



Native and Indigenous Foods Listening Session Report

Native and Indigenous Foods Listening Session Report

Developed by
The Seattle Urban Native Community and
sləp̓iləbəx^w (Rising Tides) Indigenous Planning Group



sləp̓iləbəxʷ

Pah-tu Pitt Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs

Demarus Tevuk Inupiaq (Nome Eskimo Community)

Cece Hoffman Umatilla, Nimiipuu, and Ojibwe

Kim Deriana Mandan and Hidatsa

Dakota Murray* Bad River Chippewa

Francesca Murnan* Shawnee and Cherokee

With support from the City of Seattle

Bridget Igoe, Office of Sustainability & Environment

***Dakota Murray**, Office of Planning and Community Development

***Francesca Murnan**, Department of Neighborhoods

Nate Moxley, Department of Neighborhoods

Denise L. Emerson (Diné and Skokomish Enrolled) is the artist and graphic designer who created the report cover. In this artwork, Denise draws from the style of a Native, Northwest coast basket. The image appears as though you are looking down at the basket. The loops on the rim were originally used to lash a soft cover on the basket to keep the contents secure and intact. The reason for symbolizing loops is to secure all the symbols that create this basket image.

The outermost ring or layer has symbols of a man with a son standing next to him and a mother with a daughter standing next to her. They represent the heart of a family.

The second ring contains symbols of land and sea animals that feed the family. Denise used the animal symbols of a duck, mountain goat, shrimp, quail, eel, rabbit, whale, bear, trout, deer, and Dungeness crab. These are foods Denise ate growing up and visiting Skokomish family at weddings, funerals, Shaker Church events, and tribal gatherings.

The third ring has symbols of plants eaten or used for medicine; some are made into a tea and salve. They are hazelnuts, mushrooms, dandelions, seaweed, camas, salal, crab apples, devil's club, and huckleberries.

The center contains symbols of a female root digger, a female hunter, a fisherman spearing a fish, and a female clam digger with a basket on her back.



Table of Contents

Opening Commemoration	5
Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives	5
Justice: Land Back	6
Glossary and Definitions	9
Introduction and Summary	11
Indigenous Research Methods	15
Summary Results	19
Global Themes	19
Food is Culture, Culture is Healing	21
Land Back	23
Healthy and Resilient Native and Indigenous Food Systems	25
Relationships between Urban Natives and Tribes	27
Take Care of Basic Needs First to Rebuild Food Sovereignty	28
Conclusions and Recommendations	31
Recommended Local Resources	33
Native Food Businesses	33
Native Food Systems	33



Opening Commemoration

We present learnings from a Native food sovereignty listening session, which was designed to hear from Native people's perspectives and implement policies and actions of support based on what was shared. Our team intentionally created a space where community members could share openly and honestly, due to expressed concerns of the City of Seattle historically causing harm, and not valuing, listening, understanding, and implementing policies that protect Indigenous food sovereignty.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives

Our community holds a desire to call out the specific connection between Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR), women, girls, LGBTQIA2S+ peoples, those living unsheltered, and justice. The discussion of MMIR can cause disturbing feelings or emotional harm.

MMIR Story

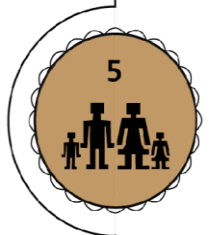
Pah-tu E.

Last year, I accompanied a relative to look for her mom. No young person should ever experience the loss that she went through. All I could do was stand by her and pray.

Families of MMIR need to be supported. Our communities are displaced into the streets into conditions that are way out of sync with any human rights standard or ethics in the world. It is important to recognize that there are opportunities to support MMIR families, organizations, and the efforts of Tribes and peoples working in areas that promote community wellbeing and climate preparedness. I encourage direct support to families, impacted communities, and Native organizations working on justice or equity efforts including landback and MMIR prevention and response.

For more information and resources, visit:

- [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls: A snapshot of data from 71 urban cities in the United States](#)
- [Washington State Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force](#)



Justice: Land Back

Pah-tu E.

Frequently, within our communities our voices are saying, “Our communities are already experiencing the crisis of a country founded upon stolen lands and stolen peoples.” Calls for justice often miss the experiences of Tribes and Native peoples and actions rarely go beyond land acknowledgements.

Examples:

- Energy sector (tar-sands, oil and gas extraction, piping, exports, and dam infrastructure) within the Pacific Northwest and beyond fueled by a capitalistic market that continually harms us.
- Harms are often disproportionately impacting women, LGBTQIA2S+, and families with jobs that are out of sync with the values of local peoples, yet potentially few other opportunities align with traditional values.
- Green Energy is often still harmful to Native Nations across the globe and are led by people with little reverence towards justice or prioritization to Native climate efforts and further impacts to First Foods.

Harmful impacts of:

- Eurocentric educational, medical, governmental, and economic institutions that are not designed to serve Native communities.
- Lack of opportunities or services designed for and by Native peoples using cultural safety principles.
- The over-policing of Native and African American peoples, including repetitive, violent removal from our homelands and places we are displaced to via genocide, and the legacy of chattel slavery.
- Economic systems that exploit, are not inclusive, and distribute a set of harmful disadvantages via a legacy of white supremacy.



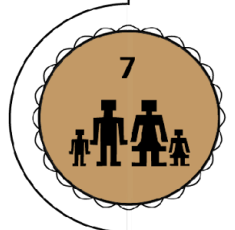
Many of these outcomes result in potentially repeating past injustices in a different way. For instance:

- Youth over-representation in foster care is similar to removing children to be harmed at boarding schools, as means of separating Native peoples further from their relations and culture in the goal of further land acquisition and settler colonialism.
- Trafficking or lack of services creates an environment of abuse, lifelong mental health issues, and a feeling of a lack of safety, a precedent which was unheard of prior to invasion as our peoples hold principles around valuing our autonomy and each other. These experiences are pronounced in association with the technology sector and sports.

Language around the greater good and presumed settler innocence need to be changed at a personal and institutional level as part of the effort to actually end genocide, anti-blackness and other ubiquitous institutionalized oppression. The word “progress” for the benefit of the greater good is the language used to create large-scale changes that result in wealth for a few. The destruction of the Columbia River via energy development included this language with the energy produced exported to large markets like California and the source of power for many environmentally harmful industries that communities of color, including displaced Native peoples, experience. Similarly, many communities of color are impacted and displaced by capital projects, such as dams, stadiums, or freeways. Using language like progress in conjunction with themes around the greater good normalizes the violent displacement of communities, their cultural connections, and ecosystems. Instead of progress, it is important to recognize that governments and institutions are a party to harm, rather than building relationships and moving forward in a better way.

Languages are a reflection and product of a culture’s worldview. The English language is itself a barrier to understanding Native and Indigenous knowledge frameworks for managing ecologies and producing sustainable food. For example, the English term of “stewardship” still places humanity in an extractive and hierarchical role with Nature; there is no English equivalent for the Indigenous worldview of humanity’s role as an integrated member of ecology who both benefits from, is taken care of by, and nurtures the world. The language and worldview barriers are why our team continues to advocate for outreach and research that is conducted and analyzed by Indigenous consultants.

Land Back and returning Native relationships to the land is a necessary action that leads to many positive outcomes. We heard in our listening sessions the value of being in a place where every community is taken care of, supported, and with their own sense of place

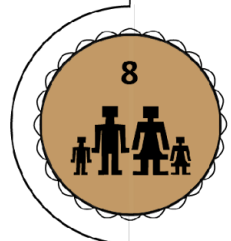


reflected. The current land-use model violently excludes communities of color from benefiting from the economy.

There are clear connections to the environmental sector at the intersection of exploitation and eugenics via environmentalism's racist history and the resulting need to diversify many institutional fields of study. The absence of justice is lived and experienced every day and often invisibilized as many fields and places are continuing the legacy of the injustices embodied and present, following the invasion of what we now call the United States.

Restoring Native relationships to land and place is essential for stopping our experiences within the legacy of US genocidal policies and erasure. The lands and waters also need us to be in better relationships with them. While Indigenous people make up only 5% of the earth's population, we protect 80% of the earth's biodiversity due to our relationships¹. Many local Tribes and Indigenous communities are engaged with restoration projects and would like a scale up in various ways. Land back is an approach to address historical injustice, including the legacy of MMIR, and support the leadership and community cohesion for Native communities and Tribal Nations.

Supporting the restoration of Indigenous worldviews, and uplifting place-based values and ways of thinking and being in relationship, strengthens *everyone* in *all* aspects, as the perspective during the work often switches from independent to interdependent across Tribal peoples. As we are all in relationship together, there is an intrinsic connection between both the beauty and harms we face today. The violence we face from settler colonialism is connected to our relatives being murdered and taken; to our lands and waters being poisoned; to our food, or relatives, being maltreated and erased. We see a solution to these issues as being able to rebuild our relationships through the return of our self-determination and agency with our lands.



¹ National and International Frameworks. (2021). Australia State of the Environment. <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/climate/management/national-and-international-frameworks#-cli-21-figure-21-indigenous-peoples-and-the-environment>

Glossary and Definitions

Decolonization - The process of freeing institutions, systems of government, and activities from the cultural, social, environmental, and economic effects of colonization. In the context of settler colonialism, this must involve the rematriation of land (soil, water, air) and recognition of how land and relations to land have always been differently understood and enacted.^{2,3}

First Foods - The staple foods that were eaten before contact with colonizers. First Foods are a connection to the past, people, ecosystems, Indigenous Identities, and creation stories. Revitalizing and maintaining connection to First Foods and Native food systems is a restorative framework to nourish and strengthen community health and wellbeing, both social and ecological. For instance, marine nutrients associated with salmon are associated with the biodiversity needed for climate resiliency and community health through cultural connection.

Land Back - Land Back refers to efforts by Native and Indigenous peoples to reestablish their sovereignty, with political, economic, environmental, and cultural control of their unceded traditional lands. It is a movement that seeks to place Indigenous land back in Indigenous hands.⁴ Prioritization should include respect, reciprocity, and understanding for local Tribal Nations. Land Back returns relationships of Indigenous people to ancestral homelands that were severed, and continue to be hindered, during settler colonialism.

Native and Indigenous - *Native* refers to people living within what is now the United States prior to European contact. *Indigenous* refers to peoples with pre-existing sovereignty who were living together as a community prior to contact with settler populations. Native Americans are the Indigenous peoples of the United States. We use *Native and Indigenous* to be as inclusive as possible recognizing there are many diverse identities connected to Seattle from throughout the world.

Settler Colonialism - The practice of colonizing a place, occupying it with settlers with the intention to stay, and imposing settler cultural values, religions, and laws, while also trying to eradicate the Indigenous peoples. As a structure, settler colonialism requires genocide: the

² Racial Equity Tools. Decolonization Theory and Practice.

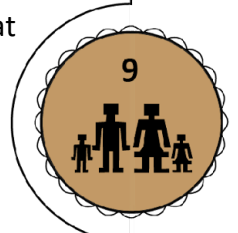
<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/fundamentals/core-concepts/decolonization-theory-and-practice>

³ Tuck, E. and Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*. 1(1), 1-40.

<https://clas.osu.edu/sites/clas.osu.edu/files/Tuck%20and%20Yang%202012%20Decolonization%20is%20not%20a%20metaphor.pdf>

⁴ Bearfoot, Cheyenne. (April 21, 2022). Land Back: The Indigenous Fight to Reclaim Stolen Lands.

<https://www.kqed.org/education/535779/land-back-the-indigenous-fight-to-reclaim-stolen-lands>



removal and erasure of Indigenous populations, communities, and nations that exist before the arrival and creation of the settler nation. In settler colonialism the most important thing is land (earth, water, air), because it is the source of capital and the new home of the settlers. Settler colonialism is distinct from other forms of colonialism because the colonizer comes with the intention of making a new home on the land and as such insists on “settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain.”

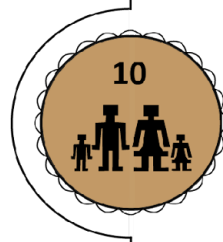
Self-determination - Self-determination in the Native and Indigenous case is about the right and authority of Native communities and Tribal Nations to determine their own futures. We use self-determination in relation to any identifiable Native and Indigenous community – Tribes, Urban Native communities, Indigenous peoples, and grassroots community groups.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) - An academic term that refers to the knowledge that Native and Indigenous peoples hold about natural and living resources and the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment. TEK is acquired through direct contact with a specific place or environment, and it is handed down through generations by cultural transmissions. A more common way to reference this type of knowledge is simply traditional or ancestral teachings and ways. TEK is also often referred to as Native or Indigenous Science.

Tribal Sovereignty - The inherent right of Tribal Nations to govern themselves and to practice self-determination and autonomy.

Urban Natives - Individuals of American Indian and Alaska Native ancestry who may or may not have direct and/or active ties with a particular Tribe, but who identify with and are at least somewhat active in the Native community in their urban area.⁵ Native peoples living in urban areas may or may not identify with this term. Government policies around re-location, termination of a tribe’s status as federally recognized, forced assimilation, and resource exploitation often lead to displacement or movement of Native people to cities. It is understood within the community that even during the Indian Relocation Act of 1956, Native peoples were encouraged to disperse throughout cities as part of the federal government’s goal of assimilation.

⁵ National Urban Indian Family Coalition definition.



Introduction and Summary

In July 2022, an Indigenous planning group named **sləp̓iləbəx̣ʷ (Rising Tides** in Lushootseed) and the Food Policy and Programs team at the Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment (OSE) organized a listening session on Native and Indigenous Food. The listening session centered on Native and Indigenous priorities and values for an equitable, sustainable, and resilient local food system. The goal was to hear directly from Native and Indigenous community members who have deep expertise and experience in the broad range of topics that intersect with local and traditional food systems such as traditional First Foods, ecosystems, food access, food sovereignty, economic development, climate change resiliency, community organizing, and more.

This report summarizes the ideas and themes shared during the listening session, which informed the sləp̓iləbəx̣ʷ [Native Neighborhood Community Study](#) efforts, and the City of Seattle’s efforts to update the [Food Action Plan](#). The report is also open for use to all those who are interested in supporting Native Food Sovereignty. The listening session planning team was composed of members of the community, sləp̓iləbəx̣ʷ, and a food policy advisor from OSE. sləp̓iləbəx̣ʷ is a coalition of Indigenous architects, planners, and community members and their mission is to cultivate a city that is culturally, socially, and economically inclusive of Tribal and urban Native people.



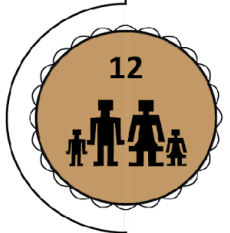
Native Foods Listening Session organizers and hosts having lunch during the event. From left to right: Kim Deriana, Natalie Garcia, Neli Jasuja, Tayah Carlisle, Fatima Camara, and Demarus Tevuk.



Chef Jeremy Thunderbird of Native Soul Cuisine serves lunch of salmon and Navajo tacos.

During the planning process, our team noted that:

- **Engagement approaches with Native communities, Tribal Nations, and Indigenous peoples need to change** – especially approaches typically used by governments and community-based organizations (CBOs) which are often extractive and not grounded in traditional Native and Indigenous values and knowledge systems. Engagement attributes include more sustainable support and commitment to relationship building, sharing power, and diverse leadership. Settlers should self-reflect and self-educate about Native communities and Tribal Nations.
- **Centering Native and Indigenous values in the design and implementation of the listening session was essential.** “Western” and colonial food system frameworks are generally not inclusive of Native and Indigenous values. Listening sessions should be designed, facilitated, and analyzed by Native and Indigenous communities and consultants.
- **Transparency and follow-up with listening session participants is important, as well as nurturing and supporting relationships with and within the community.** Reciprocity and relationality is foundational in Native worldviews and needs to be at the core of community engagement with Native and Indigenous communities. Initial and continued collaboration need to be sustainably resourced, and the values and benefits of collaboration and engagement need to be bi-directional and empower Native perspectives and priorities. Continuous engagement and self-determination shift power to include Native community members as leading participants with deeper engagement in policy processes.
- **Referring to Native and Indigenous societies as “hunter-gatherers” is derivative and demeaning.** Indigenous peoples are sophisticated agriculturalists, foresters, and aquaculturists who have been in strong relationships with, created and cared for food forests, prairies, and coastal waterways since time immemorial. The English language does not describe the level of expertise our cultures produce historically and contemporarily despite genocidal policies aimed at breaking our connections to each other and the lands.
- **The settler-colonial narrative dismisses and erases our experiences, benefiting settlers to impose inequitable systems without an inclusive justice lens.** We recognize that the legacy of viewpoints held in the sciences, such as biology, is rooted in eugenics. The violent impacts of settler-colonialism continue in



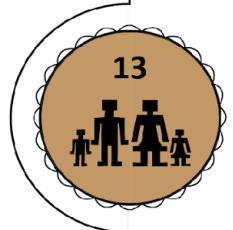
connection to the founding of the United States, centered around white men and violent taking of lands and peoples, via chattel slavery and invasion.

- ***We noted that our food systems and relationship to foods were attacked during the boarding school era***, resulting in intergenerational impacts to our traditional practices and barriers to access lands and waterways, resulting in a lack of safety to gather and share traditional foods. The group discussed the need for awareness and sensitivity for our Native communities that have had to continuously advocate for Native food systems.
- ***There are many Indigenous identities, and it is important to be identity affirming.*** Both the planning group and listening session participants noted experiences of marginalization from the perspective of experiences as urban Natives, those recently arrived in an urban area, and of Tribal or First Nations peoples. Similarly, many people experience disconnection from their culture due to the impacts of harmful genocidal policies and practices and their voices and perspectives should not be dismissed.
- ***We are all capable of harm, and harm is amplified when we are working at the organizational or policy level.***

During the listening session, several important themes emerged. These themes are detailed in the **Results** section. The highlights are summarized here:

Global themes: Several global themes emerged from the listening session that resonated across all the discussion topics. These included the need to:

- ***Take care*** of all people, all living beings, and places – a Native practice and value that should be applied to food and environmental work.
- ***Decolonize and dismantle systemic racism and oppression*** in City policies, practices, and approaches.
- ***Prioritize justice-centered work, action, and investments*** led by and for people and communities most impacted by settler colonialism, racism, classism, and other pervasive forms of oppression, and where communities feel a sense of belonging and well-being.
- ***Invest in Native-led efforts*** focused on environmental sustainability, restoration, conservation, food justice, placemaking, and more.

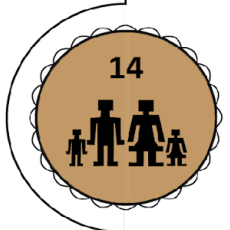


- ***Celebrate Native and Indigenous identities***, food practices, languages, and cultural ways to foster healthy and resilient communities.

Land Back. Land, water, and other natural resources are the foundation of Native foodways, culture, and identity. Native peoples are yearning to reconnect with land and waterways to cultivate and harvest food and plant medicines, revitalize cultural traditions and languages, and lead conservation and restoration projects. Land back is complicated by land restrictions, pollution, and lack of resources, including housing. It was noted that it is often the undesired lands given or reserved for Native peoples, while the Indigenous community has interest in the return of what is considered prime lands and waters.

Be mindful and critical of justice action. Culturally significant places, such as Indian Park, are undergoing construction processes that likely disrupted the community of Native people experiencing living unsheltered. Native artistic representations are on the rise, however there is a range of opinions on whether it is art that every member of the Native community can identify with.

Native and Indigenous food systems are healthier, more resilient. Native and Indigenous ways of cultivating, harvesting, processing, and storing food are better for the environment and individual health. However, the industrialized, dominant food system is not healthy or sustainable, especially in relation to climate change. Colonial land use policies create barriers for Native and Indigenous communities to connect with ancestral lands and waters, access nutritious and culturally relevant food and plant medicine, and practice cultural ways that heal and strengthen communities and the environment. It was noted that some areas of potential Native food cultivation are in the same locations as people living without housing and there is a desire to employ strategies where everyone is taken care of.



Indigenous Research Methods

Our team employed Indigenous Research Methodologies based upon our experiences in community, literature, and additional backgrounds that we bring. The methods developed by the Native Neighborhoods effort, led by Demarus Tevuk, served as a basis for our approach. Like the Native Neighborhoods study, we sought to:

- Center Native and Indigenous values to Indigenize the research.
- Actively listen to the Seattle urban Native community.
- Model respect for the ancient and enduring relationships that local Coast Salish peoples and Tribes have with the land that Seattle now occupies.



Pah-tu Pitt (standing in background on the left) welcomes people into the space.

We would like to note that replication is not always possible, and the context, approach, and folks present make this gathering unique. Research ideologies on control methods tend to be more Western rooted and a form of bias towards Indigenous qualitative methodologies.

People often think that they can replicate the work of Indigenous people, but often they should be supporting Native efforts instead. Our approach included adapting to the day and a set of conversation-guiding questions were produced, with each Native facilitator responding to their group's dynamic during the discussion.

We chose an outdoor setting with the support of Young Women Empowered (Y-WE) at Marra Farm located in South Park. We felt a community-managed location was important for the session. Facilitators and notetakers were either members of the Native community and/or other communities of color, and all were involved in food systems work. We selected participants from within our professional and community networks. A meal was catered by [Native Soul Cuisine](#) and a stipend was also provided to participants. Our team's goal was to reduce as many barriers as possible to attending the listening session.

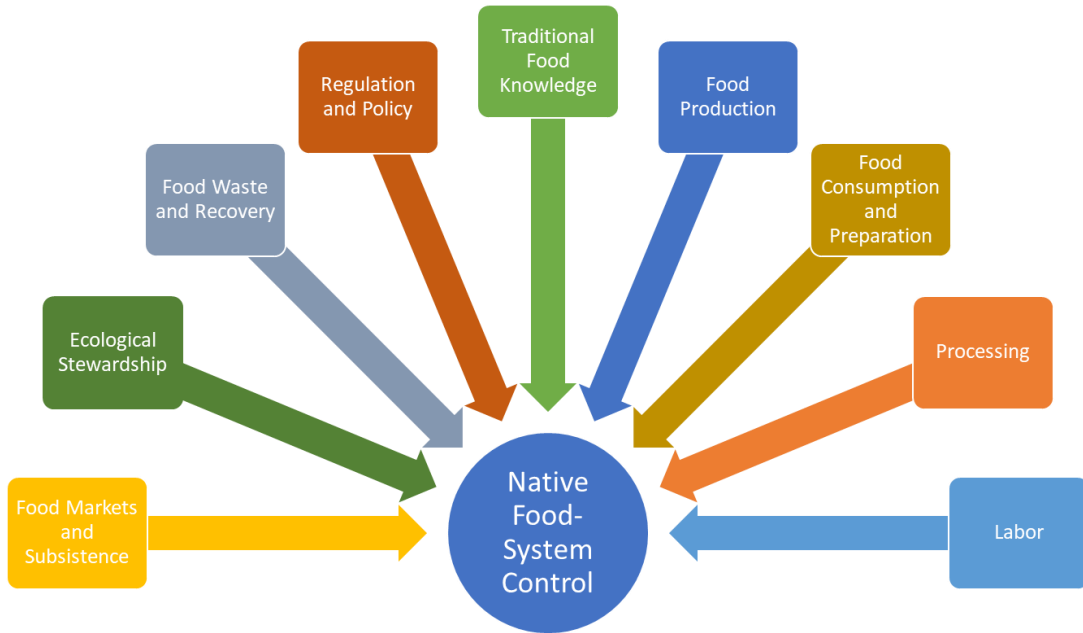
In breakout groups, we began by presenting and discussing two diagrams as seen below in **Graphic 1: Native Food-System Control** and **Graphic 2: Native Food Sovereignty** from First Nations Development Institute.⁶ These two resources offered participants a starting point for understanding and discussing their relationship to local Native Food Systems.



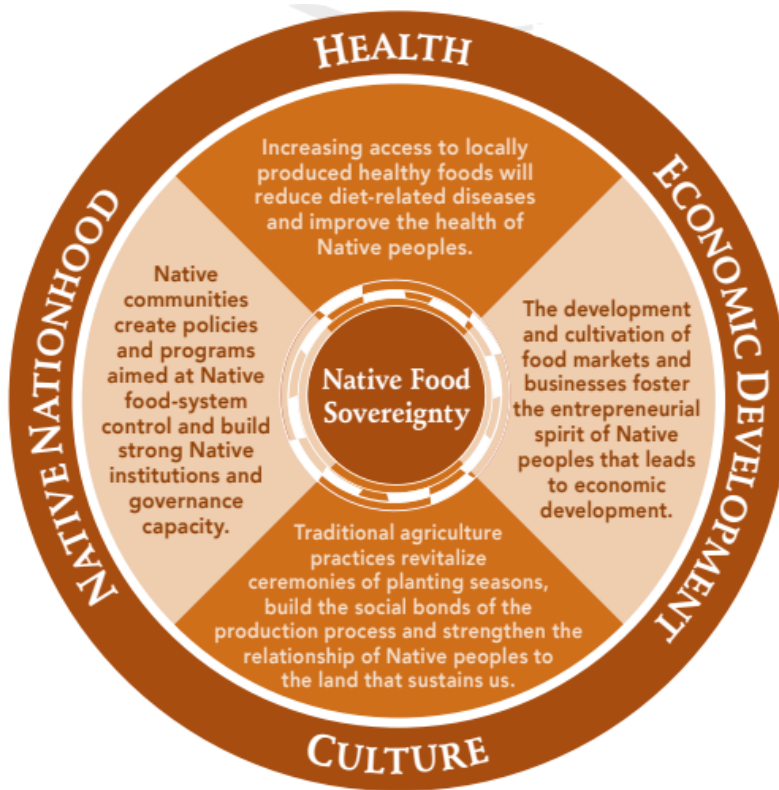
Participants joined three smaller group listening circles in Marra Farm.

⁶ First Nations Development Institute. Outcomes under the Native Agriculture and Food Systems Initiative (2015-2017).

Graphic 1: Native Food-System Control
(First Nations Development Institute)



Graphic 2: Native Food Sovereignty
(First Nations Development Institute)



Then, facilitators led small group discussions guided by the values and questions listed in the box below. The values **Relationships**, **Reciprocity**, and **Respect** and their associated question prompts were primarily used to initiate discussion within small groups, and additional prompts and probing questions were adapted to the interests of the group and flow of conversation.

Values and Questions that Guided Discussions

Relationships

How can a Native Neighborhood project and Food Justice efforts support the Seattle Native community build relationships among community members? Within the region?

Accept Only What You Need

How can Native Food systems help us practice the Indigenous value to take, accept, gather, or use only what you need?

Appreciation

What are the ways our efforts can express appreciation for nature, the land, for each other, and in solidarity with other communities?

Reciprocity

How can increased support for Native food systems encourage our communities to practice reciprocity (sharing)?

Respect

How can we ensure that our project shows respect for our community, other communities, and for the land and waters?

Responsibility

How do Native food systems express our responsibilities to the lands and waters, to our elders, youth, and to our generations to come?



Themes and feedback from the breakout group conversations were interpreted individually and through discussion among the planning group. The results offered are what we heard from the community with slight interpolation based upon the Rising Tide's collective understanding of Native and Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.

Summary Results

This section summarizes key themes that emerged from the small group discussions. Paraphrased quotes from listening session participants are provided to give context, illustrate themes, strengthen the reader's understanding, and amplify the voices of the Native listening session participants.

Global Themes

Several global themes emerged from the listening session that resonated across all the discussion topics and are themselves interrelated. These included:

Taking care of all living beings and our earth. The value and practice of *taking care* of all living beings, people, and places, needs to be applied to how the City of Seattle (the City) and our communities organize and work together.

Decolonize and dismantle systemic racism. Settler colonialism and systemic racism is the framework and foundation for past and current harm, trauma, and oppression of Native, Indigenous, Black, and People of Color. The City as an institution needs to work on decolonizing and dismantling systemic racism if it truly wants to work towards addressing injustices and supporting thriving and connected communities.

In practice, we must acknowledge past harms and address unbalanced power dynamics that perpetuate the status quo and value white and Western ways over Native and Indigenous ways. We should use healing-informed practices that are culturally relevant and focus on community strengths, not deficits. Our goal should be to revitalize and integrate Native and Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and approaches into policies and practices. The City should include Native and Tribal representation, voices, and consultation in policy and programmatic work. For non-Native people, ending systemic injustice also means examining your beliefs about Native and Indigenous peoples and how you show up and interact in the community.

Participants expressed they were unsure how to share feedback because the experiences of oppression in our communities have been so harmful and it was unclear if the City is committed to the community's desired path where safety for people and the planet is a given.

I'm scared to bring a truly radical vision to this listening session because I don't have any expectation that the City will actually do anything. All of these ideas require huge fundamental changes in other people and systems that our society is deeply invested in.



Invest in long-term justice-centered work. Governments and occupiers should take responsibility for justice-centered work and recognize that the legacy of injustice is ongoing. In addition to decolonizing, this will require culturally relevant action and meaningful investments led by and for people and communities most impacted by settler-colonialism, racism, classism, and other pervasive systems of oppression. In the words of several participants:

Real investments are needed to support long-term sustainability of food justice and food sovereignty work led by Black and Brown peoples. Small, short-term funding is not adequate for meaningful progress.

The community needs resources, infrastructure, time, and land to do this work and connection to place. These are the foundational needs for community members to have energy and time to participate in projects.

Support Native-led efforts. There is a need to support and invest in more Native-led efforts related to environmental sustainability, restoration, conservation, food justice, and placemaking. *Placemaking* is a design and planning approach that transforms public spaces to strengthen the connections between people and these places.

Supporting Native-led efforts would not just benefit Native communities. Native worldviews are centered on Relationships, Sustainability, Appreciation, Reciprocity, Respect, and Responsibility. We all benefit from policies, practices, and projects that are centered on these values. Making communities compete for resources is out of sync with reciprocity and justice.

The City has a history of giving small, token amounts for Native projects—for example, \$500,000 for capital improvements when that is clearly not enough. The City can do something more meaningful and set aside a certain percentage of the budget to local Tribal communities. Respect is doing the actual work of making meaningful contributions. It is disrespectful for the City to share such miniscule resources. As Native and BIPOC communities, sometimes we don't expect to get anything, so we are okay with scraps. But the government could and should show respect by proactively providing resources in a meaningful way. We must move away from performative relationships and toward authentic relationships.

Cultivate attachments to place. Everyone in the region would gain from developing stronger relationships with place and the physical environments we share a responsibility to care for. Placemaking is done through nurturing an attachment to a place that fosters belonging, respect

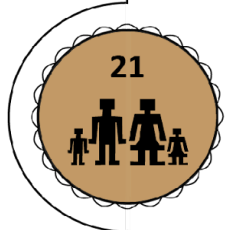


and care for the environment, and increases community participation and wellbeing. Native and Indigenous peoples are leaders in placemaking efforts that could make Seattle a more culturally, socially, and economically inclusive land for Tribal and urban Native people. Participants expressed the desire for others to connect and feel a sense of belonging, especially in the cultural context.

Celebrate Native and Indigenous culture and identities. Native and Indigenous peoples are amazing, vibrant, resilient, adaptive, and innovative. How our communities are talked about should reflect positive characterizations rather than negative stereotypes rooted in racism, oppression, and violence. Revitalizing Native and Indigenous languages, food traditions, cultural practices, places, and aspirations will foster healthy and resilient communities through their self-determination efforts and decolonization strategies.

Food is Culture, Culture is Healing

Food is a central and vital component of culture. The traditional definition of wealth is abundant and healthy land and waterways that provide the food, shelter, and gifts that an Indigenous community needs to take care of each other, future generations, and guests. The right to access and manage traditional food lifeways has been systematically dismantled by settler colonialism and the federal government's assimilation policies. In the Indigenous worldview, humans are integrated with nature with a goal of living in coexistence with nature. In the European worldview, humans are separate from nature with a goal of living in control of nature. To heal from settler colonialism, Native and Indigenous people must protect their relationships with nature, and practicing traditional food lifeways is the strongest way to build and maintain a relationship with nature.



Excerpt from "*These Abundant and Generous Homelands*"
poem by Washington State Poet Laureate Rena Priest

“We must recall a time when we did not have
the things we think, we need
but had the whole living earth for free.
‘As long as the rivers run, as long as the tide flows,
and as long as the sun shines, you will have land,
fish and game for your frying pans,
and timber for your lodges.’
These were the promises
on which this state was founded,
these sacred homelands in which
the call of eagles resounded,
resplendent from the tops of towering cedars,
where none went hungry
when salmon were running,
in clear cool waters, these abundant
and generous homelands were given
in exchange for the promise
of a world, we could live in
a world that would keep giving,
to all in common,
for as long as the rivers run.”

Cultural revitalization must include returning and nurturing the relationships that Native and Indigenous people have to the land and waterways. Cultural programming that focuses on traditional food and Indigenous language will bring healing to Native and Indigenous communities. In traditional land management practices, tending the land created stability and increased diversity and abundance and traditional reciprocal economies reduced the incentive to harvest too much. Supporting Native and Indigenous cultural practices will not only heal communities – reviving and maintaining cultural practices will heal the land as well.

Community members discussed the need to protect cultural practices and ensure that cultural appropriation will be prevented. Cultural appropriation occurs when a cultural element is removed from its cultural context and typically a monetary transaction is included in cultural appropriation. Cultural context includes worldviews, protocols and practices, and language. Sometimes cultural appropriation occurs through allyship or partnerships where ethical protocols may center settlers rather than assuming a decolonial or justice lens.



Land Back

Land Back and restoring Native peoples' relationship to land, waterways, and traditional foodways were central themes in small group discussions. Participants described working with land and waterways in traditional and culturally relevant ways as essential to Native food systems and Native food sovereignty. Land, water, and other natural resources are the foundation of Native foodways, culture, and identity. In the words of the participants:

Land is liberation.

It's all about [land] ownership transition and rehabilitation of the land and water to its traditional ecosystems.

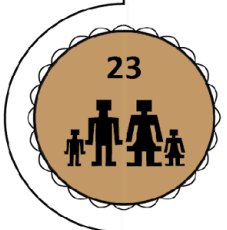
Examples of activities of interest mentioned in small groups that require access to land, waterways, and resources include:

- Cultivating plant medicines, First Foods, and food forests and integrating these into Native-led health and wellness programs.
- Gathering, hunting, fishing, and teaching how to process traditional foods.
- Community building and educational projects aimed at revitalizing cultural knowledge and practices by restoring relationships with the land.
- Working on natural resource conservation and efforts to rehabilitate land and waterways, including reintroducing native flora and fauna throughout the city and region.
- Using approaches that respond to and heal from intergenerational trauma.

Our team must highlight the need to fund all these efforts and to ensure that Native and Indigenous people are employed or contracted to lead the efforts. Native and Indigenous community members should also be compensated to participate to remove a barrier to access to land, training, and programming. The ability to volunteer one's time is a privilege that not all communities can provide. Land ownership was mentioned often as an important step to avoid governmental policies that hinder Native and Indigenous communities from pursuing their land work and programming in culturally relevant ways.

In discussing land and water topics, many interrelated challenges and complexities were noted and are described below.

Land restrictions and land enclosures. There are many land restrictions and enclosures that prohibit Native peoples from being on traditional hunting and gathering grounds and sever the



relationships Native peoples have with land, water, and their traditional food systems. Participants described many and diverse types of land restrictions including private land ownership, hydroelectric dams, wind and solar farms, barricades that are set up after homeless encampments are removed, and government policies that restrict activities on public land. In the words of one participant:

Western policy is about separating things. For example, you are not allowed to gather and harvest plant medicines and food in a park. Why is that separation needed? And how does this impact Native and Indigenous peoples who are continuously restricted from connecting with the land?

Land and water are polluted. Another key concern is that land, water, and air have been continuously exploited, contaminated, and polluted by colonizers, the U.S. government, and extractive industries. Native communities want to reclaim ancestral landscapes to protect cultural and natural resources, but the land and water are now polluted or have been altered through clear-cutting of old-growth forests, industrialization, agriculture, and hydro projects that block fish migration. These practices have had a devastating impact on Native food systems and cultural practices. Participants talked about how degraded soil, air, and water quality from superfund sites, stormwater runoff, and infrastructure impact Tribal fishers and gatherers. Remediation of polluted and altered land and waters needs to be central in Land Back conversations, said participants. Culturally relevant infographics and education is needed more broadly, but also within the context of risk, healing, and understanding.

Western frames of reference to land. Related to land restrictions, Western approaches to land and food system topics often use phrases like “land access” and “land ownership”. These terms are problematic from Native perspectives for several reasons. For one, words like “access” and “ownership” imply land is something to control or dominate, and this raises associations with settler colonialism, which is both re-traumatizing and minimizes the mutualistic and reciprocal relationship Native peoples have with land, water, plants, and animals. Additionally, a reference and focus on “land” alone assumes a preference for one type of food system over others and overlooks the importance of waterways in Native food systems. Building relation to land is complicated by jurisdictions, different worldviews, and property laws that do not necessarily reflect how Native peoples might want to relate to a place. Ideas around ownership also complicate how people understand Land Back movements.

Solidarity with other marginalized communities. Within the Land Back theme, most participants expressed a desire to be in solidarity with other communities that seek connection



with the land and have been displaced and harmed by racist Western policies and colonialism. In the words of one participant:

We must acknowledge that other marginalized communities use these lands too. There is nuance that we must acknowledge and work with if we are going to practice these values we have been talking about.

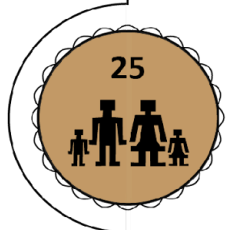
That said, at least one person expressed a hesitation to commit to solidarity with other marginalized communities because the hurt and harm in Native and Indigenous communities is the main priority at this time.

Money and resources. In today's world, it takes money and resources to be able to participate in traditional food practices. Permits for hunting, fishing, and gathering cost money and are difficult to obtain (some hunting licenses use a lottery system), and transportation to gathering and harvesting places is a challenge. Participants expressed a desire to break down these types of barriers for Native peoples so they can forage, hunt, fish, and gather in culturally relevant ways. Many jobs do not provide time off or other benefits and resources associated with cultural or traditional food system practices, which is another way boarding school trauma is reinforced by capitalistic norms.

Healthy and Resilient Native and Indigenous Food Systems

The unsustainable practices and policies of Western and industrial food systems was another prominent theme from the listening sessions. Participants discussed industrial farming and agriculture as rooted in capitalism and greed, using harmful food production practices, and producing foods that destroy our ecosystems, harm human health, and make the dominant food system vulnerable to climate change. Participants discussed commodity foods, Washington State's reliance on exports in its agricultural and commercial fishing economies, and Western monoculture agricultural techniques as contributing to a food system that is unhealthy, unsustainable, and vulnerable in times of emergencies and natural disasters.

Efforts to re-localize the food system and make it more sustainable must center workers and small businesses in these transitions, especially BIPOC and lower wage workers. Too often solutions are done for the "greater good" without analysis of the true impacts, especially on the environment and BIPOC and lower income communities.



A few participants remarked how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed major issues with Western and industrial foods systems, with Native communities especially harmed by a lack of basic food resources that were nutritious and culturally relevant.

We often talk now about how the COVID-19 pandemic revealed these thinly veiled vulnerabilities in our world – our food system is one of them. Our Native communities really needed food resources during the pandemic – basic food resources. Yet, our current food systems were so vulnerable and unsustainable that we often did not have access to the healthy and culturally appropriate foods we wanted. We often had to rely on commodity type foods...The packaging on foods is also out of sync with our values around processing.

The capitalist economy is focused on greed. That is why there is so much investment in the commodity food markets. During COVID, we saw a predominant response to food assistance was through the commodity food system.

At the same time, some noted that the COVID-19 crisis prompted new innovations and mutual aid responses that focused on local, small-scale, and Native approaches to food.

Native and Indigenous food systems were discussed as healthier, more resilient, and more biodiverse. Participants noted the medicinal value of Native foods and plants, the way Native and Indigenous land management practices restore ecosystems and creates a more productive ecosystem, and how cultural values of Respect and Reciprocity inevitably foster a food system that is better for people, communities, and the environment. One Native food expert also noted that practicing cultural food ways and connecting to the land can heal and strengthen individuals living with chronic physical or mental illnesses or substance abuse disorders.

The industrialized, dominant food system and colonial land use policies create barriers for Native and Indigenous communities to connect with ancestral lands and waters, access nutritious and culturally relevant food and plant medicine, and practice cultural ways that heal and strengthen communities and the environment.

Participants also noted that Native practices related to food, land, and resource management, what is often referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in academia, is crucial for sustainable transformation of food systems, especially in view of climate change. Tribal and



Native land management practices preserve biodiversity, provide nutritious food and medicinal plants, and are low in climate pollution. And yet, participants noted that TEK is often marginalized in Western science and policy:

Western science doesn't treat Traditional Ecological Knowledge with the respect it deserves. Indigenous plants saved the world from starvation and disease. Western farming techniques nearly eradicated the beneficial properties of plants. Indigenous ecosystem management practices should be a model for sustainable and climate resilient food and agricultural production.

It can be a challenge to come from Native knowledge systems and always cross-culturally communicating and differentiating between how TEK and Western science are treated. Validating ourselves is exhausting. But power dynamics and racism keep Western science as the dominant framework.

Failure to recognize the importance of traditional and cultural practices in taking care of the land, water, air, all living beings, and people's health and wellbeing, and the role that Native and Indigenous people can play in food systems and ecosystem restoration, is an example of how racism, oppression, and white dominant culture continue to be pervasive.

In addition to supporting and educating about Native and Indigenous ways of cultivating, harvesting, processing, and storing culturally important foods, participants noted local and small-scale food production as important ways to improve our food systems. They discussed the importance of investing in small farms, community gardens, gathering and fishing, and other "farm to table" and "nature to table" activities that produce and provide fresh, organic, and culturally important foods in Native communities. It seems associated terminologies do not always reflect how Native people might define their relationships to food systems and there should be more representation of foods important to Native peoples within our spaces and shared as appropriate.

Relationships between Urban Natives and Tribes

The displacement and relocation of Native and Indigenous peoples due to government policies have resulted in many Native and Indigenous people moving from their reservations and traditional villages to cities. Most Native and Indigenous peoples now live in urban areas



and Urban Natives are from many First Nations and Tribes across Turtle Island. This has complicated the relationships between Urban Natives and local and regional Tribes.

Participants discussed that Native people hold inherent rights to gather foods, often recognized through a protected treaty right, yet many urban Native peoples no longer live on the lands where their treaty right may apply. Meanwhile, many Tribes have large, ceded areas with rights to gather for sustenance and ceremonies, and those resources may not be available or accessible to urban Natives.

Discussions around urban Native and Tribal communities were sensitive. Urban Natives may face many challenges when they are living in metropolitan areas far from their ancestral and tribal lands, and government policies (at the state and federal levels) often include resources and relationships with Tribes. Many urban Natives are living as guests in Coast Salish land and understand and respect the treaty rights of local tribes, while also wishing to build a healthy and respectful relationship with Coast Salish lands.

One thing to remember is the Urban Native community often lacks a political relationship with the US government. That can complicate the relationship to hunting, fishing, and gathering traditional foods – they are not treaty protected for many Urban Native people.

Participants noted it was vital for Urban Native communities and organizations to build respectful and healthy relationships with local and regional Tribes, which have resources to provide assistance.

I noticed during the pandemic and through the mutual aid efforts that emerged that Tribes were there for the Urban Native community. No matter their capacity, the Tribes showed up for fellow Native people. Relationships with the Tribes are critically important. When a Tribe has the capacity to provide food or other resources, such as through their economic enterprises, they will do it. Tribes in Washington State are a major employer. Strategically, it is important to build relationships with Tribes.

Take Care of Basic Needs First to Rebuild Food Sovereignty

Participants talked about how difficult it is to steward the land and work on food justice, food sovereignty, subsistence, and engage in community work if basic needs like food, housing, health care, childcare, and transportation are not met. Related to this challenge is that Native food systems and economies have been eroded by Western capitalism. This



causes not only a loss of culturally significant and resilient practices but also a lack of access to resources needed to live and thrive. Colonial exploitation of natural resources and Native peoples to support Western capitalism have resulted in loss of access to land and resources and put Native peoples at an incredible economic disadvantage.

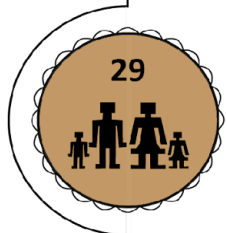
Everything degrades when you are poor. It is hard to prioritize food justice and community building work when you are just trying to survive.

When you were talking about co-ops and people living on the land, it made me think about how easily I get overwhelmed and feel pressure to provide every day for my family. When I talk about living and knowing the land, I have a deep yearning for that life...you need that connection to the land. It makes you think about a time when work becomes something more than about a wage...it becomes a place to provide and nourish you. It is a struggle to balance that as a family. We need to pay the rent and while still trying to give the experience of relationships to the land that kids deserve. How can we provide ways for people to transition from this capitalist economy and culture while still allowing them to survive? Our traditional ways are not based on this Western capitalistic economy, but that that is the system in which we live.

Essential elements to enable community members to actively participate and be fully present in food justice work or access services included providing compensation, food and meals, child and elder care, transportation, and connections to other resources. Participants also talked about the importance of culturally relevant and culturally affirming services, including diverse representation in staff providing those services.

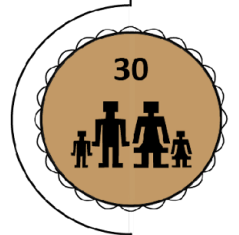
Some participants spoke of the desire for communal living and co-operative housing as an affordable housing strategy and to build community and connection. However, there was also trepidation about this model of living since it can take time to form social bonds and cohousing may not be suitable for all residents.

I am trying to work and live closer to communities of Native peoples, especially those with children, because I am interested in the idea of shared or cooperative property ownership. If we pooled rents, we could afford a mortgage.



But I am unsure of how to overcome that fear and address the traumas and realities of the world we live in, which may not be built for communal life. I badly want to have that community, but the world forces us to have more individualized experiences.

Beyond basic needs, participants also expressed the desire for economic development, community wealth building, paid mentorships, and other earning opportunities that are paired with career pathways in food systems work, climate action, and ecological restoration. Participants mentioned a variety of Native entrepreneurs, practitioners, coalitions, community-based organizations, and business and would like to see greater support and investment in these Native and Tribal leaders and enterprises.

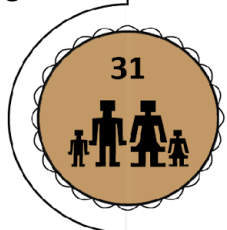


Conclusions and Recommendations

For the Native and Indigenous people in this listening session, a healthy food system is innately connected to healthy ecosystems, culture and identity, community and place, medicine and health, and decolonization. Reestablishing these connections is challenging due to the lasting impacts and trauma of settler colonialism and oppression. But Native and Indigenous people are resilient, adaptable, innovative and are actively considering futures for sustainable food systems, thriving communities, and ecosystem restoration that could benefit all.

The City of Seattle and other agencies that want to support Native and Indigenous food sovereignty should consider the following approaches:

- **Co-create policies and programs with Native and Indigenous people and Coast Salish Tribes.** This will require intentional, consistent, and respectful relationship building that does not replicate or amplify settler-colonial harms and embraces diverse frameworks and worldviews rather than following white supremacy culture characteristics⁷.
- **Support Land Back and land and waterway restoration projects managed by Native groups and Tribes.** Land and water are essential for Native and tribal food sovereignty and cultural reclamation. Land managed by Native peoples who are leaders and experts in conservation will help rehabilitate the land and waterways and make them more resilient to climate change. There are many approaches the City and other agencies could use including offering low- or no-cost leases to steward public lands, tax breaks, granting money for land acquisition, and supporting Native groups and peoples to grow food and harvest in parks, watersheds, oceans, and tides.
- **Make meaningful and direct investments in Native and BIPOC communities.** Remove bureaucratic barriers in funding and contracting. Holistically support community work, expertise, cultural safety, and Intertribal gatherings, including the time and efforts needed for collective organizing, action, and taking care of program participants.
- **Support experiential and intergenerational learning about Native and Indigenous foods and practices for cultivating, harvesting, processing, and storing foods.** Language revitalization should be a core component of educational programs. Programs must be designed and led by Native peoples and equitably offered to all by removing cost barriers through funding for stipends, food, transportation, and child and elder care.



⁷ See [White Supremacy Culture Characteristics](#)

Associated tools could be supported as well as returning language to places, such as some of the efforts of Coast Salish Tribes using a QR code or kiosks.

- **Require annual training for all City of Seattle employees, including City Council and their staff, on Native history and topics within Seattle and the region.** This training should ensure that staff recognize and respect Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and self-government and understand topics relevant to urban Native peoples such as past harmful relocation policies and urbanization.

Recommended Local Resources

Native Food Businesses

- ❖ [Native Grown & Gathered](#) - Directory of Native food and medicine producers.
- ❖ [Birch Basket Catering](#) - Chef Hillel Echo-Hawk
- ❖ [Canoe Journey Herbalists](#)
- ❖ [Nacho Mama's Fry Bread Cafe](#)
- ❖ [Native Soul Cuisine](#) - Chef Jeremy Thunderbird
- ❖ [Off the Rez](#) - cafe, food truck, and catering
- ❖ [Rose Island Farm](#)
- ❖ [Tocabe Indigenous Marketplace](#)
- ❖ [ʔálʔal Cafe](#) - managed by Chief Seattle Club

Native Food Systems

- ❖ [Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission](#) (CRITFC)
- ❖ [Feed 7 Generations](#)
- ❖ [First Food and Conservation](#) - article from Conservation NW
- ❖ [First Foods and Life Cycles](#) - article from Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- ❖ [Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project](#) - online lesson from Native Knowledge 360°
- ❖ [Upper Columbia United Tribes](#) (UCUT) – promotes fish, water, wildlife, diverse habitat, and Indian culture in the Northwest
- ❖ [Why do the Foods We Eat Matter](#) - online lesson from Native Knowledge 360°

Additional Resources

- ❖ [First Food: How Native people are revitalizing the natural nourishment of the Pacific Northwest](#) – Seattle Times, July 10, 2022
- ❖ [Wild Foods & Medicines](#) – A Native foods program by GRuB

