



AMERICAN CLIMATE
LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Giniw Collective

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This guide offers a successful and stepwise model for you to replicate in your community. It is part of a series featuring the award-winning programs from the finalists of the American Climate Leadership Awards 2021 by ecoAmerica.

PURPOSE

Indigenous peoples are 5% of the global population, holding 80% of the world's biodiversity. Our wisdom and connectivity holds the keys to life in balance. Building leaders steeped in Indigenous wisdom and centered in land defense is critical, as is urgent response to an urgent, species-ending issue. We believe in standing with those places that are left as cultural values shift.

DESCRIPTION

Through years of climate advocacy, We've noticed a lack of substantive, committed spaces for young Native people to develop traditional skills and values while learning how to engage the colonial systems destroying our lands. Most skills-based opportunities are extremely short in nature, which does not create the kind of leadership that comes from a dedicated community with deeper interpersonal relationships. Oftentimes we are thrust into civil society with little understanding or background in those spaces, while simultaneously being dispossessed of traditional values through colonization. Once we created this space, more and more young people appeared, eager to learn. With the onslaught of Line 3 tar sands threatening our wild rice beds, the heart of our culture, it was a perfect storm of need and tapping into the growing body of youth leadership, who need skills-building to lead.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Our focus is on systemic change that respects Indigenous sovereignty and the severity of climate crisis. We prioritize the advocacy streams proven effective towards generating wins and long-term leadership — traditional knowledge, divestment strategies, and land defense on the frontlines of protecting the sacred.



GOALS

To train and educate as many young people as possible in direct action, campaign tactics, traditional knowledge and harvest, and decolonial ways of being.

To empower the next generation of leadership through fellowship and values-based learning.

To center the land in advocacy by reconnecting in a direct way and embodying decolonial values through mutual aid, intergenerational knowledge transfer and hands-on land-based work.

PRIMARY COMPONENTS OR ACTIVITIES

Traditional knowledge — so far, we've brought dozens of Native and non-Native young people to the frontlines of traditional knowledge: maple sapping, wild ricing, hunting, fishing, and ceremonial practices. The first piece of our off-grid encampment was the blessing of the space by Native matriarchs and building of our sweat lodge.

Land defense and leadership development — we've trained nearly 400 folks from all walks of life in constitutional demonstration, campaign tactics and strategy, and basic forestry skills. Camp leadership includes Indigenous women and two-spirit peoples, to ensure a balance of the masculine and feminine modeled in practice.

Mutual aid — through growing and harvesting food, we've been able to provide mutual aid support to houseless folks in Minneapolis, to COVID-impacted families in Navajo Nation, and plan to expand our reach to the Ojibwe reservations of northern Minnesota.

Media training and creation — many young people are interested in storytelling, particularly from the lens of Indigenous-centered struggle. We've been able to create our own content and narrative from the inside out.

IMPACT & OUTCOMES

Our work has spurred an enormous amount of support across Turtle Island and beyond for our campaign against Enbridge's Line 3. We've inspired folks to travel thousands of miles in COVID pods to stand with us on frontlines, and solidarity efforts internationally. We've successfully pressured Minnesota's Governor to refile a critical appeal by Minnesota's Department of Commerce, which is suing the Minnesota Public Utility Commission. Through our support and training, a brave young Anishinaabe woman suspended in front of the Governor's mansion for 11 hours. The Governor refiled the appeal at the end of the day.

The efforts have resulted in Congressional members standing with us and numerous Biden transitional team members meeting with us to discuss our land and wild rice. We are a founding member of Stop the Money Pipeline, and just launched a national campaign against the 18 banks behind Enbridge's Line 3. Our founder has been directly part of literal billions divested from the fossil fuel industry through canceled credit lines and insurers dropping Dakota Access and other projects.



We've fed hundreds of people traditional foods ranging from bison to wild rice and trained young people in fleshing hides, knocking and processing wild rice, and living values in balance. Through living values, we are creating leaders who walk with critical tools of survival and understanding of the sacred in their hearts and minds.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Connect with local Indigenous organizers focused on climate justice and especially on land-based work to determine current work, needs, and capacity issues.
2. Empower the growth of a community focused on land defense and traditional knowledge transfer. This will require establishing trusting relationships with tribal circles, both traditional and youth-focused, as well as non-violent action trainers with experience working with Indigenous leadership.
3. Respect the importance of and lessons within Indigenous wisdom and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Standard metrics of structured success are far less applicable to the instilling of deep values and development of highly skilled, capable, powerful leaders.
4. Develop supportive networks to enable engagement of Indigenous rights holders at decisionmaking junctures — this is a highly successful tactic in a number of forums, including legislative bodies, financiers, and shareholders. This will require opening doors to various coalitions, networks, etc. that have been typically closed to non-NGO entities, and allowing Native-led delegations to lead conversations in partnership with others.
5. Center the voices and stories of Indigenous peoples via Native-led content creation, training and uplifting Indigenous filmmakers in a variety of formats and skillsets.

