

## *CU Boulder Powwow*

### **Abstract:**

This cross-disciplinary project proposes visioning, organizing, and hosting an inter-tribal Native American powwow at CU Boulder in spring 2024. A powwow is a traditional gathering for intergenerational Native drumming, singing, dance and community building that celebrates rich ancestral histories and contemporary Native culture. The powwow will be led by the Oyate Native American and Indigenous Student Organization and supported by CU faculty from multiple departments, the Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies, the Center for Inclusion and Social Change, and regional Native communities. The CU Boulder powwow will most importantly bring visibility to Native people. Students, faculty, staff and the public will experience being in community and allyship with Native cultural traditions, practices of celebration, and belonging. Our goal is to link the Indigenous and non-Native communities together to enrich the College of Arts & Sciences and the CU campus toward a more informed, inclusive, diverse, and accountable society.

### **Summary:**

This cross-disciplinary project proposes visioning, organizing, and hosting a powwow at CU Boulder on April 12 and 13, 2024. The powwow will be led by Native American students from the Oyate Native American and Indigenous Student Organization and supported by CU faculty from several different departments, the Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies (CNAIS), the Center for Inclusion and Social Change, and regional Native communities. This project directly fulfills several of the topical areas outlined in the A&S Dean's Innovation Fund guidelines including fostering Native-centered justice, equity, diversity and inclusion efforts. This will support linking the College of Arts and Sciences more strongly with local and regional communities, as well as contributing to recruitment and retention of Native American/Indigenous students.

A powwow is a traditional secular festive gathering for Native drumming, singing, dance and community building that celebrates rich ancestral histories and contemporary Native culture. College-based powwows are relatively common around the US, and have previously been hosted by Colorado State University, CU Denver, and the University of Denver (and by CU Boulder in the distant past). A powwow consists of several different traditional styles of dances including grass, men's and women's fancy, jingle and northern/southern traditional dances with several rounds of dancing for each category. Prizes are awarded for the top dancers in each style. While the dancers, singers, drummers, judges, MC, and arena director will all be Native, anyone Native or non-Native, will be welcome to attend this powwow and participate in non-competitive inter-tribal dances. This tradition of inclusion will provide a safe space of acceptance, cultural awareness and understanding to the CU Boulder campus community, the Boulder community, and broader regional communities. Our goal is to support Native students in re-connecting with their own cultures and gaining visibility toward more acceptance and connection on campus. Attending a powwow at CU Boulder will be a first-time experience for many students — it will offer an embodied experience of how Native culture exists in the real world that is a far different educational modality than what is possible in a classroom setting. In addition to the dancing, singing and drumming, there will be Native vendors set up as part of the powwow to sell artwork, handmade jewelry, clothing and other merchandise to any attendees. Non-Native students will have the opportunity to learn about and participate in different Native cultures, histories, dances, songs, food, language, clothing, contemporary issues, and more through this intergenerational inter-tribal celebratory context.

The motivation to organize and host a powwow at CU Boulder is multi-fold. Many Native undergraduate and graduate students, Native faculty and staff, and non-Native faculty have been advocating for a CU Boulder powwow for several years. There is a growing number of Native students at CU Boulder since the passage of the in-state tuition bill with the resulting increase in numbers among the Oyate Native American and Indigenous Student Organization, we now have the critical mass needed for a Native-centered team to make a powwow happen. The resounding number one request from undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff is the desire to have a CU Boulder powwow in April 2023. Creating a CU Boulder powwow directly speaks to the cultural imperatives of the College of Arts and Sciences through the action items of 1) engaging the world; 2) building on diversity; 3) inclusion. It will connect the past and imagine the future through a Native perspective that will reinforce the language of the CU Boulder land acknowledgement commitment to “improving and enhancing engagement with

Indigenous peoples and issues locally and globally.” The land acknowledgement further proposes 1) recognizing and amplifying the voices of Indigenous CU Boulder students, staff and faculty and their work; 2) educating, conducting research, supporting student success and integrating Indigenous knowledge. Supporting a CU Boulder powwow puts these values into direct action with a lasting positive impact on the College of Arts & Sciences and the university as a whole. We need this A&S Dean’s Innovation Fund award in order to make a CU Boulder powwow possible.

The powwow will feature a range of intergenerational Native artists whose work and identities have been severely underrepresented and marginalized within academia and whose artistry is actively visioning more sustainable and inclusive futures. This powwow project will include five months of visioning, planning, relationship building, fundraising, and organizing. The powwow itself will be a two-day event that will include a grand entry on Friday afternoon/evening and Saturday all day with both competitive and open inter-tribal dances on the CU campus. In addition to the lead Oyate student organizers, Jacob Fenner, Alfredo Bitsoi, Florence Sigismund, Artemis Nopah, Deelia Sherman, and Nvdo Dahnawa, there are two Native faculty members, Assistant Professor Anna Tsouhlarakis of Art and Art History and Assistant Professor Angelica Lawson of Ethnic Studies and Film Studies, who have previous experience organizing campus-based powwows and have indicated willingness to mentor and advise. The College of Music, through Assistant Professor Annika Socolofsky, is committed to partnering through structural support, student involvement, financial support, and promotion. The Department of Theatre and Dance, through Assistant Professor Anya Cloud, is committed to partnering through structural support, student involvement, financial support, and promotion. The CNAIS, through Faculty Advisor Professor Andy Cowell, and the Center for Inclusion and Social Change, through Director of Intercultural Engagement Amanda Linsenmeyer, will offer broad mentoring and support to the Oyate students as well as promotion. The Oyate students are already connected with local Native American organizations such as the Colorado Native Organization and Creative Nations, and to regional Native American elders for advice and mentoring.

We see this as the beginning of a continuing event, not a one-time happening, which would serve to strengthen the College of Arts & Sciences and CU Boulder’s standing and identity as an Indigenous-friendly campus that is committed to the ongoing work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is a direct action in response to the following questions put forward by CNAIS: 1) What are you going to do to acknowledge the benefits you or your institution have received in exchange for the unjust ways that lands were occupied and acquired, as well as the negative effects on the previous occupants?; 2) How are you going to work to change the continuing inequities in the present? We are also exploring the idea of collaborating with other local campuses including Colorado State University, CU Denver, and University of Denver to potentially rotate a single powwow annually among the different schools each year, as a way of creating a coalition and lightening the organizing and financial burden on any given university, reducing potential competition and overlap in scheduling. This would also importantly build networks and community between Native students and faculty from different institutions in Colorado.

While the powwow will primarily involve Native participants and organizers, it will also be a wonderful educational, community building, and allyship opportunity for all students, faculty, and staff on campus and into the broader regional community. Our hope is to 1) support and amplify the voices, leadership, and identities of Native CU Boulder students while mentoring their skills in curation, organization, and community building; 2) support and connect intergenerational Native people in the region; 3) support non-Native CU students in developing skills for more cultural respect and literacy, allyship, and community care; 4) connect the regional Native communities more fully to and with the CU Boulder campus community. This is particularly important in the context of historical and ongoing oppression and marginalization of Native communities within Colorado and across the globe.

Having a powwow at CU Boulder will importantly link both Native and the non-Native communities to enrich the overall CU campus community toward being more informed, expansive, inclusive, diverse, and accountable. This will support students, faculty, staff, and people from the broader region in witnessing ways of being in embodied community and relationship with strong Native cultural traditions, practices of celebration and belonging, cross-disciplinary meaning-making, ritual, and more. Supporting a CU Boulder powwow through this grant would be a meaningful step toward the ongoing work of decolonizing the College of Arts & Sciences and the institution. It is an active way to educate about the reality that Indian country doesn’t stop on reservations — CU Boulder is on Native land and as such we value investing in illuminating the vibrant cultures of Native people and knowledge.

Further resources, history, and context on pow-wows:

<https://www.powwows.com/>

<https://firstnations.indiana.edu/powwow/powwow-about.html>

**BUDGET:**

**EXPENSES**

Venue – Glenn Miller Ballroom	Space is free for CU faculty Technician \$23/hr x 20 hrs =\$460, Table and chair rentals \$1,010	\$1,470
Drummers	\$1,000/group x 5 groups	\$5,000
Arena Director	\$500/day x 2 days	\$1,000
Dancer Awards	\$100/50/25 for children; \$500/300/200 for adults; \$250/150/100 for seniors = \$1585 per dance x 6 dances	\$10,830
Judges	\$500 each x 4 people	\$2,000
MC	\$500/day x 2 days	\$1,000
Native Community Advisors	Honorariums	\$5,000
Security		\$3,000
Promotion		\$500
Supplies		\$500
Organizing Mentors	Honorariums	\$3,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$33,300</b>

**INCOME**

A&S Innovation Grant	pending	\$23,000
New Era Colorado Grant ( CNAIS)	confirmed	\$2,000
CNAIS	confirmed	\$500
Department of Theatre and Dance	confirmed	\$1,000
Mini-Roser Grant	pending	\$3,800
College of Music	pending	\$1,000
Oyate Fundraising	pending	\$1,500
Center for Inclusion and Social Change	confirmed	\$500
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$33,300</b>