



NATIONAL UNITY COUNCIL

# MIDYEAR REPORT

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# 2024

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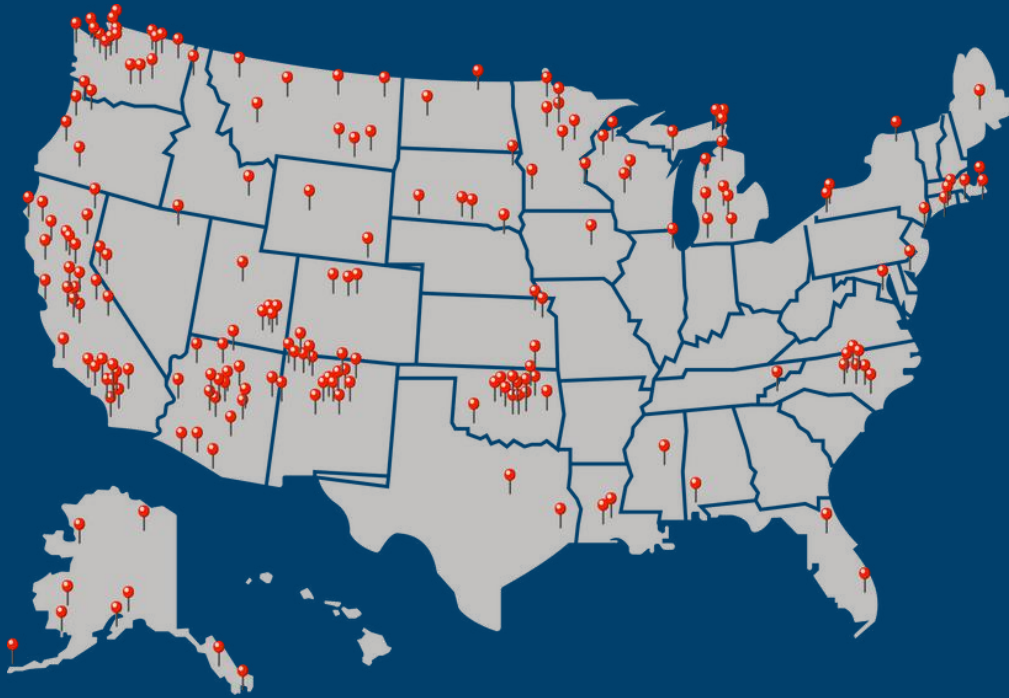
PREPARED BY  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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# UNITY NETWORK



UNITY's Mission is to foster the spiritual, mental, physical, and social development of American Indian and Alaska Native youth, and to help build a strong, unified, and self-reliant Native America through greater youth involvement.

UNITY Defined: UNITY is a national network organization promoting personal development, citizenship, and leadership among Native American youth.

UNITY has a long (40+ years) and impressive track record of empowering and serving American Indian and Alaska Native youth. UNITY is well regarded among the nation's Native American organizations, tribal leaders, and government officials.

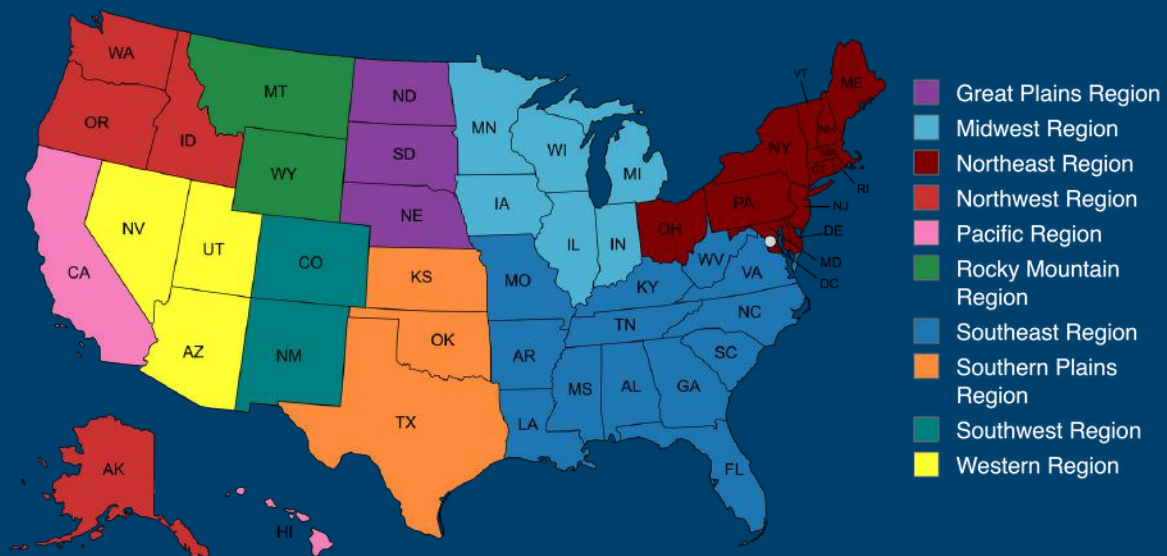




# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pursuant to Article IV, Section 8 of the National UNITY Council Constitution & Bylaws, The Executive Committee derives its authority from the National UNITY Council and shall provide a minimum of four written reports on its activities to the Council each year. One report will be presented at the annual National UNITY Conference and another at the National UNITY Council Mid-year Meeting. The other two will be delivered in accordance with a schedule decided upon and announced by the Council during its annual business meeting at the National UNITY Conference.

The Midyear Report serves to showcase the efforts and accomplishments of the National UNITY Council Executive Committee as they act on behalf of the National UNITY Council between its yearly business meetings. The report will encompass demographic information regarding meetings and meet-ups, and it will also feature highlights from each region. In these highlights, Representatives will reflect on their past accomplishments and outline their plans for the remainder of their term on the Executive Committee.









# “ CO-PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

To UNITY Youth,

Greetings from your Co-Presidents! We hope this message finds you well and in good spirits, The National Council Executive Committee has had an incredible year thus far. We have all been working very hard but also working together to create safe spaces for native youth and for UNITY! We are so excited to bring you along and share what we’ve been working on and show you some of our highlights from this year so far.

As an Executive Committee, we have all had to go through many life obstacles since taking on our leadership positions yet, we have been learning new skills and techniques to better navigate through life as native youth leaders but also as strong native youth as well. As we look back on the opportunities the Creator has given us during the year 2024 going into 2025, we are reminded how grateful we are to be your UNITY Representatives. We as your representatives accumulate the information from your youth councils, you and the events we get to attend and we are the voices for those who cannot share.

We recognize all that Native Youth do within their communities and we see your strength, power, heart, and your willingness to always help others. You are the reason why we are so inspired to do more to help our communities and inspire others to do more for theirs.

It is with the most pride and joy to share with you all the astonishing progress of your UNITY Regional Representatives. Each of these individuals comes from different areas of the United States and travels together to create and bring positive changes in communities all over Indian Country. Now may we present to you the 2024 UNITY Mid-Year Report.

In UNITY,

***KAYTLYNN JOHNSTON***

FEMALE CO-PRESIDENT

***WATSON WHITFORD***

MALE CO-PRESIDENT



# DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This demographic overview highlights the activities undertaken by the Executive Committee from July 2024 to January 2025. The report provides a breakdown of the number and types of meetings held, details on Native Youth Meet-Ups, and a comprehensive list of outreach opportunities attended by Executive Committee members.

6	Regular Meetings
1	Special Meetings
10	Native Youth Meet-Ups



## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE EVENTS PROMOTING UNITY AND TRAINING NATIVE YOUTH

- Healing Circle Training at Southwest Indian Polytechnic Institute Summer Bridge Program, Albuquerque, New Mexico
- UNITY 101 Training, Shiprock, New Mexico
- American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) National Conference - San Antonio, Texas
- National Indian Education Association (NIEA) Convention- Palm Springs, California
- White House Tribal Youth Forum - Washington, DC
- National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Convention - Las Vegas, Nevada
- White House Tribal Nations Summit - Washington, DC



Photo by Mahiya Ramirez

# OUR TEAM



## Watson Whitford

Male Co-President  
Chippewa Cree/ Navajo



## Kaytlynn Johnston

Female Co-President  
Bishop Paiute



## Mahiya Ramirez

Vice President/  
Southern Plains  
Muscogee (Creek)



## Jalen Harvey

Secretary/ Western  
Navajo/ Acoma Pueblo/ Hopi



## Sophie Landin

Great Plains  
Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara



## Marla Mesarina

Midwest  
Leech Lake Band of  
Ojibwe/Sisseton Wahpeton  
Oyate



## Liliana Mars

Northeast  
Narragansett/Navajo



## Mazie Countryman

Northwest  
Northern Arapaho/ Eastern  
Shoshone/ Shoshone Bannock/  
Navajo



## Ashley Johnston

Pacific  
Bishop Paiute



## O'Shay Birdinground

RockyMountain  
Apsaalooke (Crow)



## Kaylee Evans

Southeast  
Haliwa-Saponi/Lumbee



## Jamie Crowe

Southwest  
Pueblo of Tesuque/ Pueblo of  
Santa Clara







# GREAT PLAINS REGION

Representative: Sophie Landin

[sl.greatplains@unityinc.org](mailto:sl.greatplains@unityinc.org)



## TERM HIGHLIGHT

The highlight of my term so far has been meeting and connecting with other Native youth. Talking with young leaders from different communities has inspired me and given me new ideas to bring back to my region.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

An event highlight of mine was participating in the White House Tribal Youth Forum, it was my first opportunity to be part of an event like this. I valued hearing the stories and perspectives of others, which helped me think differently about certain challenges we as Native youth face.



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I strive to make myself available to youth councils in the Great Plains region and, through Regional Meet-Ups, support them in becoming active contributors in their communities. I encourage Great Plains youth councils to reach out to me so I can get to know them and participate in their activities when possible. I've focused on supporting my youth council within the Great Plains region and helping its members grow as active contributors. Together, we've worked on finding ways to address community concerns and bring people together. My hope is to extend this work to the entire region, encouraging more youth to get involved and collaborate on meaningful initiatives.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

Looking forward, I'm hoping to continue expanding our work to other youth councils in the Great Plains region. I hope to create more opportunities for youth to connect, share ideas and work together. My goal is to inspire others to get involved and make a lasting impact, just like we've started within in my local youth council.



# MIDWEST REGION

Representative: Marla Mesarina

[mm.midwest@unityinc.org](mailto:mm.midwest@unityinc.org)

## TERM HIGHLIGHT

A highlight of my term so far was attending the first-ever 2024 SAMHSA Youth Conference in Maryland. Thanks to UNITY Earth Ambassador Alumni Hunter Genia, I've built a strong connection with SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). Through this partnership, I nominated three Native youth leaders and myself to participate in the summit. Sponsored by SAMHSA, we collaborated with youth-led organizations nationwide to address shared challenges and presented our solutions directly to SAMHSA, advocating for the support needed to take action. I'm deeply grateful for this opportunity and excited to continue working with SAMHSA.

## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

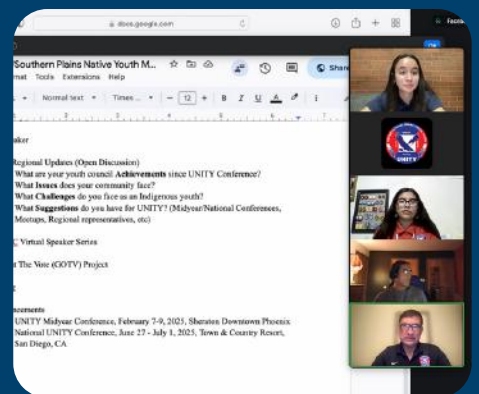
The 2024 White House Tribal Youth Forum was the highlight event for me. I got selected to host the ice breaker alongside a youth from the CNAY organization. Meeting with other Native youth leaders and sharing experiences is always the most beautiful experience I gain from events like this. Speaking with nationwide leaders about our concerns as Native youth felt empowering as we were having one on one discussions with them.

## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The 2024 fall meetup on Zoom was a great accomplishment I felt because I felt like everyone who participated on the Zoom felt connected with one another as there was socializing happening on the call and in the chat. Everyone was engaged and everyone spoke within the Zoom meeting. I felt connected with the Native youth and it reenergized me as a good way to continue with what I am doing.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

I am looking forward to connecting with the youth councils within my region and helping with as much as I can, whether that is finding funding or planning events. Starting youth councils is also on my radar.



# NORTHEAST REGION

Representative: Liliana Mars

[lm.northeast@unityinc.org](mailto:lm.northeast@unityinc.org)



## TERM HIGHLIGHT

The highlight of my term was participating in a healing circle training after the White House Tribal Youth Forum alongside the executive committee. Healing circles hold a special place in my heart, as one in November 2022 introduced me to UNITY and its many opportunities. During the training, we shared laughs, personal stories, and a focus on creating safe spaces while learning to host Healing Circles in our regions. This experience is one I'll cherish as I continue serving as the Northeastern Representative.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

Since my election in mid-2024, I've attended many meaningful events, but a standout highlight is the White House Tribal Youth Forum. Attending this forum for the second year—first in 2023 as a UNITY Earth Ambassador and now in 2024 as the Northeastern Representative—was an incredible honor. We heard from inspiring youth leaders improving their communities and from congressional allies working to protect Native lands and traditions. A memorable moment was hearing Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland share words of encouragement, affirming that Native youth are making a difference simply by showing up and representing.



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The growing engagement of Northeast tribal youth councils with UNITY, shown by increased attendance at Midyear and National Conferences, fills me with pride as their representative. At the National Conference in Portland, OR, I met many inspiring youth whose achievements highlight our region's bright future. Winning the title of Miss Sycuan Princess has further allowed me to represent my tribe and region nationwide, building meaningful connections, including with Miss Indian World, Kassie John, who praised my dedication to UNITY. Her encouragement reaffirmed my impact as Northeast Representative and motivates me to continue advocating for our region's success.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

I'm excited for the future and the opportunities ahead for my region. In the coming year, I hope to host another healing circle, following the success of the one in 2022 at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, as many youth have expressed interest in having it return. Additionally, I look forward to the accomplishments and progress within my region, as well as the growth of my executive committee. Although some of us are new to UNITY, the support from past representatives has been invaluable, and I'm confident that together we'll achieve great things.



# NORTHWEST REGION

**Representative: Mazie Countryman**

**[mc.northwest@unityinc.org](mailto:mc.northwest@unityinc.org)**

## TERM HIGHLIGHT

Since my re-election as the Northwest Representative, a standout moment was hosting a Friendsgiving with the Fort Hall Youth Council for the Shoshone Bannock Community in November. After weeks of planning, we served a free meal at the Boys and Girls Club, with over 50 attendees. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and it was rewarding to see everyone enjoying the event. This experience also taught our youth council members valuable skills, such as preparing a turkey or mashed potatoes. Overall, Friendsgiving was a successful and meaningful way to unite the Shoshone Bannock community.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

The White House Tribal Youth Forum in Washington, D.C. has been the highlight of my term. I had the honor of representing UNITY, the Center for Native American Youth, the Northwest Representative, and the 2024 Brave Heart Fellow. I was selected to participate in a mental health panel, where I asked White House officials about their efforts to support Native youth mental health. During the event, I connected with several youth from the Northwest region and discussed future collaborations. Special recognition goes to Joseph Payne and the NAHOVA (Native America Hear Our Voices Arise) Youth Council, who were awarded Youth Council of the Year. I'm grateful for the opportunity to participate and share my voice in such important conversations. It was an incredible experience!



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During my term, I had the honor of speaking at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in front of hundreds of tribal leaders. This experience allowed me to connect with leaders from my region and learn about issues affecting Native youth. My involvement in community service events has been fulfilling, giving me the chance to give back in meaningful ways. These experiences have strengthened my voice as an advocate for Native youth in the Northwest region, and I am committed to continuing this important work.



## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

Looking ahead, I'm excited to amplify Native youth voices in Idaho, Oregon, Alaska, and Washington. Over the next six months, I plan to strengthen ties with youth councils, organize community service events, and focus on mental health initiatives for our youth. I'm committed to fostering unity and empowerment among Native youth, creating positive change, and building a brighter future for our region. Thank you for your support—I'm proud of all of you. You are loved, and you matter. I hope to see you soon!



# PACIFIC REGION

Representative: Ashley Johnston

[aj.pacific@unityinc.org](mailto:aj.pacific@unityinc.org)



## TERM HIGHLIGHT

Manahuu! ii na-nia-nai Ashley Johnston Payahuupu-wae nuu kima du, Bishop a wae nuu novi-du I am a lifelong resident of Bishop, California, and a proud member of the Bishop Paiute Tribe. I am your Pacific Region Representative. Participating in the Walking in Beauty MMIW event was my top highlight as it was the first event where I was invited to introduce myself to our Bishop Paiute Tribal community as the newly elected Pacific Region Representative, and to be of service in participating in an event to bring awareness to MMIW, relatives and children. The art that was displayed was very moving, and it was nice to gather with other youth and pay respect. The event is a prayer run, art display, and a community dinner.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

The Fall Gathering (Yuuwano) is a gathering of our tribal community. I assisted in running youth and family games, we had a great turnout, and I was able to share what UNITY was and share with the youth what it meant to be elected as the Pacific region representative. Back to School event, this event was a two-day informational booth event where community members earn a pass to get a free backpack filled with supplies for students to be prepared for the upcoming school year. This is an annual event where the BTYC presents our tribal veterans with a meal, presentation and gift to thank them for their military service and to honor them.



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I have also been involved in various activities and projects to represent the Pacific Region such as cultural craft and tribal language programs, with our local cultural center and the Bishop Indian Education Center, I feel it is important to continue our traditions and practices. I am always open to invitations, and suggestions to represent throughout our region. I have been an actively serving as your Pacific Region representative and as a Bishop Tribal Youth Council member.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

Everything about serving as the 2024/2025 Pacific Region representative has been a highlight. I am honored and humbled to have the opportunity to represent the Pacific region and the UNITY organization. I hope to continue to serve in the best way I can.



# ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION

Representative: O'Shay Birdinground

[ob.rockymountain@unityinc.org](mailto:ob.rockymountain@unityinc.org)

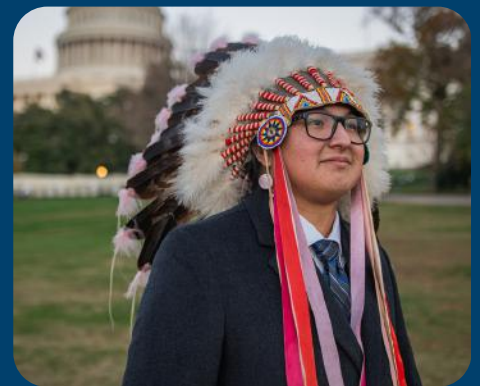
## TERM HIGHLIGHT

A Term highlight for me was the opportunity to travel and meet Indigenous youth nationwide. Seeing the youth's work makes me happy, and I am looking forward to a brighter future for Native American Country. I am excited to continue to see and add to that growth over the next few months.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

Attending the White House Tribal Youth Forum and moderating a segment of the day was a highlight for me. This experience has provided me with invaluable knowledge and helped me build relationships with Indigenous youths who are hard at work, fostering a better way of life for our communities.



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A regional accomplishment is that a new youth council has begun on the Northern Cheyenne reservation! It has been wonderful to work with their advisor, and it makes me happy to see the Northern Cheyenne community foster this new council. I hope that they see success soon!



## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

Looking ahead to the future, I am currently in my last semester of undergrad, and in May, I will graduate with a B.A. in Economics and Political Science. I still don't know what I will do after I hope to be involved with UNITY, either in the Rocky Mountain Region capacity or another!



# SOUTHEAST REGION

Representative: Kaylee Evans

[ke.southeast@unityinc.org](mailto:ke.southeast@unityinc.org)



## TERM HIGHLIGHT

Nahá:pipi: (Good day), I hope you are well, being the Southeastern Representative has been a pleasure, I have enjoyed serving the mighty southeast thus far! My term highlight was attending the College Horizons Program at Notre Dame University. At this program, I had the privilege to share UNITY and our mission to the Native youth at the camp. While attending, I was able to connect youth to their UNITY regional representative, to which that individual is now creating their own youth council! I want to encourage everyone to share UNITY with all your relatives, whenever you can, as it is a phenomenal organization that I am honored to be a part of. I also encourage you to apply to this astounding program, I gained many connections with youth that I will keep for a number of years.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) conference was an eye opening experience. I am grateful to Marla Mesarina for inviting me as the conversations were powerful. We shared our experiences with tribal communities and substance abuse/mental health issues, an experience that is not usually shared in national spaces.

## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

I visited Tennessee, an underrepresented area in the southeast, and shared UNITY to the attendees. I have continued to work with the North Carolina Native American Youth Organization on fundraising efforts to attend the UNITY national conference, and I am working on outreach events to many other parts of the southeastern region in the coming months. I have attended many powwows and socials with the hopes of sharing UNITY. My goal is to uplift the southeastern region and with the support of my communities and my region, I have been working towards this goal.



## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

I am excited to see the southeastern region representation at all of the UNITY events, I hope to establish a healing circle in one of our communities to aid in the healing of our youth, I cannot wait to travel to more communities and learn about their cultural heritage, and I am looking forward to the success that all the many youth within our region can achieve. Sending love and appreciation to everyone reading this!



# SOUTHERN PLAINS REGION

Representative: Mahiya Ramirez

[mr.southernplains@unityinc.org](mailto:mr.southernplains@unityinc.org)

## TERM HIGHLIGHT

Estonko, Southern Plains Region! The first six months of my last term as your representative have come to a close. The previous six months have been unforgettable. A few highlights from this term must be the 81st Annual National Congress of American Indian Convention, the White House Tribal Youth Forum, and the White House Tribal Nations Summit.

## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

During the NCAI conference in Las Vegas, NV, UNITY Representatives joined the Co-Presidents on stage as they addressed Tribal Leaders, earning a standing ovation for their impactful words on behalf of Native youth. Their speech resonated deeply, with many leaders, including members of the Choctaw Nation, expressing gratitude and sharing how they were inspired throughout the week. At the Fourth Annual White House Tribal Youth Forum, I introduced Mr. Nick Thorpe, Senior Advisor for Environmental and Energy Justice with the White House Council on Environmental Quality, and Ms. Jasmin Chavez-Cruz, Associate Director of the White House Internship Program, who served as panelists for a discussion on the White House Internship Program. The forum also featured meaningful conversations on critical topics such as mental health, food sovereignty, MMIP, and climate change, reflecting a strong commitment to these pressing issues.

## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Being at the 2024 White House Tribal Nations Summit was indeed an unforgettable experience. Being once again surrounded by tribal leaders from across the Indian country is always inspiring. Hearing work that has been done for the last four years within the Biden and Harris administrations and the items were put in place to ensure that work is done for the betterment of Indian country. Alongside nine other youths attending the WHTNS, we heard directly from Madam Vice President Kamala Harris as she shared some inspiring words.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

As for the remainder of my term as Vice President and Southern Plains Representative, I plan to spend more time with all of you and travel to visit with as many of you as possible. All the work you all do to bring about change in your community brings me hope and inspires me daily. I look forward to seeing you all in San Diego, CA.





# SOUTHWEST REGION

Representative: Jamie Crowe

[jc.southwest@unityinc.org](mailto:jc.southwest@unityinc.org)



## TERM HIGHLIGHT

Serving as the 2024-2025 Southwest Representative on the Executive Committee has been an incredible experience. It has helped me grow in confidence and leadership, pushing me out of my comfort zone and enabling me to take on events and collaborations I never thought possible. This role has inspired me to advocate for myself and Native youth nationwide, fueled by opportunities like the White House Tribal Youth Forum. I'm determined to embrace every opportunity and take healthy risks to continue making a difference.

## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

The event that has highlighted my term this far has been the White House Tribal Youth Forum. To be able to connect with and get to know several Native youth across the country to meet with our nation's leaders was beyond inspiring to me. I never attended an event that was like that and it is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life. It is important to be able to voice what it is you feel to the people who lead your country, and I did that. I felt empowered and resilient to be one of the many voices that could advocate for native country and communities. Especially since a lot of Native youth today feel as if it is impossible. It proved that the impossible is possible. More specifically, to me.



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In July of 2024, I was able to be apart of UNITY's Healing Circle training that was hosted at the Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It was the first time I was actually being trained to be the trainer. When I attended training before with my youth council, I had been the one listening and being spoken to. It was different being the one who was co-hosting and speaking to a group of Native youth. I know now that I will be able to host a healing circle and feel the inspiration and empowerment without being nervous. To impact a group of native youth goes a long way and even today the youth still talk about how UNITY had positively impacted their lives.



## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE

As my term progresses I am looking forward to our Midyear Conference and webinars that the Executive Committee will be hosting. These are major highlights of what I am looking forward to the most. Both are opportunities for me to empower other Native youth and make them feel seen and heard. I cannot wait to connect with more Native youth and create friendships and bonds with others who are just as inspired as me. I am looking forward to hosting a workshop at Midyear, which is something I have never done before. A lot of firsts, but never lasts because this is something I want to continue to do until my age allows me to.



# WESTERN REGION

Representative: Jalen Harvey

[jh.western@unityinc.org](mailto:jh.western@unityinc.org)

## TERM HIGHLIGHT

Yá'át'éeíh, Nukwantalöngva, What an incredible six months it has been! If I had to sum up this journey in one word, it would be inspirational. Connecting with so many dynamic youth councils has been uplifting, and it fills me with pride to see the bright future ahead for Indigenous youth. This opportunity wouldn't have been possible without the Western Region's unwavering faith in me. I'm truly grateful to serve and grow alongside all of you! The highlight of my term so far was joining the Securing the Future (Young Voters) Panel at the 2024 Arizona Native Vote Forum, where I discussed challenges faced by first-time voters and highlighted the amazing work of Indigenous youth in their communities and governments.



## EVENT HIGHLIGHT

One of many event highlights of my term was attending the Akimel O'odham/Pee-Posh Youth Council Inauguration on October 26th. I'm so proud of this council's dedication to their community and surrounding areas. It's inspiring to see their growth over the past year and the heart they put into their work. Congratulations to the outgoing members for their incredible contributions, and to the newly elected members, I'm excited to see all you'll achieve for yourselves and your communities. You each represent your families and communities beautifully!



## REGIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Jamie, our Southwest Regional Representative, and I had the privilege of hosting the Western and Southwest Fall Regional Meet-up, a significant accomplishment for our region. With over sixty inspiring youth leaders and dedicated advisors, the event sparked meaningful conversations and connections. It was a true testament to the passion and commitment of our community. I couldn't be more proud of how it all came together, and I'm excited to see the continued impact of the incredible youth leaders across the Southwest and Western regions!




## LOOKING AHEAD TO THE FUTURE


As I look ahead to the second half of my term, I'm filled with excitement and anticipation! One of the greatest honors has been serving as the Western Area Representative & Secretary—something I hold close to my heart. These past six months have been such a blessing, and I'm incredibly grateful to the youth in the Western Region for their trust and support. It's been amazing to be part of so many events, and seeing my calendar filled with new opportunities only fuels my motivation to keep working hard. I'll forever be in debt to all of you inspiring leaders for your encouragement and belief in me. I'm committed to doing all I can to help the Western Region continue growing, and I'm excited for the journey ahead. Here's to what's next!



UNITY INC.

# THANK YOU

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# 2024

PREPARED FOR  
NATIONAL UNITY COUNCIL