemis, Detroit, Shelbyville, Fulton, Dowagiac, MSU Campus

PIN KEY

● In-Person Sessions

● Virtual Sessions

INTERACTIVE MAP

Hover your cursor over a pin to reveal listening session information, i.e., session format (in-person or virtual), date of session, and number of attendees for each tribal government and/or Native organization in attendance by geographic location.

LISTENING SESSIONS BY THE NUMBERS*

29
Total Organizations Invited
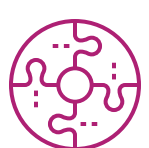
27
Total Organizations Attended

23
Total Number of Listening Sessions

202
Total Number of Attendees

*Organizations that were part of the MSU campus community were invited to jointly attend 1 of 3 shared listening sessions. See more detail in the interactive map above and the Appendices.

TREATIES WITH TRIBAL NATIONS IN MICHIGAN

Source: A Short History of Treaties, michiganology.org

Sault Ste. Marie
Treaty
1820

La Pointe Treaty
1842

Washington Treaty
1836

Cedar Point
Treaty
1836

Saginaw
Treaty
1819

Washington
Treaty
1836

Detroit
Treaty
1807

Chicago
Treaty
1821

Greenville
Treaty
1795

Carey Mission
Treaty
1828

Chicago Treaty
1833

Maumee Treaty
1817

FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBAL NATIONS IN MICHIGAN

Source: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, www.michigan.gov

1   Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians

2   Keweenaw Bay Indian Community

3   Hannahville Indian Community

4   Bay Mills Indian Community

5   Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

6   Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

7   Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

8   Little River Band of Ottawa Indians

9   Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians (Gun Lake Tribe)

10 Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe

11 Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

12 Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi
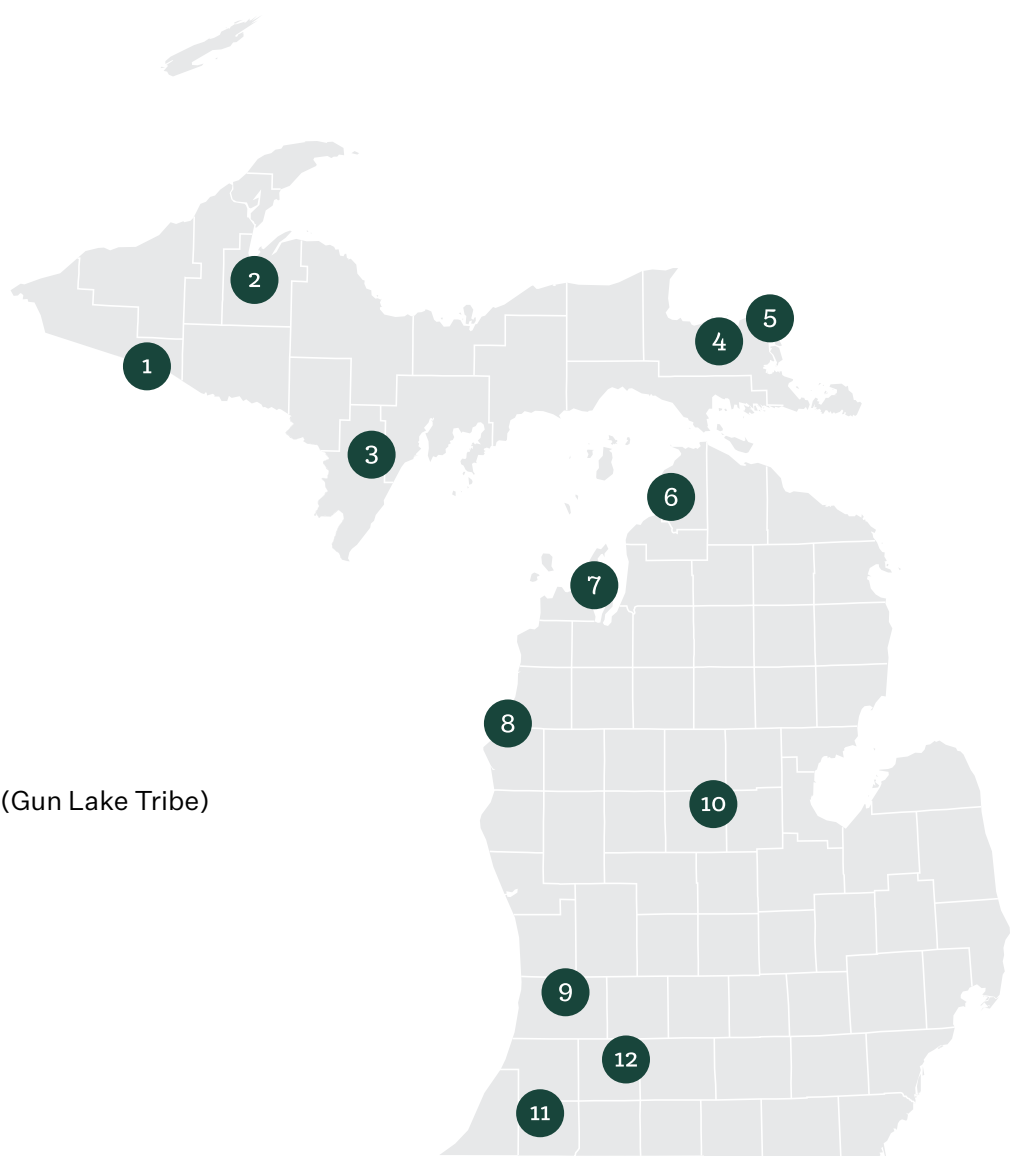
The history and context of tribal relations is important and interplays with current efforts to improve tribal-university relations. During our conversations interviewees emphasized the importance for policymakers, students, and the public to have a strong understanding of the history and context of tribes and, specifically, tribes in Michigan. A solid grasp of history and context can ensure a stronger relationship, increased trust, and inform how best to support students and tribal communities and organizations. What follows are key historic and contextual factors that interviewees shared. They are important to understand the rationale for why the interviewees made the recommendations they did.

Land Succession

The 1819 Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw

Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabeg—the Three Fires Confederacy of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. Under provisions of the 1819 Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw, also known as the Treaty of Saginaw, the Ojibwe tribe ceded a large portion of land to the United States government contingent upon both parties meeting the terms of the agreement. Tribal representatives from the Saginaw, Swan Creek, and Black River Bands were present during the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw.[1]

Similar to other treaties that were signed between the U.S. government and tribal nations during the 19th century, the Treaty of Saginaw did not fully protect the rights and interests of the Ojibwe tribes. Under the terms of the treaty, the Ojibwe ceded a significant portion of their ancestral lands in southeastern Michigan. In exchange for the land, the Ojibwe were promised annuity payments, provisions, and other forms of assistance from the U.S. government. However, the ineffective implementation of treaty provisions led to further land loss and hardships for the Ojibwe people.[2]

Michigan State University Formation as a Land Grant Institution

Land-grant institutions were established with the passage of the Morrill Act in 1862, a congressional act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln. The Morrill Act granted federal

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1   Treaty with the Chippewa of Saginaw, 1819. National Archives. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/178354861

2   An Historical Analysis of the Saginaw, Black River and Swan Creek Chippewa Treaties 1855 and 1864. https://turtletalk.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/gulig-report.pdf

land for the establishment of colleges that focused on agriculture, mechanical arts, and military tactics.[3] Michigan State University was established in 1855 and benefited from the Morrill Act when MSU's land grant status was granted in 1863 through the Michigan state legislature. MSU was granted 240,000 acres of federal land to support and maintain an agricultural college. The proceeds and sale of this land started the endowment for Michigan State University.

Legacy of Colonization

When answering questions about what the tribal and organizational priorities and needs are within the community, all conversations discussed and described consequences of colonization. Interviewees shared that the displacement of Native people from their ancestral homelands through colonization has resulted in disconnection with their ancestral way of life, loss of land, language, culture, spirituality, and more.

The consequences of this have manifested in poor social determinants of health and is passed on through generations. Native populations are more often impacted by violence,[4] co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders,[5] and chronic disease[6] at a much higher rate. This has also contributed to high rates of violence against women and where the community has created movements to bring awareness to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR).[7]

3   Morrill Act, 1862. National Archives. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/morrill-act

4   Rosay, André B., Violence Against American Indian and Alaska Native Women and Men: 2010 Findings from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2023, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/249815.pdf.

5   Soto C, West AE, Ramos GG, Unger JB. Substance and Behavioral Addictions among American Indian and Alaska Native Populations. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2022 Mar 3;19(5):2974. doi: 10.3390/ijerph19052974. PMID: 35270667; PMCID: PMC8910676.

6   See Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Tribal Health: Public Health Information for Tribes, Chronic Disease, https://www.cdc.gov/tribal/data-resources/information/chronic-diseases.html#:~:text=American%20Indian%2FAlaska%20Native%20(AI,more%20likely%20to%20be%20smokers.

7   See U.S. Department of the Interior: Indian Affairs, Missing and Murdered Indigenous People Crisis: Violence against Native Americans and Alaska Natives exceed national averages, https://www.bia.gov/service/mmu/missing-and-murdered-indigenous-people-crisis.

Boarding School History in Michigan

One of the greatest mechanisms within colonization that contributed to cultural disconnection was the federal policy of separating children from their families and tribes and placing them in Indian boarding schools. This was a major contributor to family disintegration. Children were not just separated from their parents and extended family, but were also separated from their culture, language, and generational knowledge and understanding of the land, including land stewardship. In a **recent report** created by the U.S. Department of the Interior, it documented that boarding schools fostered an environment of "physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; disease, malnourishment; overcrowding and lack of health care." Survivors were prohibited from visiting with family, speaking their language, and participating in cultural practices.[8]

Michigan had three Indian Boarding Schools, including the longest running boarding school in the country. Holy Childhood School ran for 102 years and was the last boarding school to close in 1983. Other boarding schools included the Indian Industrial Boarding School in Mt. Pleasant and The Holy Name of Jesus Indian Mission in Baraga.

Michigan Gaming Compact and Tribal Communities

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) was passed on October 17, 1988 by the United States Congress which allows Tribal Nations to continue to operate under tribal sovereignty and establish gaming enterprises on tribal land that are clearly defined in Federal Law. Gaming within Michigan began in 1993 with the first seven Tribal Nations receiving an approved Gaming Compact with each respective Tribe and the State of Michigan. The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, on November 16, 1993, created the Charter of Soaring Eagle Gaming which is operated by the Soaring Eagle Gaming Board of Directors and includes the Tribal Council of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. The Michigan Gaming Compact has provided significant economic opportunities for tribal and surrounding communities, like employment, hospitality sector development, and local tourism. However, tribal gaming revenue is vulnerable to the economic downturns, including the COVID pandemic. The various regulatory and legal changes that govern tribal gaming can be costly and may be exploited by non-tribal entities. These challenges can be averted by a proactive approach that can allow for tribal members to take part in legal and business development programs.

Over the years, the expansion and development within Michigan's tribal gaming industry expanded to include entertainment venues and conference centers, which has created destination resorts. Tribal communities are continually expanding by employing new business strategies to create other economic streams that can benefit the tribal nation and diversify their business portfolio.

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8 Boarding schools along with the Code of Indian Offenses (1883) were major traumas and sources of disconnection that are still felt today.

American Indian Tuition Waiver

The Waiver of Tuition for North American Indians Act was enacted in 1976 and became Public Act 174 (1976).[9] The Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver is a program that provides educational assistance to eligible Native American students in the state of Michigan. Students need to be enrolled members of federally-recognized tribes to meet residency requirements and accepted into an eligible program of study at a Michigan public institution of higher education. The passage of the tuition waiver followed decades of student activism and a lawsuit in 1971 that found that free tuition was consistent with language found in the Treaty of Fort Meigs.

Taxation

The taxation of businesses on tribal lands in the United States is complex and depends on various factors, including the specific tribe's tax laws, the type of business, and the activities conducted on tribal lands. Generally, businesses operating on tribal lands may be subject to both tribal taxes and state taxes, and sometimes federal taxes as well.

Many Native American tribes have the authority to impose their own taxes on businesses operating within their reservations, while state governments may also impose taxes on businesses that operate on tribal lands, depending on the nature of the business activities and the state's tax laws. Sometimes, this can lead to situations where businesses are subject to double taxation. However, double taxation is generally discouraged and there may be agreements or negotiations in place to avoid or mitigate it. Tribes and states may have compacts or agreements outlining how taxation will work within a specific tribal reservation.

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9 Waiver of Tuition for North American Indians. Public Act 174 (1976). http://www.legislature.mi.gov/ (S(s4usajwndqrnqjdbngw0x1cu))/mileg.aspx?page=GetObject&objectname=mcl-Act-174-of-1976#:~: text=An%20act%20to%20provide%20free,departments%2C%20commissions%2C%20and%20agencies

The Native American Institute was born out of a constellation of organizing movements in the late 1960s and 1970s—student leadership and the Native American power movements. Student leaders at Michigan State University worked with the Director of Racial and Ethnic Studies, Dr. Jack Bain, to establish a handful of courses in American Indian Studies. At the same time, Indian economic development was a top priority for tribes in Michigan. Through the tribal leadership of George Bennett and a member of Governor Bill Milliken's administration, Stan Pratt, advocates passed the Indian Economic Development project which established a commission on Indian Affairs. The Milliken Administration's support of the tribal communities resulted in the inclusion of $100,000 in MSU's 1981 general fund budget to establish the Native American Institute. A recent graduate at the time, Dr. George Cornell, was named the first director.

Under Dr. Cornell's tenure from 1981–2009, the Institute experienced 30 years of growth, consistency in leadership, and increasing resources. The Institute developed programming to encourage and support students such as ceremonies that recognize high achievement students, student-led powwows, and the hiring of a staff member in MSU's financial aid department. They also supported tribal priorities like the protection and expansion of access to the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver (MITW), along with other priorities to procure federal funds to build additional tribal programming.

Based on an interview with Dr. Cornell, the success during these years was attributed to two reasons. First, NAI valued innovation. They used funds that were readily available to create and adapt programming to meet the needs of students on campus. Second, the Institute valued a strong connection and attunement to the Native community and honored its commitments to the community. "We prided ourselves in doing what we say we will do and delivering." It is important that an institute like this should have a strong commitment to outreach that serves the well-being of tribal citizens and following through on those promises.

Over the past 15 years, prosperity for the Institute has evaporated. Students have limited access to programming compared to the first 30 years of the NAI. The external community does not have a relationship with the Institute. An entire generation of tribal citizens have lost a connection to a fierce and responsive advocate, along with the resources once dedicated to the development of the Native community in Michigan.

Findings

With the historical context in mind, in this section we summarize what we heard about the current reputation, quality of interactions, and the strength of relationship between the Native American Institute and Michigan State University from interviewees.

NATIVE AMERICAN INSTITUTE'S STANDING IN THE COMMUNITY

Finding 1: Absent from Tribal and Native American Community for the Past Decade

Very few interviewees knew about NAI's existence or its purpose after George Cornell left NAI. In eight of the 23 conversations, only one interviewee in each conversation recalled or knew about the Institute, or knew of its affiliation with Michigan State University. None of the other attendees could describe the mission of the department or could say that they had partnered with NAI in recent years. Three conversations attributed this unfamiliarity with NAI and the potential services it could provide to the lack of consistent and proactive communication from NAI.

Notably, this was even the case for University-affiliated groups. Students posited that the information about such an important department which houses resources should be readily available to them, and that they should not have to seek out information about NAI. Interviewees at MSU mostly learned about NAI through word of mouth or through participation in student groups like North American Indigenous Student Organization (NAISO) on campus, through interactions with other department faculty in the American Indian and Indigenous Studies department, or through the procurement of resources for research projects. One long-tenured faculty member recalled successful programming that happened in the past like the film camp and summer work program.

> "I knew [NAI] existed and there was a rich history, but also felt like things were getting heated and there was drama internally and in relationships with tribes. Also, [NAI] was housed in College of Agriculture, so felt like it wasn't my space. I appreciate the existence and also professionally as a researcher and mentor with students, but I didn't have a whole lot of interaction."

Although there was little understanding about NAI and its mission, Michigan State University is most visible to these interviewees through the MSU Extension and Indigenous Law Program. Attendees in eight conversations reported working with faculty in the Extension Department around issues of climate, food, and sustainability. In four of the conversations, interviewees highlighted working relationships with the Indigenous Law and Policy Center.

It is worth noting that the reputation of NAI is still colored by the unresolved sexual harassment of a former faculty member and interim director. Interviewees external to MSU did have some knowledge of these incidents before our visits, but attributed them to happening at the University overall, not just the Institute. Internal MSU attendees had a great deal of knowledge, and both audiences deemed the future resolution of these events critical to building a relationship with the Institute.

Finding 2: Barriers to Accessing Higher Education

Since NAI was largely absent from engagement with tribal communities and Native American organizations in Michigan, most of the conversations we held with tribes began with and focused on Michigan State University's role as an education institution. The general consensus is that MSU has fallen short in its support of Native and Indigenous students. In all 23 group conversations, interviewees emphasized the need to offer and increase support for Native and Indigenous students at MSU. Three interviewees noted that as a land-grant university, it is the responsibility of the University to appropriately serve all populations within the state of Michigan and reaching and enrolling Native students would help the University fulfill that mission.

College Readiness

One area of concern that came up in multiple conversations was the issue of college readiness. During our conversations, tribal members and Native American and Indigenous organizational staff and leaders put the needs of student support in broader historic and political context of tribal communities and Native and Indigenous peoples. They shared that due to the legacies of the boarding school era and current effects of marginalization, public K-12 schools are often unable to create the right conditions for Native students to thrive. Children and families might be disengaged from the classroom, the school environment, or the curriculum. To compound these historic and generational challenges raised by interviewees, the lack of access to stable broadband and reliable

technology is a barrier for Native students in northern Lower Peninsula and in the Upper Peninsula. As a result, Native students may fall behind and lack credits or perhaps years of educational requirements by the time they are applying for college.

Attendees offered several suggestions about how to approach college readiness in partnership with MSU. First, MSU could offer developmental courses that can build academic skills. The University could work with tribal colleges to support students who begin their post-secondary education at a tribal college before transferring to MSU. Much in the same way, some students begin their college education at a community college. In both cases, ensuring that courses Native students take, tribal and community colleges properly align and fulfill transfer requirements. Alternatively, MSU can co-create courses, in partnership, with tribal colleges so that it meets the academic requirements that the University sets out for all students. Interviewees also stressed the importance of having specialized certificates that serve students who are not seeking a four-year degree program directly after high school. Another way that tribes and tribal colleges could partner with MSU. This includes offering extra academic support and classes that are meant to build foundational knowledge and skills for post-secondary education programs.

In addition to academic college readiness challenges, pathways to higher education are not smooth. Interviewees shared that the bureaucratic process of financing a college education can be daunting and confusing for Native and Indigenous students and their families. Students need support with filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), completing scholarship applications, or applying for the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver (MITW).

To increase recruitment, interviewees suggested that student engagement should happen early in a student's career, so that MSU is familiar and viewed as a realistic option even before senior year. The University could visit and promote their programs and to offer guidance about becoming a student at MSU as early as middle school, which is the timeline of student engagement described in one of our conversations. Another specific idea that was offered is sponsoring a direct admissions day for all 12 federally recognized tribes where admissions officers are ready to accept students on the spot.

Finding 3: Student Transitions to College and Navigating University Bureaucracy

No matter the path that a Native or Indigenous student enters college, the transition is challenging due to the size and complexity of MSU. Interviewees shared that MSU is a hard institution to navigate for Native students because of the large, complicated systems, seemingly unnecessary bureaucracy, and siloed nature of resources and services.

One former student reported that her dorm had more people than her entire town back home. Students also reported stressors like navigating a complex campus, meeting education requirements while experiencing personal hardships, and experiencing financial instability without knowledge of where to find support or help. Interviewees described this experience as having to "ask questions in a way that MSU administrators and staff understand." A common criticism among all audiences is that everything is siloed and hard to find. A graduate student suggested that it would be valuable to "[have] the support and mentorship of how to navigate MSU systems and bureaucracy."

MSU's financial aid office is a large source of anxiety and stress for Native students and their families. One of the main critiques heard is that many University staff do not know how to administer programs for Native students. Interviewees shared that the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver is not well known by staff in the Office of Financial Aid. Meaning staff either do not know it exists or do not understand how to administer it, so cannot or does not provide guidance to Native students on how to apply for it. The lack of understanding or knowledge of the program resulted in students being passed from one staff person to another and in other cases not being notified of funding delays until their classes were dropped.

In three separate conversations interviewees reported that they knew that the Office of Academic Transitions, formerly known as Minority Aid Program, is there to support underrepresented students. They shared that it used to do a decent job of helping Native students by staff who were also from Native communities. However, now it does not seem to properly fulfill the needs of Native and Indigenous students because the staff are not sensitive to the cultural needs of Native students. They receive generic support for any non-white student.

Interviewees offered several suggestions for how MSU could better serve Native and Indigenous students. First and foremost, addressing the issues experienced with the Office of Financial Aid through more training on the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver and cultural competency trainings for staff. So that Native and Indigenous students can be confident in the financing of their education without being worried they will be dropped from classes because a program they are eligible for was not properly administered. Also, extra funds for students navigating these transitions for the first time are integral to success. Currently, there are two scholarships, the John R. Winchester Scholarship Fund and the Emma Shore Thornton scholarship, but students and community alike suggested expansion to improve access and to honor the historical intent for these programs.

Four interviewees emphasized the importance of having strong, trusted mental health support that is easily accessible for students. Suggestions include peer-to-peer training where students are better able to recognize and connect their peers to services during mental health crises. One tribal organization advised that MSU "make [services] visible to the student body without being intrusive… where students are allowed to engage in a safe environment where they were seen and heard."

Finding 4: Centralize Resources and Supports for Native Students and Community

Once the students are at MSU, it is important to have services centralized to create better access and utilization. Most of our conversations during the Tribal Outreach Project brought up the need to have a point person at the University who could help students navigate the many departments, faculty members, programs, and other offerings at the University.

"Siloed" programming is detrimental to support of Indigenous students because interviewees reported confusion about eligibility when accessing resources that were located in different departments. This is especially true for students who often "get shuttled around the [MSU] bureaucracy," so having support centralized would move the onus off the students who are seeking assistance. **Faculty and students alike** have advocated for the resurrection of a program called Aanii Transition Support Program that was designed to be a one stop shop that provided Native students with support/advising. Centralized resources are also important for students or faculty groups who are planning cultural events and have funding issues. They need an independent department with centralized funds that can marshal funds to their events more smoothly.

This could mean NAI provides academic counseling or guidance so that these types of student assistance programs are housed in one location. These supports could include entities and initiative like American Indian Studies, efforts to preserve cultural heritage and to revitalize Indigenous languages, and research. Bolstering the student native groups that serve students is also an appropriate function so that there are relationships and direct opportunities for partnership and collaboration between NAI and the on-campus groups. Bringing together resources into one location eliminates siloed work and promotes better coordination.

Having trusted and available faculty members within and connected to NAI was integral to its success in supporting students. They looked to the faculty for resources, support navigating, but also guidance in making academic choices. For example, counseling on which class to take and if or how they might pursue a graduate or doctoral program, and that encouragement is vital. It is worth noting that a number of interviewees did not believe MSU was creating a safe academic environment by allowing the faculty member who was found to have sexually harassed a former faculty member to continue teaching students.

Finding 5: Create and Support a Sense of Belonging for Native and Indigenous Students

Michigan State University's time and resources need to be reinvested in the effort of creating a sense of belonging for Native students. Often students come to campus from a small, tight-knit community with a rich cultural fabric. At MSU, this is not the case, interviewees described a lack of connection and community. This lack of connection can have detrimental effects like loneliness and poor academic outcomes, as well as mental health challenges. This was reported by both student interviewees, and from parents, educators, administrators, and tribal leaders in all of our conversations. When leaving communities, students are also leaving behind cultural practices that they rely on to soothe and settle their nervous systems and offer co-regulation in a community setting, like ceremonial dancing, sweat lodges, and singing.[10]

Native culture is centered around the collective. All conversations emphasized that community is important. It is imperative to support students by creating an on-campus community that is commensurate with the quantity and quality of supportive relationships they would receive within their tribal home. Connecting students with safe, supportive faculty, and other students is key. Interviewees suggested ideas like having faculty reach out more often to students, hiring more faculty who understand the students' backgrounds and lived experience, and having peer programs and mentorship programs.

Interviewees shared that part of the reason MSU cannot provide services which create community is because administrators do not have a good sense of which students need this support. We heard from tribal members that it does not seem that MSU is tracking the number of enrolled Indigenous students. Tribal members believe this data is important because to offer services, support, and build a network, the University first needs to identify Native students on campus and those eligible for tailored support. Two tribes shared that they, to the best of their ability, track band members' college attendance. They would like to be in communication with MSU about students from their tribes that are attending so that as partners they can offer the assistance those students need for success. The two tribes offered that lists of the students who are attending could be made available through appropriate data sharing agreements.

One interviewee said that they "would like NAI to be seen as a 'home,' as a resource for Native students, especially students that are not part of American Indian Studies."

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10 See the work of Resmaa Manakem, MSW, LIC-SW, like *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*.

Interviewees shared a number of ways to help students feel more connected to MSU's campus is seeing more representation of their cultural and community members on campus, for example:

▎ Offer more Indigenous Studies courses, including Anishinabemowin Language Classes

▎ Hire more Native and Indigenous faculty to teach Indigenous Studies courses

▎ Have more Native and Indigenous representation on campus, like signage and Indigenous art

▎ Have a lodge on campus that is protected by an appropriate smudging policy, where ceremonies can be held

These suggestions could build on the offerings already being hosted by faculty and student groups on campus. Students and former students reported having benefited from cultural programming, such as:

▎ Workshops for cultural practices, like basket weaving

▎ Presentations of historical importance, like implications of the boarding school era

▎ Gatherings, like a welcoming ceremony and an end of the year celebration

Conversations with the MSU campus community did reveal the need for more resources for student groups, as well as more streamlined funding mechanisms to sustain this type of cultural programming. These experiences already create a community on campus and provide an opportunity for students to build a strong social network which is one of the biggest protective factors for students and increases their resiliency.[11]

CULTIVATING POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout our conversations, we asked interviewees what is important for a university to know to cultivate strong partnerships. Initially, we heard factors that contributed to tribal and organizational hesitation about entering partnerships with the Michigan State University which are summarized in this section. Then, interviewees offered guidance and advice about how best to create a working relationship with tribal and cultural organizations. Finally, interviewees offered a few special considerations that are important for tribal-university partnerships.

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11 Mohatt, N. V., Fok, C. C. T., Burket, R., Henry, D., & Allen, J. (2011). Assessment of awareness of connectedness as a culturally-based protective factor for Alaska native youth. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 17(4), 444–455. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025456

Finding 6: Extractive Histories of Land Grant Universities

Participants in three conversations took issue with the land grant history of universities, Michigan State University included, as this history is riddled with extractive practices towards Indigenous lands and people. In our conversations, the issue of land, land stewardship, land acknowledgments, and the land grant status of the University came up. Interviewees cited MSU's extractive land stewardship practices, lack of land access offered toward Native students and populations despite treaty rights, and revisionist history offered within narratives of the land grant history and within the proposed land acknowledgment, as problematic and pain points.

Interviewees also described an extractive history and relationship regarding Indigenous knowledge, cultural items, and spirituality. This includes the acquisition and storage of sacred stories, songs, and items as well as the commodification of Indigenous languages. One interviewee raised concerned about the use of human remains as a means of instruction which would likely violate the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

> "There are still ancestors being used in medical schools—at MSU and other universities. This needs to end, and they need to be returned."

Related to MSU held property, interviewees advised that the University prioritize large-scale, high volume repatriation efforts. They also suggested providing Native populations with access to land to enact their treaty rights of hunting, fishing, gathering, and foraging of food and medicines. MSU should also consider supporting efforts to establish an Indigenous foods seed bank, provide cultural workshops around traditional hunting practices, and give guidance and seminars on protecting treaty rights. Finally, interviewees advised the adoption of a land acknowledgment which is "strongly worded and acknowledges the wrong doings of the University and how it benefited from the displacement of [Native] people." In addition, interviewees emphasized that MSU follow the adoption of a land acknowledgment with action to redress its previous transgressions.

Finding 7: Creating Partnerships that Honor Reciprocity with Tribes

It is important to know that trust is built by positive interactions over time. Within these interactions it's important to have transparent and consistent communications, and it's important to have partnerships that are mutually beneficial where Michigan State University can share resources that it has acquired. One interviewee offered that as an institution, MSU can "establish relationships with tribal education departments and councils and meet with them regularly."

Guidance and Advice for Tribal-University Partnerships

Tribes and organizations reported experiencing a lack of follow through with the original agreements that had been made by organizations and institutions, MSU included, or moments where the partnerships they had entered did not actually benefit the tribe. Tribal sovereignty can also make tribes more susceptible to partners with duplicitous motivations. Tribes are cautious about the motives of potential partners. Interviewees reported experiencing exploitation from other companies and entities who sought to skirt state laws and regulations via tribal sovereignty.

Individuals or organizations who want to work with tribal or cultural organizations should know and prioritize the following:

- Tribes are different from each other. The cultures, operations, governance models, geographies, sizes, populations, and needs are varied. Any relationship with a tribe needs to be tailored and considered first.

- In-person meetings and presence is valuable and honors cultural protocols.

- Transparency about the benefits to both parties is clear about what the return on investment will be of their time and effort.

- Consistency of communication and actions to "make sure that what was agreed upon and what was committed to is what happens in the end."

Tribes specifically reported that potential partners need to have a strong understanding of tribal sovereignty. Examples of issues that come into play during partnerships are data sovereignty or double taxation on tribal lands (tribal tax then state tax) which make partnerships more tenuous and require partners to be more skilled and knowledgeable in areas like these. Interviewees also warned that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at MSU did not always have a strong understanding of tribal sovereignty and how it relates to data and the collection of data in a culturally competent way. There was also a desire for NAI to be transparent and communicative to interviewees about the development of its future vision and goals.

Finding 8:
NAI as a Connector and Convener

In addition to what was described above in terms of supporting students' success, the centralization and increased visibility of support and resources would benefit external partners and potential partners as well. From our conversations we heard similar confusion to the students about who to reach out to contact with questions or requests. We heard frustration at inconsistent communication, turnover, or confusion about MSU contacts about partnerships.

As a remedy to issues like these, interviewees offered suggestions that NAI plays the role of convener and connector. In 21 of our conversations, we heard that having a point person and/or a dedicated department for tribal communities and Native and Indigenous organizations to reach out to is a need. It

> **NAI could be a really good connector between the University and the tribes by doing outreach to the tribes and tribal organizations to connect with people on campus. They need to make tribes more aware of what MSU has to offer."**

would help tribal communities and organizations navigate and learn about opportunities to be matched with potential researchers for applied research projects or with student interns who could add staffing capacity with tribe or native organizations. Being matched with faculty and resources on campus could satisfy mutual needs which currently go unfulfilled because of the disjointed location of Native and Indigenous services on campus. An example of this that was brought up is short-term staffing opportunities which could be positive work experience for students, for example). NAI could be a partner in safeguarding tribal sovereignty. Furthermore, tribal and cultural organizations described a desire to be convened in a state or regional (Great Lakes region) manner to interrogate various topics that intersect with Native and tribal affairs.

Finding 9:
Opportunities for Partnerships

Tribes and Native organizations are open to partnering with Michigan State University, especially around efforts that are already being created and implemented. There are already initiatives of mutual interest happening now. We heard that interviewees would be interested in working with MSU partners in efforts around cultural preservation and language revitalization; agriculture and land stewardship; renewable energy; workforce development; technical skill sets like grant writing, HR, marketing, journalism, and communications; and proper data storage and management. Research studies are also ready opportunities for partnership.

Tribes are conducting research about issues that affect Native populations like, mental health support, suicide prevention, evaluating the effectiveness of traditional healing modalities, sustainable land stewardship, mitigating substance abuse, renewable energy, and more. Overall, tribes need research support and would like to be connected with qualified faculty members to work together. One interviewee offered an important reminder that "tribes are highly sophisticated" and any of these pursuits would ask that MSU have a tailored approach that equip tribes with the tools, infrastructure and specialized skill sets that empower and complement how tribes are already doing this work.

Cultural Preservation

Cultural organizations are often and recently entrusted with historical items that are important and special, but also timeworn and delicate. By training tribal and cultural organizations with the newest technologies and processes to preserve and care for historic items, MSU would be offering an alternative to institutions of higher education housing sacred items on campus. For example, ensuring access to "archival material that tribes need for research on boarding schools, honors NAGPRA and the reclamation of artifacts, and more." Interviewees emphasized that this approach allows Native communities the opportunity to reconstruct true histories and would like MSU to develop collaborations with MSU to enhance and speed up NAPRA efforts.

Workforce Development

Tribal economies are becoming increasingly sophisticated and diversified. Tribal and cultural organizations described the need for training, staffing capacity, and technical support for tribal members to aid in tribal economic prosperity. Specifically, training around leadership development, including tribal governance training was mentioned. Economic and business development courses are also needed. Efforts to create pathways to work within tribes, including internships or full-time positions, were named as priority needs. These pathways could include opportunities to work in positions like human resources, marketing, and communications as these are in high demand. Technical skills or partnerships are needed for feasibility studies, tourism studies, or grant writing. Interviewees mentioned that grant writing could be supported by increasing the knowledge and skill of current tribal and organizational staff, by filling staffing positions, and by compiling relevant data that can be used in grant applications.

Education and Awareness of Native Issues

This is related to a need in support of policy and advocacy efforts at the state and federal levels of government. The lack of knowledge about Native affairs, tribal sovereignty, the history of colonization is a huge barrier for tribes, Native organizations, communities, and individuals when navigating western systems and advocating for their needs. Interviewees shared their disbelief and frustration with the lack of knowledge by Michigan policymakers in state government and at the federal level.

As a result, tribal and cultural organizations spend valuable time and resources educating policymakers about their own lived reality before ever being able to advocate for their needs or finding creative solutions. Tribal and cultural organizations want support in educating the general public about Native history, context, tribal sovereignty, and Native affairs to shift incorrect or incomplete narratives. They had ideas like creating a K-12 curricula that would incorporate these issues and holding workshops in community about pertinent native issues. Furthermore, the tribes and tribal members want more training and support with advocacy and policy work at the state legislature.

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE NATIVE AMERICAN INSTITUTE

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Finding 10: One of Us and an Advocate for Tribal Communities and Peoples

Lastly our process asked interviewees to speak directly to the appointment of the new director and to the strategic plan of the Institute going forward. Interviewees described what qualities they would like to see in the new director of Native American Institute.

> **The ideal candidate would be 'someone who is accountable to community not just the people above them [at MSU].'"**

We heard from participants that the ideal candidate should have strong cultural and community ties. They pointed out that the Institute is uniquely situated and well-positioned to be impactful for MSU students and for tribes and organizations outside the University. As such, the new director requires a special set of skills. One interviewee offered an important reminder that Native American is not just a racial identity, but a political identity, so the candidate should have a strong understanding of tribal sovereignty. They should also have a strong understanding of life for Native students, including historical trauma and intergenerational healing, how to enhance student experience and academic success while on campus.

To emphasize what we heard about student success, this would look like guidance on how to access resources during their program, encouragement to grow and possibly continue their education, general academic guidance, and be "a safety net and support for students."

The new director should also operate from a place of Native values and Indigenous paradigms, like the Seven Grandfather Teachings, traditional knowledge, not just formal liberal arts knowledge.[12]

It was also mentioned by interviewees in three of conversations that having someone who can advocate for systems change to effectively serve Native students and communities. As mentioned in previous findings, the majority of MSU's staff and faculty lack cultural understanding about how to interact with tribal nations on issues like data sovereignty and cultural protocols, like gifting. NAI could be a critical voice to ensure cultural practices are not made impossible due to bureaucracy. And importantly, the candidate and Institute should also prioritize a well-rounded and fulfilled Indigenous studies program, so students can remain inside the University and still learn about their culture. Lastly, MSU should look to what made NAI successful under Dr. Cornell's tenure. The Institute was in constant communication and in relationship with the tribal communities in the state. And when NAI made commitments, it followed through on those promises.

"**NAI should look at reconnecting Native students to their culture and serve as an advocate for Native students, faculty, and staff.**"

12 See https://nrd.kbic-nsn.gov/sites/default/files/Seven%20Grandfather%20Teachings.pdf, https://nhbp-nsn.gov/seven-grandfather-teachings/, and https://nhbp-nsn.gov/blog/connecting-students-with-indigenous-keepers-of-traditional-ecological-knowledge/

Conclusion and Looking Ahead for the Native American Institute

Tribal-university relations is an important topic that universities across the country are beginning to reckon with, especially land grant universities. It is critical that Michigan State University understands its own history and current standing with the 12 federally recognized tribes in Michigan, with Native American and Indigenous cultural, educational, and health organizations, and with the Native American and Indigenous community on campus. The University's commitment to the Tribal Outreach Project has been an important first step, and interviewees are eager to see action taken following these conversations and as a result of the information shared through this process.

The Institute currently does not have a strong reputation within the community because community members and students alike do not have a sense of the mission, services, programming of the organization which leads to inability to create positive interactions. Moreover, students and some community members are aware of allegations of sexual assault which further deter interactions.

During our conversations with tribal communities and Native American and Indigenous organizations, they offered concrete and specific recommendations for how NAI and MSU can serve the community in Michigan and possibly regionally. Findings Eight, Nine, and Ten offer very specific requests and suggestions from interviewees. We heard about how NAI is well positioned to lean into its role of connector and convener, and to serve as a specialist in Native affairs at the University. We recognize that the recommendations provided in these findings may not be feasible for MSU to undertake given their status as a public university, but NAI can support them by convening and connecting tribal communities and organizations with other external organizations.

CONTINUE THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In addition to what interviewees shared, we have offered some immediate and interim steps NAI should consider as it goes through a formal strategic planning process and hiring of a permanent director. The conversations were a down payment on new relationships with tribal communities and organizations, immediate next steps will help strengthen those new connections. Some immediate actions include:

▌ Ensure there is follow-up after visits with periodic updates and more visits to build on conversations that were started.

▌ Update tribes and community members on the actions stemming from the suggestions gathered during our process and outline within this report.

- Clarify and share information as it develops through the search for NAI's new director and the strategic planning process, especially as it pertains to the mission, services, and programming of NAI. Showcase this information on NAI's website.

- Adopt a land acknowledgment that is presented to tribal and community partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NAI'S STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

In addition to relationship building, the following recommendations are ones that NAI should undertake to build trust with tribal communities and Native and Indigenous organizations on and off campus and undertake the role of convener and connector.

- Sustain a conversation with tribes and native people about MSU's extractive history.

- Invite tribal community members to be part of the strategic planning process as advisors and sounding boards.

- Conduct a full account of what artifacts and remains have been taken from. The Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing (TRUTH) Project in Minnesota is an example of a project that showcases strategies to interrupt harmful interactions, reverse extractive dynamics, and conduct a full accounting of what has been grabbed.[13]

- Complete a full accounting of what the university houses in its archives and storage facilities, as well as what professors have in their private collections.

- Include a rebranding of the Institute as part of the strategic planning process to align with a mission that is more focused on relationships with tribal communities and organizations.

HEALING AND BUILDING STRONG NATIONS

Despite the troublesome history and complex contemporary context, interviewees emphasized that healing is happening through reconnection to culture. Tribes and tribal nations have rebuilt communities that once faced depravation through ingenuity and perseverance. Gaming has been an important element of this stabilization that has allowed community members to reconnect to their cultural practices in order to heal generational trauma.

MSU can be a key partner for the tribes in pursuits that build healthy and strong nations. Using its resources, it can create partnerships with tribes to disrupt the legacies of colonization, to aid healing efforts by promoting cultural reconnection and language revitalization efforts, and to support tribes in their self-determined and nation-building efforts.

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13 TRUTH Project: Towards Recognition and University-Tribal Healing. https://mn.gov/indian-affairs/truth-project/

CARE FOR STUDENTS

The most important change that was asked for from all interview groups is for MSU to take care of Native students on campus. Through this process, interviewees charged NAI to be in service to and care for the Native students, faculty, and staff on campus. Doing so can engender trust with partners and start to revive the reputation of the Native American Institute and Michigan State University after its recent hardships. Tribal communities are in regular communication with each other, so to hear word of Native students' positive experiences would mark a turning point from recounts of microaggressions, loneliness, frustrations, and disconnection to celebrations of support, growth, and empowerment.

Currently, students are going through and have been through a lot. We heard that students are tenacious as they overcame obstacles to becoming an MSU student and faced distress on campus. They are also living through the challenging moment that we all are with political polarization, COVID pandemic aftermath, gun violence, and climate tragedies which create so much uncertainty. Also, students remain concerned that the documented harassment on campus was not adequately addressed. MSU needs to wrap students in support so as to not compound these multiple stressors that they face. Our recommendations pertaining to the support of students are as follows:

▌ Involve students as advisors and sounding boards in NAI's strategic planning process.

▌ Remedy, mitigate, or eliminate sources of distress are important to more effectively recruit and retain Native and Indigenous students. Consider examining how student services are provided to better determine if the frustrations and unnecessary stress that Native students are experiencing are also being experienced by other underrepresented students.

▌ Provide a space of learning where Native students can be understood and appreciated as their whole selves as a Native/Indigenous person AND a MSU student. This could involve ensuring research practices incorporate culturally appropriate guidelines for non-Native or Indigenous researchers.

Within Indigenous paradigms of learning and knowledge, learners are people of all ages, scholars are highly valued, and childhood is an especially sacred time. During the time from "cradle to career," children's learning and focus on self-development should be protected and highly prioritized. Furthermore, the adults who are caregiving during this time frame, MSU included, need to support this pursuit, and equip learners with the ability to diligently tend to their craft. This is the role for all of us and is an input into the tribes' stated goal of building strong nations.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Tribal Government and Native Organizations Involved in the Tribal Outreach Project

Organizations Invited

- American Indian and Indigenous Studies (AIIS)

- American Indian Health and Family Services

- Bay Mills Community College

- Bay Mills Indian Community

- Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Department (CMTED)

- EAGLE (Native Faculty and Staff Association)

- Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians

- Hannahville Indian Community

- Indigenous Graduate Student Collective (IGSC)

- Indigenous Law & Policy Center (ILPC)

- Inter-Tribal Council

- Keweenaw Bay Indian Community

- Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College

- Little River Band of Ottawa Indians

- Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

- Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians (Gun Lake Tribe)

- Michigan Inter-Tribal Land Grant System (MILES)/MSU Extension Office

- Native American Law Student Association (NALSA)

Organizations Invited *(cont.)*

- Nokomis Cultural Heritage Center

- North American Indigenous Student Organization (NAISO)

- Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi

- Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

- Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe

- Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College

- Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

- United Tribes of Michigan

- Ziibiwing Center

Organizations That Declined Invitation

- Grand Traverse Museum

- Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians

Appendix 2: Research Plan

Grassroots Solutions conducted the Tribal Outreach Project over a six-month period from March 2023 through August 2023. During this time, the Grassroots Solutions employed three data collection methods to answer nine research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through the proposal and planning processes, Native American Institute and Grassroots Solutions identified nine research questions for the Tribal Outreach project that fall into three categories:

1 | **Positive Partnerships**   **2** | **Community Needs**   **3** | **Visioning NAI's Role**

The following table lists the research questions associated with each category. NAI staff were asked to prioritize questions that were most important and provided rationale for their selections. Together, these questions guided Grassroots Solutions' work and partnership with NAI to document past and current understandings and opinions of the Institute and envision the next iteration of the NAI strategy.

Category	Research Questions	Interviews: External Partners	Interviews: Internal Partners	Reflect Session
Positive Partnerships	How familiar are external partners with the mission of NAI? Its past programming?	✕		
	What has NAI done well in supporting partners? Where has NAI fallen short?	✕	✕	
	What makes for a positive partnership with NAI?	✕	✕	
	How can a partnership with NAI be strengthened?	✕	✕	✕
Community Needs	Overall, what scholarship, programming or resources are needed for NAI's partners to achieve their goals and initiatives?	✕	✕	
	What roadblocks do NAI's partners routinely confront?	✕	✕	

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Category	Research Questions	Interviews: External Partners	Interviews: Internal Partners	Reflect Session
Visioning NAI's Role	What role can NAI play in helping your community/organization/unit become more self-sufficient and self-determination? What needs to be in place protect sovereignty?	✕		
	To be in service to our communities (partners), what role/s should NAI play as an actor within the University?	✕	✕	✕
	What should NAI consider as it revises its strategic direction and appoints a new director?	✕	✕	✕

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND SOURCES

To answer the research questions, Grassroots Solutions sought input from NAI's internal University partners and external partners (a full list of organizations invited is included in Appendix 1). Data collection methods included:

1 | Conducting listening sessions with internal partners including native students, faculty and staff

2 | Conducting listening sessions and interviews with external partners including tribes, tribal colleges, and other constituents

3 | Holding reflective sensemaking conversations with NAI staff