

First Alaskans Institute

Emergent Community Connection Response Plan Indigenizing First Alaskans Institute's COVID19 Pandemic Response

As the COVID19 pandemic unfolds in real time, front line health and essential services are rightly focused on stemming the impact of the virus in Alaska. Our Tribal, state, and city governments are working to ensure protection of life and adequate supplies are in place. All other organizations and the people of Alaska, such as First Alaskans Institute (FAI) and our employees, are doing their part to help flatten the curve, including FAI's emergency shift to virtual operations for an initial two weeks due to this pandemic. In this quickly evolving time, we have a unique opportunity to transform our community engagement work and use our peoples' wisdom to be of service during this turbulent time.

As Native peoples, we have been exposed to health crises like this one throughout our history - the sky has literally been falling on us since colonization and we have been holding it up ever since. Through it all, one of the strongest values and truths about our Native peoples is that we shine during hard times by holding each other up. As in all times past when we have experienced crises, we find strength in the relationships that bind us together and a good path forward through the stories carrying wisdom that have been passed down over thousands of years. In this spirit, FAI seeks to operationalize our Native value of being good relatives to one another.

One on One Coffeetime with our Elders

During this time of community-wide isolation, it is essential to uplift our well-being and connectivity to one another. While FAI may not be a front-line medical service provider, we can still be helpful to our communities in our advocacy, outreach, through our relationships, and by being part of a collective effort to ensure we do not lose touch or sight of who we are. We take care of each other.

- While we are working remotely during the pandemic, our staff are currently authorized to take a total of up to two (2) hours of work time per work week, to call Elders in our communities using either phone or video chat, whichever is most comfortable and appropriate for both.
- Conversations are intended to help alleviate isolation that our Elders and staff may be experiencing during this uncertain time, and simply represent an opportunity to connect, say hello, and share a small part of each other's day without any other set agenda.
- Staff will co-create an ongoing list of names to keep track of Elders, contact info and notation to track when Elders have been called. This will likely start with those closest to us and spread out naturally from there, a ripple effect of community engagement.

Though our Elders always have good words to share, we are also cognizant of the fact that many of our Elders have experienced the traumas of separation from our cultures, families, communities, and ways of life through other epidemics, boarding schools, federal relocation programs, mass institutionalization and so on. This simple act is meant to reflect love, care and what they mean to us as a community.

We anticipate that this effort will have many positive effects, including: build community spirit and connection, enhance mental and emotional well-being, cut down on loneliness, inspire great learning, inform the future of our work, support and catalyze innovation, and build relationships across our state among other benefits we cannot currently anticipate. Together, this effort will ensure that though we may be self-isolating, we are still together as a community during a time when we vitally need connection with one another.