



**THE HARVARD PROJECT ON  
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John F. Kennedy School of Government • Harvard  
University

**HONORING NATIONS: 2010 HONOREE  
Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School  
All Indian Pueblo Council**

**Contact Info:**

Contact Information:

All Indian Pueblo Council

1501 Cerrillos Road

Santa Fe, NM 87505

Tel: 505-989-6303

Founded in 1997, the Leadership Institute at the Santa Fe Indian School aims to create a dynamic learning environment in which community members not only learn and teach, but are able to actively contribute to the success of their nations. Four themes guide the Institute's work: leadership, community service, public policy, and critical thinking. These themes are realized through the Institute's four programs: Community Institutes, a Summer Policy Academy, High School Symposia, and Enrichment Opportunities.

**The Need for Leadership Training**

The All Indian Pueblo Council (AIPC), organized in 1965, represents the nineteen pueblos in New Mexico and the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in Texas. Its mission is to preserve and protect the pueblos' collective interests through the social and economic advancement of all Pueblo Indians. Although each community is distinct, cultural and historical commonalities and shared contemporary experiences mean they have numerous shared concerns. The AIPC has long provided an organizational base for inter-pueblo collaboration and continues to lend support on various programming that nurtures community development.

Increasingly, AIPC and the pueblos also were concerned about their young people, including those who chose to take advantage of higher education opportunities far from home. While youth benefitted from academic knowledge and the chance to expand their horizons, leaving their communities put them at risk of losing connections to traditional culture. Tribal leaders noticed a tendency for young people to pursue job prospects elsewhere even though their skills were very much needed at home.

In Pueblo governance, traditional leadership is sometimes conferred by community appointment. This means that all Pueblo citizens need to be ready if and when they are chosen to serve. Readiness, however, does not simply come from wanting it to be so. Nations need to create opportunities for leadership experience and growth. For the pueblos, this meant finding a means to actively recognize, nurture, and bolster leadership expertise within their communities. By doing this, they could create a dynamic, supportive environment that would prepare a new generation for leadership and encourage youth, should they go away, to return and contribute to the life of the community.

**Finding Leadership from Within**

The Leadership Institute was established in 1999 as a way to hold public policy conversations about the challenges facing Pueblo nations. It is based at the Santa Fe Indian School, a former federal Indian boarding school now owned and administered by AIPC. The activities sponsored by the Institute are informed by the pueblos' core cultural values and their desire to developing homegrown solutions to the problems affecting their communities. An integral part of the Institute's mission is to educate its citizens about policy issues and encourage them to contribute — now and in the future — to the discourse.

Policy think-tank events, or Community Institutes, are one of the Leadership Institute's essential programs. These meetings are convened two or three times a year. Each event focuses on a specific topic of concern and brings together topic area experts and up to 40 tribal-citizen participants. The think-tank begins with in-depth introductions, storytelling, and a review of the effect of 100 years of federal Indian policy; only then does attention shift to a general topic presentation and breakout sessions focused on solutions. The gatherings end with participants' personal reflections on the contributions they each might make. The Community Institute publishes a "Grey Book" that describes the meeting and records policy recommendations that can guide future decision making.

Other programs of the Leadership Institute specifically target youth. The innovative Summer Policy Academy (SPA) offers a four-week session that exposes Pueblo students to leadership and public policy training. These high school juniors and seniors are introduced to tribal, state, national, and international issues by well-known faculty drawn from tribal communities, universities, and governments. One goal is to put participating students in the shoes of leaders by asking them to wrestle with the same issues tribal governments frequently face. The sessions also address specific topic areas relevant to Native American youth, such as Native history, life skills, personal and communal identity, careers, and traditional lifestyle choices. The SPA year two program is a partnership with Princeton University and is held at the Woodrow Wilson School. SPA year three places students in internships in their communities and surrounding areas. Year four of the program is in development and will serve as an international exchange for a select group of SPA graduates.

The Leadership Institute also facilitates community contributions through the Seniors Honors Project, where the entire senior class undertakes a one-year research project on a selected issue of importance to tribal communities. Seniors have worked on a wide variety of topics, including technology, language preservation, Indigenous peoples, global warming, Native American gangs, urban Native issues, and traditional agriculture. Funding for the Institute's programs comes mainly from the state of New Mexico, the school, the tribes, and specific grants.

### **Considering the Past and the Future**

The Leadership Institute provides a vitally needed place for Pueblo Indians to develop policy and leadership. Through the Community Institutes, community leaders are able to take a step back from the day-to-day business of governing and develop new perspectives on tough issues. Since the discussions are firmly grounded in core cultural values, guided by citizens' insights, and informed by experts in the field, resulting policy recommendations are built on strong, community appropriate foundations. Community members gain new tools and resources and have a means of moving beyond reactive policy to develop proactive strategies that make sense to their citizens and are consistent with their traditions.

A notable aspect of the Leadership Institute is the way in which culturally based methods and practices flow through all its programming. For example, in Pueblo culture, learning is

considered a shared responsibility, and everyone is expected to make a personal contribution. Likewise, in Community Institutes, all participants are expected to talk and listen, whether they are elders or youth, professionals or students, non-Native policy makers, or tribal leaders. The introductions at the beginning of the meeting are part of each participant's personal story and are considered essential to forming a cohesive group. In a similar way, the Summer Policy Academy takes a very broad view of leadership and seeks to assemble a group whose members bring diverse individual gifts to the program — gifts which may include academic excellence, traditional knowledge, singing, storytelling, or laughter. The faculty (many of whom are Community Institute participants) are seen as mentors, and the groups are designed to become a lifelong support cohort.

Fundamentally, the Leadership Institute serves tribal communities by helping them find ways to bridge traditional knowledge and modern realities. As one Community Institute participant explains, the Institute's activities are an invaluable resource to explore "the sacred and inherent responsibility of sustaining our Indigenous life ways, while drawing upon our western knowledge so that we are successful in generating a better quality of life for our people today and into the future." The Institute's programs help youth take the knowledge they gain in school and put it context with the history of their peoples. One faculty member of the Summer Policy Academy sums up the Institute's holistic view of its mission by noting what an honor it is for her to help nurture "rising generations of young tribal people who live meaningfully." Mentorship, networking, community service, and a feeling of personal responsibility have become pillars that form a foundation for community building.

### **Bringing the Lessons Home**

By fostering discussion on common issues, crafting culturally appropriate policy, and encouraging tribal citizens to help solve community problems, the Leadership Institute helps ensure that Pueblo futures are in Pueblo hands. The Leadership Institute's programs also help tribal youth manage the relationship between the two very different worlds in which they live. By combining engagement in contemporary policy challenges with engagement in history and culture, the Institute helps future leaders be true both to their responsibilities as Pueblo people and to the needs of the times.

### **Lessons**

**1** Local tribal policy forums can elevate issues on the tribal agenda, educate tribal citizens, and inspire emerging leaders.

**2** Tribal civics curricula help sustain Indigenous nationhood.

**3** Indigenous youth leadership development has individual and collective benefits — youth gain confidence and experience, and the nation gains culturally and politically astute citizens.

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79 John F. Kennedy Street • Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138  
telephone: (617) 495-1480 • facsimile: (617) 496-3900  
website: [www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied)