

The Department of Interior (DOI) Listening Session on Tribal Youth and Climate
October 13, 2021, 3:00 pm- 5:00 pm ET¹

Background

[Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government \(EO 13985\)](#) directs agencies to conduct equity assessments of select programs to determine whether underserved communities face systemic barriers in accessing benefits and opportunities. Per EO 13985, underserved communities are defined as, “populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life...such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.” As part of implementing [EO 13985](#), the Department of the Interior (DOI) is assessing the equity of its programs related to three initial focus areas that support the agency's mission and have high potential for equity impact: (1) contracting, (2) recreational visitation, and (3) tribal discretionary grants. DOI contracted with Kearns and West to conduct 15 virtual listening sessions where the public were invited to provide comments and feedback on the barriers that limit access, diversity, and equity as well as recommendations of actions the Department should take to reduce barriers.

On behalf of DOI, Kearns and West facilitated a listening session on Tribal Youth and Climate on October 13, 2021, from 3:00 pm- 5:00 pm ET.

Participant Data

Ahead of this virtual session, registration totaled 101 participants including youth, those who work or mentor youth, Tribal leaders, and federal employees. The listening session saw a maximum number of participants early in the session with 85 attendees, and two instances where multiple participants joined through one Zoom account bringing the total number of participants to 91.

Participants were invited to voluntarily use Poll Everywhere to understand who was participating and as a tool for building community in a virtual space. Participants were asked about where they were coming from, their age, and their initial thoughts on climate change.

Polling data and registration information showed that participants joined the session from a wide geographic area with larger numbers in Alaska (12), Arizona (7), California (5), Washington, D.C. (6), New Mexico (9), Nebraska (2), Oregon (6), and Virginia (3). Participants also represented states such as Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, and New York.

Ages of participants included both youth and adults, with 20% identifying as a youth mentor, 20% identifying as a high school student, 4% identifying as a middle school student, and 56% selecting the other category (which included college students).

Regarding where participants learn about climate change, participants responded with the following: school, science classes, Tribes, Tribal elders, family, social media, research, social media, and some even mentioned “everywhere”. Many associated climate change with the relocation and displacement of

¹ This meeting summary was prepared for the U.S. Department of the Interior by Kearns & West, Inc. (K&W) pursuant to an existing IDIQ contract.

indigenous populations, changes in weather, extreme heat conditions, a problem that needs to be solved collectively, a human-made problem, wild fires, habitat loss, and wildlife loss. Lastly, participants were asked through a free response question who inspires them to take climate action, and participants answered with the following: Mother Earth, elders, youth, the animals, the 7 generations, school, future generations, and cultural practitioners.

Agenda Overview

The purpose of this listening session was to begin a conversation with Tribal youth about the future of our climate. DOI held this session to further understand the challenges facing Tribal youth, and how to work together on issues of climate and climate change. Keeping this purpose in mind, Kearns & West, DOI, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) developed a two-hour facilitation plan to target youth, specifically middle school, high school, and college students on the topic of climate change, future actions, and opportunities for empowerment.

Miro, an interactive, collaborate virtual whiteboard was used to capture participants' responses to developed facilitation questions. Prior to the session, participants were sent a session reminder email with instructions on how to use Miro, which included a PDF of Miro Tips and a YouTube video tutorial. Sara Omar, Kearns & West, provided an additional demonstration of the Miro board, with instructions for those uncomfortable with the technology to express their ideas verbally or by using the chat function. Miro provided participants with the space to reflect and respond to the following guiding questions:

- How is climate change impacting your Tribal nation and/or your community?
- How can you help connect people of all generations to work together to solve community problem with honor and respect for the land and environment?
- What types of projects would make a difference in your Tribal community to help with climate change impacts? What areas of expertise does your community need to accomplish these projects?

Utilizing these questions as a framework, Ben Duncan, Kearns & West, led participants through a series of discussions. Each question corresponded to a dedicated half hour of discussion through the Miro board, the chat function, or participants' verbal remarks. Each section began with an introduction to the question, slides with additional context to participants presented by Coral Avery, BIA, and then a dedicated space for conversation and reflection. Each discussion portion of the agenda concluded with a summarization of themes, and its relationship to the goals of the listening session.

In addition to guided facilitation of Miro activities and reflection, the listening session opened with a prayer from Ben Hunter- Francis and welcoming remarks from Kathryn Isom-Clause, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs for Policy and Economic Development. The session closed with remarks from Ben Duncan, Kearns & West, who reiterated that the listening session provided a foundation for future conversation and action among tribal youth around issues of climate and climate change. The session closed with a song performed by Ben Hunter-Francis.

Themes and Concepts

Three thematic conversations were held during the listening session: (1) introduction to youth and climate, (2) moving towards action, and (3) empowering tribal youth with opportunities. A summary of each conversation's themes is included below.

Introduction to Youth & Climate

This section looked for participants to begin brainstorming answers to the following questions:

- How is climate change impacting your Tribal Nation/community?
- What are the top three most important things, activities, traditions, etc. that might be or already are being impacted by climate change?
- How can you help connect people of all generations to work together to solve community problems with honor and respect for the land and environment?

Participants were asked to describe the issue of climate change as it relates to youth and Tribal nations and communities. Participants' words, reflections, experiences, and recommendations on this topic were recorded on the Miro board, a screenshot of this board is included as *Figure 1: Introduction to Tribal Youth Miro Board Screenshot* in Appendix A. **Themes that arose from the Miro board included: concerns about drought, extreme temperatures, and impacts to the natural environment. Participants expanded on these concerns to include how climate change impacts fishing, hunting, berry picking, and other cultural activities. This segment of conversation also introduced the complexity of the relationship between elders and youth, where elders hold the knowledge and youth hold the questions.**

Ben Duncan, Kearns & West, opened additional space for participants to reflect on comments posted on the virtual Miro board or participants' experiences with climate change. Youth participants added additional considerations towards language and traditional knowledge, as it relates to native populations and their stewardship of Mother Earth. There was also a discussion of the tension between traditional teachings and Western education. Participants pointed to a need for further connection between the teachings of elders and youth.

Moving Towards Action

This segment asked participants to brainstorm how they could act based on the following questions:

- As future leaders, how can you use your voice and skills to make a difference for the environment, while continuing to respect your culture and strengthen your sovereignty?
- How can you share stories of the challenges faced by your community in a way that will influence others to act?
- How would you go about involving elders, Tribal council, other youth, and community members to be actively involved in a climate change resistance initiative?

These questions and reflections on the Miro board moved participants from describing and identifying issues to begin brainstorming and developing solutions that youth could implement around climate and climate change. **This discussion built upon previous reflections and sticky notes that emphasized a need for a connection among the elders and the youth for future generations to understand resiliency, strength, and acquiring the necessary wisdom to move actions forward.** Participants' words, reflections, experiences, and recommendations on this topic were recorded on the Miro board, a screenshot of this board is included as *Figure 2: Moving Towards Action Miro Board Screenshot* in Appendix A.

Ben Duncan, Kearns & West, opened the space for additional reflections. Reflections from a youth participant emphasized that working together as people can build a better future that remains resilient to the various climate challenges. To work together, youth must be able to learn from their elders and keep their Tribe's traditional knowledge before it is too late. Tribal elders were compared to that of a

library, and as each one passes away, it is comparable to a library burning down. To take future action, cultural knowledge must transcend current generations for future generations' success and enjoyment of the environment.

Empowering Tribal Youth with Opportunities

This section looked for participants to begin brainstorming answers to the following questions:

- What types of education and leadership opportunities would help you and your Tribe address climate change issues (e.g., types of opportunities, emergency preparedness, climate scenario planning, communications, leadership, gardening/agriculture, renewable energy development, business/entrepreneurship; formats for training: in-person workshops, online webinars, etc.)?
- What jobs/careers are you interested in? How might these jobs help your community with climate change issues?
- What can the federal government do to make it easier for you to start on community projects for your Tribe? (e.g., funding, training and education, policy, business/entrepreneurship, formats for training: in-person, workshops, online webinars, etc.)?
- What would empower you and your Tribal nation to take action on climate change?

These questions and reflections on the Miro board moved participants to consider what additional resources or investments would help empower Tribal youth solutions. Participants' words, reflections, experiences, and recommendations on this section were recorded on a Miro board, and a screenshot of responses are included in Appendix A as *Figure 3: Empowering Tribal Youth Miro Board Screenshot*.

Themes that arose on the Miro board involve three specific categories of investment: investment in the individual in terms of putting resources towards scholarships and mentorships that allow youth to grow, learn, and contribute to their communities; investment in the community in terms of money going directly into tribal services such as community gardens and waste disposal; and lastly, and investment in self in empowering the imagination of young people to contribute to climate change conversation and action through art.

Ben Duncan, Kearns & West, opened the space to allow participants to reflect on points of empowerment or the conversation. Many participants expressed their gratitude in holding a session to begin conversations about these topics and hoped for future conversations. One youth participant reflected on how the world might look without all that divides people, in hopes that the current generation can propose solutions that allow the future generations to have clean air, green grass, animals, and fruits to enjoy. This segment closed with a reflection with a metaphor about building bridges across cultures, rather than fences that cut through our natural landscapes.

Overarching Recommendations

At the conclusion of the session, many participants were thankful for the space to hold these conversations. It is through these reflections that many raised the hope that there could be continuous conversations about tribal youth, climate change, and the impact youth can have on bringing forward innovative solutions. The key recommendations the Kearns and West facilitation team heard and would like to emphasize included:

- Participants recommended increased funding to Tribal nations directly. Increasing investment in scholarships and mentorships to native youth, while also holding additional space for continued teachings, workshops, and trainings.

- Youth participants recommended and stressed the need for Tribal youth to connect with Elders in their community around language and traditional customs to create innovative solutions rooted in their customs and cultures.

Appendix A: Miro Board Screenshots

This Appendix features participant responses to the DOI Listening Session on Tribal Youth and Climate Change. These sticky notes reflect participants' own words, experiences, reflections, and recommendations.

How is climate change impacting your Tribal Nation/community?

What are the top three most important things, activities, traditions, etc. that might be or are already impacted by climate change?

How can you help connect people of all generations to work together to solve community problems with honor and respect for the land and environment?

Anything else we should know?

Repeating activities, due to droughts. Large amounts of destruction, loss of homes.

Water shortages

Fishing, hunting, and tide pooling changes

Climate change is impact the risk to our traditional native species. Without these Native species, our people essentially lose connection to our way of life.

More connectivity across groups/tribe impacted by climate change, especially because the impacts don't look the same everywhere. For example, there are no trees on St. Paul Island, so students there might not connect the wildfires in the lower 48 to climate change, and conversely students in the lower 48 might not know what life is like in the Bering Sea and how climate change is impacting communities there.

Education, "How to lower carbon emissions, how to recycle properly, how to compost properly"

doing activities that will help demonstrat the affects of climate change

Listen to youth

Leaders need to get serious about it

I am a youth

I do not think of myself, I think of the people that will come after me.

Invite youth to future sessions. Continue the dialogue.

Taking opportunities to make a difference in our communities and thinking out of the box.

the glaciers in montana feed the Blackfoot people, other tribes, and other Montanans with clear pristine water... the glaciers are at least 7000 years old... sadly some have already disappeared. there was a prediction that they'd be gone by 2050 and that was moved up to 2020... there are a few left but I have seen the changes in my own lifetime (I am 55)... glaciers in home to many species of large and small animals as well traditional plants and foods and these are all being affected, let alone the lifeways of the people

Being able to speak to one another in your own language and within those languages there are teachings. Teaching about Mother Earth and how to respect her and how to take care of her. Speaking the language will help bring these teachings back.

Set into place procedures on how to be environmentally friendly especially in the farming industry. Encourage and educate on cover cropping and better ways of harvesting.

Although elders know the answers, youth are the ones asking the questions and bringing up these important discussions. Youth from Alaska

This is a good question, and can be hard to answer because all Tribal Nations have different approaches. I feel it would be sensible to invest in solar panels to install on tribal facilities and homes. This may be out of scope for Tribal Nations, but it would be worth it to think about today's generation and generations to come.

Right now, we are experiencing a halt on our hotel project in downtown Port Angeles due to contamination of soil. We have had to clean up those contaminated soils and will possibly have to put more soils. Due to this hold up, my Tribe has had to somewhat shrink the size of the project.

**Youth Commission Vice President
National Congress of American Indians**

Earlier this summer, many Tribal Nations on the west coast, in the State of Washington, experienced high temperatures that were over one-hundred degrees. These temperatures are not native to our area.

As a result of these temperatures, many of our trees became fried, areas in our county, Clallam County, experienced droughts, affected the lives of marine life by the millions, shrinking glaciers throughout the Olympic Peninsula, and threatening the survival of our precious and pristine natural resources.

**Youth Commission Vice President
National Congress of American Indians**

1. Decline of adult salmon returns, changes in timing of returns, lower juvenile survival due to scouring of redds, high stream temperatures, and loss of habitat.

2. Development from population increases that reduce floodplain connections, reduce groundwater inputs, and limit salmon habitat.

3. Higher stream temperatures in the summer and lower water quantity for yearling juveniles and returning adult salmon.

4. Changes from a snow dominant to a rain dominant system. More flooding and more intense storms.

5. Sea level rise that pushes our community from our ancestral lands to areas that are already over populated.

Supporting tribal people in issues related to climate change means thinking not just outside the box but outside reservation boundaries. Funding is great to encourage activities like the replanting of grasslands or controlled burns and management but these projects can't just happen on tribal lands (already scarce and often committed to other purposes). They need to include parks, forest service lands, public lands, and can include private lands should private land owners wish to apply and follow the guidelines which may require them to consult with people who have indigenous knowledge or closely follow the task force recommendations. Climate Change requires Solution Change and that requires ALL OF US!

St. Paul Island, AK: fishing, subsistence activities, coastal erosion

Food, traditional plants, water

Food shortages

Water shortages due to drought

**Marshell, AK
Low numbers of King Salmon
Migration patterns of land animals.
Unpredictable weather patterns**

Music (drought impacting the cane width of elderberry)

This past summer in my village it wasn't possible for us to fish for subsistence which many people rely on to supply their families with food. Youth from Alaska

Fishing, wild rice harvesting, berry picking

Fishing, tides, hunting

Fishing, berry picking, hunting, Youth from Alaska

Fishing, Gathering, Hunting

Connecting with the land, Native Dancing, and Connecting with Elders, and Peers

Food, traditional plants, water

Ceremonies, farming, and hunting.

Fishing, hunting, potatch, berry picking

Set into place procedures on how to be environmentally friendly especially in the farming industry. Encourage and educate on cover cropping and better ways of harvesting.

Although elders know the answers, youth are the ones asking the questions and bringing up these important discussions. Youth from Alaska

The apocalyptic threat of Climate Change has already brought together hundreds of Tribal Nations. However, we have a lot of educating to do with our tribal members to know the excruciating effects of climate change.

To speak to helping our community solve this problem, we need to make them aware by sharing information. To that end, I plan to share as much information to my Tribal Nation as I can on climate change and how it threatens our treaty rights, natural resources, Mother Earth, and the future of our Nations.

**Youth Commission Vice President
National Congress of American Indians**

Figure 1: Introduction to Youth and Climate



Figure 2: Moving Towards Action Miro Board Screenshot

What types of educational and leadership opportunities would help you and your Tribe address climate change issues (e.g., types of opportunities: emergency preparedness, climate scenario planning, communications, leadership, gardening/agriculture, renewable energy development, business/entrepreneurship; formats for training: in-person workshops, online webinars, etc.)?

What jobs/careers are you interested in? How might these jobs help your community with climate change issues?

What can the Federal government do to make it easier for you to start on community projects for your Tribe? (e.g., funding, training and education, policy, etc.)business/entrepreneurship; formats for training: in-person workshops, online webinars, etc.)?

What would empower you and your Tribal nation to take actions on climate change?



Figure 3: Empowering Tribal Youth with Opportunities Miro Board Screenshot