

Native Excellence and Wellness Series

Project Description

The Native Excellence and Wellness Series was a culturally responsive initiative created to uplift, inspire, and unify American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities throughout Los Angeles County. Rooted in a deep understanding of the impacts of multigenerational trauma, racism, and historical oppression, this project sought to counter internalized negative self-perceptions by reigniting pride in Native heritage, cultural identity, and community strength.

The series was designed in direct response to the mental health disparities disproportionately affecting AI/AN populations, including high rates of depression, suicide, and cultural disconnection. By centering Indigenous voices and lived experiences, the project aimed to increase awareness of these challenges while promoting holistic wellness through a Native cultural framework.

To accomplish this, the project engaged respected Native speakers, cultural leaders, subject matter experts, and wellness practitioners to lead community workshops, storytelling events, and shared discussions. These sessions explored themes of historical resilience, cultural excellence, and the many contributions of Native peoples—particularly those local to the greater Los Angeles basin. Topics included the psychological effects of colonization, boarding school trauma, language erasure, and systemic discrimination, along with culturally grounded tools for healing and mental wellness.

Native Excellence and Wellness Series

Attendance for the program was steady and meaningful. Our Friday evening virtual events, conducted via Zoom, averaged 20 participants per session. These sessions were especially effective in offering a safe, sacred space for dialogue, inspiration, and connection—welcoming individuals newly reintroduced to their Native identity and those seeking community care. Saturday in-person sessions were held at the Huntington Park Library, home of the Native American Culture Center, and averaged 10 attendees, including both community members and walk-ins already present at the library.

A key feature of both the virtual and in-person events was the inclusion of a shared meal—a gesture that emphasized community, reduced isolation, and mirrored the warmth of traditional gatherings. For online events, this was facilitated through DoorDash gift cards provided during a 30-minute lunch intermission. During that time, participants were encouraged to share in a meal, take a wellness break, or view cultural content curated to enhance the theme of the day. This included Bird Singers Pow Wow performances, spoken word pieces, a TED Talk by Lila June, and a short film titled *The Salmon People*. In-person events served healthy meals, including tacos, deli sandwiches, Panda Express, and Mediterranean cuisine. All offerings included water, low-sugar beverages, and vegetarian options to promote nutritious food choices as part of overall wellness.

The series concluded with a powerful and intimate dialogue titled “An Intimate Discussion on Native Wellness,” featuring Virginia Arvizu-Sanchez and Nicole Estrella of Sacred Path Indigenous Wellness Center. The interview was hosted by the project lead and served as a reflective close to the series. The video is available at this link: https://youtu.be/Rt36o_wNrDs

Native Excellence and Wellness Series

Out of respect for the privacy concerns within the AI/AN community, and in alignment with culturally appropriate practices, distribution of the recorded content was limited. Rather than broadcasting widely via social media ads, some participating organizations chose to share the content internally and through their own trusted networks to maintain control over where and how the material was viewed.

A social media outreach campaign accompanied the project overall, helping to extend awareness while respecting the boundaries and autonomy of Native communities.

In essence, the Native Excellence and Wellness Series was not only a call to healing—it was a celebration of Native identity, leadership, and enduring contributions to society. It fostered emotional connection, cultural affirmation, and mental wellness in ways that were accessible, relevant, and deeply rooted in community values.

Program and promotional materials

All Events Flyer for Virtual and In-Person

This is a project of the AI/AN UsCC subcommittee and brought to you by Nail Dega



NATIVE EXCELLENCE & WELLNESS SERIES

**Celebrating and Empowering
Native Families through Pride,
Unity, and Cultural Legacy.**

**VIRTUALLY ON FRIDAYS FROM 12:00-2:00PM
IN-PERSON ON SATURDAYS FROM 12:00-2:00PM**

Week 1: May 2 & May 3, 2025

Footprints of Our Ancestors: Native Excellence in Society

Week 2: May 9 & May 10, 2025

What We Carry: Trauma, Truth, and Transformation

Week 3: May 16 & 17, 2025

Unsettling the Story: California Missions through Native Eyes

Week 4: May 23 & 24, 2025

Coming Home: A Journey Back to Self through Culture

Week 5: May 30 & May 31, 2025

Gathered in Good Spirit: Safe Spaces Rooted in Tradition



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
**DEPARTMENT OF
MENTAL HEALTH**
hope. recovery. wellbeing.



WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE

Need mental health support? Call the 24/7 LACDMH Help Line at 800-854-7771 or dial "988" Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Program and promotional materials

Virtual Flyer for Fridays

This is a project of the All/An UcSS subcommittee and brought to you by
Nail Deга



NATIVE EXCELLENCE & WELLNESS SERIES

Celebrating and Empowering
Native Families Through Pride,
Unity, and Cultural Legacy.

VIRTUAL: FRIDAYS FROM 12:00PM-2:00PM
ZOOM LINK:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81834966323>

Week 1: May 2, 2025 - Avril Cardova & Jax Stewart
Footprints of Our Ancestors: Native Excellence in Society

Week 2: May 9, 2025 - Virginia Arvizu-Sanchez
What We Carry: Trauma, Truth, and Transformation

Week 3: May 16, 2025 - Virginia Carmelo
Unsettling the Story: California Missions Through Native Eyes

Week 4: May 23, 2025 - Taylor Pulsifer
Coming Home: A Journey Back to Self Through Culture

Week 5: May 30, 2025 - Citlali Arvizu
Gathered in Good Spirit: Safe Spaces Rooted in Tradition



Need mental health Support? (LACDMH 24/7 Help Line 800-854-7771 or 988 Suicide Crisis Lifeline)

In-Person Flyer for Saturdays

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NATIVE EXCELLENCE & WELLNESS SERIES

Celebrating and Empowering
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IN-PERSON: SATURDAYS FROM 12:00PM-2:00PM
HUNTINGTON PARK LIBRARY
6518 MILES AVE LOS ANGELES, CA 90255

Week 1: May 3, 2025 - Jax Stewart
Footprints of Our Ancestors: Native Excellence in Society

Week 2: May 10, 2025 - Jax Stewart
What We Carry: Trauma, Truth, and Transformation

Week 3: May 17, 2025 - Lazaro Arvizu
Unsettling the Story: California Missions Through Native Eyes

Week 4: May 24, 2025 - Brian Frejo
Coming Home: A Journey Back to Self Through Culture

Week 5: May 31, 2025 - Brian Frejo
Gathered in Good Spirit: Safe Spaces Rooted in Tradition



Need mental health Support? (LACDMH 24/7 Help Line 800-854-7771 or 988 Suicide Crisis Lifeline)

Engagement and Demographics

Views ⓘ

125.6K ↑ 626%



See more

Reach ⓘ

56,025 ↑ 342.7%



See more

Post engagements ⓘ

3,015 ↑ 100%



See more

Link clicks ⓘ

2,265 ↑ 464.8%



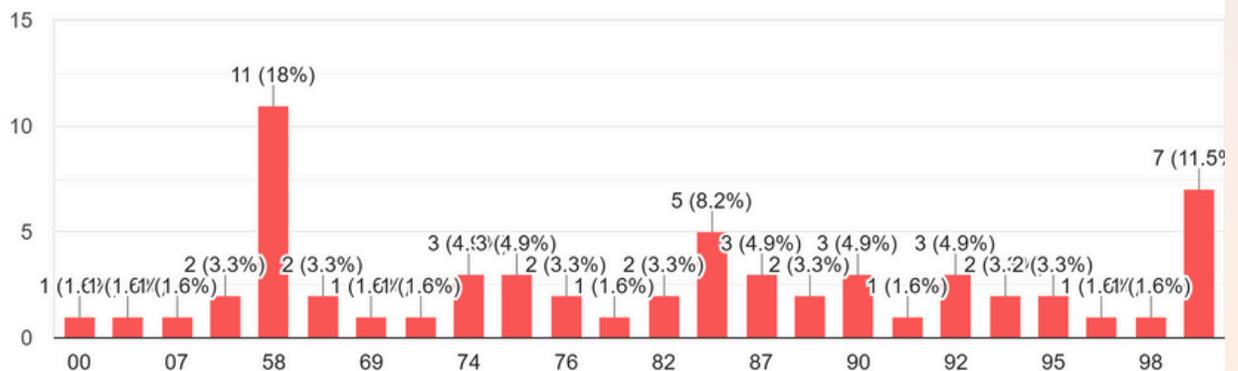
See more

307

RSVP's

86

Attended



Participant Age Group Breakdown

Age Group Birth Years Age Range Count % of Participants

Elders 1950–1964 60+ years old 18%

Midlife Adults 1965–1979 45–59 years old 9.8%

Adults 1980–1994 30–44 years old 29.5%

Young Adults 1995–2006 18–29 years old 19.7%

Youth 2007–2010 Under 18 4.9%

Unclear/Misc. (Possible typos) — 18%

Engagement and Demographics

The participant demographic for the Native Excellence and Wellness Series reflected a diverse intergenerational presence. Based on 86 sign ins, the largest group represented were elders aged 60 and above, specifically those born around 1958, who made up approximately 18% of the total participants. This shows a strong presence of respected elders, highlighting the value of their wisdom and leadership within the space.

The next most represented age group were adults between the ages of 30 and 44, comprising nearly 30% of participants. This group included individuals born in the 1980s and early 1990s, indicating strong engagement from community members who may be actively working, raising families, or serving in peer leadership roles.

Young adults aged 18 to 29 accounted for nearly 20% of participants, many of whom are in the process of reconnecting with their Native identity or seeking spaces that promote healing and cultural education.

A smaller yet notable portion of attendees were middle-aged adults between 45 and 59, who made up about 10% of the group.

Finally, youth under 18 made up a smaller segment, representing just under 5% of respondents. Their participation, though limited in number, added value to the intergenerational spirit of the series.

Overall, this breakdown shows that the series successfully attracted individuals across age groups, with particularly strong engagement from both elders and adults in their 30s and 40s—demonstrating a meaningful blend of cultural wisdom and active leadership across generations.

Strengths and barriers of the Project

Strengths

The Native Excellence and Wellness Series was well received by the community, with many participants expressing appreciation for the intentional space it created. A notable strength was the engagement of individuals who had recently reconnected with their Native identity and found the series to be a welcoming, inspiring, and affirming experience.

The Friday evening virtual sessions offered both accessibility and emotional safety, creating a consistent environment for sacred conversations, cultural sharing, and personal reflection. Participants noted that the format allowed for vulnerability and connection without the pressure of in-person attendance. The addition of a virtual shared meal was especially meaningful—it mirrored the communal aspect of in-person gatherings and helped foster a sense of cultural continuity and care.

Speakers from diverse tribal affiliations brought valuable insight, knowledge, and lived experience. Their cultural teachings and openness to sharing deeply enriched the program, and their professionalism made them a pleasure to work with throughout the series.

Barriers

While the project was a success overall, there were some notable challenges that surfaced throughout the planning and implementation process.

A key logistical barrier was the execution of the virtual shared meal component. While this initiative significantly enhanced the sense of togetherness and mirrored the community aspect of in-person gatherings, it posed several challenges from the vendor's perspective. Due to DoorDash's system limitation of five gift cards per credit card, it became necessary to use multiple cards—sometimes three to five different credit cards—each week to distribute meals to all virtual participants. This added an unexpected layer of complexity to financial tracking and accounting, making the process more time-consuming and harder to manage independently.

In terms of cultural navigation, as a new vendor to the AI/AN community in Los Angeles, and someone affiliated with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, I encountered early difficulties in navigating unfamiliar cultural protocols. In many other communities where I've worked, my track record has allowed my work to speak for itself. However, in this space, I quickly came to understand and deeply respect the importance of earning trust, engaging in community vetting processes, and working through the appropriate chain of command—especially when collaborating with tribal co-chairs and community leaders. While this was an adjustment, I now fully appreciate the integrity and accountability that such a structure provides.

Barriers

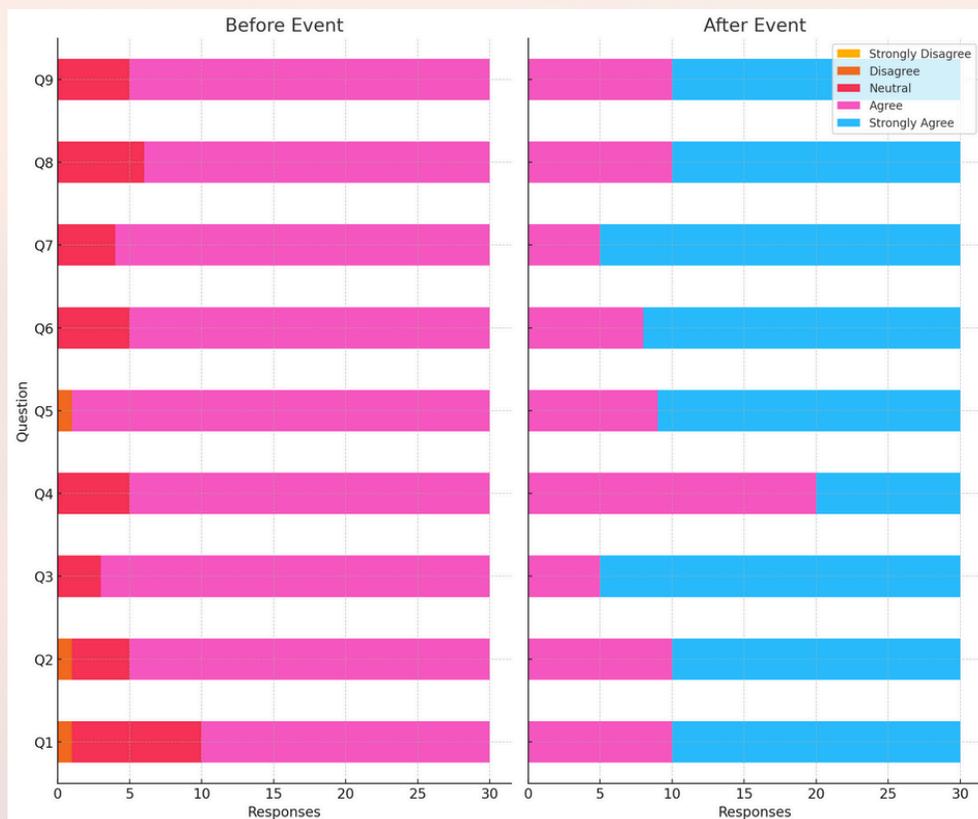
Another significant barrier was the compressed timeline of the project. Due to the short notice, securing venues, coordinating with community leaders, and confirming speaker participation were all challenging. Although many speakers graciously accepted the invitation, the limited preparation time created stress for some. One speaker personally expressed that the last-minute request caused strain for him and his family, emphasizing the need for greater lead time in future initiatives to support both planning and wellness.

Event attendance was also affected by timing. Several in-person Saturday sessions overlapped with large pow wows in Pomona, San Diego, and Riverside, which are important and highly attended cultural events. As a result, some community members were unable to attend the sessions. Additionally, as a new face in the community, the project may not have received the full level of trust, visibility, or support that a more established vendor might experience. Still, I remained committed to showing up authentically, listening with care, and allowing the quality of the experience to build its own credibility.

Despite these challenges, the Native Excellence and Wellness Series was executed with integrity, flexibility, and deep cultural respect. Each barrier served as an opportunity for learning and growth. Every individual who participated—whether virtually or in person—added to the collective healing and affirmation that this project set out to cultivate.

Summary of the Retrospective Post-then-Pre Questionnaire responses

1. I understand the historical contributions of Native peoples to society and how they continue to shape our world today.
2. I am aware of how colonization and boarding schools have impacted Native communities across generations.
3. I can recognize the signs of intergenerational trauma within myself or others and understand its origins.
4. I know the truth behind the California mission system and its impact on Native Californians.
5. I recognize the ongoing strength and resilience of American Indian and Alaska Native communities.
6. I understand the importance of Native language and cultural practices in healing and identity.
7. I know where to get mental health help.
8. I understand some of the signs and symptoms of mental health problems.
9. I realize that mental health issues are a normal response to trauma and stress.



Summary of the Retrospective Post-then-Pre Questionnaire responses

The Native Excellence & Wellness Series aimed to increase cultural awareness, historical understanding, and emotional healing among participants through an immersive, peer-led workshop format. A total of 79 surveys were collected across the series. However, only 30 surveys were completed fully and correctly, which were used in the final analysis to ensure data accuracy.

Despite this reduced sample size, the data provides meaningful insights into participant growth and the workshop's positive impact.

Awareness and Growth

While several participants entered the workshop with a foundational understanding of Native culture and history, the post-survey data clearly shows a shift toward deeper awareness and confidence in discussing key topics.

For example:

- The number of participants selecting "Strongly Agree" responses increased across nearly all 9 survey questions.
- Neutral and uncertain responses decreased, suggesting that attendees gained clarity and understanding through the event.
- Even those who initially selected "Agree" or "Neutral" showed a movement toward stronger conviction after participating.

This indicates that even those who came in already somewhat informed left with a deeper sense of knowledge, affirmation, and emotional connection.

Measurable Positive Impact

The horizontal stacked bar chart comparison illustrates a consistent and meaningful shift:

- Participants reported greater recognition of intergenerational trauma and its effects.
- There was increased confidence in identifying historical truths and colonial impacts.
- The sessions promoted healing through cultural connection, storytelling, and open dialogue.

This growth suggests that culturally grounded healing spaces not only inform but transform.

Validity and Outcome Consideration

While the fact that only 30 out of 79 surveys were fully completed may slightly influence the representativeness of the results, the trends in the completed responses are strong enough to suggest that the program had a measurable and positive effect.

The partial completion rate also suggests that participants were highly engaged in the experience itself—many may have prioritized the immersive conversations and group work over form completion. That said, those who did complete the survey gave responses that point to growth, learning, and awareness, validating the workshop's effectiveness.

Native Excellence and Wellness Series w/ Presenter Brian Frejo



Native Excellence and Wellness Series w/ Presenter Lazaro Arvizu



Testimonials from participants of the Project

"I think my biggest thing is just gratitude for you doing these types of series, these types of discussions for every not, I mean in addition to you, but everybody who does this, everybody who grows the awareness, everybody because it who knows who you're saving, who knows who you're helping and it's it's only going to get better. "

-Nicole Estrella, Native Excellence and Wellness Presenter

"I want to thank you also Olina, but also all of the individuals who work. So hard to allocate dollars to the Native American you know community because we're seeing that work in the community, we're seeing the amount of workshops, we're seeing zoom sessions and and all these changes that 20 years ago were non-existent."

-Virginia (Gina) Arvizu-Sanchez, Native Excellence and Wellness Presenter

Recommendations for LACDMH for decreasing gaps in service delivery.

One of the great strengths of the Native Excellence & Wellness Series was the accessibility created through hybrid engagement, including virtual sessions and virtual shared meals. This approach allowed people to attend, connect, and share in sacred conversations from wherever they were.

Recommendation: Continue investing in technology, platforms, and training that support meaningful virtual participation. This is especially crucial for those with mobility barriers, transportation limitations, or caregiving responsibilities.