



2025 Opportunity Youth Forum Spring Convening Report

Introductory Note

Coming home to Los Angeles for the Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) Spring Convening was more than just another stop on the calendar for me. It was a return to roots, a reconnection to place, and a reaffirmation of purpose. For me, as an Indigenous Zapoteca from Oaxaca, raised by the city of Los Angeles, walking these streets with our Fresh Tracks family was deeply personal. This city shaped my earliest dreams. Now, nearly a decade into this work, it continues to shape our shared movement for justice, healing, and opportunity.

As we mark nine years of Fresh Tracks, we celebrate more than longevity: we celebrate impact. **From a bold idea born on the banks of the Yukon and the streets of South Central, we've grown into a national movement that's helping define the future of youth leadership and well-being.**

At the Spring Convening, our Native, Indigenous, and Tribal Community of Practice (NIT CoP) showed what it means to lead with culture, strength, and community wisdom. Youth and community-led solutions took center stage, spotlighting what's possible when healing, justice, and belonging are the foundation. We hosted a powerful working session that brought together experts in philanthropy, policy, and programming to align around accelerating best practices that increase access to the outdoors for youth well-being via the Open Pathways Project. We also co-hosted a reception with the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (AIFCS) Justice team and our NIT CoP partners that reminded us all: the path to justice must be a healing one.

As we look ahead to our 10-year milestone, we're naming and claiming a future where healing-centered organizing leads the field. Fresh Tracks was built for this, and we're just getting started.

With pride and purpose,

— Juan D. Martinez Pineda

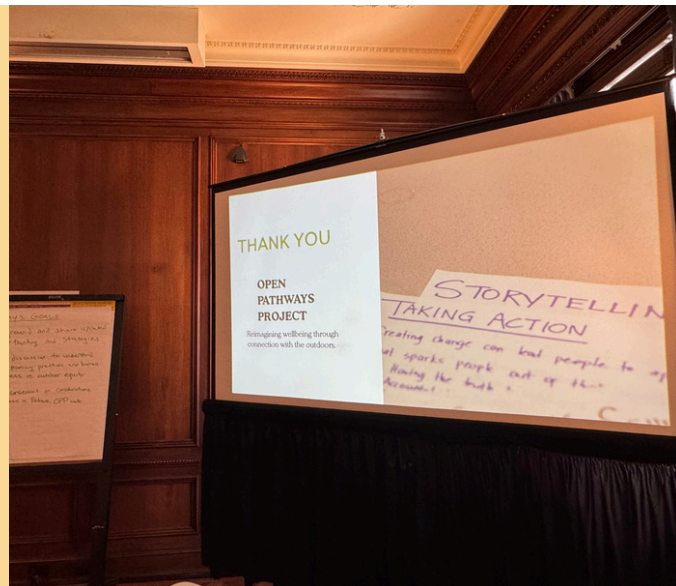
Open Pathways Project

At the OYF Spring Convening, Fresh Tracks co-hosted a Strategic Field Partner Discussion, aimed at regrounding and sharing updated thinking, framing, and strategies with close collaborators. The session opened with an overview of how the Open Pathways Project (OPP) has laid the foundations for large-scale systems change rooted in the healing and unifying power of the outdoors.

Together with partnership from Fresh Tracks, the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, YMCA Bold & Gold, Native Americans in Philanthropy, and the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators, the Open Pathways Project is creating a clear, actionable blueprint for driving systems change from the ground up, starting at the state and local levels.

To catalyze cross-sector impact and ensure the outdoors benefit everyone, OPP is convening policymakers, program experts, and philanthropists to:

- **Lean into the power of state and local impact**
- **Highlight innovative ideas and practices for centering the outdoors**
- **Forge new models for public-private partnership**



A group dialogue facilitated by Harris Solomon followed a discussion to uncover barriers to success and best practices as we move to embrace a state-to-national impact strategy. As a result, our team gathered recommendations that included centering data-driven narrative building, leveraging relationships with schools and universities, and utilizing Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) to inform state-level strategies for expanding youth engagement in the outdoors.

The session concluded with an exciting announcement: the first Open Pathways Project convening will be held in Washington State on September 10, 2025. Bringing together national experts, state policymakers, Tribal and community leaders, youth program providers, and philanthropic partners, this gathering will serve as a working summit to co-create recommendations for ensuring Washington's leadership in outdoor well-being continues to grow. The convening will focus on identifying concrete strategies to sustain and scale efforts—from expanding access and increasing funding to embedding nature-based experiences into education, mental health, and workforce systems.

The Native, Indigenous, and Tribal Community of Practice

The Native, Indigenous, and Tribal Community of Practice (NIT CoP) convening is a consistent highlight of the Opportunity Youth Forum. At this year's convening, we celebrated significant milestones and offered opportunities for connections and updates among attendees. Andrea Wagner, Senior Program Associate at Fresh Tracks, officially introduced Sage Innerarity as the new NIT CoP Coordinator, marking a significant milestone in the community's development. This convening also marked the introduction of Savannah Baber as the new Program Manager for Indigenous Leadership Initiatives at Native Americans in Philanthropy. Baber will offer her expertise and partnership to co-develop new opportunities for learning, growth, and funding in the Community of Practice. Most significantly, this convening welcomed and celebrated the Pueblo of Acoma into the NIT CoP!



“Everything we offer to adults should be offered to our youth.”
— Naomi Concha

Highlighting Youth-Centered Programming in the NIT CoP

Youth-Centered Programming in the NIT CoP highlighted the organizing experience of representatives Mikayla Sarracino (Laguna Community Foundation), Naomi Concha (Taos Pueblo Division of Health and Community Services), and Andrea Wagner (Fresh Tracks). In this panel facilitated by Sage Innerarity (Fresh Tracks), speakers shared best practices, lessons learned, and strategies for effectively engaging Native, Indigenous, and Tribal youth. Drawing on their own experiences creating opportunities and fostering belonging among NIT youth, panelists reflected on their approaches to centering trauma-informed care, the outdoors, and culture in their initiatives.

Sarracino offered powerful insights as a young leader who has both benefited from and helped shape youth-centered programming. She spoke to the importance of making sure youth never have to navigate the world alone, and the ongoing responsibility to create better opportunities for future generations. Concha echoed the need for consistency and continuity in programs and pathways, ensuring that youth have access to support at every stage of life.

Wagner's expertise in programming and cross-community youth engagement offered insight into the importance of collaboration across organizations and creation of circumstances in which youth lead at all levels.

“Being youth-centered means more than designing programs FOR young people, it means ensuring they are leaders at every stage: planning, organizing, advocating, and making decisions. Through my work with Fresh Tracks, we uplift this commitment by centering youth as co-creators, not just participants.”

— Andrea Wagner

Attendees left the session with actionable strategies and scalable ideas to bring back to their communities. More than that, the panel created space to build connections among NIT communities working to solve similar challenges. Ultimately, this panel revealed that when we center youth and their well-being in our policies and programs, all members of the community feel a heightened sense of connection and well-being.



Centering Youth Well-being: A Dialogue on Culture as a Catalyst

Fresh Tracks convened partners for a powerful dialogue exploring how culture serves as a catalyst for youth well-being. This conversation was grounded in insights from the Youth and Young Adult Well-being Project, a collaborative effort led by youth and adult allies across the U.S. and Canada. A key outcome of this work is the Well-being Tool, developed by youth from American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Latine communities to reflect the intersections of cultural identity, mental health, and social-emotional development. Rooted in the belief that youth should be co-creators of solutions, the tool centers their voices and experiences throughout the process. It will be piloted later this year, allowing Fresh Tracks and partners to test, evaluate, and refine the tool in real-world settings.

Centering Youth Well-being: A Dialogue on Culture as a Catalyst highlighted Fresh Tracks partners who are leading innovative, evidence-based approaches at the intersection of culture and well-being.

CJ Goulding, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Boyz N The Wood, shared insights from his hands-on experience working with youth from diverse communities and his ongoing research with Colorado State University, which explores how culture-centered nature programming influences well-being outcomes.

Shawna Rosenzweig, CEO of Camp Fire, emphasized the organization's intentional efforts to transform outdoor programming into a culturally responsive space by both creating inclusive pathways for youth whose cultures have historically been excluded from nature-based experiences and shifting the systems that deliver those programs. Drawing on her work challenging cultural appropriation in youth-serving institutions, Rosenzweig stated,

“When we center young people’s culture and well-being not as an afterthought but as our North Star, we create conditions for transformation—both for the young people we serve and for ourselves.”

— Shawna Rosenzweig

Together, these leaders illustrated the power of authentic collaboration among youth and adult facilitators and research partners. Their work reaffirms that when culture is embraced as a catalyst, we unlock more effective and sustainable pathways for healing, belonging, and youth leadership.



Acknowledgments

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