

Gathering the Goodness: Conversations Around Tribal History, Cultural Safety, and Community Collaborations With Suicide Prevention Grantees Across Minnesota

Payton Counts

Minnesota GLS

Tribal Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Minnesota Department of Health



Gathering the Goodness: Conversations around Tribal History, Cultural Safety, and Community Collaborations with Suicide Prevention Grantees across Minnesota

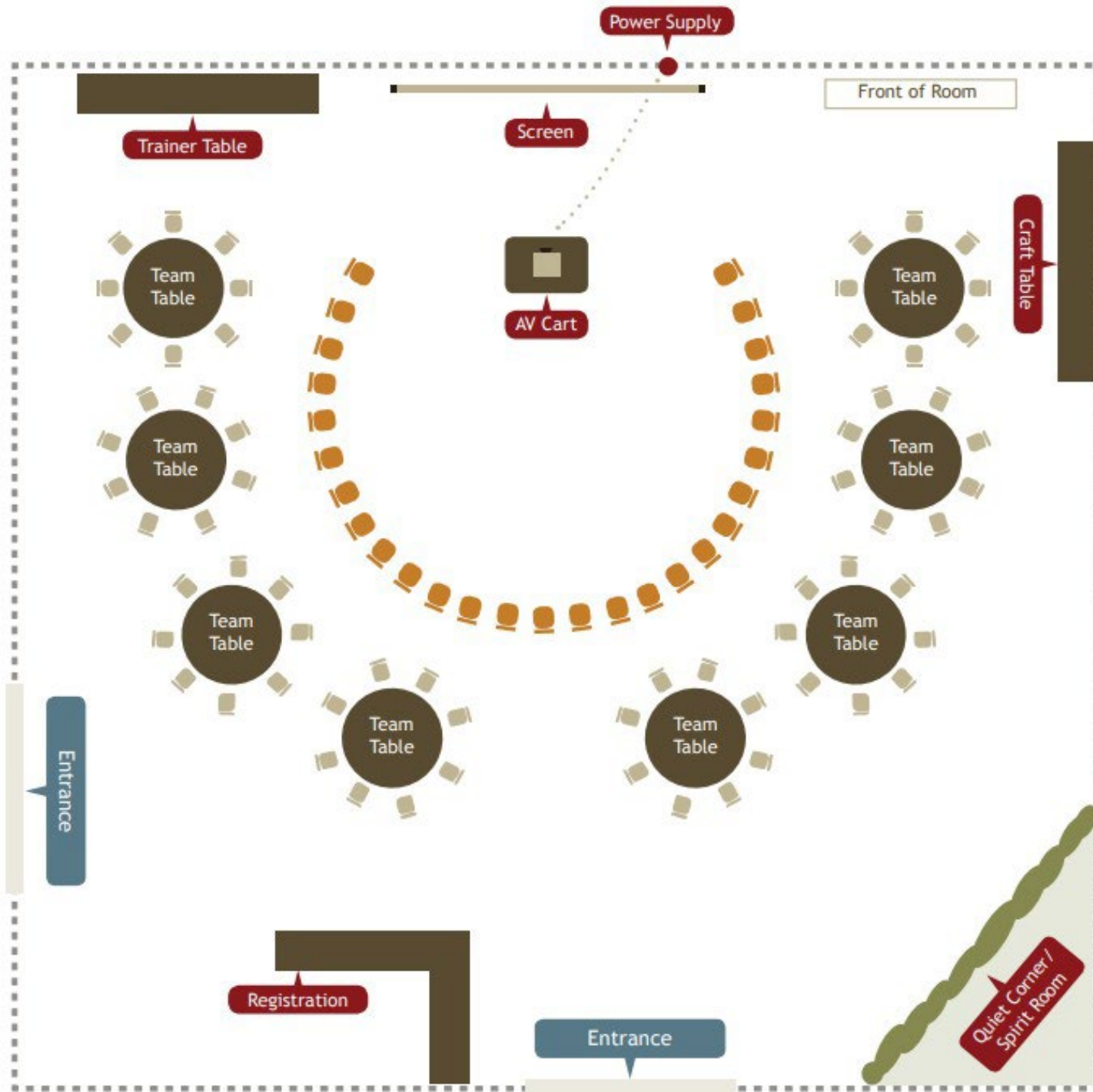
Payton Counts



- 
1. Create a trauma and resilience informed environment, where individuals participate as both learners and teachers.
 2. Increase awareness of historical and cultural resilience and trauma in American Indian communities.
 3. Increase capacity to safely serve tribal and urban Indigenous communities through storytelling, cultural safety, team building, and resolution to reconciliation.
 4. Strengthen knowledge and collaboration through resource sharing.



Lay Out



Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention Unit

Stephanie Downey



Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Wil Sampson-Bernstrom



Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Tanya Carter



Suicide
Prevention Unit
Supervisor

Kelly Felton



State Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Payton Counts



Tribal Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Emily Lindeman



Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Jenilee Telander



Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Stefan Gingrich



Epidemiologist

Stephanie Anderson



Communications

Katie Fritz-Fogel



Evaluation
Supervisor

Wendy Huckaby



988
Communications
Specialist

Emily Drago



988 Evaluator

Kelsey Scott



988 Project
Coordinator

Verna Mikkelsen



988 Tribal
Suicide
Prevention
Coordinator

Anna Lynn



Mental
Health
Promotion
Coordinator

Garrett Lee Smith Grant Goals

1

Goal 1: Build capacity of communities to develop a multi-sector, data-driven plan to **identify and respond** to cultural and community needs to promote mental health and reduce suicidal experiences.

2

Goal 2: Strengthen youth **access and deliver of care** for mental health and suicide.

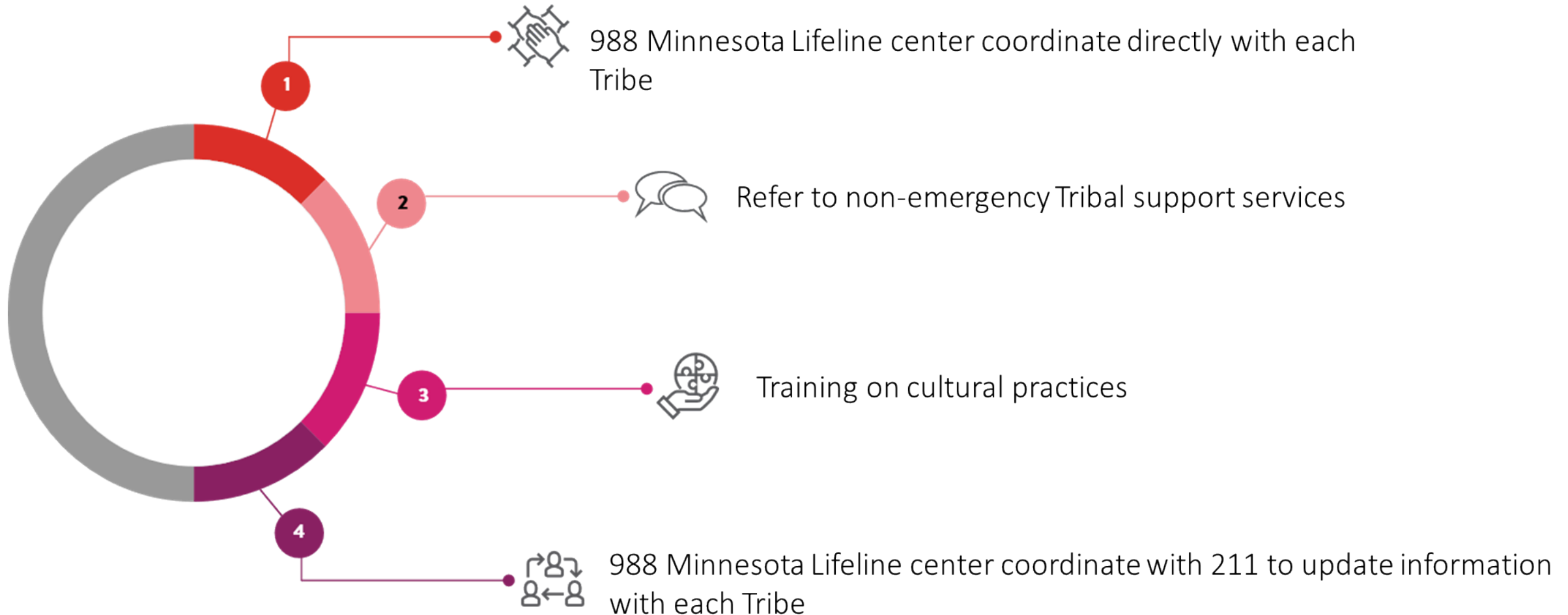
3

Goal 3: Increase **help seeking behaviors** of youth including **peer to peer** engagement.

4

Goal 4: **Connect, heal and restore hope** to those impacted by suicide.

2022 Tribal Listening Sessions: Nine Tribal partners



2024 Tribal Listening Sessions: Six Tribal partners



Partners in Creation and Review



- American Indian Mental Health Advisory Council
- Minnesota Department of Health Employees
- Minnesota Department of Human Services Tribal Team
- Minnesota Tribal State Relations Team



*"When someone comes into a room
- they are coming in with
generations, they are coming in as
a collective. **That** is entering the
room with them."*

-Community member

Facilitation Team



Payton Counts

Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa

MDH Tribal Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Email: Payton.Counts@state.mn.us



Verna Mikkelson

White Earth Band of Ojibwe

MDH 988 Tribal Suicide Prevention
Coordinator

Email: Verna.Mikkelson@state.mn.us



Adam Preuss

Upper Sioux Community

Tribal Liaison/
Regional Coordinator
Canvas Health

Email: apreuss@hsicrisis.org

Tribal onboarding: Regional Coordinators and Grantees

Primary Audience:

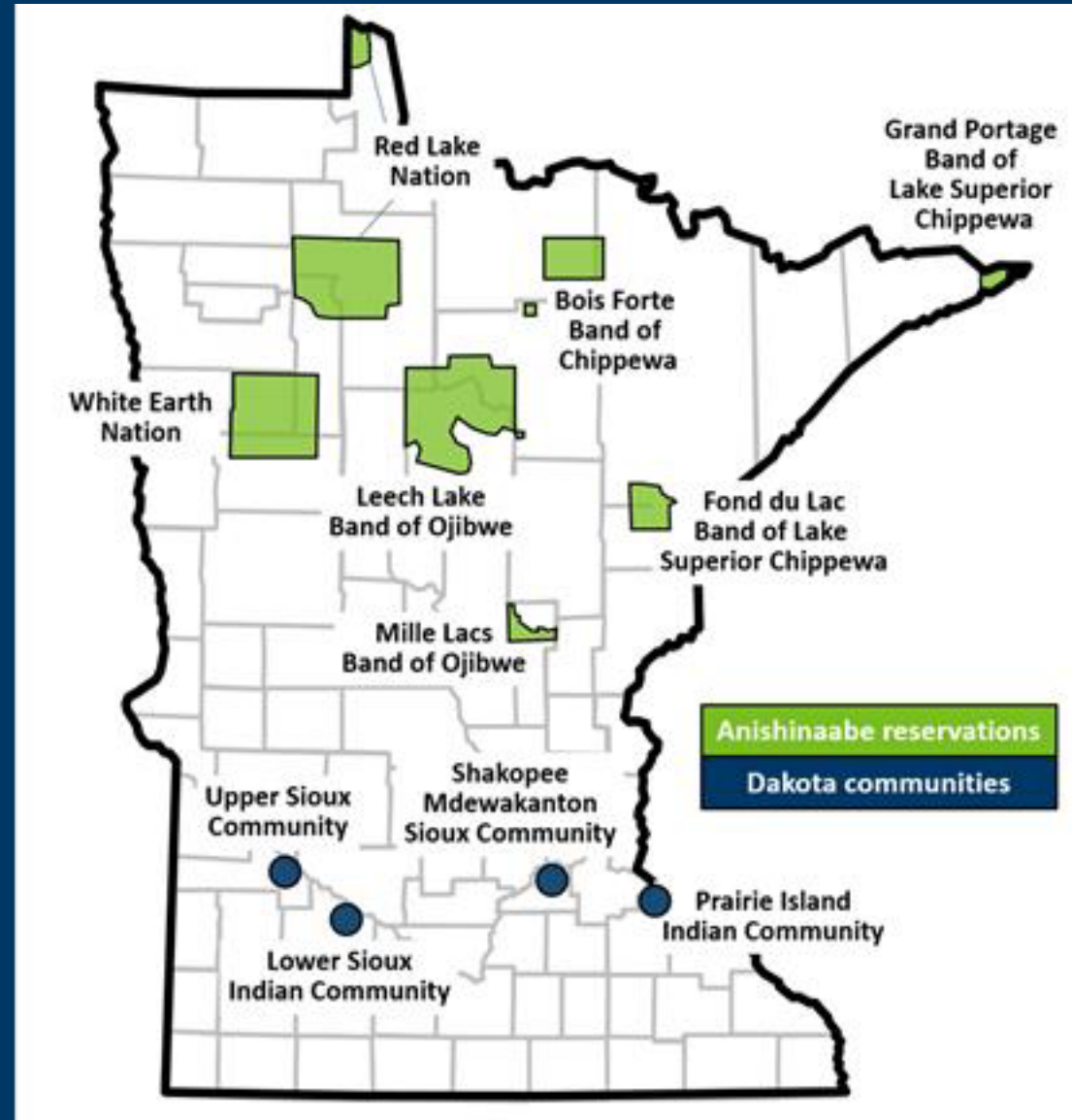
*Allies who work with local tribal community
on suicide prevention efforts*

Opportunity to recognize:

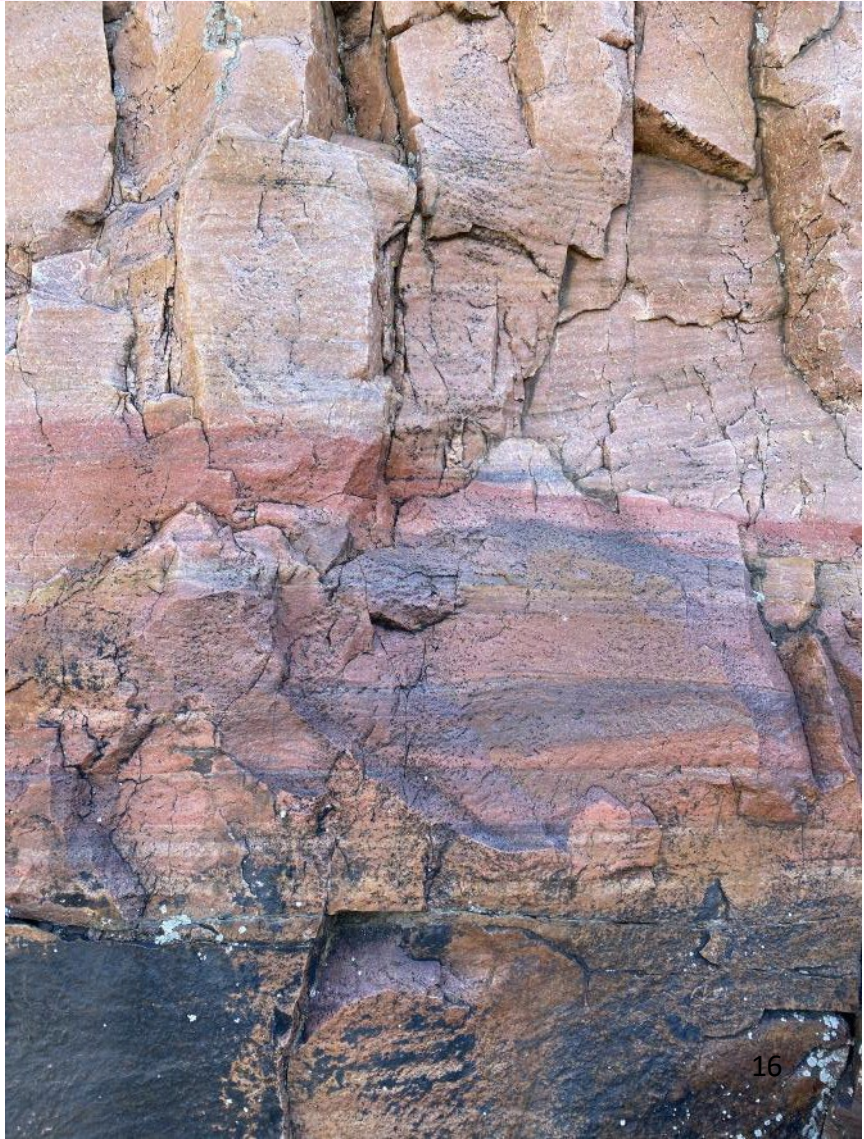
1. our non-native allies, partners,
and collaborators
2. safe setting to have healthy dialogue
and ask questions



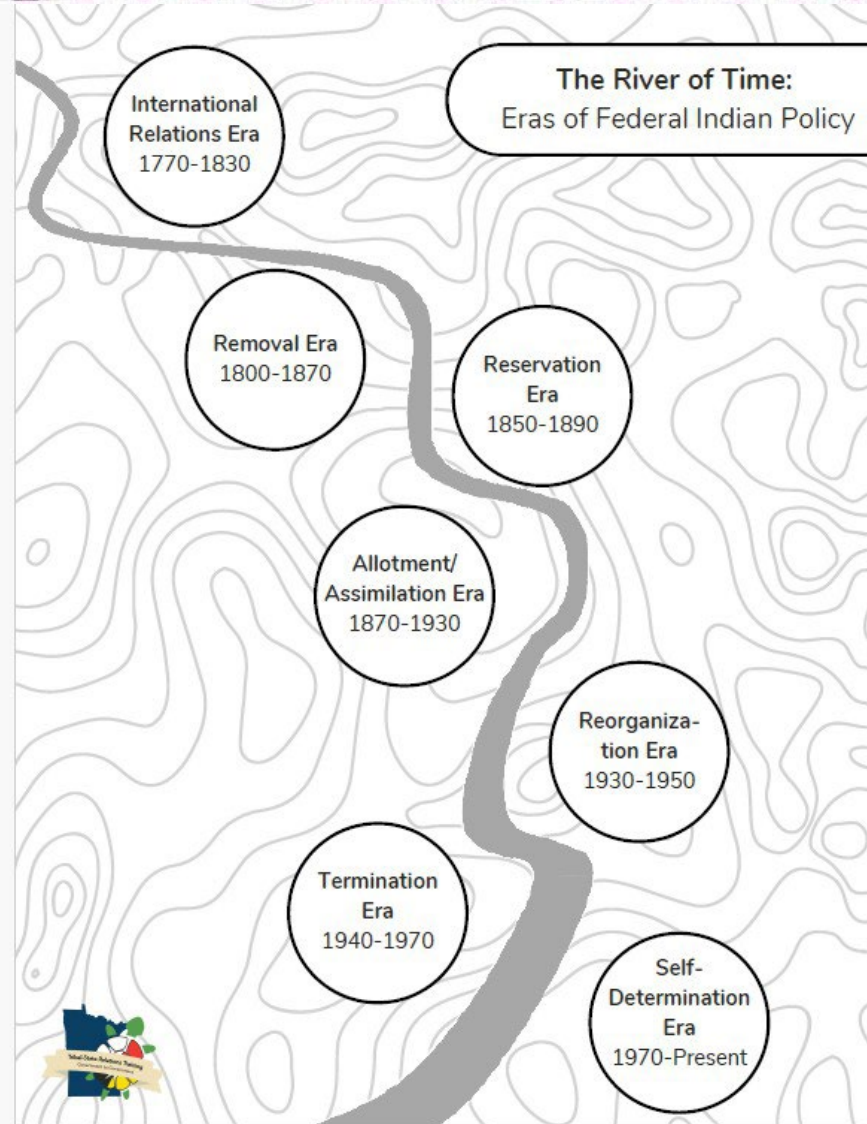
Tribal Overview



Agenda

- 
- 
- 
- Registration, Breakfast, & Connecting
 - Opening in a Good Way & Introductions
 - Sacred Medicines, Art, Values & Grandfather Teachings
 - B R EAK
 - Historical Context, Cultural Safety & Health
 - MN Tribal Nations Activity
 - Review morning conversations Q & A
 - LUNCH
 - Boarding School Era & Grandfather Teachings
 - Present and Protective Factors, Integrating within Work
 - BREAK
 - Cultural Activities, Evaluation, & Closing

The River of Time



Why look into the past



Provide historical context to present day issues that impact health and well being

Understand barriers:

- distrust, fear, lack of adequate access, recognition of history

Knowledge of history and barriers can help us

- Not repeat the past
- Reflect on how to be better partners moving forward

Example of a slide (Allotment/ Assimilation)



General Allotment Act/Dawes Act (1887)

- Divided reservation land to individuals; lost 2/3 of reservation lands.
- In Minnesota, the Nelson Act (1889)

“During the 19th and 20th centuries, federal legislation stripped Native Americans of lands, property, and rights, while federal agencies forbade the practice of indigenous Native American religions. (Guéno, 2017).”

This was in law until 1978, with the passing of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act. *47 years ago as of August 11, 2025.*

Breakdown of tribal power, reduction of land base, individual ownership ideology
Breakdown of passing down traditional knowledge, loss of knowledge keepers, seeing impacts on
millennial and gen Z, shame, lack of belonging

What to lean into: Protective Factors

- Community Gatherings and Programming
 - Communal activities from hunting, gathering, harvesting, ceremonies etc.
- Culture first approach
 - Elder Wisdom
 - Strengths –Based language and practices
 - Identity and language reclamation
- Traditional Medicines and Food Teaching
- Song/ Dance
- Talking Circle



Additional Technical Assistance/ Community Request

- Safety planning
- Safe messaging
- **Reducing stigma** and shame
- Care coordination across the health care spectrum
- More resources and **education** around resources
- **Postvention**
- The ripple effect – loved ones and relatives handling the aftermath of an attempt or suicide death
- Secondary trauma
- 988 education and awareness



Gathering the Goodness: bringing into your wo

- 
- Learn about the people you serve.
 - Attend community events, meet folks, ask questions, listen!
 - Understand historical context of distrust and impacts on current issues.
 - Learn about broad history and specific – to your area and organization.
 - Reflect on personal bias and how that impacts your work.
 - Identify valuing differences as strengths vs barriers.
 - Relationship approach to identifying cultural strengths.
 - Develop *collaborative relationships* with Indigenous Partners.

Accountability: Working with Communities



How do we hold ourselves accountable?

- Talking through this. Active involvement and critical thinking.
- **How are we taking what we learned into the communities we work in?**
- **How do we incorporate this into our everyday work?**
 - Paying attention to our language, micro-aggressions, modeling inclusion.
- **How do I reach out to the tribal peoples near me?**
 - Attending events. Tabling. Start slow and build relationships.
 - Talk with people, ask about programming.

Key Take Aways

- History is an important landscape for understanding
- If you are doing work for or with a community, involve the community
- Building relationships and trust will take time
- Seek out continued learning opportunities



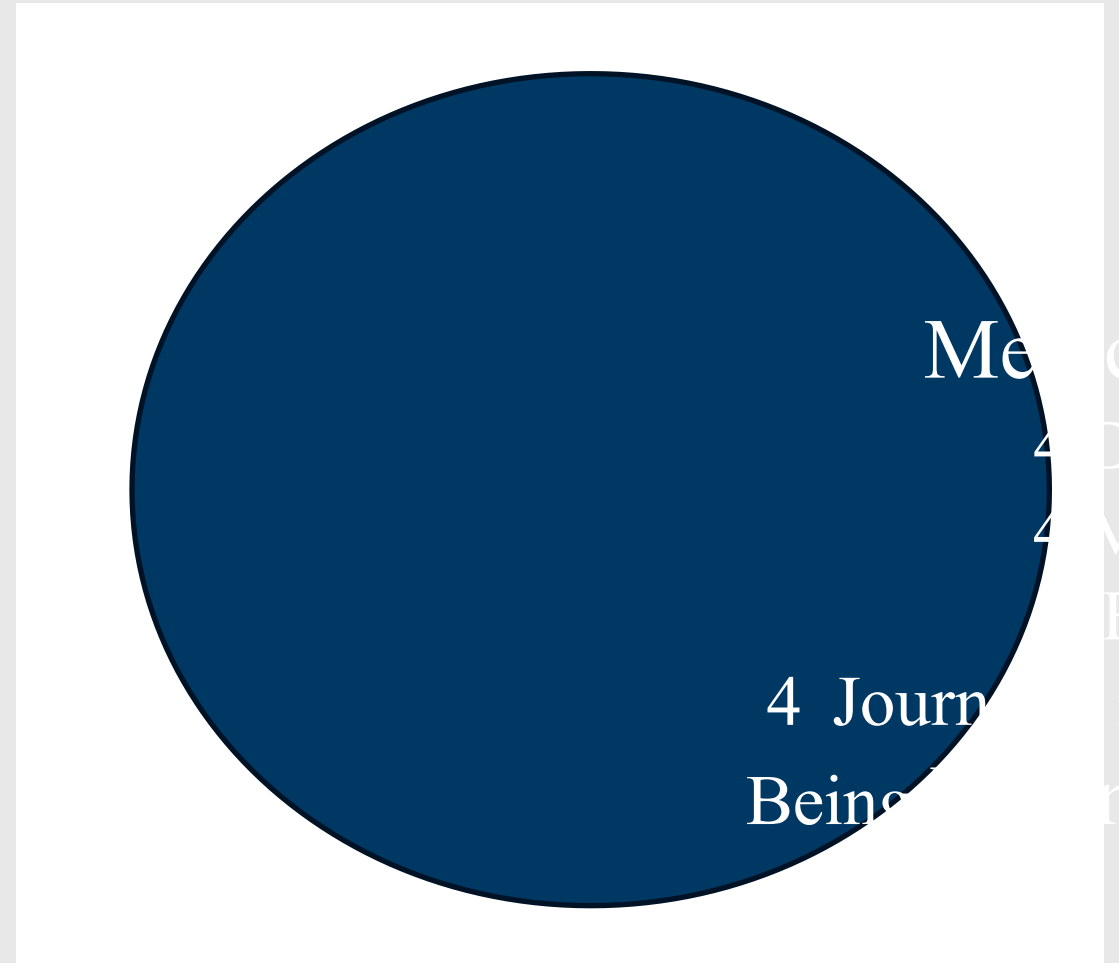


Training for Trainers

Facilitation training with the American Indian
Mental Health Advisory Council

- November 2026





Thank You and Questions

Pidamaya

thank you in Dakota

Miigwech

thank you in Ojibwemowin

Verna Mikkelson

Gaa-waabaabiganikaag (White Earth Band of Ojibwe)

988 Tribal Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Email: Verna.Mikkelson@state.mn.us

Payton Counts

Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and White Bear First Nation

Tribal Suicide Prevention Coordinator

Email: Payton.Counts@state.mn.us

Minnesota Department of Health

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Unit

Email: health.988Lifeline@state.mn.us



TA Request Form: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/ta.html>

Building Sustainable School Mental Health Systems

Jennifer Treger

Jennifer Treger

Public Health Advisor

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration