

Arctic Rivers Summit Action Plan

Youth and Elders: Building a Bridge of Traditional Knowledge

December 2022

Action Plan: Youth and Elders - Building a Bridge of Traditional Knowledge

1.0 Introduction

The Arctic Rivers Summit was a gathering that brought together nearly 100 people to discuss the current and potential future states of Alaskan and Yukon rivers and fish and how we can adapt. The summit was held in Anchorage, Alaska from December 6-8, 2023. People who attended included Tribal and First Nation leaders, community members, managers, and knowledge holders, western scientists, federal, state, and provincial agency representatives, academic partners, non-governmental organizations and others. The Summit was held as part of a five-year Arctic Rivers Project funded by the National Science Foundation's Navigating the New Arctic Program. The Arctic Rivers Project was co-led by the University of Colorado-Boulder and the National Center for Atmospheric Research, and both the project, and the Summit were guided by an Indigenous Advisory Council. Additional Summit partners included the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council, the U.S. Geological Survey, the University of Saskatchewan, and the University of Waterloo.

One of the key goals of the summit was to develop action plans centered around four topics:

- (1) State of salmon
- (2) State of rivers
- (3) Partnering Indigenous Knowledge and Western Science for Management
- (4) Youth and Elders: Building a Bridge of Traditional Knowledge

This action plan focuses on *Youth and Elders: Building a Bridge of Traditional Knowledge*. Intergenerational knowledge sharing is an integral part of Indigenous cultures and has been done by Native peoples for thousands of years. Although each of the plans is presented separately, interconnections exist among all the plans with intergenerational knowledge sharing being key among them.

To develop the Youth and Elders action plan, two small group discussions were held. During the first discussion, group members first shared stories and got to know one another. Afterwards, they did an activity in which they used their five senses to describe the relationship between youth and elders. The group then moved into creating a collective vision for how to revitalize youth-elder relationships. This is described in Section 2.0. During the second discussion, the group reviewed notes on the sensory activity and the vision and then concentrated on actions to support the vision. The main action focused on was ***supporting culture camps***.

2.0 Gathering 1 – Visioning

*Share stories, songs, dance,
laughter, language, and wisdom
intergenerationally, which is love.*

During the first gathering for this working group, the group began by discussing their collective vision for how to bridge traditional knowledge between youth and elders, engaged in a five senses activity, and then discussed barriers that prevent youth and elders from connecting with one another and how to overcome those.

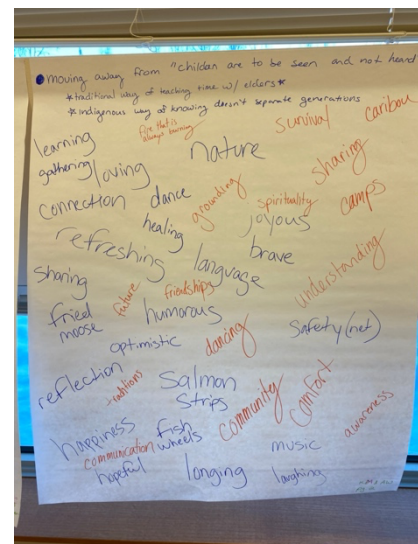
2.1 Collective vision

During the first gathering for this working group, the group began by discussing their collective vision for how to bridge traditional knowledge between youth and elders - which included how this bridge is gapped and where this exchange could take place. Some of the main themes that emerged from this initial activity were:

- The need to acknowledge generational trauma
- To tell stories both written and orally from the past to inform present healing and to move forward
- The importance of reciprocal learning, listening, and understanding between youth and elders
- Building relationships based on trust, humor, language, spirituality, and culture
- Reimagining the role of youth and their roles in society
- Culture camps

2.2 Five senses activity - culture camps

The working group agreed that organizing culture camps was the best way to engage youth and elders. From this point, the working group participated in another activity that drew on their five senses to continue visioning what a culture camp would look, feel, smell, sound, and taste like. Working group members organically shared single words or phrases that came to mind ranging from shared values for the culture camps to the traditional knowledges and practices that would be shared. (See photo for more details).



The Present-day Disconnect between Youth and Elders & What We Can Do About It

After the working group concluded their in-depth visioning about how to create culture camps, the group transitioned to discussing the barriers that prevent youth and elders from connecting with one another. Discussion points included:

- Young being caught in colonialism
- Western's society innate tendency to separate different ages in educational spaces
- The technology gap for elders
- Not enough spaces to interact with one another

Youth are lost in the path of colonialism. Let's reconnect them with Elders to help them find their way to embracing who they are.

Concurrently, suggestions were made about how to overcome these barriers. Discussion points included:

- Elders teaching youth cultural values through ceremony, traditional language, songs, dance, stories, and skills to tend the land
- Uplifting and respecting elders in their traditional roles as leaders and knowledge holders in their communities
- Reciprocally, have youth teach elders the importance and benefits of technology
- Re-educating elders about the importance of two spirit+ folks in traditional communities

3.0 Gathering 2 – Ways to build bridges between youth and elders

During the second gathering for this working group, people discussed actions to create opportunities for intergenerational exchanges to take place. In considering this, one of the main actions that the group focused on was:

- Supporting and connecting culture camps.

A specific suggestion was made to create a program for communities doing culture camps to network and learn from one another. Another suggestion was to expand culture camps beyond summer, when many take place, to other seasons, thus prioritizing traditional learning throughout the year. Other actions noted during the conversation included:

- Developing and using place-based cultural curriculum in schools.
- Hosting community events that build bridges between youth and elders.
- Encouraging youth to reconnect with their villages

These actions and the associated guiding conversations are discussed in more detail below.

3.1 Supporting culture camps

Culture camps bring together youth, elders, and others. They can be spaces and times to get out on the rivers and land and speak native languages, share stories, sing traditional songs, prepare native foods, learn traditional skills, engage in ceremonies, and be immersed in traditional ways of life, connecting to the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental health that brings. Camps can uplift youth who may have had to leave their lands and empower communities keeping languages and cultures intact. Much of the discussion during this gathering focused on creating positive spaces during the camps. One group member recommended starting off by asking people what they want – *“there is a lot of power in asking the question.”*

We’ve gotten away from our own traditions – look at the environment and that’s where we are learning from.

Involving elders and youth in the camps

Indigenous ways of knowing values Elders. Western society treats them like they are in the way with nothing to offer. Let’s once again treat Elders with the care they deserve.

In discussing culture camps, the working group noted the importance of involving elders and youth early in the planning process and that the elders and youth planning the camp could become the camp. Some also cautioned that some elders may be unhealthy and that it is important to be able to identify healthy people on a healthy path.

Spaces to heal boarding and residential school trauma

A topic of significant discussion was the impact of boarding and residential schools on Native communities with a particular focus on how these impacts sometimes show up for elders during culture camps. During the 19th and 20th centuries, in an effort to assimilate Native Americans, the governments of both Canada and the United States forcibly removed First Nation/ Native American youth from their families and homelands and relocated them to boarding or residential schools (IAPOC 2021, Newland 2022). At these schools, many children experienced disease, malnourishment, and abuse and/or were severely punished for speaking native languages, violating school rules, which they may not have understood, and running away (IAPOC 2021, Newland 2022). The intergenerational trauma caused by these efforts to eradicate Native American cultures and identities cannot be overstated.

In the context of culture camps, there may be trauma that comes up for elders from them not knowing their culture because of boarding and residential school experiences. Group members noted the importance of having a lot of support in place for elders who are participating in camps, honoring elders wherever they are, not trying to suppress feelings

that may arise and providing a safe space for them to potentially heal some of the pain resulting from their residential/boarding school experiences.

Guidance on funding, partnerships

During the discussion, the working group brought up both the need for funding and partnerships for culture camps and concerns around the restrictions and/or requirements that funding or partnerships can entail. Funding may be needed, for example, to transport people to camp locations. The importance of paying elders as the experts that they are was also brought up as was the importance of including Tribal governments and schools in grant writing. The group also considered the potential of scientists to be allies in supporting culture camps with the possibility that they could provide boats being noted.

At the same time, funding may require reports, which may not be desired by camp participants, and a requirement of some funding may be knowledge co-production, which involves the sharing and weaving together of Indigenous Knowledge with western scientists, which also may not be desired. Further observations around funding included the need to engage Tribal government and schools when writing grants for culture camps and also the need to be able to say that we as Indigenous people can have culture camps without being dependent on grants.

Knowledge co-production

If for a particular camp, knowledge co-production is being documented, the group discussed both potential benefits and concerns. The group noted for example that cataloguing stories from the elders can help ensure that information is being passed down through the generations and is not being lost. At the same time, the group noted the importance of getting permission of Tribal governments for knowledge co-production and ensuring that any information provided by Tribes remains the property of the Tribes and that Tribal communities benefit from the co-production of knowledge.

Additional culture camp resources

Some additional research after the summit found two culture camp guidebooks:

- [*Back to the Land: A Guide to Indigenous Cultural Resurgence Through Youth Culture Camps*](#)
- [*Culture Camps for Language Learning: An Immersion Handbook*](#)

In addition, Table 1 contains example of and contact information for Alaska Native and First Nation culture camps.

3.2 Place-based cultural curriculum

Another idea that came up for connecting Native youth with their practices and traditions was developing and/or making use of existing place-based cultural curriculum in schools. Such curriculum may teach Indigenous beliefs, practices, calendars, and more.

Some additional research after the summit found two examples of Alaska Native-based curriculum:

- [*Association of Interior Native Educators* \(AINE\)](#). Examples of curriculum units developed by AINE include: [*Appreciating Caribou: Vadzaih, Birch Bark Uses, and Interior Plant Project*](#).
- The [*Alaska Native Knowledge Network*](#) also has [*curriculum units and a searchable database*](#).

Cultural curriculum examples outside of Alaska include:

- [*13 Moons First Foods and Resources Curriculum, Swinomish Indian Tribal Community*](#)
- [*Thirteen Moons Curriculum Anishinaabe Cree Kaniakeha':ka*](#) (clicking on the link immediately downloads the curriculum)

3.3 Hosting community events that build bridges between youth and elders

A third idea brought forth to connect Native youth with elders was hosting community events that bring together youth and elders. Such events could include lunches that support casual conversations, beading classes, and more. Events could potentially be overseen by Tribal governments or village schools and might be able to be funded through wellness grants. Such events could establish community guidelines that describe *“how we are going to be with one another while we’re here,”* which might be akin to traditional law. One caution that people noted was the importance of conducting criminal background checks and to ensure that participants were drug-free.

3.4 Reconnecting youth with their villages

Another important way for youth to engage with elders and learn their traditions and culture is to reconnect with and visit the villages of their parents and ancestors. However, youth who may want to return to their lands may be prevented from doing so by their parents or for other reasons. In addition, if they do go back, they may face rejection from people in the village and be discouraged from practicing their traditions. Kids in the village, for example, may be harsh with or bully youth returning because they were not raised in the village and went to outside schools. One youth at the summit who has returned to her village wanted other youth who may be dealing with negative responses and feeling disheartened to know that they are not alone, and she wanted to inspire and encourage them to reconnect with their roots despite this.

4.0 Conclusion

The Arctic Rivers Summit brought together a diverse array of people to share ideas around intergenerational knowledge sharing and connecting Indigenous youth and elders. This knowledge sharing has been an integral part of Indigenous cultures for thousands of years, sustaining Indigenous peoples through many changes and upheavals.

It is our vision and intention that the discussions and ideas presented in this plan will motivate conversations and inspire actions to build a bridge connecting youth and elders to sustain cultures, values, and identities into the future and increase the resiliency of both human and non-human relatives for the generations to come.

For questions

Please contact Karen Cozzetto, Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP) Tribal Wellbeing for Seven Generations Program Co-Manager and Nikki Cooley, ITEP Co-Director, with any questions or comments about this plan.

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References

Independent Assessment Process Oversight Committee (IAPOC). *Independent Assessment Process Final Report*, March 2021.

Newland. BT. *Federal Indian boarding school initiative investigative report*. United States Department of the Interior, Office of the Secretary, May 2022.

Table 1. Examples of Tribal Culture Camps

Event Name	Dates and Times	Host and contact information	Description	Examples of activities/ classes
<u>Salteau First Nations Culture Camp</u>	- Held annually during the summer	Salteau First Nations P.O. Box 1020 Chetwynd, British Columbia VOC 1J0 <u>Contact:</u> communications@salteau.com (250) 788-3955	The Salteau First Nations Culture Camps are “scheduled to allow community Elders and Knowledge Keepers of the community to share our history, culture, knowledge and traditions with our youth in the hopes of keeping our culture and traditions alive for future generations to come.”	Singing, hand games, beading, moccasin making, Teepee raising, meat rack building, berry picking, bannock making, hunting and fishing knowledge, basic survival skills, storytelling
<u>Sand Point Culture Camp</u>	- Held annually for around 10 days in June or July. <u>Examples of times for different ages</u> - K–2 nd grade: 1 pm-4 pm - 3 rd –4 th grades: 9 am-12 pm - 5 th –12 th grades: 9 am-5 pm	Qagan Tayagungin Tribe Culture Camp P.O. Box 447 Sand Point, Alaska 99661 <u>Contact:</u> 907-383-5616 <u>Funding:</u> Aleut Corporation	Camps for kindergarten (K) through 12th grade are held at the Tribal community center. Culture camps provided lunch, snacks, drinks, and camp gear. The camp started in 2009 and has become an annual event up to 2023. Interested participants can submit camp applications.	Unangan language and dance, regalia, head dresses, mask making, weaving, Aleut bentwood hats, beaded glass balls, model iqyax classes, and gathering and preparing traditional foods.

Event Name	Dates and Times	Host and contact information	Description	Examples of activities/ classes
<u>Tanana Chiefs Conference Cultural Wellness Camp Program</u>	<p>Over ten camps have been held in different locations throughout the Tanana Chiefs Conference region. Camps ranged from 2 to 6 days and were held in March or May through September.</p> <p>All ages have attended the camps including Infants as young as 1 year old and elders.</p>	<p>Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC)</p> <p><u>Contact:</u> Camp Manager, 907-452-8251 ext.3288</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Administration for Native Americans</p>	<p>The camps' focus is to promote healthy parenting and assist families in maintaining self-sufficiency through culture and wellness activities.</p> <p>The camps are open to all communities within the TCC subregion in which the camp takes place.</p>	<p>Native language, beading, traditional Athabascan values, cutting fish and skinning caribou hide with traditional tools, moose hunting, cutting, and meat processing, making fish ice cream, berry picking, winter survival skills, elder stories. Wellness activities included suicide prevention and awareness, boat/life jacket and gun safety, bullying, alcohol and drug prevention, and more.</p>
<u>Urban Unangaŋ Culture Camp</u>	<p>- Held annually; typically the 3rd week of June.</p> <p>- Children (ages 0-10): 9-12 pm</p> <p>- Youth (ages 11-17): 9-5 pm</p> <p>- Adults: 6 pm-9 pm</p> <p>- Elders may attend any time during the day</p>	<p>Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association (APIA)</p> <p>Headquarters:1131 East International Airport Rd., Anchorage, Alaska 99518.</p> <p><u>Contact:</u> culturecamp@api.ai.org</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Aleut Corporation</p>	<p>All ages can participate. Elders spend time with children to share traditional stories, history, and family genealogy. The camp is free and open to community members. Priority is given to Tribal members enrolled in one of the 13 APIA Tribes. A record of 239 participants attended in 2019. Interested participants can submit camp applications.</p>	<p>Traditional foods, drums, dance, language, regalia sewing, various textile sewing, jewelry making, basket weaving, "kayak" construction, Native Youth Olympics practice.</p>
<u>Great Lakes Cultural Camps</u>	<p>- Camps are held year-round with different topics for each of the four seasons</p>	<p>Family-run business Ontario, Canada</p> <p><u>Contact:</u> info@culturalcamps.com</p>	<p>Camp programs are open to the public with guided trips and a cultural interpreter educating on First Nations people, the area's history, and providing First</p>	<p>Many classes are provided and differ depending on the four seasons. Activities include: maple syrup harvest, language,</p>

Event Name	Dates and Times	Host and contact information	Description	Examples of activities/ classes
		705-942-9909	Nations-focused cultural activities. Programs can be customized with respect to topics, group size, location, and length of time. Fees and signed waivers are required.	harvesting seasonal plants, birch bark canoe making, fish camp, moose harvest, rites of passage, elders and youth, woodland survival skills, winter Ojibwe games and many more
<u>Old Minto Cultural Heritage Camp</u>	-working to extend culture camp programs to be offered throughout the year	<p>Cultural Heritage & Education Institute (CHEI) P.O. Box 73030 Fairbanks, Alaska</p> <p>CHEI is a non-profit organization</p> <p><u>Contact:</u> CHEI@mosquitonet.com 907-451-0923, 907-451-0924</p>	Cultural Heritage/Spirit camp programs take place at Old Minto and are open to the public. Participants have the opportunity to “live in a remote Alaskan river village” and “gain insight into the traditional Athabascan culture, ways of life, and people.” In addition to culture camps, CHEI hosts high risk youth camps, alcohol abuse treatment camps and youth-elder spirit camps.	Fisheries practices, fish preservation, outdoors skills, weather prediction, wilderness navigation, birch bark/spruce root basketry, beading, canoe construction, traditional native dress, dance composition, storytelling, and singing