

 **FRESH TRACKS**

NYCALC

Native Youth Climate Adaptation Leadership Congress

2023 Report



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Introduction

Fresh Tracks is a program of The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions. Fresh Tracks provides young Indigenous, rural, and urban diverse leaders with cross-cultural community power building, leadership development, civic engagement, and action training, rooted in the healing power of nature and culture. In 2015, Fresh Tracks was inspired by a call from President Obama for bold new programs that use the outdoors to broaden horizons for young Americans facing persistent opportunity gaps. It began with a successful pilot that took two cohorts of young adults from Los Angeles and Alaska on a shared journey from southern California to the Arctic Circle; it now supports youth and community driven action to over 200 youth movement leaders in 46 communities across 24 states. Now in its eighth year, the initiative officially joined the Forum for Community Solutions team in the spring of 2020.

The Native Youth Climate Adaptation and Leadership Congress (NYCALC) is a federal and non-governmental collaborative that invites Native communities to work together to address climate challenges in a changing environment. NYCALC provides workshops and learning opportunities in leadership principles, STEM, conservation, and outdoor skills for the next generation of Native leaders (rising high school seniors) and their communities. The Congress encourages students from different communities to collaborate on a climate change action plan. A mini-grant program provides students with resources for implementing these action plans once they return to their communities with the goal of empowering communities to address social change and conservation priorities.

NYCALC is a part of the effort by federal agencies to create meaningful relationships with tribes by engaging and empowering the next generation of Native youth. NYCALC was created with the goal of empowering emerging high school Native youth leaders to address conservation and climate change challenges that are occurring within their home communities.

The goal of the Fresh Tracks partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to be a partner in engaging, motivating, inspiring, and empowering the next generation and the generations that follow, while sharing feedback and tools that support federal partners in engaging with youth and young adult leaders from Indigenous communities.

Native youth initially enter the program as high school participants and develop climate and community related actions throughout the week. They have the opportunity to return in subsequent college-aged years as Junior Faculty to support this process and serve as mentors for future participants.

Fresh Tracks has joined to support NYCALC's expanding leadership development pathway for Native college-aged Junior Faculty and to train this cohort in mentoring skills through participation in a Fresh Tracks-curated leadership development track. As a part of participation in the program, these Native youth have access to continued professional development, community action grants, and the international network and opportunities available within the Aspen Opportunity Youth Forum.

This partnership supports the growth of cultural competency, understanding of regional communities, communication skills, and awareness and sensitivity to different cultural beliefs from federal staff present at NYCALC.

The Big Question that this year's group of students developed projects and solutions for was:

What is an intergenerational approach to climate justice?



Participants

In total, over 75 Native youth from across the country participated in NYCALC 2023, representing the following communities:

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Algaacig | Isleta Pueblo | San Ildefonso Pueblo |
| American Samoa | Jemez Pueblo | Sandia Pueblo |
| Arapaho | Karuk Tribe | Santa Ana Pueblo |
| Athabascan | Laguna Pueblo | Santo Domingo (Kewa) Pueblo |
| Bear River | Lakota | Tohono O'odham |
| Chamorro (Tinian)/CNMI | Mississippi Band of Choctaw | Tolowa |
| Cherokee Nation | Monacan | Tule River Indian Tribe |
| Cheyenne | Native Hawaiian | Wiyot |
| Choctaw | Navajo | Yankton |
| Choggiung | Northern Marianas Descent | Yavapai Apache |
| Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation | Omaha Tribe | Yup'ik |
| Grand Portage | Oneida | Yurok Tribe |
| Hoopa Valley Tribe | Passamaquoddy | Zia Pueblo |
| Hopi | Samoa | Zuni |
| Inupiaq | San Felipe Pueblo | |



Fresh Tracks Trainer Team



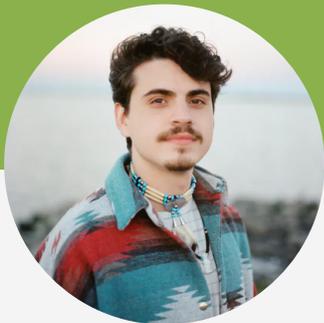
Talia Davis is Tlingit from the village of Kake, Alaska. After witnessing how logging affected every aspect of the environment that raised her, Talia was inspired to learn more about Western environmental sciences to supplement the traditional knowledge that she already carries. She attended the University of Alaska Fairbanks and graduated in May of 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in fisheries and ocean sciences. As an undergrad, she researched the effects of climate change and pollutants on the water and biological species around Kake. Talia has experience conducting fisheries, forestry, and oceanography fieldwork. She now lives in Portland, OR where she is finishing up a fellowship with NOAA Fisheries and in the fall will begin working towards her master's degree at Oregon State University. Talia believes that stewardship of the air, land, and sea is inherently connected to her people, and that all Indigenous peoples have a right to manage and protect the resources that have supported their people since time immemorial.



Kainoa Azama is a Kānaka Maoli from He'e'ia, O'ahu, Hawai'i, who was inspired by the forward thinking of elders in his community to restore traditional agricultural practices, prevent overdevelopment, and maintain traditional wisdom. Kainoa is dedicated to the intergenerational transfer of knowledge to usher a thriving society rooted in a culture of continuity. Kainoa is currently a part of the Rising Voices Center for Indigenous and Earth Sciences, a part of NCAR, UCAR, and NOAA, a recognized Earth Ambassador for UNITY, the current President of the Associated Students of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, a member of O'ahu Water Protectors, and a Director of the Ko'olaupoko Hawaiian Civic Club, amongst many other responsibilities to community. An 'ōlelo no'eau which inspires him is, "He wa'a he moku, He Moku He Wa'a, (an island is a canoe and a canoe is an island)" a reminder of the need for relationality with ourselves and each other, as well as with the family that is the natural world, in order for us to make the distance on our voyage on this canoe known as island Earth.



Jacob Henry is from Farmington, NM and was born in the Navajo Reservation. He is Bitter Water and was born for the Towering House clan. Jacob attended the University of Arizona and recently completed his bachelor's degree in chemical engineering. At the University of Arizona, he participated in student government and cultural clubs that engaged in activism and served as a social safe space for many other individuals. Jacob has since moved to Farmington and loves to discuss and come up with solutions revolving around current events, Native issues, or anything in general. He really enjoys sports, running, playing ball, playing instruments, and singing. One of his goals this year is to read more and he would love any book recommendations that you come up with.



Devon Parfait is the current Chief of the Grand Caillou/Dulac band of Biloxi Chitimacha Choctaw (starting August '22, succeeding Elder Chief Shirell Parfait-Dardar) and a '22 graduate of Williams College, where he majored in geoscience. Throughout his undergraduate degree, he studied how coastal land loss disproportionately affects Tribal communities in southeast Louisiana. Devon has had varied work experience ranging from developing media and GIS projects with the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences to conducting fieldwork on shoreline change in the Gulf Islands National Seashore with the National Park Service. Devon has also held several other leadership roles through the Native Youth Community Adaptation Leadership Congress and the Y Bold and Gold Advisory Council. Devon currently has a position as a coastal resilience analyst for the Environmental Defense Fund, working with the Mississippi River Delta Coalition as the science coordinator. In this role he is working with organizations and institutions throughout Louisiana to help create more meaningful and intentional Tribal/community engagement, as well as working on coastal restoration projects for frontline communities to advance justice and to help restore Tribal land sovereignty.



Kimberly Kivvaq Pikok is an Iñupiaq fisher from Utqiagvik, Alaska. She graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) in 2021 with her Bachelor of Science in wildlife biology and Kimberly is now a master's student at UAF in the interdisciplinary studies program, researching local hunter and whaler observations to determine the seasonal changes in Utqiagvik's spring whaling. After she graduates with her master's degree, she sees herself working with her community to inspire and encourage Native youth to pursue a career in the sciences and involve more youth in wildlife co-management spaces. During her time at UAF, being in the graduate student researcher role for the Alaska Arctic Observatory and Knowledge Hub, and her summers working at the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management, Kimberly learned how important it is to have Indigenous people involved in all aspects of research and decision-making. She plans to incorporate the skills she is learning from these experiences and opportunities into her future career back at home.



Steve Harvey is an enrolled Tribal member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe located in the southwest regions of Arizona. He comes from the Rock Strung Out Into the Willow people clan born for the Red Band people. Steve is currently a student at Eastern Arizona College majoring in social work and developmental psychology. Steve is the current Western region representative on the National Unity Executive Committee for the United National Indian Tribal Youth Inc (UNITY), and an alumni of the 2020-2021 Circle of Earth ambassadors. Outside of UNITY, he is an active member of the San Carlos Apache Tribe Youth Council and a full-time employee under the San Carlos Apache Tribal Social Service department. Steve has grown up around the core values and teachings of the Apache way of life and uses those teachings instilled by his community to work toward empowering and influencing Native youth within NDN country.



Benjamin Hunter-Francis II is Yup'ik and was born and raised in Marshall, Alaska. He graduated West Anchorage High School in 2017, and while in high school, participated in numerous after school activities. One of those activities included Native Youth Community Adaptation and Leadership Congress (NYCALC). After participating in NYCALC, Benjamin joined the Arctic Youth Ambassador program where he and other youth across Alaska shared their stories, experiences, and concerns about the Arctic. Benjamin has also attended the Alaska Job Corps Center in Palmer, Alaska. Benjamin completed Job Corps in 2019 and is currently working as a Security Dispatcher at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. One of his core goals is to encourage Native youth to be successful in life and to be proud of who they are and where they come from. Some of Benjamin's hobbies include camping, fishing, helping family/friends with little to big chores and projects, and gaming.



“I’m at a point where I’m learning leadership and communication skills. To be able to share those skills with Junior Faculty and have deeper conversations with them at their early college age is something I wish I had earlier in my life.”

– Talia Davis

Trainer Team Roles & Responsibilities

The Fresh Tracks Trainer Team began with eight team members, a mix of Indigenous young adults who served as Trainers for the 2022 NYCALC and new additions to the team. Fresh Tracks operates with a peer mentor model where young leaders participate and learn one year, and return as mentors to another group of leaders the following year.

In preparation for the 2023 Congress, the Trainer Team met every other week to review the curriculum, determine roles, and set goals for engaging with the Junior Faculty during the week. They were introduced to trainings on facilitation, healing, leadership development, community organizing, and developing a narrative for change.



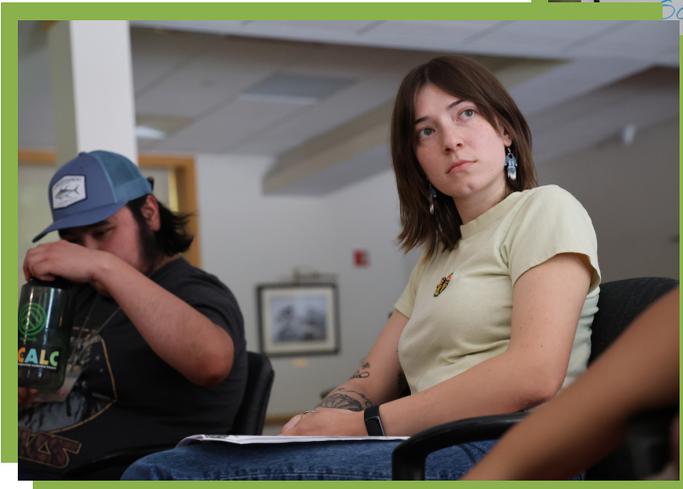
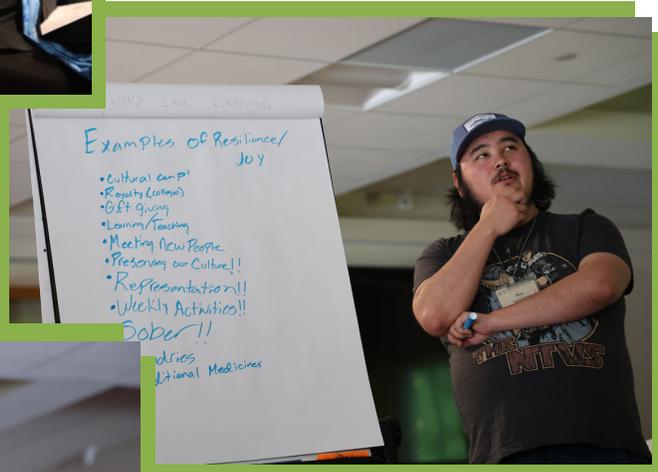
The Trainer Team prepared based on the Fresh Tracks Toolkit, designed in part by the NYCALC 2022 Trainer Team. This toolkit for action is available for other young leaders in community to use to catalyze connection and action in their communities. This toolkit includes an overview of the full curriculum, activities, strategies for action, and examples of ways Fresh Tracks leaders have already taken action.

During the NYCALC week, the Trainer Team primarily served as mentors to the college-aged Junior Faculty, facilitating workshops and sessions designed to give young leaders space for connection and healing, add to their arsenal of skills, boost their leadership development, and bring growth to their community. They also facilitated a healing talking circle where the young leaders were able to express personal and community issues and experience the support of their peers.



Trainer actions and responsibilities included:

- Building relationships with NYCALC Junior Faculty and participants
- Leading connection sessions
- Leading workshops on Healing, Storytelling, and Two-Eyed Seeing
- Representing Fresh Tracks and NYCALC as positive role models
- Representing their cultures by contributing during Culture Night
- Serving as mentors by sharing personal experiences and their developing career journey in various panels



Highlight: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Presentation

Fresh Tracks aims to expose youth and young adults in the network to opportunities for learning and connection to resources that they can use to create change in their communities. This includes inviting community leaders and federal partners to share their work and opportunities for young leaders to partner in action.

During NYCALC, Fresh Tracks invited Danny Gogal (Senior Environmental Protection Specialist and Tribal and Indigenous Peoples Program Manager for the Environmental Protection Agency) to speak to the Trainer Team and Junior Faculty about environmental justice and financial and technical assistance that they could apply for to support their community projects.

The unprecedented amount of federal funding and intention in ensuring that Indigenous communities receive said funding give these young leaders an opportunity to be innovative with their solutions for climate change with the sustainability of financial support.



Highlight: Trainer-Sparked Change and Cultural Relevance

During NYCALC 2022, Junior Faculty and Trainer Team members spoke up and advocated for more youth leadership and voice in the planning and leadership of the Congress. NYCALC leadership responded by having Trainer Team members on the Core Planning Team and incorporating a youth/Junior Faculty advisory group into the planning and decision-making process.

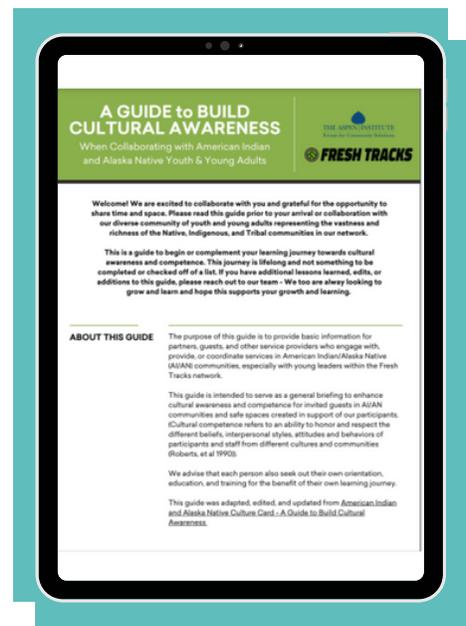
During NYCALC 2023, a member of the Trainer Team advocated for high school participants from different communities to be able to share their culture and practice cultural protocol for entering into a space or beginning a session. This seemingly small change was profoundly impactful for the students, incorporating a level of depth, connection, and cross-cultural learning that the Congress had not yet seen.

In preparation for NYCALC 2023, the Fresh Tracks team adapted and developed a Guide to Cultural Awareness as a tool the organizers could use to support the education and cultural growth of federal staff and partners.



"NYCALC was healing. I live by the saying that “you can’t give from an empty medicine bag.” I’m a giver in my life, and at NYCALC, the community is nurturing and empowering to fill my bag.”

— Steve Harvey



Highlight: Trainer Team Panels

Trainers served as speakers on several panels during the week, with the intention of sharing knowledge and their stories as examples of the paths that high school students can take.

Devon Parfait spoke on the Climate Change panel, sharing the experience he has had as Chief of the Grand Caillou/Dulac band of Biloxi Chitimacha Choctaw and the erosion his community has faced with rising sea levels.

Benjamin Hunter-Francis II and Jacob Henry participated in a Trainer Team panel where they shared their leadership development journey from high school participant to college-aged mentor to being members of the Trainer Team. They shared lessons that they have learned about identity while reminding the students of the benefits from staying connected to the NYCALC network.



“Two things I’ve learned are: First, knowing everyone has knowledge, no matter how young or old someone may be, from my grandmother back at home to someone in a PhD program. Second, has been being able to facilitate conversations between people to share that knowledge so that we can all learn from the knowledge we bring from so many different backgrounds and so many different places.”

— Jacob Henry

Highlight: Culture Night

One of Fresh Tracks' core values is the importance of intentional cross-cultural connection; we can celebrate and learn from our differences in culture, and build bonds over the things we have in common. As a part of the week, NYCALC hosted a night where Native youth from over 15 different communities shared elements of their culture including dances, songs, stories, games, and playing instruments. Culture Night is the culmination of NYCALC. These Indigenous youth from around the nation get to share and display their cultures, sharing them with other students who may not have the opportunity to travel to each of these communities. Students, representing their communities, were able to find commonalities between cultures while also being enriched and enlightened by the differences between them. Culture Night is a night for knowledge sharing, community building, and connection.



Members of the Fresh Tracks Trainer Team participated in Culture Night as well.

- Benjamin Hunter-Francis II and Andrea Wagner are both Yup'ik Alaska Native from the same region in Alaska. Along with other Alaskan students, they shared a dance, with some participants experiencing Yuraq, also known as Eskimo dancing, for the first time. An invitation to join the blessing dance was then opened to all NYCALC participants, giving the opportunity for observers to learn and for everyone to dance together.
- Benjamin Hunter-Francis II is a talented drummer and singer for Yuraq. He recorded himself singing and drumming a song to teach other Alaskan students at NYCALC. After practicing and teaching them throughout the week, he brought his ripstop nylon drum to sing and drum the song while the other Alaskan students danced.
- Jacob Henry joined several other Navajo students to sing a song that is part of a ceremony called the Beauty Way Ceremony.



“NYCALC is a blessing for me to be able to learn from so many different cultures like American Samoa and Hawaii, while being able to share some of our teachings from back home (Alaskan Yup'ik culture)”

– Benjamin Hunter-Francis II

Partner Acknowledgment

The actions of Fresh Tracks are made possible with the support of our partners at The REI Cooperative Action Fund, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The 11th Hour Project, Teeline 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.

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.

