Native FEWS Alliance March Gathering
Evaluation Memo Report #2:

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Creating an Understanding (Overview)

The Native FEWS Alliance, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF-DRL #2120001) and led by UC Berkeley and the University of Arizona, is focused on fusing place-based approaches to teaching and diversity with applied research in food, energy, and water systems (FEWS) and Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. The dual vision of the Native FEWS Alliance (the Alliance) is to build a highly skilled Native American STEM workforce at the nexus of Food, Energy and Water and to co-innovate and deploy Indigenous place-based FEWS education and community partnerships. Native Pathways (Laguna, NM) and Reimagine Research Group(Corvallis, OR) were engaged to lead an evaluation process that brings together Indigenous and western paradigms in order to weave multiple ways of knowing throughout all levels of the project. The current document reflects evaluation of the Native FEWS Alliance's first annual gathering, which took place at UC Berkeley on March 31 and April 1, 2022.

Preparing the Ground (Evaluation Processes and Methods)

In order to document outcomes from the Annual Gathering and the ways in which key goals were advanced through the meeting, the evaluation team engaged participants in a written reflection activity at the close of the 2-day gathering. Participants were invited to reflect on sticky-notes around the following areas: 1) The "gifts" or new learning they gained from the gathering; 2) action steps they feel prepared to take; and 3) any support they may need from the Alliance. These were gathered on poster boards, entered into an Excel database, and analyzed for emergent themes. About one week after the gathering, the evaluation team led a debrief reflection with the leadership team, include PIs, CoPIs, project managers, and Stepping Stone leads, during a 1-hour call via Zoom. The dialogue was recorded and transcribed, then analyzed for key themes using a content analysis software, Dedoose.com. While the evaluation team organized a debrief with students who attended the gathering, only one student was able to participate, perhaps due to the difficult timing of the meeting (around final exams).

What we Learned (Results from Post-Reflections)

Data results are shared below in terms of the three prompt questions that participants were invited to reflect on at the close of the meeting: 1) Gifts from the Gathering; 2) Action steps they feel prepared to take; and 3) Supports needed from the Alliance.

Gifts from the Gathering

Forty-eight responses were received around the area of "gifts" (e.g. new learnings or outcomes) that participants felt they received from the Alliance Gathering (See Fig 1). The most common area shared was around **Building Relationships (n=21)**, which included expanding networks, developing new partnerships, and making space for healing. For example, the following comments were shared:

- *"Connections and relationships for future collaborations"*
- *"Lifelong networks"*
- *"Community networks"*
- *"Opportunities for connection are within reach*
- *"This event reminds me of the tireless work of my parents, grandparents, and ancestors in welcoming others and building peace and making, opening spaces where healing may perhaps happen."*
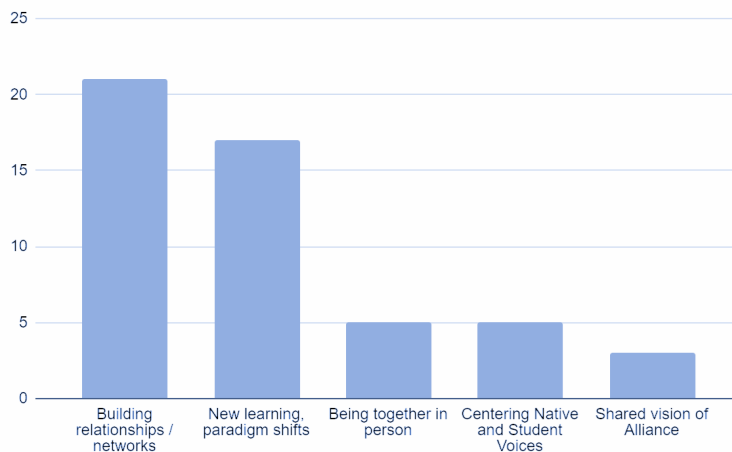
Figure 1. Gifts from the Gathering (n=48)

Other areas of impact included new learning and paradigm shifts (n=17), such as deepening perspectives around core values and guiding principles of Indigenous FEWS practices and existing efforts: followed by being together in person after two years of a pandemic (n=5), seeing Native scholar and Native student voices centered (n=5), and gaining more clarity around a shared vision of the Alliance (n=3).

Action Steps

Fifty responses were shared around action steps the participants felt prepared to take (See Fig 2), although just under half of these (n=24) included a specific, concrete action step. This suggests that Alliance members may need more support in building specific action plans and/or they are not ready or aware enough of the Alliance goals to feel clear about how to move forward. Overall, the most common area shared was related to uplifting student voices and leadership (n=12). This included comments around elevating student voices, creating a graduate student advisory committee, including more tribal youth voices, and specific activities such as a graduate student research showcase or an Alliance-wide student research poster session.

Other common action steps related to networking (n=10) and collaboration (n=8). These ranged from expanding the Alliance, including new partners, making connections between specific people or programs, or building collaborative partnerships both within the Alliance (e.g. across the Stepping Stones) and with community / tribal partners. Nine responses related to communication, including regular communication among the leadership

Figure 2. Action Steps (n=50)

team and the Alliance more broadly, as well as media communication and storytelling. Action steps mentioned less frequently were related to Indigenizing the Alliance, Nation Building, general planning and professional development, such as reading a specific article.
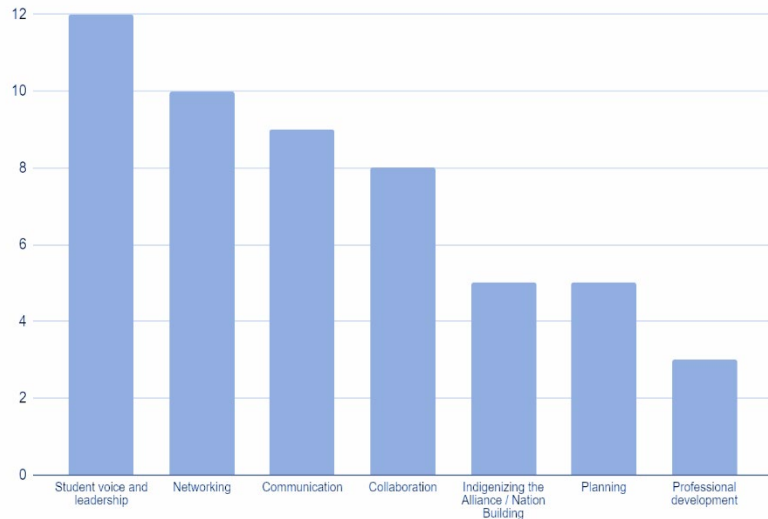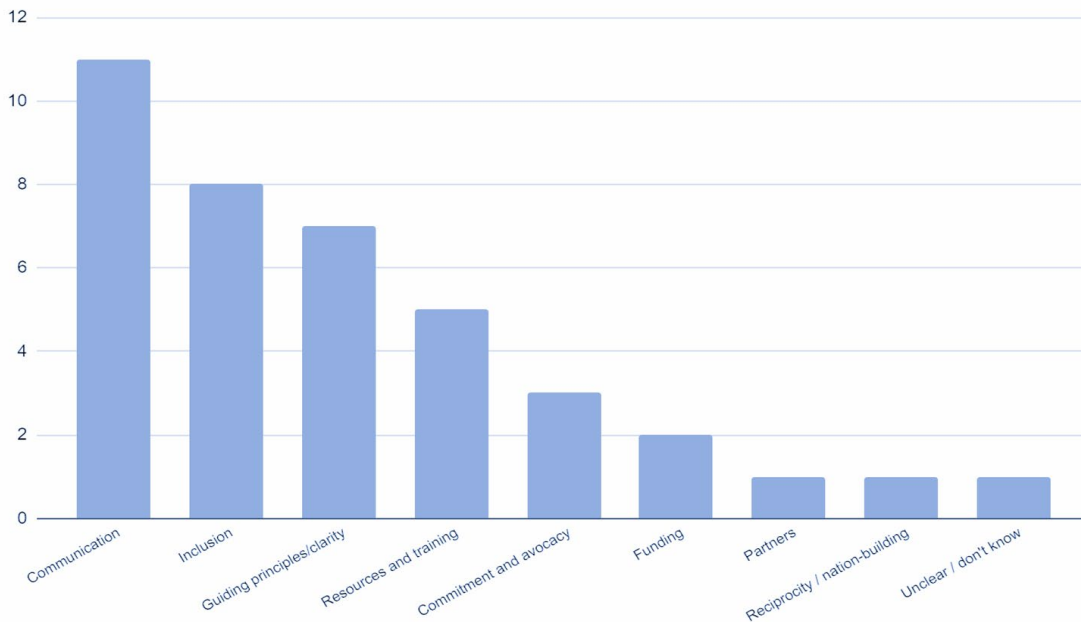
Supports needed from the Alliance

Thirty-six responses were shared in this area around supports needed from the Alliance in order to do this work (see Figure 3). The most common need shared by participants related to **communication (n=11)**. This included internal communication, ways for sharing input about what works and what doesn't (e.g. evaluation), communicating findings with the broader field and community partners, follow-up and transparency. This also included two responses that references the need to launch the Alliance website.

The next most common area of need was around **inclusion (n=8)**; these comments suggested that the Alliance needs to be mindful of opening its doors, inviting in community members, including non-

federally recognized tribes and students, and making sure it does not exclude important voices. For example, one participant commented: "*In what ways is NFEWS ensuring that these research groups and convenings are not exclusive? (i.e. how are we bringing in non-affiliated/interested students? Where are we working to keep all doors open and inviting in this community?*"

Figure 3. What participants need from the Alliance (n=36)

Seven participants shared that they needed **guiding principles** or more clarity around the direction of the Alliance, including an organizational chart and protocols for how the Alliance is bringing in new members. Five participants wanted access to resources and training, including mentorship, a list of organizations doing Native FEWS work, and a virtual resource center.

Other areas, shared by fewer than 5 people each, included the need for commitment, advocacy support, funding, community partners, and reciprocity. For example, one participant commented, "*How will these projects directly build capacity of Indigenous communities? (i.e. getting info, findings, funding, jobs outside of pure academia).*" One participant shared that they were still unclear and wasn't sure what support they needed from the Alliance.

What we Learned (Results from Debriefs)

A post debrief with the Native FEWS Leadership team was held on April 28, 2022. The dialogue engaged the PI/Co-PI team, Backbone lead, and Stepping Stone leads, and was focused on five specific areas. Participants were invited to share their thoughts on one of the following prompts, related to the Annual Native FEWS (N-FEWS) Gathering in Berkeley, CA.

- Something new that I realized
- Something I feel excited or energized about
- Something I appreciated about the meeting

> *"It really brought into perspective the amount of Indigenous scholars and also community members, communities just in general, working on trying to figure out solutions to these very wicked problems for sure."*

The majority of responses centered on areas that the leadership team were **excited or energized about.** The following were key themes emerged in this area:

- Meeting in person
- Opportunities for building relationships
- Keynote speakers
- The concept of "Boundary Spanners"
- Commonalities around FEWS and learning about possible research areas
- The array of Indigenous scholars
- The evaluation process
- Honoring of student voices
- Small group interactive sessions that had distinctive focus areas
- Laughter and uniqueness of the gathering

> *"I think that the Indigenous Evaluation Framework and sharing examples was really successful and impactful for the students and for myself. Thinking back to when I was a student, I've had several students share with me with excitement, how they really connected with that framework. For example, the golden mean, and the example that Shelly shared of the Pueblo problem solving. I think that was really successful and I hope that we continue that."*

Participants were invited to share a story of what they felt worked well about the meeting (examples of success), and to elaborate on what this looked like and how they knew it was successful. They were also invited to share how their story or experiences could help to inform future gatherings or how they work together as an Alliance, including possible frameworks, guiding principles, or processes. Below are key areas that emerged.

Areas that worked for the Gathering

- Participants felt that relationship-building was a key outcome and was best supported through the following opportunities:
    - The box luncheon and walk to the community garden provided informal time.
    - The interactive activities brought participants together to engage in dialogue and hands-on activities.
    - The open invitation to join UC Berkeley's Native American Center's community dinner
    - The Native FEWS Advisors being present during the online sessions.
    - The fieldtrip to Alcatraz

- Inclusion of all participants – Several participants noted that they appreciated the evaluation team's attention to engaging the participants who were participating virtually. They felt included. The following quote shares this thought:

- Small group size - Participants appreciated the gathering was not a large conference style, that often times prohibits equity and quality of participation. Participants felt the size of the gathering was key to nurturing relationship building, opportunities to fully immerse in networking and being comfortable to engage in the dialogues, where participant's voices were mostly heard.

"Thank you so much. When the evaluation team helped moderate the online versions of the evaluation effort, it was helpful."

"One of the things that I thought was really nice was the gathering that we had the day before that was put together. That was really nice to be able to meet in an informal way that Patrick had organized with the students. That was really nice to be able to meet beforehand to get to know folks in an informal way and meet people that way. Share a meal, that's really important in Indigenous communities."

- Pre-planning for next year – while unintended, there was a natural transition of igniting next year's gathering, which prompted the local host from Arizona State University to begin their planning efforts.

Alignment to Meeting Goals

Participants were invited to reflect on the meeting goals and the extent to which they felt the goals were supported by the meeting. They were also invited to elaborate on what supported those areas and how the Alliance can strengthen these areas or continue to build on them moving forward. The meeting goals for the Annual Gathering were articulated by the leadership team as follows:

- Relationship building within Alliance and partners
- Map opportunities and priorities
- Begin developing cross sector connections
- Translate map into action plan

Data suggested that on some level each of the four goals was supported throughout the gathering. For example, one participant indicated that the **preparation and planning** of the local host team helped to support all the goal areas. The following quote expresses this thought:

"One thing at the meeting that I think supported all of these goals is the preparation that the local hosts did, so Yale and Patrick and Alice. For example, the technology, I don't think it was perfect, but it was pretty good and reliable, and that's a miracle these days, I think. And so I think a lot of... If the question is, what supported reaching these goals, one answer is the good preparation for the space and the technology, and I guess all the way through the meals and everything else, but that was well done."

<u>Relationship building within Alliance and partners</u>

> *"I think we could have been more explicit in setting up relationship building times. For one silly example, we didn't even have everyone introduce themselves until we were, I don't know, an hour or so into the meeting or something. We might have set up more time. And I know early on, at least I think Diana asked for that. She said, "We need more open time just for people to get to know each other." So maybe next time, we can think more carefully about saving more time for relationship building."*

The most amplified area across the dialogue was the space the gathering provided for **building relationships**. At the start, the host team was able to open the space with inviting the participants to engage in a community dinner, hosted by the Native American student program. To be welcomed to the campus by the Native American community was significant from an Indigenous worldview. This allowed participants an informal space to meet local Native community members and Native FEWS Alliance participants. Opportunities to continue relationship building included interactive sessions, meals and fieldtrips. While this was one of the highlights of the gathering, there were also areas where participants indicated that missed opportunities occurred, such as delays in introductions, limited time for some of the interactive activities, participants being cut-off from presentations due to the agenda timeline. Participants suggested being more intentional with making space for relationship building environments.

The gathering also provided opportunities for **students to create relationships or deepen relationships** among themselves. The student panel and student orientation were two of the key activities that offered this space. While there were actions taken to consider inclusion of student voices, participants noted that some students indicated

> *"I also think, in terms of relationship building, I think the field trips were really great. I went on the field trip to the garden, and we barely had enough time. We got our food and we walked over there, and we sat down, and it was already time to walk back. Within the hour, we didn't*

their voices were not included or considered in the small group sessions and this frustrated them.

<u>Map opportunities and priorities</u>
Through the dialogues that emerged within the interactive sessions and the small group immersive experiences, participants were able to map out possible opportunities and priorities for their Stepping Stone. This was mostly amplified during the River of Life process. For those groups that were able to share, it was evident that this goal area came to life. Unfortunately, due to time, there were some groups who were cut off from sharing, creating critical missed opportunities to galvanize key mapping and action planning. The other session which attributed to positive movement was the evaluation activity at the end of gathering, which had participants define action steps that they would take responsibility for and share out during next year's gathering.

Begin developing cross sector connections

Around the area of the **cross-sector connections**, there were instances where participants engaged in dialogues that influenced thoughts around cross pollination of ideas and perspectives. The key activities that drove the percolation of thought around cross-sector connections were the keynote presentations and interactive sessions (River of Life and Seed Project dialogues). Unfortunately, due to time, there were some sessions that were cut short due to a focus on time constraints, creating missed opportunities to fully consider possibilities of key areas for cross sector connections.

Translate map into action plan

There were mixed responses shared around this area. There are three key areas that either supported or challenged this area, as shared below:

1. There were thoughts shared around the participants needing sufficient **clarity** on purpose of gatherings. While those participants who have been engaged throughout the planning stages, the participants who are new to the environment, may not fully understand specific goal areas and purpose of the gathering, creating a feeling of confusion**.** An orientation and resource materials for new team members would be helpful to their understanding.

2. The variety of interactive sessions, breakout groups, along with the keynote speakers was the necessary fuel to help participants begin to understand the larger FEWS initiative and program goals to help support participants to consider ideas of mapping out possible areas of an action plan.

3. Participants indicated that one positive outcome of the gathering was the intentionality to charge participants to identify **next steps that seed the development of action plans**. That said, participants also indicated that the leadership needs to make sure there are clear ideas for student goals and how they fit within the action plans.

> *"One thing I think we could strengthen is just the purpose of the meeting. Because when we first started talking about this, since it was our planning year, this was going to be a planning meeting. I guess I have to say we did great on the goal of mapping opportunities, but we did not do very well on turning that map into an*

> *"I was pleased with is there were a lot of action items. When Karletta and I met with the students, they had some great ideas, and I do think we need to nurture them and support them in the next step. Everybody identified next steps. So, I think we need, as a leadership team, to curate the next steps that came out of this meeting and work with and support the leaders in those next steps."*

Alignment to Strategic Goals

Participants were invited to share their thoughts around how they felt the gathering helped to articulate, define and/or prepare to advance the strategic goal areas of the Alliance. They were also invited to share examples of how these goal areas were addressed or met and what their own learning was around the strategic goal areas, which are shared below:

- Use curricula and interventions to recruit, retain and graduate Indigenous students

- Address urgent FEWS challenges in Indigenous communities
- Co-develop integrated, Indigenous, place-based FEWS curricula, mentoring and practice experiences
- Transform institutional STEM fields to be relevant and accessible to Indigenous communities

These areas were mostly amplified through the Lightning Talks and Keynote Speakers' presentations. These two activities were critical to helping participants consider the overall goals of the Alliance and provided participants with initial ideas of how these areas fit within their own work and goals and can contribute to developing their own action plans. The quote below reflects one participant's thoughts on the Alliance goals:

> *"I think we touched on all of these four goals. I think for the curricula, I know that there was some great brainstorming that happened that we're going to use, because we're actually going to STAR School tomorrow and we're meeting with them about curriculum development for FEWS. That was really effective."*

Use curricula and interventions to recruit, retain and graduate Indigenous students - One initiative that made significant traction during the gathering was the Certificate Program. The mentoring component was minimally mentioned during the Gathering, but participants indicated they were interested in learning more about the Indigenous mentoring concept and how it might support Native students' pathways in Indigenous FEWS fields.

Address urgent FEWS challenges in Indigenous communities - The Gathering provided opportunities to deepen participants' understanding around FEWS challenges in Indigenous communities and positive, asset-based, and culturally responsive approaches to addressing these areas. This learning occurred particularly through the keynote presentations, which highlighted current research, resources, and wise practices in these areas. While this was more about information-sharing than action oriented at this stage, these examples served to inspire participants and bring the key goals of the Alliance to life.

> *"I'm glad that we set aside time for the lightning talks. I know we went back and forth about how to do those, but the lightning talks gave examples of each of these four goals, and I think, once again, helped us gain deeper understanding of these goals. And then, especially for goal number two, about addressing urgent FEWS challenges, I think having (the keynote) talks specifically that talked about ways to address these challenges, that helped us meet these goals."*

Indigenous-based FEWS curriculum component – During several interactive sessions, participants were able to key in on the curriculum development area, particularly with the Star School partnership on the Navajo Nation. As a result of these interactive sessions, a small group scheduled a site visit a few weeks later.

Transform Institutional STEM fields - While the Alliance is still at the infancy around this goal area, the seed was planted through the keynote presentations and interactive sessions. There was considerable dialogue and learning around common barriers across STEM fields, and examples of what needs to happen to transform STEM fields to make space for engaging multiple worldviews and effectively addressing FEWS issues from an Indigenous worldview.

Strengthening Future Gatherings

Participants were invited to share their ideas on ways the Alliance can move forward on strengthening future gatherings. Suggestions centered around creating more space for relationship building, such as longer lunches, health/wellness activities at breaks, and more interactive (small group) activities; and creating more space to center student voices, create leadership opportunities, and include them in the planning of future meetings. Making sure there is diversity of students from many different institutions and programs, and include community college and non-registered tribal members. Creating more space for Alliance members and graduate students to present around their work (e.g. a poster session) was also recommended as a way to strengthen future gatherings. The following quotes help support these ideas:

> *"Like meditation or even like a stretch exercise already been taking a like a little walk. Outside and coming right back in like I don't know, maybe like because I felt like it was kind of heavy on like presentations."*

> *"I think the virtual was definitely something we needed to think more about, and to have a way to manage the virtual sessions a lot better. I think we didn't really even know how many people were going to be online virtually until the very last minute as well."*
> *"I also want to keep in mind that there's also going to be new folks that are going to be joining the Alliance, new partners and new students. We're going to need to continually provide that historical development and orientation to them so that they can have that background. It's not just the students we need to orientate, but it's the folks that we want to continue to bring into the Alliance."*

> *"I thought it was absolutely brilliant to engage Karletta, what a gem. I was excited to hear her voice and her story. I think continuing to bring in some of the team, because each of them have their own gifts and their work has been just invaluable to indigenous communities and broadly native people. I would also like to hear from some of the graduate students."*

> *"I was blown away actually with having that many native PhDs in the room. I've never been in an environment like that, it was really inspiring. To hear what they are working on, wow. One of them is doing work with NASA, just amazing stuff and I was blown away. Having them highlighted as the feature, the keynote, I think that would be amazing."*

10

Challenges

There were a few responses from participants around areas they felt challenged by during the two-day session. The main challenge was around time; participants indicated the two-day session did not provide enough time for learning about individuals' work, existing programs, relationship building and for them to consider action steps. Several participants indicated they felt there were missed opportunities to hear from all groups during sessions because of limits on time. The second challenge, which also was shared across the dialogue in varied ways, was the limited amount of students that attended the gathering. This mostly centered around the fact that the numbers of students representing universities, tribal colleges and community colleges was not balanced. The following quote reflects some of the challenges experienced at the gathering:

> *"One part I wish I could have heard a little bit more was the mentoring, because that's specific to the students and Ruth talked a little bit about it. She mentioned how her program does have an indigenous mentoring component or training. Would've been great to have her either do a training or talk more about what is mentoring for indigenous students. I think that might have of brought us together and created a common space between the students and faculty to know how we can amplify and give space for their voice, be a good mentor, not just in academia, but here at the conference or at this meeting."*

Student Debrief

With the notion of centering student voices, students who attended the March gathering were invited to engage in a debrief dialogue around their learning and impacts they encountered through attending the gathering. Unfortunately, only one student attended the session and one student did provide thoughts around the key areas via email. The timing of the session may have been a factor in the low attendance, since it was near finals and graduation activities. While this summary does not reflect all of the students' experiences of the gathering, we share a few key areas below:

- Getting to know other universities and Indigenous scholars and community members working on similar FEWS related projects was beneficial;
- Both students felt excited about being in a space where there were mostly Native people represented, the work being done within tribal communities, shared experiences and the uniqueness of the gathering environment, which felt different to them from other conferences and/or meetings.

- Students appreciated the hands-on activities, meeting new people and seeing familiar faces and the discussion groups for Native students.
- Spending time with participants and hearing their stories about their work helped to increase their understanding about the Alliance's goal areas.

> *"I really enjoy when we have those breakout sessions in the morning and how you remember how we had those big papers and we had to share what interests us and that was really cool because that made me talk to other people that I didn't know personally."*

Native FEWS Alliance and for them, this was a notion of success. Additionally, connecting and diligence of staying connected to likeminded participants who were also passionate about topic areas was important to them.

- Suggestions for strengthening the gathering included having more time to engage in informal dialogue, for example, providing some type of social hour at the end of the orientation, start off the mornings with a trivia games that helps participants refresh their minds on previous topics, or during breaks the participants could engage in healthy, wellbeing activities (e.g., short walks, stretching, meditation or yoga).

> *"It would be really cool to share each of our research, like give time, maybe like half the day or like a five-minute lightning talk…I think that would be really cool to expand those opportunities for graduate students to be able to share your research."*

- The student panel was an opportunity to hear what other research projects graduate students are engaged in; more space and time to share their research projects was suggested.
- It was helpful for students to have the orientation, as this gave them a sense of understanding Native leadership in a university setting

> *"An opportunity of a potential mentor mentee relationship of some sort. I saw that there was a lot of professionals at the gathering that shared a great wealth of knowledge and I know other students were very interested in like their work. Being able to continue or reaching out to that individual would be helpful in our research or professional development [and] learning from them."*

- Suggestions around supports needed from the alliance included opportunities to build relationships and networks, such as a mentor-mentee program; visiting universities, colleges, and programs involved in the alliance; and supporting more opportunities to engage students in Alliance activities.

Being Mindful (Recommendations)

While suggestions are sprinkled throughout the report, below are key recommendations for the Alliance leadership to be mindful around as it moves forward. They are shared in terms of recommendations for 1) future gatherings; and 2) the overall Alliance pathway.

Recommendations for future Gathering

- Provide space for Students to share and discuss their research, beyond the student panel

- Consider splitting up the student panel into two days, so that each student has more time to share
- Create more space for relationship-building, such as longer lunches, more breaks, and more unstructured time to connect with one another outside the agenda activities
- Build in time and space to connect with the local Indigenous communities whose lands that we are holding the gathering on
- Have more opportunities for Alliance members to present their work; for example, continue to engage them as keynote speakers, and perhaps also add a poster session for sharing work, as this ignites possible collaborative partnerships and sharing of wise practices
- Be mindful of who is engaged in the Alliance gatherings, and whose voices need to be included and at the table, such as Elders, knowledge holders, and tribal leadership.
- Be mindful of an equitable approach to engaging students from diverse educational, geographic, cultural, and tribal backgrounds.
- Continue providing support for students to travel to Alliance gatherings; this is essential for them to be able to participate.
- Make time for wellness activities to support healthy wellbeing, such as yoga or mediation breaks, walks, and mindful reflection time.
- Consider the definition of time in terms of how the gathering unfolds; be mindful of engaging an Indigenous worldview of time that is fluid, flexible, and responsive to the needs of the people and the Alliance. For example, create agendas that are less tight and structured, and be explicit with participants about why we are taking this approach.
- Include a space for local, traditional Indigenous foods for one of the meals in order to model and celebrate what the Native FEWS Alliance is all about.
- The orientation for students was extremely valuable; this would also be important to include for "new" Alliance members so they will come in with a clearer understanding of the Alliance goals.

Recommendations for the Alliance

- Continue to engage students in leadership opportunities across the Alliance, including planning, developing program activities, evaluation, and some of the committees and advisory board.
- Consider developing a mentor/mentee program across the Alliance in which students would be matched with some of the Alliance leadership, of undergrads with graduate students, in order to transfer knowledge and learning across the stepping stones.
- Alliance members need more support in understanding their role and place in the Alliance, and in developing action steps or plans for sharing and implementing wise practices. For example, offer a facilitated session, training series, or mentorship opportunities across the Alliance.