

## Indigenous Leadership Academy Spring 2024 Cohort

Phoenix, Ariz. — The [American Indian Policy Institute](#) (AIPI) is thrilled to announce the Spring 2024 cohort of the [Indigenous Leadership Academy](#) (ILA)! With a focus on emerging leaders, there is no other leadership program like this in the country. Twenty-five of forty-seven applicants have been accepted into the cohort. Their demographics represent 19 tribes from 13 states. All participants demonstrated a strong passion for working with and for Indigenous communities. Some topics the participants are passionate about are education, healthcare, housing, MMIWP, policy, and youth. Past cohorts have focused on themes of imposter syndrome, sovereignty, and the Supreme Court. For this cohort, the focus will be on sober living homes and their effects on the Native community.

We are excited to have such a diverse group of participants. The AIPI is delighted to see what wonderful things this cohort will accomplish. Please read about each cohort member below.



### **Kalvina Belin**

Kalvina Belin is of the Living Arrow Bitterwater clan and born for the Coyote Pass clan. The Tangle clan is her maternal grandfather and the Bitterwater clan is her paternal grandfather. And that is how she identifies as a Diné (Navajo) woman. Kalvina currently serves as the Tribal Liaison for First Things First (FTF). FTF is Arizona's early childhood agency that funds programs and services that address the development, education, and health needs of children from birth to age 5 (before kindergarten). Her main role at FTF is to ensure effective partnerships with tribes in Arizona to better support young children and their families. In addition, Kalvina continues to promote the field of Public Health, Navajo culture, and health research among students and she previously worked as the lead contact tracer and trainer for the Navajo Nation. She received her Bachelor of Science in Public Health with a minor in

Indigenous Health Studies and earned her Master of Public Health degree in Health Promotion with an emphasis in Indigenous Health Track.



### **Marcus Benally**

“Yá’át’ééh shí’ke’ dóó shí’dine’é. Shí éí Marcus Benally yinishyé. Naasht’ézhí Dine’é (Zuni Clan) nishíí. Naakaii Dine’é (Mexican Clan) báhíichíín. Kinyaa’áanii (Towering House Clan) dashicheii. Bit’ahnii (Folded Arms Clan) dashinálí. Ákót’éego Diné nishíí.” With more than eight years of experience in public accounting, Marcus has focused primarily on serving the financial and compliance needs of Native American tribes. As an Audit Manager at REDW LLC, he provides comprehensive financial and compliance assurance services for tribal healthcare entities and tribal casinos, as well as financial and federal program compliance audit services for tribal governments. Additionally, Marcus currently serves as a Board Member for the Valley Young Professionals, a program of the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce. The VYP provides experiences for its members to build lasting relationships, engage in

professional development opportunities, and become change-makers in the community. Marcus is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation. Marcus holds a B.A. degree in Accounting from New Mexico State University and an M.B.A. in American Indian Entrepreneurship from Gonzaga University.



**Cola Boyer**

Cola Boyer is an enrolled member of the Shoshone Bannock tribe located in Fort Hall, Idaho. Cola received her bachelor’s degree from Eastern Washington University in Race and Culture with minors in American Indian Studies and Africana Studies. Cola has her master’s degree from Whitworth University in Business Leadership with an emphasis in Executive Leadership. She was voted by her class to receive the John Hengesh Award for servant leadership. Cola was recently honored by the city of Spokane by the Journal of Business as one of the top ten rising stars in business. Cola has worked for a small tribe for fourteen years working in operations and then stepping over to Human Resources. Cola sits on four boards: [Believe in Me](#) as Vice President, [Embrace Washington](#) as Secretary, [Eastern Washington University Alumni Association](#) as Board Member, and Spokane Community Colleges School of

Business Advisory as a Board Member. Cola is creating a non-profit for Indigenous People with Multiple Sclerosis. Cola has had MS for fourteen years and has worked on understanding and creating an environment for other indigenous people to have a place of support when dealing with this disease. Here is her website: [Indigenous Peer Support Group website \(canva.site\)](#)



**Rebekah Chattin**

Rebekah Chattin grew up between Oak Springs, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation and the Zuni Pueblo. Her clans are Dibé Łizhinií, the Black Sheep Clan, and she is born for Naasht’ézhí Dine’é, the Zuni people. Rebekah holds a bachelor's degree in Applied Indigenous Studies with minors in Chemistry and Indigenous Health Studies from Northern Arizona University. During her undergraduate career, Rebekah worked as a research assistant with the Native Americans in Cancer Prevention program at Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona. At NACP, she researched Navajo people’s knowledge and experiences with Helicobacter Pylori Infection. In 2021, Rebekah started as an Executive Assistant under Jim Enote at the Colorado Plateau Foundation. She learned about the importance of Indigenous

leadership and presence in philanthropy. In 2023, Rebekah stepped into the role of Partnerships and Strategies Associate, a role that strengthens partnerships and builds a strategy to impact the lands and people of the Colorado Plateau positively. Rebekah is passionate about the importance of Indigenous women's leadership to solve complex issues facing their communities.



**Dana Chavis**

“I am from Raeford, NC, and I am a proud enrolled member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. I earned my Bachelor of Arts in History from Duke University. In 2011, I earned my Masters of Public Administration from UNC-Pembroke while working full time at State Employees’ Credit Union (SECU) and raising my two young Diné/Lumbee daughters. I graduated *cum laude* with my Juris Doctor from North Carolina Central University School of Law in 2020, while working full-time at SECU, attending four years of law school in the evening (summers included!), and ensuring my daughters were also successfully continuing their own educational journeys. After passing the July 2020 Uniform Bar Exam (UBE) with a score high enough to practice in any UBE jurisdiction, I was admitted to the North Carolina Bar and promoted to an in-house attorney position at SECU. In 2021, I joined the inaugural Dix Park

Intertribal Powwow committee in Raleigh, NC, and we are now planning our 4th powwow. I also serve on the Lumbee Tribal Constitutional Reform Committee with a goal of clarifying the language in our current constitution. As a lifetime learner, I am so excited to join the Spring 2024 Indigenous Leadership Academy!”



**Debra Garcia**

“My name is Debra “Debbie” Garcia. I am Akimel O’otham and Tohono O’odham. I am an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Community, my home district is Stotonic, District 4. My alma mater is Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe, Arizona. I am a first-generation college graduate and graduated on December 11, 2023, with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Sociology and a Minor in Organizational Leadership/Cum Laude. During my college endeavors, I made the College of Liberal Arts and Science Dean’s List for the Spring and Fall 2023 semesters. Currently, I am a volunteer victim advocate and community educator for a non-profit organization. I have been volunteering my time and advocacy services since October 2019 as I have a deep passion for helping others who are in need. I specifically chose to be a victim advocate because I can relate to them, and I know the importance of

gaining the trust of a victim/survivor including their families for them to know that I am trustworthy and will do my very best to help them. Many gaps need to be filled to fully be able to help and provide more/better resources to those affected by crimes.”



**Gerilene Haskon**

Gerilene Haskon is a Tribal Liaison at the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS), responsible for serving as a liaison between ADHS, Tribes, Indian Health Services, and Urban Indian Organizations, and supporting the Office of Directors initiatives. Her background is in community-based participatory research methodology, mobilizing community networks and collaborations, and implementing maternal and child health programming. She currently serves as a Council Member of the Arizona Advisory Council on Indian Health Care, a member of the Northern Arizona University Southwest Health Equity Research Collaborative Community Expert Board, and a peer reviewer for federal grant opportunities for the Health Resources and Services Administration. Mrs. Haskon holds a Master of Public Health degree in Maternal and Child Health and a Bachelor of Science in Nutritional Sciences

from the University of Arizona. Gerilene is Bijn bitoodnii – a Navajo clan also known as the Deer Spring People. She is born for the Ta'neezahnii, Tangle People. She is the maternal grandchild of the Tsi'naajinii, Black Streak Wood People, and the parental granddaughter of the Tótsohnii, Big Water People. She is originally from the Navajo Nation and grew up in Tuba City, Arizona.



**Dr. Charlinda Haudley**

Dr. Charlinda Haudley is a member of the Navajo Nation, from Chinle, Arizona. Her doctorate from the University of Arizona focuses on intertribal student engagement at a university Native American student center. She is the Stakeholder Outreach Coordinator with the Central Arizona Project as the tribal liaison. Prior, she was the Deputy Scheduling Director for U.S. Senator Mark Kelly and the Assistant to the State Director at the United States Senate. Her leadership is rooted in the Navajo teaching, “T’áá hwó’ ají t’éego” which means “it is up to you.” Currently, she is a Board member for Greater Tucson Leadership. She is involved with the Emerging Leaders Council with the Tucson Metro Chamber and the Southern Arizona Leadership Council. She is also a 2022 Flinn-Brown Fellow. She previously held leadership roles with the American Indian Alumni Association, Tucson Young Professionals, Higher Ground, and the CACTIS Foundation. Her recognitions include the Tucson

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s 40 under 40 award in 2020, the 2021 Special Contributions to Indian Education Award, and the 2019 Maria Teresa Velez Diversity Leadership Award. She is an alumnus of the UA’s



Arizona Assurance Program, the McNair Achievement Program, and UCLA's Graduate Opportunity Fellowship Program.



### **Alejandro Higuera**

Alejandro Higuera (Pascua Yaqui) is a digital storyteller, runner, and cultural preservation enthusiast. Alejandro has been producing media for over 15 years and earned his filmmaking degree from Northern Arizona University. His experience extends to a diverse range of disciplines, including marketing, portrait photography, event coverage, conference documentation, documentaries, and sports photography. Alejandro's work has graced various platforms, from academic institutions to public venues, magazines, and community events within Arizona, and extending to the international stage. Outside of media, Alejandro enjoys running, cycling, climbing, and weightlifting. He has a deep passion for long-distance running as a vehicle for healing. He believes it has been transformative for his emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. As a runner, he is also committed to running for strength

and prayers for indigenous communities. Alejandro's long-term goals revolve around preserving the Yaqui language and culture and utilizing media. He also hopes to be a resource for other tribal nations who are building their own language revitalization programs. Future plans include earning his MFA degree and teaching filmmaking for a tribal college.



### **Shawna Hotch**

Shawna Hotch is from Jilkaat Kwaan and is a member of the Chilkat Indian Village of Klukwan. Her work focuses on nation-building efforts to improve the health and wellness of the people in the Chilkat Valley through land stewardship, tribal sovereignty, and community-led initiatives to protect and preserve the Jilkaat Kwaan for generations to come. Shawna is inspired and empowered by previous Tlingit generations who uphold the community-focused tribal values of *Haa Kusteeyí* "our way of life" and *Áat Yaa Awuné* "respect for all things." As a mother, sister, granddaughter, and tribal councilwoman, Shawna has experientially learned these values and the importance of community building, community engagement, and cultural transmission through traditional ways of knowing. Shawna holds a bachelor's degree in Public Health from Fort Lewis College and a master's degree in

Public Health with a focus in Community Health Sciences from North Dakota State University. As a Tribal Liaison, Shawna learned the importance of community togetherness and tribal sovereignty in real-time during the COVID-19 pandemic and engaged stakeholders across federal, state, and local levels to respond to and mitigate COVID-19 in Klukwan. Shawna continues to study development strategies to help Klukwan as a Master of Rural Community Development student.



### **Edward Hunt**

Ed Hunt is a member of the Lumbee Tribe of NC and has served in many positions across the State of NC. Ed moved back to his home community in 2004 to support local educational resources and support the family farm business. Ed is the Kate B. Reynolds Coordinator at the Thomas College of Business and Economics, Thomas Entrepreneurship Hub, at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. He focuses on grant development programs, business development, and educational opportunities. He received his Master of Science in Agriculture and Environmental Biology from the NC Agricultural and Technical University in Greensboro, NC. Ed has over 15 years of academic experience with more than 30 years of agriculture and community development planning. His research interests are agriculture, food security, and rural community development. Ed enjoys time on the farm improving

infrastructure, forestry projects, and sharing knowledge with other farmers.



### **Gianni Lacey-Howard**

Gianni Lacey-Howard is a proud member of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation in North Carolina. She is a passionate advocate and scholar graduating with distinction from Duke University in May 2023. Holding a B.A. in Medical Sociology and a minor in Chemistry, Gianni is a Benjamin N. Duke Scholar and Cardea Fellow, dedicated to advancing Indigenous representation and well-being. In leadership roles, Gianni chaired the Duke Native American/Indigenous Student Alliance, fostering community through events like Duke's Inaugural Indigenous Arts Showcase and Gala. At Duke, she also served as the President of The Nu Chapter of Alpha Pi Omega Sorority, Inc. She currently serves as the social media chair for her tribe and as the chair of the 2024-2025 Occaneechi-Saponi Youth Ambassador Advisory Council. An accomplished researcher, Gianni contributed to various programs, including a

Native American Research Internship at the University of Utah and Four Directions Summer Research Program through Harvard Medical School. Beyond academia, Gianni served as a Native Youth Grantmaker for Native Americans in Philanthropy, exploring the intersection of philanthropy and tribal communities. In her free time, she enjoys powwow dancing as a women's southern traditional dancer, beading jewelry for family and friends, and sewing!



### **Stanford Lake**

Stanford Lake, hailing from Kayenta/Black Mesa on the Navajo Nation, is an accomplished professional with a background in engineering and project management. His academic journey led him to attain an engineering degree from Northern Arizona University, and subsequently, he fulfilled his work experience prerequisites under the guidance of a seasoned professional engineer before securing his professional engineering license. With over 24 years of dedicated service in the AEC (Architecture, Engineering, and Construction) domain, Stanford has excelled in various roles, primarily as a project manager/principal for several reputable firms in Arizona. His expertise spans project management, quality control inspections, project meetings, construction administration, and engineering design across a diverse array of projects. These endeavors have catered to Indigenous tribes, esteemed

architects, professional engineers, general contractors, government officials, and private owners. Notably, Stanford has also embraced the responsibilities of a Business Development Manager, demonstrating a keen understanding of market trends. In this capacity, he adeptly organized in-person and virtual business meetings, pioneered the establishment of a drone service department, identified strategic teaming opportunities, prepared, and submitted project proposals, and oversaw the financial aspects of business operations.



### **Brandi Liberty**

Brandi Liberty, of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska and United Houma Nation descent, is an expert in tribal consulting with over 15 years of experience. As CEO of The Luak Group, she has successfully secured over \$78 million in grants for tribal community and economic development. Her areas of expertise include business and economic development, grant writing, tribal housing, policy, and strategic planning. Miss Liberty is the co-author of the book "Womanhood: Identity to Intimacy and Everything in Between," published in 2023. A sought-after speaker, she delivered keynotes and presentations at significant tribal symposia and contributes a monthly column to Verite News, with insights into the culture, challenges, and events that shape the lives of the Tribes in Louisiana and across Indian Country. A proponent of advancing women of color in business, Liberty has been recognized as an



MBDA Enterprising Women of Color and serves on several boards, including the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center and Research Wild. Liberty holds a BA in History and a master's from the KU Center of Indigenous Nations Studies, specializing in Tribal Human Resources. She also earned an Executive Leadership Certificate from Harvard Business School, in partnership with NAFOA.



**Darnella Melancon**

Darnella J. Melancon is an enrolled member of the Quechan Indian Tribe, located partially in California and Arizona, bordering Baja California, Mexico. In the past, Darnella served two terms as a tribal council member for the Quechan Tribe and will soon retire from law enforcement service with the State of California after 21 years. During her public service, she has served in several specialized roles, including Public Trust and Organizational Development Sergeant, Peer Support, Military Support, and Organizational Wellness Officer. Darnella is a military veteran, honorably discharged from the US Army after serving as a Combat Medical Specialist and other classifications. In her youth, she worked for Quechan's Community Health Services as a Community Health Representative. After military active duty, she coordinated the Quechan Tribe's Victim Advocacy program. In July 2023,

Darnella became a Co-chair with the Indigenous Women's Leadership Network, a non-profit organization that aims to provide networking and mentoring to women working on water and natural resource issues in Indian Country. Darnella also serves as a spiritual leader for her community. Darnella is a wife, mother, grandmother, and mentor. Her passion is to promote strength, healing, and well-being to those within her tutelage.



**Ramon Montano Marquez**

Ramon Montano Marquez (Kickapoo, Kumiai/Paipai Tribal Nation's/Mexican/Xicano) Was born and raised in San Diego, CA and currently resides in McCloud, OK. An established Community Advocate with a diverse background in Community and Social Services, Ramon has dedicated his career to bringing change in the urban setting and hopes to bring his experiences in working in the educational, nonprofit, and juvenile justice system to tribal communities. He has been a strong advocate for the implementation of Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices in both the Educational and Juvenile Justice System and also has a strong background in government accountability specifically around police practices and community oversight.



**Hector Ortiz**

"I'm a Senior Talent Acquisition Recruiter for Block, Inc. (formerly Square). Block, Inc. is an ecosystem of financial and technical businesses including Square, Cash App, Afterpay, TIDAL, Spiral, TBD, etc. I have 19 years of experience in Human Resources, 12 of those years are in Recruitment. I have led our Indigenous community as ERG Global Lead at Block, Inc. I'm a mentor for American Indigenous Business Leaders (ABIL). I graduated from the University of Phoenix with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management. I'm an enrolled member of Oglala Lakota (Oyate Watogla). My mother and family are from Pine Ridge Reservation, Kyle South Dakota, Medicine Root District, from the Old Horse / White Elk / Bull Bear families. I'm also a son of a Mexican

immigrant from Chihuahua Mexico (Tarahumara Uto-Aztecan). I'm named after my father. I'm a father of a daughter and twin sons, Kaelyn (18), Jacob (5) and Ryan (5). I was born and raised in Nebraska and I relocated to Phoenix in 2001. My hobbies include travel, coffee, I'm a foodie, I enjoy riding my bike, I support local live music, spending time with my kids, and always learning more about my Indigenous roots."



**Mary Parker**

Mary Parker, a proud enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation, is the Public Affairs Manager at the National Indian Gaming Commission, and directs national communication programs, handling media engagement, internal information, external relations, social media, and legislative affairs. Formerly the Compliance trainer at Cherokee Nation Entertainment, she spent seven years designing and implementing regulatory compliance training for casino employees. Recognized for her contributions, Parker was named to the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development's 40 Under 40 and received the Emerging Leaders of Gaming recognition in 2020. The following year, the Journal Record Magazine in Oklahoma City honored her as an Achiever Under 40. She is also a proud Native Forward scholarship recipient. Originally from Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Parker earned her bachelor's

degree in Psychology, Mental Health, from Northeastern State University in 2006. She continued her education, obtaining a master's degree in Administrative Leadership from the University of Oklahoma in 2017. Currently pursuing a doctoral program in Instructional Systems Design and Technology at Sam Houston State University. In every role, she shapes effective communication and outreach for the agency.



**Kellen Polingyumtewa**

Mr. Polingyumtewa began his career as a Community Health Liaison under Northern Arizona University's Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP). His impact on cancer prevention education with Arizona tribal communities and his assistance with Community-Based Participatory Research projects (ManUP - male health initiatives, Girl's Night Out women's health conferences, etc.) which spanned over 7 years earning him a *Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition* on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 by Arizona Congressman Raul M. Grijalva. Mr. Polingyumtewa continued his passion for chronic health issues and disease prevention working with a non-profit Urban Indian Health Center for 2 years before taking his position as a Program Coordinator for the HOPI Cancer Support Services. Mr. Polingyumtewa

continues to exhibit his leadership qualities to the cancer prevention community by serving as an advisory board member for the Cancer Support Communities of Northern Arizona. His innovative insights on cancer care have helped to enhance screening services and improve screening behaviors among indigenous communities.



**Rose Mary "Lashawaat" Quilt, J.D.**

Rose is enrolled with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation and a Lummi Nation descendant. Raised on traditional Yakama homelands, she embraced Yakama and Lummi ways taught by her mother and grandmother. Rose was also culturally adopted by a beautiful Tlingit and Haida family from Kêex' Kwáan, Alaska. Rose independently consults with tribal and ally organizations. She formerly served 10+ years at the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC), departing as Director of Policy and Research. As a survivor and "systems survivor," she was honored to serve nationally and internationally, bringing life-long personal and professional experience to the movement. As Policy Director she led and managed policy priorities advancing tribal sovereignty to enhance legal protections and systemic changes for Native women and families. She also led Tribal

Coalitions TTA, Native youth initiatives, collaborated with MMIW surviving family members, and regularly contributed to NIWRC's Restoration Magazine. Rose pursued her AA from Haskell Indian Nations University, BA from Central Washington University, and a Juris Doctorate from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law to serve Native peoples. Living near the Columbia River, she cherishes the waterways, lands, traditional foods, and precious time with her kids, grandkids, and 2 grand-rezdogs.





**Dr. Lizette Rivera**

Dr. Lizette Rivera has worked in higher education for over 12 years and currently serves as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging at Ivy Tech Community College Indianapolis. Dr. Rivera is originally from Chicago, IL where she completed a Doctorate of Education in Community College Leadership from National Louis University. She earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL. Dr. Rivera is a first-generation college graduate and first-generation born on the mainland of North America. Her family originates from Puerto Rico, and she is an enrolled citizen of the Iukaieke Guainía, Borikén (Guainía Taíno Tribe of Puerto Rico). She is also registered with the United Confederation of Taíno People (UCTP). Dr. Rivera is an Army Veteran under Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). She

completed 6 years in the U.S. Army Reserves. In 2003, she was deployed to Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the Office of the Staff Judge Advocate. She served as a Military Justice Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge (NCOIC), a Legal Assistance NCOIC, and an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) liaison for the Army.



**Amy Sazue**

Amy Sazue, Sicangu/Oglala Lakota, is the Executive Director of the Remembering the Children Memorial in Rapid City, South Dakota. Amy has almost 20 years of experience working with Native American nonprofits in and around the Black Hills region of South Dakota, primarily focusing on work with Indigenous youth. Her work with Native nonprofits has been informed by her experience growing up on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations and residing in Rapid City for the last 20 years where she is raising her four children alongside her husband, Tracy. Amy is an active and engaged community member and advocate for equity in the Rapid City community and continually seeks opportunities and collaborations that contribute to a just and equitable community. She serves on the Rapid City Public School Foundation board, the Rapid City Arts Council board, the Oyate Health Center Governing

Body, and Mni Luzahan Wicozani Advisory Committee, South Dakota AFP Board of Directors, Amy holds 3 Associate degrees in Early Childhood Education from Bay Mills Community College, a Bachelors in Education from Oglala Lakota College, a Certified Fundraising Manager (CFRM) graduate certificate from the Indiana University Lilly School of Philanthropy, and is working to complete a Masters in Nonprofit Management and Leadership.



**Elizabeth Talbert**

“Ki’su’k Kyukit, my name is Elizabeth Talbert I am a proud member of the Salish and Kootenai Tribes. I am both passionate and motivated to begin my journey with the Indigenous Leadership Academy. I currently work as a Mental Health Clinician where I strive to provide meaningful support for families. I received my Masters in Social Work at Walla Walla University in 2022. My education and work history are where I have learned to bring my extensive knowledge, dedication, and passion, to all people and projects that I am a part of. In my professional development journey, I have gained skills in the delegation of work and gained confidence in both my vision and integrity. The Indigenous Leadership Academy offers an opportunity for growth in projects close to my heart and the potential to develop long-term leadership qualities and skills that I will then utilize on my own Reservation.”





### **Taylor Throne**

“My name is Taylor Throne. I’m a member of the Navajo Nation. I am of the Bitterwater Clan born for Biligáana. I was born and raised mainly in Orem, Utah but now I live in Salt Lake City. My mother was from Kirtland, New Mexico and my father is from Pennsylvania. I have spent the past 15 years working in different non-profit areas such as caring for adults with autism, working at a family homeless shelter, food bank, and policy analysis & advocacy for low to moderate-income families focusing mainly on fair tax policy and supporting a state ICWA bill. My mother instilled a strong sense of caring for others. I always knew I wanted to work in the humanitarian field and with my skills and

interests I pursued a master’s degree in Statistics and am currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Economics at the University of Utah. I am interested in raising the standard of living of others through economic development which is culturally and environmentally sustainable. My favorite thing to do is go on adventures and try new things, I’m a world traveler - I’ve been to 6 continents, and 1 more to go!”



### **William Wilkinson**

Will Wilkinson, an experienced strategist and advocate for community empowerment, is deeply committed to fostering positive change. A proud alum of Haskell Indian Nations University, Will notably represented students at the Kansas State Capitol and with congressional leaders during his tenure as student body president, where he gained national recognition for enhancing student life. Following his time at Haskell, he was admitted to Carnegie Mellon’s Heinz College, where he is completing his Master’s degree in Public Policy and Management. At CMU, Will served as a strategic advisor at the Lean Innovation Lab and participated as a distinguished member in the inaugural cohort of the Tribal Leaders Program at Harvard Business School, an innovative initiative for Indigenous leadership. His experience extends to his previous role as a political consultant, where he effectively bridged tribal

communities with key strategists in Washington D.C., and collaborated on impactful policies with Biden-Harris appointees. As a Fellow at the Aspen Institute, he was instrumental in launching a nationwide youth-centered environmental program that garnered substantial engagement from young environmental advocates. As a senior advisor for the City of Chicago, Will continues to leverage his diverse experience, developing strategies that address public safety, community wellness, and systemic challenges.