

Consultations with Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, Alaska Native Corporations, and the Native Hawaiian Community

For the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, the Department of the Interior (Department) conducted consultations with Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, Alaska Native Corporations, and the Native Hawaiian Community.

The Department announced the consultations through two Dear Tribal Leader Letters, dated September 28, 2021, and October 19, 2021. The Department held consultations on the following dates:

- November 17, 2021, Wednesday, 1-5pm EST.
- November 18, 2021, Thursday, 1-5pm EST.
- November 23, 2021, Tuesday, 1-5pm EST.

The Department officials who participated in the consultations included:

- Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior.
- Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary.
- Heidi Todacheene, Senior Advisor to the Secretary.
- Bryan Newland, Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs.
- Wizipan Garriott, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.
- Kathryn Isom-Clause, Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs for Policy and Economic Development.
- Joaquin R. Gallegos, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs.

Officials from the Department of Health and Human Services who participated in the consultations included:

- Elizabeth Fowler, Acting Deputy Director, Indian Health Service.
- Michelle Sauve, Acting Commissioner, Administration for Native Americans.
- Elizabeth Carr, Senior Advisor to the Director, Indian Health Service.
- Loretta Christensen, Chief Medical Officer, Indian Health Service.

The Department engaged approximately 707 participants during consultation sessions.

The Department provided the following topics for consultation participants to address in discussion or written comments:

1. Appropriate protocols on handling sensitive information in existing records;
2. Ways to address cultural concerns and handling of information generated from existing records or from potential sitework activities;
3. Potential repatriation of human remains, including cultural concerns and compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act;
4. Future policy and procedure implementation to protect burial sites, locations, confidential information, and culturally sensitive information;
5. Management of sites of former boarding schools;
6. Privacy issues or cultural concerns to be identified as part of the Initiative; and
7. Other issues the Department should address in its review.

The Department received and analyzed approximately 68 written comments on the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative. Main consultation themes included, but were not limited to, the following:

Involvement of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, Alaska Native Corporations, and the Native Hawaiian Community

The Department received comments advising that it involve Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, Alaska Native Corporations, and the Native Hawaiian Community throughout the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, including planning, implementation, and future site work. The Department also received comments describing the value and endangered nature of Indian boarding school attendees' first-hand experiences and Tribal experts on the Federal Indian boarding school system. The Department received additional comments supporting (1) overall and site-specific Tribal consultation, (2) Tribal involvement in Indian boarding school site management during review processes, (3) long-term accessibility of information derived from the investigation, and (4) inclusion of Tribal perspectives in presenting investigation findings.

Handling Sensitive Information

The Department received comments spotlighting Tribal priorities to secure sensitive information obtained from existing records and at school locations, including marked and unmarked burial sites, to develop protocols to access Federal Indian boarding school system information, and to protect sensitive information from Freedom of Information Act requests and other disclosures, including Tribal communications regarding Federal Indian boarding schools to prevent grave-robbing, vandalism, and other disturbances to Indian burial sites. The Department also received comments supporting mechanisms to access sensitive information not in control of the Federal Government, including those under State, local, religious, institutional, or organizational control.

Protecting Marked and Unmarked Burial Sites

The Department received comments requesting Federal protection of cemeteries and marked and unmarked burial sites including location information, use of physical barriers like fencing or security to prevent looting, vandalism, or other disrespectful activities; site maintenance including landscaping and cleaning; and preserving or installing gravestones, memorials, or markers. The Department also received comments addressing the need for Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community to maintain access to Federal Indian boarding school burial sites to conduct religious activities and ceremonies including for known and unknown human remains.

Human Remains and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)

The Department received comments describing concerns for the handling of remains of any Federal Indian boarding school attendees that may be discovered and the need for broad policies for Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community to honor, mourn, and care for any discovered remains, including options to repatriate or disinter and leave human remains buried at their current location depending on Tribal protocol. The Department received comments supporting renewed guidance on NAGPRA applicability to human remains discovered at various marked and unmarked burial sites, including enforcement. The Department also received comments advancing broad interpretation and application of the NAGPRA, Archeological Resources Protection Act, and National Historic Preservation Act, and revising laws as needed to promote maximum protection for Federal Indian boarding school sites and marked and unmarked burial sites.

Cultural Differences Among Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community

The Department received comments specifying that there is variance in cultural beliefs, protocols, and preferences across Indian Country regarding repatriation or disinterment. The Department also received comments supporting departmental recognition of those differences in decision-making and policymaking throughout the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, including for future site work.

Identifying Human Remains

The Department received comments affirming the priority to determine the identities of Federal Indian boarding school attendees, including names and Tribal affiliations, including for those interred at marked or unmarked burial sites, and the locations of marked and unmarked burial sites, and the need to communicate with and notify Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, Alaska Native Corporations, and the Native Hawaiian Community of any relevant findings. The Department also received comments encouraging collaboration with archivists and other officials across Indian Country and the Native Hawaiian Community that have performed prior identification work of Federal Indian boarding school attendees and marked and unmarked burial sites. The Department received additional comments recommending departmental support for funding and deployment of ground-penetrating radar at sites across the Federal Indian boarding school system.

Involvement of External Experts

The Department received comments supporting departmental use of outside experts or contractors in achieving the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, including for data analysis, and Tribal inclusion in selecting any experts. The Department also received comments supporting congressional endorsement and departmental creation of a representative advisory group of Tribal experts, like the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans that supports the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Scope

The Department received comments supporting additional Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative actions past the initial reporting stage, requesting an accounting of Indian lands, including those established under Indian treaties, annuities, and allotments used to support Federal Indian boarding schools, suggesting the investigation (1) expand the definition of “Federal Indian boarding school” to examine Indian boarding schools beyond those under Federal control, operation, or support; (2) evaluate Indian day schools, as the pre-cursor Indian education institutions to Indian boarding schools; and (3) contemplate Federal Indian boarding schools that impacted Indian Tribes not federally recognized. The Department also received comments affirming the priority to review boarding schools that impacted Native Hawaiians in the Initiative’s scope of review.

The Department received additional comments suggesting the investigation consider any positive impacts of the Federal Indian boarding school system and distinguish between historical Federal Indian boarding schools and current schools under the Bureau of Indian Education, including off-reservation boarding schools, many of which provide high-quality, culturally relevant education to American Indian and Alaska Native students.

Other comments covering the scope of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative include the need to plan for engaging non-Federal entities that founded, operated, or currently control sites of other Indian boarding schools and promoting Federal and Tribal access to relevant documents and information, including those related to the identities of attendees and possible marked and unmarked burial sites, and the need to protect and preserve Indian boarding school sites, including structures. The Department also received comments supporting exploration of Tribal co-management of Federal Indian boarding school sites currently on Federal lands.

The Department also received comments supporting assessment of the impacts of the Federal Indian boarding school system, including associated laws and policies on surviving attendees, descendants, and Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, Alaska Native Corporations, and the Native Hawaiian Community and engaging relevant sister agencies in any assessment, including the Department of Defense, as the successor agency to the Department of War, and Department of Health and Human Services. The Department received comments supporting increased funding and programming for revitalization of Indian languages.

Actions Outside the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative

The Department also received comments covering actions outside, but related to, the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Support for a Federal apology for the Federal Indian boarding school system;
- Support for increased congressional funding for the Indian Health Service to increase mental and physical health care, including for a national hotline for Indian boarding school attendees and their families;
- Support for protection, reclamation, and co-management of Indian boarding school sites not currently on Federal or Tribal lands for preservation and education;
- Support for congressional legislation covering Federal and non-Federal Indian boarding school systems and for the Department to support that legislation if Congress requests for the Department to provide its views;
- Support for other Federal agency research into the Federal Indian boarding school system;
- Support for funding sources for Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and the Native Hawaiian Community for identification and repatriation or disinterment of human remains at marked and unmarked burial sites associated with Federal Indian boarding schools;
- Support for developing a healing model for Indian boarding school attendees;
- Support for increased funding for Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and associated staff to address Indian boarding schools;
- Support for further Tribal consultation on public preservation efforts of Federal Indian boarding school sites; and
- Support to examine First Nation, Inuit, and Métis attendees at U.S. Federal Indian boarding schools along the northern U.S. border.

Consultation Participant Views

“[T]he real truth of [federal Indian] boarding schools is not in the archives. It’s in Indian families. It’s in the stories of survivors.”

– Veronica Pasfield, Bay Mills Indian Community.¹

“Indigenous populations have lived through these horrific life tragedies, which then replay endlessly through the generations in cycles of substance abuse, addictions, generational disparities, chronic illnesses, violence, self-hatred, survivor’s guilt, cultural dissociation and unremitting grief.”

– J.C. Seneca, Seneca Nation of Indians.²

“I was born in 1949, and my whole family, from great-grandparents, all the way through my family to my son, have gone to the boarding schools ... [M]y parents were young parents in their 20s and had just come out of the boarding school, where they had been in the [19]30s and [19]40s ... [M]y mother had been put there at five years old, and she didn’t leave until she graduated. So, she didn’t really know how to be a mom or didn’t really know how to [be] ... a loving mom ... And neither did my dad. One thing they did learn while they were there [is] ... how to discipline and they learned what alcohol was, so ... growing up ... there was a lot of violence, a lot of alcoholism. And that wasn’t just in our home, it was throughout the [Indian] reservation ... We grew up and became alcoholics. So, now, we do have post-traumatic stress disorder. We’ve got all of the things that come from the boarding schools ... Why aren’t more people who’ve had to live through this, why are we not being talked to? Why are we not talking about it?”

– Andrea Big Goose, Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California.³

“[O]ral punishment had a longer impact on me than the physical punishment ... What hurt me the most was the tone of the voices my punishers used when I was disciplined for speaking Yup’ik in class ... This loss [of language] led to the loss of understanding oral traditions of our people. These oral traditions were part of the foundations of the Alaska Native societies. This may never be revived again among some of the Alaska Natives, for

¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 17, 2021, p. 66, lines 17-20.

² U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, Written Comment, December 23, 2021.

³ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 18, 2021, pp. 91-93, lines 21-10.

example, the Eyak people of Southcentral Alaska as the last Eyak speaker died several years ago. Loss of languages also led to the [loss of] traditional means of raising children among some of the Alaska Native societies. That loss also [led] to the loss of knowing what plants are edible and can be used for medicine as well. How will these losses be revived?”

– Nelson N. Angapak, Sr., Native Village of Tuntutuliak.⁴

“What they took from us from the intellect was a way of life, a way of medicines, a way of subsistence, a way of looking at our environment, looking at our universe ... we had our spirituality taken away in a very, very different concept of what they call religion was enforced upon us. And then even our physical way of life was changed. We had a whole different subsistence pattern[] ... no longer our way of hunt ... instead changed to flour. And then our emotions became different. Now, we knew what sadness was. Our children know what loneliness is, what sadness is. And now we know what anger is.”

– Ione Quigley, Rosebud Sioux Tribe.⁵

“We can start ... the healing ... for our people. I’m really excited about this report, so that we can get a written record of what transpired to our people ... [W]e have a very [telling] perspective about what it took to bring back our children ... The burden of NAGPRA and ... repatriation is ... always put on the Tribe to basically determine ... these human remains of ancestors belonged to us.”

– Jordan Dresser, Chairman, Northern Arapaho Tribe.⁶

⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, Written Comment, December 20, 2021.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 23, 2021, p.57, lines 2-19.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 23, 2021, p. 26, lines 7-10, p. 27, lines 2-8.

“My father was one of the boys that was walking down the dirt road picked up by the Indian police and a week later found [him]self[] 800 miles away in a boarding school ... And here on [the] Wind River Indian Reservation, we have a boarding school ... where a lot of students went ... [F]rom that time period ... there was death. It’s the same old story that we keep looking for our records and the trauma that comes with just having them say, ‘[Y]our relatives attended school here, but you know what, she never made it home’ ... [I]t’s so personal and that hits you and it’s so emotional.”

– John Washakie, Co-Chair, Eastern Shoshone Tribe.⁷

“Prior to 1936, many ... students were taken from their families involuntarily. Students were indoctrinated in non-Indigenous ways of learning, speaking, and thinking. Intense instructional and disciplinary regimes sought to exterminate languages and lifeways to make children into domestics, workers, and consumers for the benefit of non-Indigenous society ... [R]egarding unmarked graves and missing children ... throughout Indian Country ... [t]hey are [the] heritage of our Creator ... [T]hese comments sum up the request for national-scale thinking and planning to be balanced with local investments and capacity expansion, consultations, investigations, and partnerships directed toward reconciliation.”

– Gwendena Lee-Gatewood, Chairwoman, White Mountain Apache Tribe.⁸

“We are all survivors of what we call residential schools ... My grandparents were sent to residential schools ... My grandfather ... worked in the barns. And he worked with the cows and the pigs and the chickens and the turkeys, and he never remembered ever eating except from the scraps from the table of the nuns and the priests.”

– Ronald LaFrance, Tribal Chief, Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe.⁹

“I believe that the assimilation process broke our people, destroyed [our] hoop, or circle of life. The future generations will try to heal the circle, heal the people, and heal the future generations to ensure love, survival, and the healing of our people.”

– Lisa Skippergosh-Young, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians.¹⁰

⁷ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 23, 2021, p. 69, lines 17-22, p. 70, lines 1-4, p. 71, lines 13-19.

⁸ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 17, 2021, p. 69, lines 17-22, p. 70, lines 1-2, p. 74, line 2, 18-22, p. 75, lines 5-9.

⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 17, 2021, p. 42, lines 1-2, 10-16.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, Written Comment, December 10, 2021.

“How can the Department of [the] Interior ... work ... with [the] Department of Education, so that the schools can start honoring our history and acknowledging this history because it does help in our healing as a people and as a nation ... We need healing. We need our elders.”

– Valeria Big Eagle, Yankton Sioux Tribe.¹¹

“This process is about the people in pain and Tribal Nations.”

– Charles Monty Roessel, President, Dine College, Navajo Nation.¹²

¹¹ U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 23, 2021, p. 78, lines 11-16, p. 79, line 18.

¹² U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Boarding School Initiative Tribal Consultation, November 23, 2021, p. 125, lines 5-9.