

Rising Healers:

A Native American Youth Healthcare Expo





About IHEART

The Indigenous Health, Education and Resources Taskforce (IHEART) is a national collaborative formed in 2021 to address the scarcity of American Indian and Alaska Native communities in the health professions. Its mission and goals were established with input from the Association of American Medical Colleges, the Association of Native American Medical Students, the Association of American Indian Physicians, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, and the Indian Health Service.

American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities are severely underrepresented in U.S. health professions. AI/AN populations also experience higher mortality rates from the leading causes of death than all US populations. However, having AI/AN providers can support improved health outcomes for AI/AN patients.

IHEART strives to promote systems-level change focused on AI/AN health workforce development; foster the development of systems-focused leaders at the national and local level; identify and disseminate effective systems-based solutions to address health workforce gaps; and create a centralized national resource for health professions workforce development that centers AI/AN expertise and cultural ways.

IHEART includes approximately 680 health educators, learners, organizational leaders, tribal college leaders, and community members who are committed to AI/AN communities and increased workforce diversity. The collaborative is organized into a national coordinating committee and regional networks. The five IHEART regions—East + Southern Plains, Northern Plains, Southwest, California + Hawaii, and Alaska + Northwest—are led by Regional Hub Champions who facilitate the creation of new programs and initiatives to enhance and expand upon existing health pathways in their respective regions. The initiative was founded by Dr. Mary Owen and sustained through the generous funding support of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Contents

Project background.....	p. 4
Project justification example letter.....	p. 5
Project impact.....	p. 6
Budget example.....	p. 7
Agenda example.....	p. 8
Logistical considerations.....	p. 9
Activity examples.....	p. 10
Hands-on activity rotations.....	p. 11
Traditional elements.....	p. 12
Speakers, volunteers, booths.....	p. 13
Train the Trainer.....	p. 14
Forms and feedback.....	p. 17

This toolkit was prepared by the Indigenous Health, Education and Resources Taskforce (IHEART) in 2026 for educational purposes. Photos enclosed in this toolkit are not to be reproduced without written permission from IHEART, the University of New Mexico, A.T. Still University, and the University of Arizona.



Project Background

The Rising Healers event series was conceived of, planned, and executed by the Southwest regional team of IHEART in 2025 and 2026. Three Rising Healers events were hosted in 2026 at the University of New Mexico, A. T. Still University, and University of Arizona, respectively. The goal of the event series was to increase AI/AN representation in the healthcare workforce by providing outreach to AI/AN students at the K-12 level to help generate interest and entry into health sciences career pathways.

Hosting a one-day, in-person event with established medical higher education programs in the region is a tested and effective method for outreach, with similar programs throughout the country, such as Doctor for a Day or Youth with Stethoscopes. The Rising Healer events were modeled after the Native American Healthcare Career Expo, an annual event by the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The Expo informs Native American middle and high school students about healthcare careers through hands-on activities and in-person outreach.

One of the key innovations of this event was the Train the Trainer session. During the event, teachers and chaperones were invited to join a structured discussion of how to support students who are interested in healthcare careers. The full Train the Trainer session materials are included in this toolkit (see page 14).

This toolkit was created to help other colleges, universities, organizations, and institutions hold similar events in the future. All of the materials included here are intended for replication and utilization in similar events, with the exception of the photos. Please respect the students, faculty, and volunteers pictured here, and do not utilize the photos included here for any events, outreach, or promotion.

The Rising Healer event series served IHEART's mission to amplify and grow pathways into health professions for Native communities through Indigenous-led collaborations and systems-level solutions. This work was funded through a generous grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.



Project Justification

We hope this example letter will be useful for you to copy, edit, and present to your administration to help garner support for hosting a Rising Healers event at your institution.

Dear _____,

I am writing to request approval to host a Rising Healers Native American Youth Healthcare Expo at [name of institution]. This event will be modeled after the Rising Healers event series hosted at the University of New Mexico, A.T. Still University, and the University of Arizona in 2026. The goal of the event is to create, expand, and optimize opportunities for American Indian and Alaska Native students to enhance their awareness and academic knowledge about health profession programs. Hosting this one-day, in-person event on our campus would build community connections, increase awareness and familiarity with our programs, and promote health and educational equity. This event would be planned and hosted by [department/office] in addition to our regular responsibilities, and would be financially supported by community partners. The proposed budget for this event is [see budget example, page 7].

I believe this event would be beneficial for three key reasons: reaching new audiences, building existing relationships, and giving back to the community. Past Rising Healers events have drawn 100-150 students, the majority of whom were first-generation college students. Visiting a campus in person, meeting faculty and students, and having positive experiences there is a very powerful experience for young students. By focusing our outreach on American Indian and Alaska Native students, we can reach new programs we have not worked with in the past and strengthen community ties. Hosting this event will also be an opportunity to engage administrators, teachers, counselors, and family members. The healthcare focus of this event is an important way for higher education institutions to honor Tribal sovereign partners, students and families and associated treaties and agreements. American Indian and Alaska Native people are underrepresented in healthcare fields; encouraging American Indian and Alaska Native students to pursue healthcare is one way to address this issue and help address healthcare inequity.¹ Dr. Clinton Normore, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion at A.T. Still University, had this praise for the Rising Healers event: "This was by far the largest number of American Indian High School students to be on our campus in my 13-year tenure."

I am eager to begin planning this event; thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

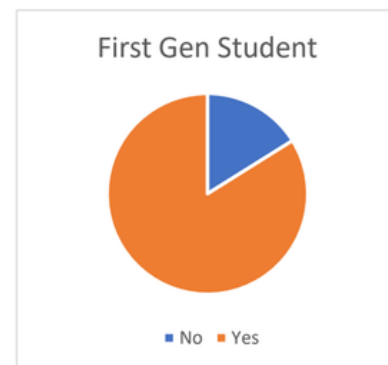
[Name]

1. Silver, J. K., Bean, A. C., Slocum, C., Poorman, J. A., Tenforde, A., Blauwet, C. A., Kirch, R. A., Parekh, R., Amonoo, H. L., Zafonte, R., & Osterbur, D. (2019). Physician Workforce Disparities and Patient Care: A Narrative Review. *Health Equity*, 3(1), 360–377. <https://doi.org/10.1089/heq.2019.0040>

2026 Project Impact

An overwhelming majority of the students who attended the 2026 UNM event were preparing to be first-generation college students, with 75% identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native.

86% of student survey respondents from the UNM and ATSU events said the event increased their interest in healthcare careers, and 80% from the UNM event said they learned new information.



Student and Parent Feedback

What were your key takeaways from the event?

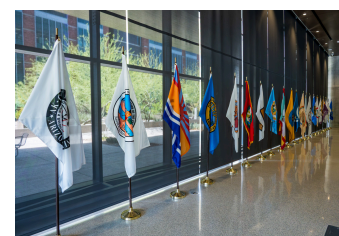
“The ultrasound was so cool.”

“I know how to fill a cavity.”

“The importance of diversity in healthcare.”

“The different medical field we got to experience hands on.”

“To follow my heart and I can do whatever I put my heart to.”



Tribal flags displayed at U of A event

What was the most interesting session?

“‘Think like a doctor’ was because it gave me some information on...what to ask if I wanna become a doctor.”

“The most interesting session was the sugar/stitching session because it had brought joy and helped me understand new things.”

“I liked the dermatology because it was interesting and cool to see the skin basically get put back together by some needle and string.”

“The cultural session was most important because it informed me about the significance about Native Americans in healthcare.”



Volunteer shirts featuring UNM logo



A.T. Still Mascot dressed up for event

At the ATSU event, **parents/guardians** were asked via the permission form, “What do you hope your child gains from participating in the [event]?” Responses included:

“Learn that staying and doing well in school can lead to beautiful places.”

“Open mind about different opportunities that she can choose from. Any positive encouragement about her future (“It’s not scary”).”

“That she might like the healthcare field and maybe consider it as a career.”

“That this experience will help him to see that he needs to follow his dreams to a great future.”

Budget Example

Expense details	Average cost (2026)	% of budget
Lunch (250 people)	\$2,500	22%
Custom printed tote bags (200)	\$1,500	13%
Anatomy coloring books (200)	\$1,200	11%
Printing costs	\$1,000	8%
Graphic notetaker (7 hours)	\$1,000	8%
Breakfast (250 people)	\$950	7%
Cultural Performance	\$800	6%
Photographer	\$800	6%
Travel for Train the Trainer facilitator	\$600	5%
Single use stethoscopes (200)	\$500	4%
Thank-you gifts for volunteers	\$300	3%
Sub fee for participating school	\$180	2%
Drinks, snacks, napkins	\$100	1%
Color-coded lanyards, wristbands (200)	\$50	0.5%
Medicine bags for traditional activity	\$20	0.2%
Totals:	\$11,200	100%

This budget is a compilation of the three 2026 event budgets. A similar event is possible on a smaller budget. Seek donations and sponsors, including in-kind donations from your institution for things like room rentals, A/V equipment, and parking passes. This type of support also shows institutional support and builds community.

For example, the UNM Rising Healers event was made possible through partnerships with IHEART and the UNM Center for Native American Health (CNAH) as a part of the Indian Health Services (IHS) Indians into Medicine (InMED) grant. AIH-AHEC contributed bags, books, and stethoscopes to the ATSU and U of A Rising Healer events.

Substitute teacher fees were offered in order to allow small, remote schools to attend the event. Transportation assistance was also offered, although utilization of this assistance was relatively low. Offering financial support to rural schools—which are often excluded from events of this nature—may increase their participation. If your budget is limited, we recommend prioritizing food, cultural performances, and giveaways; the stethoscopes were especially helpful for the day's events.

Agenda Example

8:30-9:00 am	Arrival/Check-in
9:00-9:10 am	Welcome speeches, overview of day
9:15-11:40 am	Students rotate through 5+ different 25 minute activities*
11:45-12:30 pm	Lunch <i>With time for students to talk, rest, and interact with organizations that are tabling</i>
12:35-1:05pm	Native Healthcare Professional / Student Panel
1:10-1:30pm	Cultural performance
1:35-2:00pm	Closing & Departure

Train the Trainer should ideally be offered to chaperones at a time when students can be monitored by event volunteers. Achieving this requires careful planning and early, consistent communication with chaperones so they are comfortable with being away from students at that time.

*Activity rotations are explained in more depth on pages 10-11.

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA HEALTH SCIENCE CAMPUS



- First aid is available at the Check-In table. Contact anyone wearing a red t-shirt for assistance.
- Restrooms are available in the HSIB Lobby or on each HSIB level.
- Attendees are welcome to use the Quiet Space on the HSIB RM 541. Please contact anyone wearing red t-shirt

- ★ Check-In and First Aid.
- ★ Bus drop off.
- ★ Bus/Van parking
- ★ Self pay parking
- ★ COIT Museum
- ★ EMT Activity
- ★ College of Medicine-Tucson
- ★ Drachman Hall

Printed Agenda

In addition to printing the agenda for the day for participants to reference, it is recommend to print maps of the area students will be navigating for the day. Consider marking key spots like registration, lunch area, first aid, and a quiet spot for students who may feel overwhelmed.

All three of the 2026 Rising Healers organizers also printed short bios for the key speakers for the day, and basic information about the host institution.

Logistical Considerations

For ease of navigation, it's recommended to split students into color or letter-coded groups. This makes it easier for chaperones and volunteers to keep everyone organized. It's also recommended to identify volunteers with t-shirts or badges. At the IHEART Rising Healers events, student nametags were prepared and groups were assigned ahead of time. These nametags were distributed, along with the student material bags (with a stethoscope, coloring book, bingo card, campus map, and agenda for the day), when students checked in. Check-in is also the best time to collect signed student permission forms from chaperones.

Arrival and check-in were the largest hurdles of the day; stay on schedule by prepping beforehand, having extra blank nametags, providing a parking map for buses, and having several volunteers at check-in.

Volunteers should help groups navigate campus, especially during rotations. Walkie-talkies were very helpful for volunteer communication, and it's recommended to have one floater who can run errands and respond to immediate needs.

At the IHEART Rising Healers events, it was also helpful to have a virtual meeting with the participating schools in advance of the event. At least one representative from each school joined the call to review student needs, dropoff plans, and other details about a week before the event.



Activity Examples

Perhaps the most popular, impactful, and logistically challenging part of these events is the hands-on activity rotation. If hosting this event at a university or hospital, it may be beneficial to ask the program leaders, faculty, and students at each department to develop and monitor these. When reaching out to volunteers to facilitate these activities, we recommend emphasizing hands-on demonstrations or activities over presentations; putting on a bandage, taking blood pressure, or looking at cells through a microscope. Setup for these varies greatly; anywhere from 5-20 different activities could be offered depending on space and time constraints.

Example planning structure

- Amount of time for rotations $\div$ length of rotation time = number of activities
- 2 hours $\div$ 30 minute rotations = 4 activities
- 80 students, 9 classrooms available
- Use 8 classrooms and 4 activities; each activity will be offered in two different classrooms, every student gets to do all 4 activities and groups are not too large



Example rotation activities:

- Learn how to take blood pressure
- Making dental molds
- Learn how to do CPR and basic physical therapy assessment
- Making traditional medicine bags
- Cardiology ultrasound demonstration
- Stop the Bleed lesson
- Midwifery demonstration
- Demonstration of simulation equipment
- Veterinary medicine demonstration
- “Think Like a Doctor” discussion
- Medical Student Panel
- Pharmacy “Design a Drug” activity
- Indigenous Public Health lesson
- Indigenous Food Sovereignty lesson
- Learning basic suturing stitches
- Emergency medicine demonstration



Traditional Opening



Out of respect and celebration for AI/AN heritage, these events may start with a traditional opening. This can take many forms, but often consists of someone leading a traditional prayer and providing a spiritual grounding for the event. A traditional opening could be paired with a land acknowledgement, especially if your institution has an approved land acknowledgement that is commonly used at events.

Traditional Medicine Activity

At the Rising Healers event at A.T. Still University, Celina Garza led students in creating traditional medicine bags. Including a traditional medicine workshop alongside the Western medicine workshops shows that traditional ways are equally important and valued. Celina Garza is a study coordinator and community outreach specialist at the MedStar Health Research Institute.



Traditional Food



At the Rising Healers event at the University of New Mexico, lunch was provided by a local, Indigenous-owned catering business serving traditional foods. This provided an opportunity to support Indigenous businesses, provide nutritious and culturally grounding foods for participants, and connect with the Indigenous food sovereignty activities that were part of the day's program.

Traditional Performance

It is strongly recommended to include a traditional performance in your event. This provides cultural grounding for the event and emphasizes that traditional ways are prioritized and valued at your institution. Traditional performances at the 2026 Rising Healers events were coordinated by students at the host institutions.



Speakers

In addition to a traditional opening, we recommend inviting one to three guest speakers for the event opening and closing. It is also common practice to have a panel of AI/AN healthcare professionals as part of the activity rotation, representing a range of professionals from different points in their careers. Finally, we recommend inviting administration from your institution to speak, in order to solidify support for the event and show attendees that their presence is valued.



Volunteers

In addition to running activities, important volunteer tasks include set-up, greeting participants, registration, helping students navigate the event space, setting up and managing lunch, answering questions, and being available to solve problems as they arise. Consider offering volunteer service hours to student groups and reaching out to community groups; this is a great opportunity to build relationships for future projects and events. With enough volunteers, you could assign one to each student group for rotations.



Booths

If logistically feasible, tables or booths provide an opportunity for student interaction during breaks, like during lunch or transitions. This allows partners to share about their programs, especially other healthcare pathway programs that students might be interested in applying to. Making these kinds of connections is one of the ways you can help students extend learning beyond this single event.



Train the Trainer

The addition of the Train the Trainer session to the Rising Healer events was intended to further connections among the teachers and volunteers, as well as providing them resources and tools for long-term support of Indigenous students interested in health careers. Chaperones were invited to attend this training while students were engaged in activities. The main elements of the Train the Trainer session were discussion, sharing, resource mapping, and networking.

Train the Trainer Tips

- Communicate with chaperones well in advance to let them know they are invited to attend Train the Trainer while students are monitored by volunteers
- Two Rising Healer events held Train the Trainer during the hands-on activity rotations; the event that had the Train the Trainer session *after* the rotations had lower participation
- Consider inviting administration from participating schools to attend

Sustaining Connections

At each Rising Healers event, the facilitators gathered contact information for all Train the Trainer participants. Several requested to be added to IHEART mailing lists and/or recurring regional meetings, and some even added their programs to the [IHEART Healthcare Pathway Programs Map](#). Participants of the first two Train the Trainer events were also invited to attend subsequent Train the Trainer discussions virtually. These long-term collaboration opportunities will help sustain connections, build networks, and advance systems-level change.



This image was created by a graphic notetaker during Train the Trainer at the UNM Rising Healers event.



Train the Trainer Agenda

- Welcome & Session Purpose
 - Build capacity to create local, culturally grounded health career pathways
 - Share tools to design meaningful youth experiences
 - Adapt and apply work within your community
- Grounding & Introductions: Please share
 - Your name + where you're joining from
 - Who are the youth you serve, or hope to serve?
- Reflection
 - Who do youth currently see in healthcare roles?
 - Who do they *not* see?
- What makes an experience meaningful
 - Relevance, local community and context
 - Relationships built on connection and trust
 - Representation
- Paired discussion
 - What has made an experience meaningful for youth in your setting?
- Community asset mapping
 - What resources already exist?
 - Who could be involved?
 - Who do youth trust?
 - What spaces can support this work?
- Mentorship pathways
 - Build long-term relationships
 - Support confidence, guidance
 - Connect youth to lived experiences
- Outreach role-play: practice inviting a healthcare professional to connect with your students
- Families as partners
 - Support is especially important for first-generation students
 - Inclusion strengthens pathways, influences student confidence and decision-making
- Feedback and reflection
 - What is missing from this training?
 - What 1 action item can you take from today?



Train the Trainer Survey + Feedback

Survey

Section 1: About You (Optional)

1. What is your role? Educator / Counselor, Tribal organization staff, Academic institution, Community member, Healthcare professional, Other (short answer)
2. State / Region: AZ, NM, CO, UT, NV

Section 2: Your Experience

3. Overall, how helpful was this Train-the-Trainer session? Very helpful, Somewhat helpful, Neutral, Not helpful at this time
 4. Which parts of today's session felt most useful?, Understanding why Train-the-Trainer is needed, Asset mapping, Resource guide worksheet, Family engagement discussion, Institutional/community roles, Hearing others' perspectives, Other (short answer)
 5. After today, do you feel you could use some part of this approach in your community, school, or organization? Yes, Maybe, with more support, Not at this time
- (Optional follow-up short answer: Which part?)

Section 3: Viability & Sustainability

6. Does the Train-the-Trainer approach feel realistic for your setting? Yes, Somewhat, Not sure, No
7. What would make it feel more realistic or feasible?
8. Does this approach feel sustainable beyond a one-time event? Yes, Somewhat, Not sure, No
9. What would make it more sustainable?

Section 4: Toolkit Feedback (Pilot Version)

10. Today's materials felt: Just right, Too limited, Too much, Hard to follow
11. What felt missing or unclear?
12. What should NOT be changed in future versions?

Section 5: Looking Ahead

13. Would you be interested in continued engagement with Rising Healers? Additional Train-the-Trainer sessions, Outreach & relationship-building support, Family engagement tools, Mentorship discussions, Resource sharing across the Southwest Region, Not at this time
14. Any final thoughts or suggestions?

Train the Trainers Feedback

- 49 participants across three events
- 12 surveys completed, 4.5/5 rating average; no neutral or negative ratings
- Feedback from participants:
 - Appreciated time to gather, learn, and share ideas
 - Very interested in creating support structures for students beyond this single event
 - Many schools already had strong programs for students interested in healthcare careers
 - Instead of role-play segment, include conversation time about what specifically to ask for from providers/programs
 - Share resource mapping results between groups and between events
 - Create stand-alone event, series of webinars to continue Train the Trainer

Forms and Feedback

Disclaimer: These are example forms from the 2026 Rising Healers series that can be used as a starting point for planning similar events; copying this information will not guarantee liability coverage in every case. Please work with your host institution to develop your release and permission forms. If the event will be organized in partnership with tribal schools or tribal education departments, discuss data expectations with those partners in advance; some tribes have their own research and data sovereignty protocols that apply to information collected from their citizens, including youth. Whenever possible, we recommend providing copies of these forms in all primary language spoken in your region.

Example Student Registration Form Questions

- Full name
- Email address
- Cell phone number
- Home address
- Date of birth
- T-shirt size (if ordering t-shirts for all participants)
- School name
- Expected graduation date
- Current grade level
- Career interests
- Food allergies or dietary restrictions
- Demographics: gender, race, language(s) spoken
- Parent/guardian name
- Parent/guardian phone number
- Parent/guardian email address
- Parent/guardian highest level of education

Question for Parent/Guardian Registration:

What do you hope your child gains from participating in the Rising Healers: A Native American Youth Summit?

Example Parent/Guardian Permission Form, Liability Waiver, Photo Release

I, (name), am fully aware that participating in this program may result in personal injury or harm to my child. I hereby agree to release and hold harmless (organization) and its officers, employees, volunteers, committees, and boards from and against all liability, loss, damages, claims, or actions (including costs and attorneys' fees) for bodily injury and/or property damage, to the extent permissible by law. This Minor Liability Waiver and Photo Release agreement shall include indemnity against all costs (including, without limitation, reasonable attorneys' fees and court costs), expenses, and liabilities incurred in or in connection with any such claim or proceeding brought thereon and in defense thereof. I have read and understand this release, indemnification, and hold harmless form. I voluntarily sign it and hereby give permission to (organization) for emergency transportation and/or treatment in the event of illness or injury. I hereby accept responsibility for the payment of any emergency transportation and/or treatment. I further certify that I will disclose any medical or physical conditions that may restrict participation in this activity or program to the organizers in advance. By checking this box, I hereby authorize (organization) and those acting pursuant to its authority take photographs of my child's likeness, use their name in connection with these photographs, and/or use, reproduce, exhibit, or distribute in any medium, these recordings for any purpose (organization) and those acting pursuant to its authority deem appropriate, including promotional or advertising efforts. (signature, date, address, email address, phone number, child's name and age)

Example Presenter Sign-up Form Questions

- Full name
- Email address
- Cell phone number
- Profession
- Place of employment
- Activity to be provided (brief description)
- Presentation title
- Number of presenters
- Number of presenters attending lunch
- Food allergies or dietary restrictions

Survey Examples

Example Presenter Survey Questions

- How were you involved in the event?
- How was your experience with the event?
- 1-5, how well did we meet the the goal to expand students' awareness about health careers?
- What was a highlight of the day for you?
- What can we improve next year?
- Option to upload any photos from the day you would like to share (By uploading these photos, I agree to let this organization and its partners utilize these photos for publicity, reporting, or other purposes)

Example Student Survey Questions

- Please circle the appropriate number for each statement that best reflects your opinion (1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree)
 - The information presented today was easy to understand
 - The event has increased my interest in health careers
 - I got new information from the event that I didn't already know
 - Presentations were engaging and easy to follow
 - I have a better understanding of the resources this school has to offer
- What were your key takeaways from this event?
- What session was most interesting, and why?
- What changes should we make for future events like this?

Activity Example- Bingo

The 2026 Rising Healer events used a printed bingo card to encourage students to meet students from other schools, engage with booths and volunteers, and make connections with possible future mentors. Students submitted completed bingo cards and surveys to win prizes. If given to each participant who completes a survey, prizes can be as simple as a sticker or a branded pen from a college advancement office. In the case of a raffle, 3-5 \$20 prizes could be added to the overall budget.

Spaces on the bingo card could include:

- Programs with booths
- Presenters
- Rotation activities
- Actions for students to complete: Meet someone from another school, ask a question about college, say thank you to a teacher, etc.

