

# That's My People

Reflections from the 2011 NIYS





## Youth Taking Action in Indian Country

The third National Intertribal Youth Summit was held in July 2011 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. It was a collaborative effort among the following federal partners: Executive Office of the President, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Labor, Corporation for National & Community Service. The Summit—“**Youth Taking Action in Indian Country**”—was attended by more than 160 youth representing nearly 50 tribes who gathered together for a week of leadership development and skill building.

The 2011 National Intertribal Youth Summit was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in partnership with the Executive Office of the President, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, and the Corporation for National & Community Service. It was held in Santa Fe, New Mexico, from July 24 – July 29, 2011. The Summit entitled “**Youth Taking Action in Indian Country,**” was attended by more than 160 youth, representing nearly 50 tribes who gathered together for a week of leadership development and skill building.

Building on the momentum of the 2010 Youth Summit, the 2011 National Intertribal Youth Summit (NIYS) continued the focus on youth empowerment. In 2011, the NIYS continued to grow with higher rates of youth and tribal participation, additional tailored programming, and the introduction of multi-media.

As expressed in the 2010 Youth Summit, youth had previously raised four primary concerns for their communities:

- 1) *A lack of positive role models, healthy relationships, and youth activities.*

- 2) *Inadequate access to quality education, healthcare, safe housing, and continuing education chips away at the quality of life for tribal youth, blocking opportunities for them to succeed.*
- 3) *The need for more adults who care and can be good role models and mentors.*
- 4) *The need for opportunities for meaningful employment, contribution and voice collectively results in a sense of powerlessness among tribal youth that widens the gap between them and their community.*

Looking to address the issues raised by youth in the 2010 Youth Summit, the 2011 NIYS provided opportunities to continue to develop the skills and the inspiration to be leaders within their communities.

The youth aspired to reach new goals, create bonds across generations, work towards healthy and active living, create a collective message using new media, and build an intertribal youth voice. Together, youth came together to make a Public Service Announcement and demonstrated their Native pride and strength of a youth voice. These highlights were expressed through daily journal entries, session evaluations, as well as a reflective writing session, which were gathered and grouped by themes and are the focus of this report.



## That's My People

Youth wrote, envisioned, collectively planned, and participated in filming a Public Service Announcement.

Their vision:  
 My Reservation  
 My People  
 My Community:  
 That's My People

### Public Service Announcement

Making a Public Service Announcement (PSA) provided a vehicle for the youth to share their perspectives and create a collective story of their experience in Indian Country. Through the help of Buffalo Nickel Creative, an American Indian owned creative agency, youth were inspired to take on the challenge of learning about PSAs. This experience boosted leadership skills in three important ways. First, it provided insights into the power of communications. Second, it showcased how PSAs are developed and exposed youth to the field. Third, the method of engagement embodied intergenerational leadership. Together, these three elements made a lasting impression on participants as they claimed Indian Country and their role in taking action by saying "That's My People."

### *Power of Communication*

Storytelling is an honored tradition and takes on many forms. The PSA was an opportunity for intertribal youth to tell their story; their own words and experiences guided the script. During the process, the youth were often surprised by how much they had in common with participants from other tribes. Creating this collective voice was an important part of their leadership development.

### *Learning About New Media*

For many youth, this was the first time they saw and supported video production. Exposure to this field, which includes graphic designing, writing, editing, and videography, inspired many to seek out additional education. It sparked an interest in communications, a field that could benefit from a Native voice.

### *Intergenerational Leadership*

Interaction between the youth and video team, as a Native owned enterprise comprised of young adults (ages 25-40), was a prime example of intergenerational leadership. As a focal point for this year's Summit, a significant amount of time was designated for this activity. Youth worked with the team and developed bonds and found role models simultaneously.



## Native Pride

A culturally enriched week helped students connect to their own traditions and promoted a sense of Native pride. Youth cherished learning about the variety of, as well as similarities between, traditions across nations. The daily ceremonial openings and traditional dances were complemented by the array of speakers and presenters from American Indian and Alaskan Native communities. Those presenters shared common experiences, provided proof of an array of career path possibilities, and embodied a growing field of professionals from Indian Country. Together, all these elements fostered a sense of Native pride. Particular programmatic successes that continually showed up in journal entries as inspiring sources for supporting Native pride are listed below.

***Santa Ana Trip (Feast Days)*** Visiting this pueblo and interacting with the families in their homes by the sharing of food was a clear highlight for the youth. Feast Days also included a special ceremonial dance.

***San Felipe Trip (Sports Clinic)*** The Notah Begay III Foundation shared the personal history of the San Felipe Field and how it was funded (through matching grants) before delving into golf, soccer, and nutrition clinics.

***Traditional Opening*** Each day an elder from a tribe would lead the ceremonial start to the day.

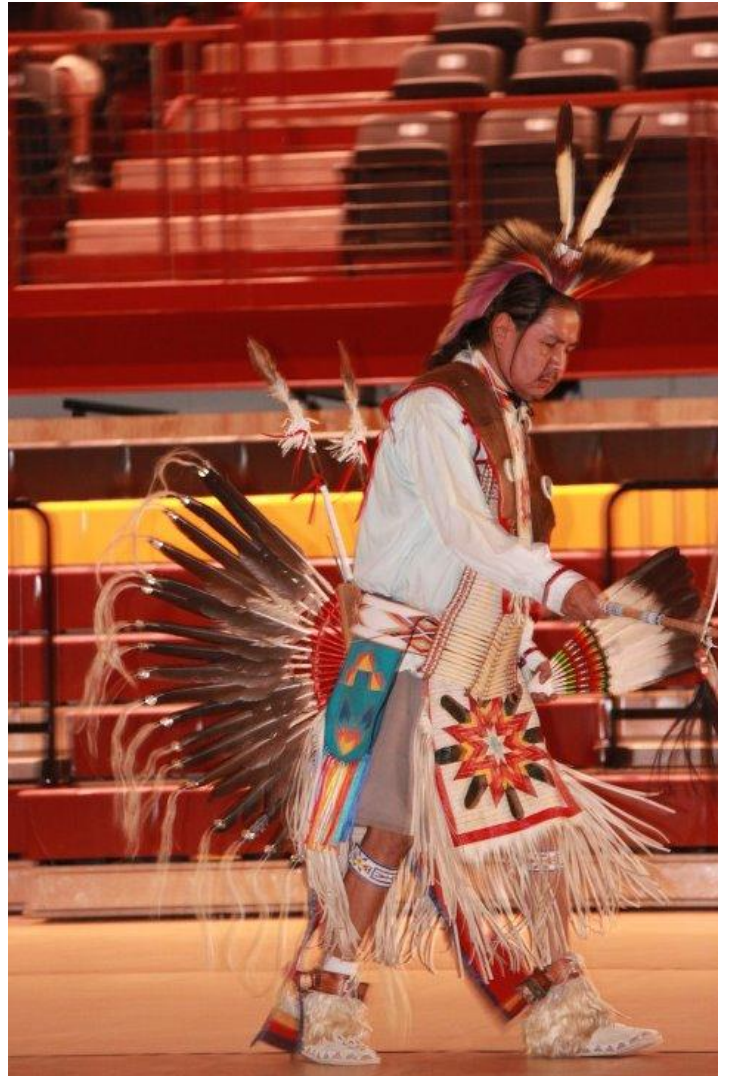
***Morgan Fawcett (Tlingit)*** Youth respected hearing from a peer with a multi-layered presentation style mixing personal stories, music, and demonstrations.

***Gene Tagaban (Cherokee/Tlingit)*** Youth learned and connected with each other as they were led through the Talking Circle.

***Hilary Tomkins (Navajo)*** A story that reflected a personal perspective on life in and out of the reservation and the privilege of being able to live in Indian Country was impactful for youth.

***Chaske Spenser (Lakota Sioux)*** An actor and activist who leveraged his fame to promote civic engagement encouraged youth to connect to their communities regardless of what career path they chose, because they can always do something.

***Craft-making*** Learning beading, silversmithing, drumming, and how to make moccasins illustrated the depth and creativity within these traditions.



## Native Pride

Youth reveled in the variety of tribes represented, and the American Indian and Alaska Native presenters who fostered a deeper sense of Native pride.

# Intertribal Connections

Interacting with youth from other tribes helped build connections, friendships, and surfaced many similar experiences and viewpoints for youth taking action in Indian Country.



The Voices of Youth Listening Session used the World Café facilitation model designed to encourage interactive dialogue that centers on posing questions and receiving collective responses. The facilitated discussion helped youth share perspectives and visions for healthier Native communities with the federal representatives who participated in the NIYS.

Along with the federal partners, Jacqueline Johnson Pata, the Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians, facilitated the spirited discussion and helped youth and federal representatives discuss issues important to Indian Country and Native youth. Participants were asked the following three questions in order to spark discussion:

- 1) What is your vision of a healthy Native community?
- 2) What support, resources, and tools do you need to make your vision a reality?
- 3) How can youth work with tribal and/or village leaders to promote healthy choices, strong relationships, and pathways to success?

These questions elicited a variety of responses, visions, and ideas for action. A graphic artist produced a visual rendering of the conversation themes and documented the ideas and commitments of the participants.

Federal representatives actively participated in facilitated discussions with Native youth. Tom Perrelli, U.S. Associate Attorney General, is pictured above.

**“We can’t learn the full scope of issues by only talking to tribal leaders. We have to listen to the youth and take their voices to Washington D.C.”**

-Charlie Galbraith, Associate Director,  
Office of Public Engagement, The White House



## Findings

The notes taken during the session, the graphic artist's visual renderings, 56 youth drawn posters, and 641 handouts created a substantial picture of what is important for youth. Their visions, aspirations, tools, and desired support are described below.

### ***Increase Opportunity***

Youth have a vision for a thriving community.

- *Education*—Youth want more opportunities for a stronger educational system: counselors on campus, college preparatory classes, and scholarships.
- *Activities*—Youth want to have more options and want to be able to access those opportunities close to home.
- *Perspective*—Being proactive is important to youth who want to create a brighter future.

### ***Improve Environments***

Youth would like to interact within their home, school, community, and lands.

- *Internal Growth & Support*—Youth want accessible and safe places to go to for support, fun, and mentorship.
- *Inspiring Surroundings*—Youth are inspired by beautiful places that respect Mother Earth and a collaborative environment.
- *Enriching Cultural Exchange*—Youth want to grow Native pride, practice their traditions, and create ways to learn more about culture.

### ***Youth Empowerment***

Youth want to cultivate a collective voice to speak and share their viewpoints.

- *Communications*—Youth think the message is as important as the vision, and they want to express their

thoughts to the best of their ability through multiple media.

- *Leadership Skills*—Programs that build leadership skills and give youth the courage and determination to achieve their vision were seen as important steps towards empowerment.
- *Education*—Youth want to grow their educational expertise so they can attain the skills needed in their communities.

### ***Community Support***

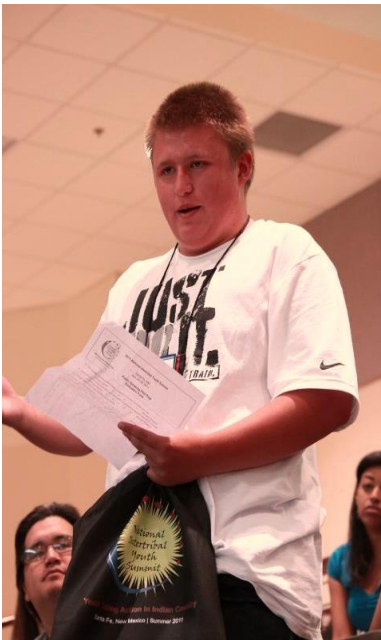
Youth desire to connect with their communities.

- *Expertise*—Youth overwhelmingly pointed to the foundational resource of their community. They want to learn from local experts and build their own skill-set.
- *Inclusion*—Youth want to foster intergenerational leadership and engage the tribal council to work on common commitments to bring the tribe together. They want to hear the perspective of elders and exercise a youth voice that is responsive and meets community needs.
- *Togetherness*—Having community building events that builds supportive environments, garners volunteer support, and fosters togetherness is important for youth.

### ***Financial Resources***

Youth could benefit from financial resources and mechanisms.

- *Long-term Program Focus*—Programs that understand the variety of youth experiences, support healthy and active living, and are guaranteed to stay for at least a decade is the financial commitment youth deserve.
- *Sustainable Community Driven Finance*—Matching funds and local investment is important to youth. They also realize that for a strong local economy to support them, all basic needs must be met first.



A Strong Youth Voice

## Highlights at a Glance



### Building an Intertribal Youth Voice

Meeting people from other tribes and strengthening connections across the nation was a highlight for the youth. They asked for more opportunities to learn about each other and relished group activities. In addition to the cultural events, the World Café and creating a PSA were particularly important in developing a youth voice. In tandem, these two activities gave youth the tools to actualize the importance of their voice in the larger dialogue about creating healthy communities.



### Creating a Collective Message through New Media

Social media is an important way to spread a message—what that message can be, however, is just as important. Learning and developing a message to give an accurate and responsible picture of life on the reservation is empowering. In addition to strengthening the image and voice of American Indian and Alaskan Native youth, it builds important new media skills and helps promote intergenerational leadership through skill sharing.



### Making Bonds Across Generations

Intergenerational connections and leadership development were a valued element of the NIYS. Thanks to the youth, chaperones, tribal elders, federal representatives, and NIYS organizers, there were many opportunities to make connections. The PSA, Gene Tagaban's Talking Circle, an impromptu wiffle-ball game, and trips to the Santa Ana and San Felipe Pueblos provided significant opportunities to make lasting memories and build relationships. Experiencing these activities together, built camaraderie and connections.



### Role Models Reaching New Heights

It was a meaningful experience for youth to see American Indian and Alaska Native speakers representing various federal agencies, and taking the time to speak to them and share their stories. The stories were especially important to youth as they were able to see future opportunities and hear leaders express pride for being from Indian Country.



### Healthy and Active Living

The daily morning *Let's Move!* activities of Zumba were the center of much talk and excitement, as was the food—youth embraced it and many wanted more. Healthy food is important to youth. Learning about obesity prevention and treatment, the nutritional clinic, and partaking in physical activities, such as golf, soccer, and basketball were a highlight for participants. Youth expressed their desire for more activities in future Summits. Youth gained motivation, learned new techniques, and built leadership skills needed to help bring healthy and active living back to their communities.



This project was supported by Grant No. 2010-TY-FX-Kozo awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

## That's My People

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