

ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP CONSORTIUM GRANT

Research/ Creative Activities Grant: **Understanding Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Michigan**
Jorie Beadle & Stephen Stresow-Cortez

INTRODUCTION & INTENTION

Land grant institutions were founded to provide agricultural and technical instruction and conduct related research and Extension (outreach) (APLU, 2026). These “land grab” institutions (Lee, 2020) were created on expropriated Indigenous land and land ceded under coercive and violent circumstances. As the “nation’s pioneer land grant,” Michigan State University (MSU) joins other institutions in navigating how to reconcile its relationship and past harm to Indigenous communities. Two entities that were established to that end were the MSU Native American Institute (NAI) and Michigan Inter-Tribal Land Grant System (MILES). Both organizations work to support Tribal sovereignty, cultural continuity and well-being of Michigan’s Tribal communities through university-community partnerships (NAI) and addressing Tribal programmatic and research requests (MILES). Collaborating with these two organizations allows for a tangible implementation of community engaged scholarship principles that center the co-creation of knowledge with communities and universities to redress past institutional harm.

This spring, they hosted the inaugural Indigenous Food Sovereignty Summit (IFSS) in response to NAI listening sessions where Indigenous communities and Tribes requested the need “to be convened in a state or regional (Great Lakes region) manner to interrogate various topics that intersect with Native and tribal affairs” (Finding 8, MSU Tribal Outreach Report, 2023). IFSS allowed for the exploration of Indigenous Food Sovereignty using principles of engaged scholarship to create “new knowledge to address social issues through collaborative relationships and shared activity between those in the university and those outside the university” (Campus Compact, 2022).

Our initial proposal outlined the plans for a needs assessment to better understand the way indigenous communities in Michigan define and engage in food sovereignty. However, we clearly heard from Indigenous organizers that MSU and similar institutions often conduct a needs assessment with little to no follow up on the needs identified. Hearing this, we pivoted to further exploring an existing need clearly identified by Tribal organizers across generations at the onset of IFSS planning: supporting Indigenous youth. To do this, we worked with Indigenous conference organizers to develop the IFSS Young Adult Cohort and host an Intergenerational Knowledge Share session. This session provided an ‘on ramp’ for youth engagement and a formalized opportunity to connect youth with indigenous leaders and collect input from the broad spectrum of attendees on ways to support Indigenous youth in food sovereignty work, a different kind of needs assessment focused on future generations.



6:00 PM- 7:00 PM | Dinner provided by Anishnabe Meejim (Eva Menefee)
7:00 PM- 8:00 PM | Ceremonial fire hosted by firekeeper, John Ostrander

Enjoy this time to connect with each other, network, and reflect.

Consider responding to the prompts on open space boards throughout the room. Your responses will be used to move this work forward.

*This event is supported by the Engaged Scholarship Consortium



Photo (1): Session description as presented in the summit program.

Photo (2): Heather Howard shares resources with Indigenous youth at Tuesday session.

IMPLEMENTATION & PROCESS

The grant allowed us to support youth engagement and collect input throughout the summit in a variety of ways.

- We hosted a pre-conference session to connect youth with each other, inquire about conference logistics, and build an agenda.
- We designed and hosted an evening session at the summit, titled Intergenerational Knowledge Share, designed to connect youth with tribal leaders and food sovereignty practitioners.
- The session featured a ceremonial fire, open space boards collecting input from attendees, and structured networking. We hosted several designated IFSS speakers/collaborators to connect with Young Adult Cohort attendees to serve as mentors and connectors.
- We included and compensated an Indigenous student heavily involved with MSU's North American Indigenous Student Organization to our planning team to ensure our efforts reflected youth needs and perspectives.
- This session was hosted at the MSU Multicultural Center, a new and important space for historically underrepresented students to gather.

Funding supported honorariums for Indigenous leaders in attendance, travel stipends for youth to attend session, food, space, and supplies (open space boards).

“This experience has strengthened my desire to work for my tribal government in support of creating a healthier world for my community through food sovereignty.”

Faith Cummings, IFSS Youth Cohort

Photo: Over **120 attendees** providing input at the Intergenerational Knowledge Share session



IMPACT

- We quickly discovered that to conduct this work in a way that did not perpetuate institutional harm, we needed more time to build the appropriate relationships and trust. As Kyle Whyte insisted, “Go slow to go fast” (IFSS, 2026). Relationship building was crucial to this modified needs assessment.
- Established partnerships with existing organizations to address the needs set forth by previous needs assessment work- doing the work of building formal connections.
- The input collected from the open space boards during the Intergenerational Knowledge share session was recorded and coded for themes. This input will be disseminated to the executive board of EAGLE (Educating Anishinaabe: Giving, Learning, and Empowering) at MSU to inform the outreach work they conduct within institutional curriculum and planning. Additionally, the input was presented as the IFSS Planning Committee roundtable to inform the design of the next summit



Photo: Youth respond to open space prompts



Photo: Youth networking with Nichole Keway Biber, water advocate and protector and community organizer.