

# First Alaskans Institute

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## **FIRST ALASKANS INSTITUTE'S 37TH ANNUAL STATEWIDE ELDERS & YOUTH CONFERENCE AND THE 9TH ANNUAL HOWARD ROCK & TED STEVENS SMOKEHOUSE GALA WILL BE HELD VIRTUALLY TO PROTECT THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OUR PEOPLES**

“Sacrificing time with our families right now will protect our family and community for generations.” – Tarruq (Iñupiaq Elder)

Anchorage, Alaska – Native peoples are the living embodiment of our Ancestors' vigilance and fortitude. They sacrificed, endured, and overcame so much in order for us to be here today. We honor that love and take the responsibility to uphold it very seriously. We have also been fortified by the strong stance our Tribes have taken across the state, even before other governments did, to secure their homelands and villages against the current pandemic.

As Alaska Native peoples, we are the first and forever stewards of Alaska and our peoples are the conduits for this special relationship. Over 10,000+ years of ancestral knowledge is embedded and entrusted into the living generations to pass on to the future. Paramount to this is staying alive. Our peoples know the continuing devastation and trauma of colonization, attempted genocide, and the diseases and pandemics that have also come to our shores. And no matter what, we survive because we know what matters most. **When we center what is best for our Elders and youth, all our loved ones, friends, advocates, and our communities the answer is simple - we will move our two largest events into the unceded virtual space of our Alaska Native peoples.**

Our First Alaskans Institute (FAI) 37th Annual Statewide Elders & Youth Conference (Elders & Youth) and 9th Annual Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala (Smokehouse Gala) will be hosted in a reimaged culturally-enriched online environment. Not only will this keep our peoples safer, but it will increase access for those who have not yet had a chance to participate.

In this virtual space, for each event, we will work to center the knowledge, wisdom, curiosity, beauty, creative talent, innovation, and brilliance of our peoples. Our Native cultures and languages are incredibly diverse, we have a lot to learn and honor about each other. Connecting our Elders and our youth is imperative to our health and well-being to ensure we know who we are, how to work together, and live off our lands and waters in a good way, as stewards of this incredible place. Our Smokehouse Gala has grown to become a highly anticipated celebration each Alaska Native Heritage Month where we make visible the tremendous contributions and efforts of our Native peoples and our friends in ensuring we are able to do this critical work of advancing our peoples for the next 10,000 years.

We invite all Alaskans and the world to participate alongside us in these virtual events. More details will follow for how to participate. Alaska is and always has been a Native place, and we know the world needs, now more than ever, the balm of Indigenous knowledge, wisdom, and ways of life. Being a part of a collective and responsible community is not only who we are, it is how we survive. We are humbled and honored to press ahead as our Ancestors always have.

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**About First Alaskans Institute (FAI):** *At FAI we know we are responsible for carrying more than 10,000 years of ancestral knowledge into the future with rigor, humor, resilience, vigilance, and love. To learn more visit our website at [www.firstalaskans.org](http://www.firstalaskans.org), contact us at 907-677-1700 or email [info@firstalaskans.org](mailto:info@firstalaskans.org).*