

OPPORTUNITY YOUTH FORUM

SPRING 2022 CONVENING REPORT



 **FRESH TRACKS**


THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
Forum for Community Solutions

INTRODUCTION

'Those closest to the pain are also closest to the solution.'

I first heard these words from Representative Ayanna Pressley. They struck me to my core and centered the notion of what we do here at Fresh Tracks.

This statement is a motto within grassroots organizing. Slowly but surely, the public narrative around who needs to be part of the solution for social change is shifting. Fresh Tracks has demonstrated the capacity to equip the rising generation of leaders to advocate for themselves and implement change. However, structural and discriminatory barriers are often too difficult to penetrate when seeking to create institutional changes. These challenges are why we are breaking silos between policy, philanthropy, and programs or projects for systems change. This is why we center an Indigenous values framework: because it is time to root our healing in the power of culture and nature.

This May, after a long pause from public gatherings, we finally had the chance to share time and space with some of you at the Opportunity Youth Forum Spring Convening in San Francisco, California. It was an emotional and powerful reminder of the strength of relationships and community. The following are highlights of those moments and exciting outcomes. Our goal is to continue building awareness and having people who are impacted lead the work informed by generational trauma and driven by generational joy! There is so much more to do, and we can't wait to join you on this journey to lift up the voices of opportunity youth and follow the lead of their calls to action.

– Juan D. Martinez,

Senior Program Manager, The Aspen Institute

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT WELLBEING PANEL

“When we are seen as stories of what we are and not tokenized, when we are put in leadership positions, when we are not just a picture you put on your newsletter, when we are trained and supported, when we are seen as an equal; we can finally take back being studied and having something extracted from us.”

– Desiree Armas, Researcher

The Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Project is a collaborative effort undertaken by young people and adult allies from numerous organizations across the United States and Canada. The overall purpose of the project is to empower youth and young adults in defining, collecting, and analyzing data on their wellbeing as a basis for advocacy and developing policies and practices that help them thrive. Three affinity groups were created: American Indian/Alaskan Native (AIAN), LatinX, and Black Expressions of Wellbeing. Each included youth and young adults (ages 18 - 25), research allies, adult research navigators, and peer research mentors. These design teams have been meeting regularly over the course of more than 16 months to conduct Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects that helped them identify key areas of wellbeing both within and across cultural contexts.



YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT WELLBEING PANEL

“ BIPOC communities learn and build off of each other.”

– Zenetta Zepeda, Researcher

The Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Project Panel session debuted Phase 1 of the project’s research and findings for the first time to the public. The panelists consisted of four members: Desiree Armas, Latinx, Researcher, Shaquana Boykin, Black Expressions of Wellbeing, Researcher, Zenetta Zepeda, AIAN, Researcher, and Sally Munemitsu, Hello Insight, Co-founder & Chief Operating Officer. They came together to highlight the common themes of their affinity groups and also had the chance to elaborate on their group's research. The seven common and interconnected factors of wellbeing identified were: Healthy Environment, Cultural Connections, Financial Stability, Inclusion and Safety, Community Self Efficacy, Healthy Relationships, and Mental Health. However, the specific indicators, expressions and language that were used by each group differed somewhat, especially in the area of inclusion and safety. Each panelist had the opportunity to speak more in-depth on their group's research while also answering some questions from the audience.



NATIVE INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Native Indigenous and Tribal Community of Practice (NIT CoP) is a partnership of Native Americans in Philanthropy and The Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF). This initiative supports community-driven levers of change at the intersection of the community's need for meaningful knowledge sharing and the capacity to generate positive, culturally relevant outcomes.

The Community of Practice is coordinated by the Fresh Tracks team and was created to strengthen collective impact and community collaboration and, moreover, to share what is learned. To do this, a "Community Learning Agenda" was created and is updated with input by members of the Community of Practice. This learning agenda seeks to answer fundamental questions, to address community pathways, and is supported by a collective of partner resources. In 2021, the learning agenda focused on data sovereignty, and in 2022, the team is developing a landscape profile showing the strengths and opportunities for the impact of current community members.



NATIVE INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

During the Opportunity Youth Forum Convening, The Native Indigenous and Tribal Community of Practice discussed the community's collective challenges, needs, and successes for the first time in over two years. NIT CoP identified common themes and challenges within the session that will better inform and update the Community Learning Agenda.

Topics discussed included:

- Assisting with building capacities of communities (turnover rates, hiring, finding grant writers)
- Youth engagement strategies
- Maintaining and restoring Native languages
- Creating shelters
- Systems change; how government deals with Tribal communities, and the impact that government has



THE OUTDOOR EQUITY PROJECT

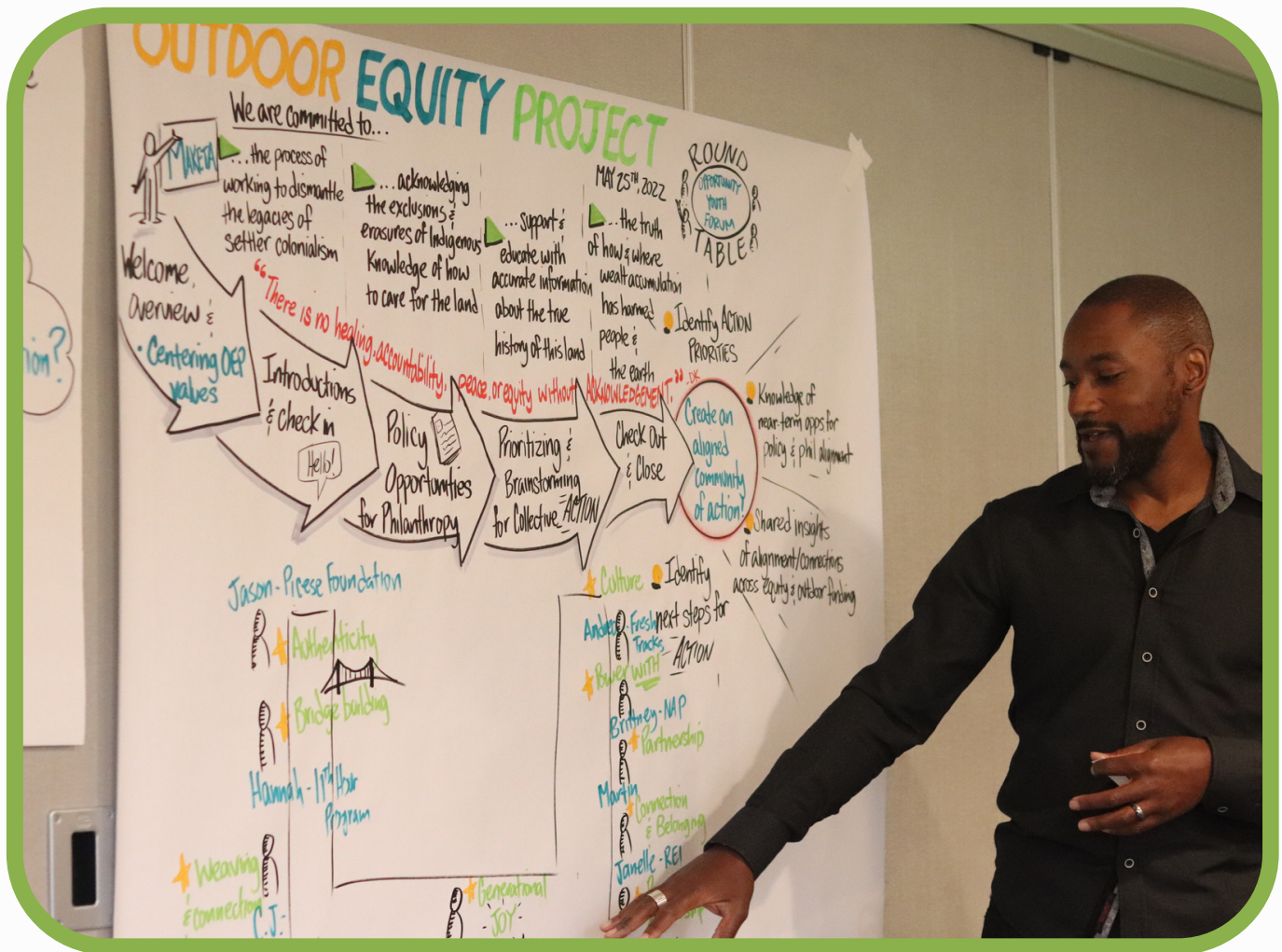
For the past year and a half, a joint team from Native Americans in Philanthropy, Fresh Tracks, and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions have been having strategic conversations with program officers and staff representing seven foundations that fund the equity space, outdoor space, or both. The goal of the Outdoor Equity Project (OEP) is to create a coalition that can build a movement for equity, policy and ultimately systems change strategies rooted in the outdoors and environmental education. As our joint team began to learn from our stakeholders, we found that important themes and priorities emerged around key goals.

The Outdoor Equity Project was able to convene for an in-person roundtable in San Francisco to continue these conversations. The evening before the roundtable, a trusted partner, The Pisces Foundation, put together a reception for the Outdoor Equity Project, and was joined by community members of the Native, Indigenous, and Tribal Community of Practice at the Opportunity Youth Forum and in partnership with Native Americans in Philanthropy.



THE OUTDOOR EQUITY PROJECT

The Outdoor Equity Project roundtable kicked off the next day and was made up of trusted partners in the early stages of this work. To become a part of the learning process, this community will inform an action framework that brings together the programs doing the work with frontline communities and driving positive youth outcomes through evidence based practices, policy leaders at the local, state, and federal level facilitating institutional change, and philanthropy leaders that are dismantling systems of inequity and breaking down silos for system wide change. The in-person roundtable discussion was an opportunity to uplift a shared common vision.



THANK YOU!

Since time immemorial, Native communities across the Americas have demonstrated resilience and resistance in the face of violent efforts to separate them from their land, culture, and each other. Indigenous people remain at the forefront of movements for justice, equity, the protection of nature and the life it sustains. Fresh Tracks is aware that we walk, support, and work on Native land. Native American communities continue to thrive and lead the movements for human rights today. The Fresh Tracks team acknowledges the critical and necessary step to honor Native communities and their leadership to build an equitable future for all. Fresh Tracks encourages all to uncover truths of the original inhabitants of the land we all walk on.

This work is made possible with the support of our partners at The REI Cooperative Action Fund, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The 11th Hour Project, Treeline Foundation, Tides Foundation, The JPB Foundation, The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation, the Andrus Family Fund, the National Recreation Foundation, and the network of youth and young adult Fresh Tracks leaders across the country who make Fresh Tracks a community of action and positive change.

