



TRC Steering Committee E-Newsletter | May 2025

Greetings

We last convened the TRC Steering Committee virtually in September, and we can't believe spring is already here! Seeds planted then and throughout this cycle of the TRC are now blooming, and we're finding our calendars filled with opportunities to share the TRC's work in webinars, conferences, and publications. We hope the updates below bring inspiration to your day and serve as a reminder of the important ways you've helped shape our work to benefit Native children, families, and communities.



So many within our network are experiencing critical shifts right now. We are thinking of you, and we appreciate the knowledge and time you share with us. We invite you to continue reading to learn more about our recent and upcoming TRC activities. We would also love to hear updates from you so that we can continue to elevate the good work you're doing! Please email us (michellesarche@nebraska.edu) to share any new products, upcoming events, or positive stories you'd like us to circulate.

Miigwech (Thank you),
Michelle and the TRC Leadership Team

TRC Mission & Priority Areas

Our mission and priorities are provided here to build a shared understanding of the TRC's work across our Steering Committee members.

Mission: The TRC's mission is to grow the field of early childhood research in partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) Head Start, Home Visiting, Child Care, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program leaders, AIAN community partners, early childhood researchers, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) federal staff, and a broad network of ACF and other early childhood initiatives and National Centers serving AIAN communities.

Priority areas: Our work is organized in three areas: 1) National Leadership, 2) Scientifically & Culturally Rigorous Research, and 3) Strategic Dissemination. Please read on for updates in each of these areas!

National Leadership

The TRC works with AIAN communities and early childhood partners to continually inform and refine TRC activities through partnership and consultation, and to provide training, professional development, and networking opportunities.

TRC 2025 Virtual Learning Circle Series on Early Childhood Curricula

Last month, the TRC hosted our 2025 Virtual Learning Circle Series on *Indigenous Approaches to Building Early Childhood Curricula, Learning while Implementing, and Assessing Children's Progress in Tribal Head Start Programs*. The focus grew from TRC Steering Committee input and a recent [Information Memorandum from the Administration for Children and Families](#) on the use of Indigenous Knowledge in AIAN Head Start programs. Our goal was to showcase how programs are relying on Indigenous knowledge of children's development to build curricula grounded in culture, refine curricula over time, and assess children's progress in ways aligned with Indigenous values and visions for their children's futures.



The graphic features the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center logo on the left and the Brazelton Touchpoints Center logo on the right. The central text reads: "Virtual Learning Circle Series" in large bold letters, followed by "Indigenous Approaches to Building Early Childhood Curricula, Learning while Implementing, and Assessing Children's Progress in Tribal Head Start Programs" in a smaller font. Below this, it states "Held April 22nd, 24th, and 29th with" and lists three speakers with their photos and affiliations: Lana Garcia (Walatowa Head Start), Vanessa Goodthunder (Lower Sioux Children are Sacred School), and Genevieve Jaramillo-Padilla & Stan Coriz (Santo Domingo Head Start).

In the first session, Lana Garcia shared how the Walatowa Head Start curriculum was developed with community input and grounded in Jemez child development beliefs and practices. The second session featured Vanessa Goodthunder, who described the ways that Čaŋšayapi Wakąnyeža Owayawa Oŋi is raising the next generation of Dakota language speakers by focusing on children ages birth-to-five. Genevieve Jaramillo-Padilla and Stan Coriz, from the Santo Domingo Head Start program, closed out the series by sharing how they're responding to family, staff, and community priorities in the early stages of curriculum development. Approved recordings will be added to the TRC's website soon, so stay tuned!

The TRC is preparing for our Summer Institute Course with Johns Hopkins!



The graphic includes the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center & Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health 2025 Virtual Summer Institute logo at the top. Below the logo, it lists: "What: Early Childhood Research in Tribal Communities Course", "When: July 21-25 from 1-5pm ET", "Where: Online", and "Details: Graduate coursework and mentorship for students interested in learning about collaborative research with Native early childhood programs and the families they serve. Limited scholarships are available to support participation." A photograph of a person in traditional Indigenous regalia is shown on the right. At the bottom, it states "Scholarship applications are due May 16 at 5pm ET."

The TRC's Summer Institute Course offered in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health will take place July 21-25 from 1-5pm ET. We offer a limited number of scholarships and have a fantastic line-up of speakers who bring research and practice expertise to the classroom. Encourage your networks to visit <https://cih.jhu.edu/training/certification-programs/> to learn more about the course, how to apply for a scholarship, and registration options (e.g., non-degree student, non-credit).

Scientifically & Culturally Rigorous Research

In consultation with partners and using a Community of Learning (CoL) approach, the TRC conducts research that aims to: 1) identify needs, effective practices, and integrated systems that acknowledge the challenges AIAN children face as well as the incredible resources provided by culture, community, and family, and 2) inform culturally meaningful measurement that is reliable and valid for understanding AIAN children's development and for use by the programs that serve AIAN children and families.

Early Relational Wellbeing CoL

The Early Relational Wellbeing (ERW) CoL has reduced its meeting frequency in recent months, but there is still plenty of work underway! Their [peer-reviewed publication describing the development of the Indigenous ERW conceptual model](#) was recently published, and the measure that was created using Group Concept Mapping (GCM) is now being piloted. The TRC team is working with 3-4 sites to get input on the measure's content and feasibility for use in Tribal early childhood programs.



Manuscripts are also being drafted to describe the GCM process and results of analyses that explored ERW-related items within the AIAN FACES data. Additionally, we're excited that the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health has decided to use the ERW pilot measure in their LEGO Project work with Indigenous communities in the US and other international settings. It's fantastic to have such a great response to this work and see much of it led by Chelsea Wesner as part of her Doctor of Public Health program (a reflection of our mission to grow the field!). The next ERW CoL meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 21st at 12pm MT. Please contact Chelsea (chelsea.wesner@cuanschutz.edu) if you have questions about this work.

Understanding Early Childhood Needs, Effective Practices, and Implementation Supports CoL

This CoL builds on past TRC CoL work to identify Tribal early childhood needs and priorities, with an emphasis on Head Start, Home Visiting, and Child Care workforce needs in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The CoL is actively recruiting directors and administrators from these programs to participate in qualitative interviews. Approximately 20 interviews have already been completed, with interim results recently presented in a poster at the 2025 Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting. The CoL will produce a comprehensive report of findings later this year.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Are you a...

- ✓ Tribal Head Start, Home Visiting, or Child Care Director or Administrator?
- ✓ Interested to share your perspective on the tribal early childhood workforce and program administration?

If so, we'd love to hear from you!

The CoL meets approximately once a month, and those interested in learning more are encouraged to contact Michelle Sarche (michellesarche@nebraska.edu). If you know someone who may be interested in participating in an interview, please contact Michelle so that she can provide details on how to do so.

The Native Language and Culture CoL



As our longest standing CoL, the Native Language and Culture (NL&C) CoL is steadily building on past work and sharing critical lessons with the field through peer-reviewed publications, presentations, and refinement and piloting of measures that more accurately reflect the experiences of Native children in early learning environments. The NL&C CoL has several manuscripts being drafted on topics such as measuring cultural identity and socialization and the psychometric properties of the Native Culture and Language in the Classroom Observation tool (NCLCO).

Team members will also be sharing lessons from their work at the upcoming National Indian Head Start Directors Association Conference in late June. To learn more or join the NL&C CoL, please contact Jessica Barnes-Najor (barnes33@msu.edu).

Family Economic Well-being CoL

The TRC's Family Economic Well-being (FEW) CoL is focused on understanding family economic well-being within AIAN communities and early childhood settings. A scoping review that helped launch this work is now complete, with a manuscript describing the results currently being finalized for peer-reviewed publication. This CoL also explored patterns and correlates of FEW within the AIAN FACES data and plans to submit a manuscript for peer-review this summer. As a next step for this work, the CoL will outline a plan to use Group Concept Mapping to develop a measure of Indigenous FEW and consider funding opportunities to support further activities. To learn more about the FEW CoL, contact Chelsea Wesner (chelsea.wesner@cuanschultz.edu).

Strategic Dissemination

The TRC leverages multiple communication channels to share resources and research on AIAN children's development in the context of family, community, culture, and Tribal early childhood programs to facilitate research-to-practice and practice-to-research knowledge transfer.

Lessons from the TRC's Research and Engagement Approach are Informing the Field!

We're in the final months of our five-year cooperative agreement for the TRC, which means we have a lot to share from the work that's developed through our Communities of Learning! We're also regularly asked to share lessons about our engaged research approach. We're pleased that the focus of our work and how we do it is helping inform and grow the field of Tribal early childhood research. Below is a recap of the publications, presentations, and webinars we've been part of since our last meeting in September.

Publications

- Wesner, C., Around Him, D., Sanigaq Ullrich, J., Martin, L., Denmark, N., Russette, H., Lee, K., Sarche, M., Asdigian, N., Barnes-Najor, J., Whitesell, N.R., & the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center Early Relational Wellbeing Community of Learning (2024). Co-creating a conceptual model of Indigenous

relational wellbeing in early childhood: Planting seeds of connectedness. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.22149>

- Barnes-Najor, J., Stonefish, B., Wentworth, C., Gartner, D., Saucedo, J. S., Howard-Bobiwash, H., Koval, P., Burnett, R., Martin, L., Leask, M., Schneider, R., Hopps, C., Gordon, C., & Cameron, A. Stories and reflections on gikinawaabi: Recentering Indigenous Knowledge in early childhood development through land-based practices. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2023.12.014>



Conferences & Webinars

- The Power of Data in Native Early Childhood Development: Strategies for Effective Data Use webinar hosted by ACF and the Administration for Native Americans with recording available [here](#) (presentations by Deana Around Him, Jessica Barnes-Najor, and Ann Cameron of the TRC Steering Committee)
- Designing Data Collection for Whole Families with an Equity Lens session at ThinkXChange: The National Forum on 2Gen Approaches hosted by Ascend at the Aspen Institute (facilitation by Deana Around Him)
- Toward Conceptualizing and Measuring Family Economic Wellbeing in Indigenous Communities lecture for the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Indigenous Learning Community (presentation by Chelsea Wesner)
- The Power of Community: Lessons Learned from Indigenous Home Visiting in Shaping Research, Program Development, and Systems Change keynote conversation panel at the National Home Visiting Summit (panelists included Michelle Sarche and Lisa Martin of the TRC Steering Committee)
- Maternal Health and the Well-being of the Next Generation panel at the Center for Native American and Indigenous Research at Northwestern University's 7th Annual Research Symposium (panelist included Deana Around Him)
- Co-Creating a Measure of Indigenous Early Relational Wellbeing: Results from a Pilot Study presentation at the Reclaiming Indigenous Ecologies of Love Conference hosted by the International Network for Indigenous Health Knowledge and Development (Chelsea Wesner presenter, meeting also attended by Nancy Whitesell)
- The TRC was represented in 8 sessions at the recent Society for Research in Child Development 2025 Biennial Meeting! We had team members serve as moderators, discussants, and panelists, and work from our ERW, FEW, and Workforce Needs CoLs was presented in paper symposia and posters. (Michelle Sarche, Deana Around Him, and Jessica Barnes-Najor attended in-person, with Nancy Asdigian and Chelsea Wesner also leading development of presentation content)
- Tribal Child Care Association of California Tribal Quality Improvement System Annual Conference (attended by Michelle Sarche)

Upcoming Events & Activities



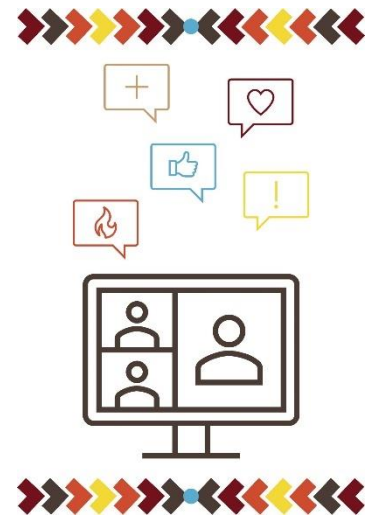
There are several upcoming conferences and events that we will present at, attend, or lead in future months. Please consider submitting your work, looking for our team members if you attend, and helping us share the news about these gatherings!

- [Society for Prevention Research](#), May 27-30, 2025, in-person at Seattle, WA
- [National Indian Head Start Directors Association Conference](#), June 23-26, 2025, in-person at Bloomington, MN
- TRC and Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health (JHCIH) Virtual Summer Institute, July 21-25, 2025. To learn more about the JHCIH institute course offerings and certificate program, see [here](#).
- [Native Children's Research Exchange Conference](#), September 18-19, 2025, with details forthcoming and a TRC Steering Committee meeting planned for September 17.

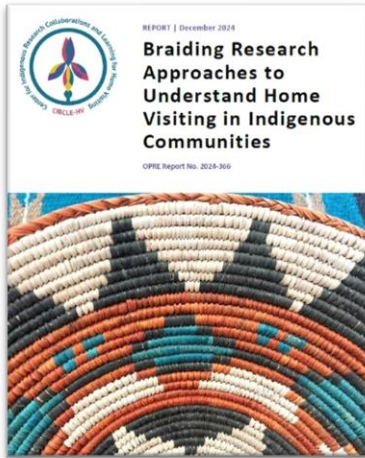
TRC Steering Committee Meetings

Thank you to everyone who was able to join our virtual TRC Steering Committee meeting held on September 30, 2024! We provided general updates, shared highlights from our Early Relational Wellbeing and Family Economic Wellbeing CoLs, and gathered input on future TRC activities and connections between our work and yours. **Our next virtual Steering Committee meeting will take place June 3, 2025, at 10am MT.** A calendar hold and meeting link will be sent soon.

Planning is also underway for an in-person TRC Steering Committee meeting on September 17, 2025. As you know, we typically hold this meeting in conjunction with the Native Children's Research Exchange (NCRE) Conference. We are currently weighing options for shaping both the TRC Steering Committee meeting and NCRE Conference in ways that will be responsive to the shifting context and needs of everyone in our partner network. Please email Michelle Sarche (michellesarche@nebraska.edu) with questions!



Understanding Indigenous Research Methodologies in Early Childhood Research



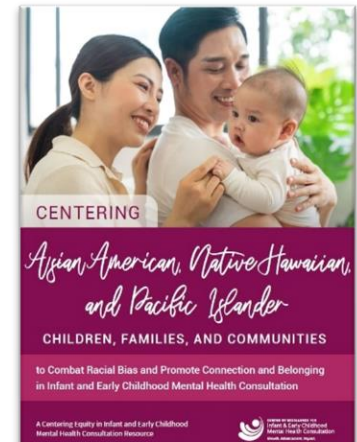
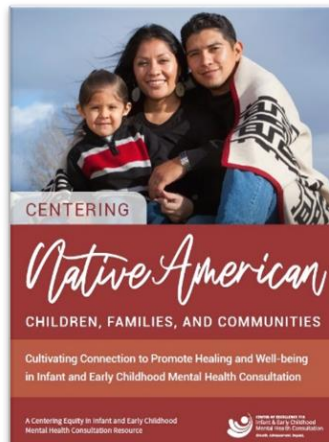
Several members of our TRC Leadership Team and network are involved in the [Center for Indigenous Research Collaborations and Learning for Home Visiting](#) (CIRCLE HV), a federally funded project that seeks to build the evidence base on home visiting in Indigenous communities. Recently, CIRCLE HV released [Braiding Research Approaches to Understand Home Visiting in Indigenous Communities](#). The report shares examples of research approaches used with Indigenous communities implementing home visiting and other family services, underscores the differences between methodology (a framework) and methods (steps taken to conduct research), and describes principles of Indigenous research methodologies identified through a literature review and interviews with experts in the field.

The principles undergirding most Indigenous research methodologies further explained in the report are:

1. Relationality: Recognize our inherent interconnectedness and worldview.
2. Respect: Hold in deep regard partner community cultures, lived experiences, ways of knowing, and priorities.
3. Relational Accountability: Understand and uphold our responsibilities to the people and communities we serve.
4. Reciprocity: Give of ourselves and honor the gifts of others.
5. Place: Honor that ways of knowing and ancestral wisdom are grounded in place.

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Are you hearing more about Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) in your work? The [Center of Excellence for IECMHC](#) has resource guides to support consultants who work with various populations, including [Native American](#) and [Native Hawaiian](#) children, families, and communities. The guides provide foundational population information, review consultation competencies and promising practices for applying them with the populations, and offer scenarios and reflection prompts for readers to consider. TRC Leadership Team members contributed to the Native American guide.



Stay in Touch



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Email us: tribalearlychildhood@cuanschutz.edu

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