

Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aaniih & Nakoda

Decolonizing Is the Justice in Data Justice

Indigenous Values, Living Knowledge, and the Futures We Are Building

Kelly Gonzales, PhD, MPH

3rd Annual State of Oregon Data Equity Summit

2026

INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUITY INSTITUTE

We will move through four parts:

1. The origins of IHEI
2. How colonialism shapes public health &data
3. Ways to recognize and address it in our work
4. Indigenous resurgence & community building already underway.

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REFLECTION QUESTION

What Does Justice Ask of Us?

Justice invites us to look beyond our intentions and consider how our work transforms systems, addresses colonial conditions, and contributes to the futures we share.



Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aaniih & Nakoda

Throughout, I ask you to consider:

What does justice mean in the work you do, and does it address the colonial conditions affecting Indigenous health and futures?

And how might this be important to the futures of all of us?

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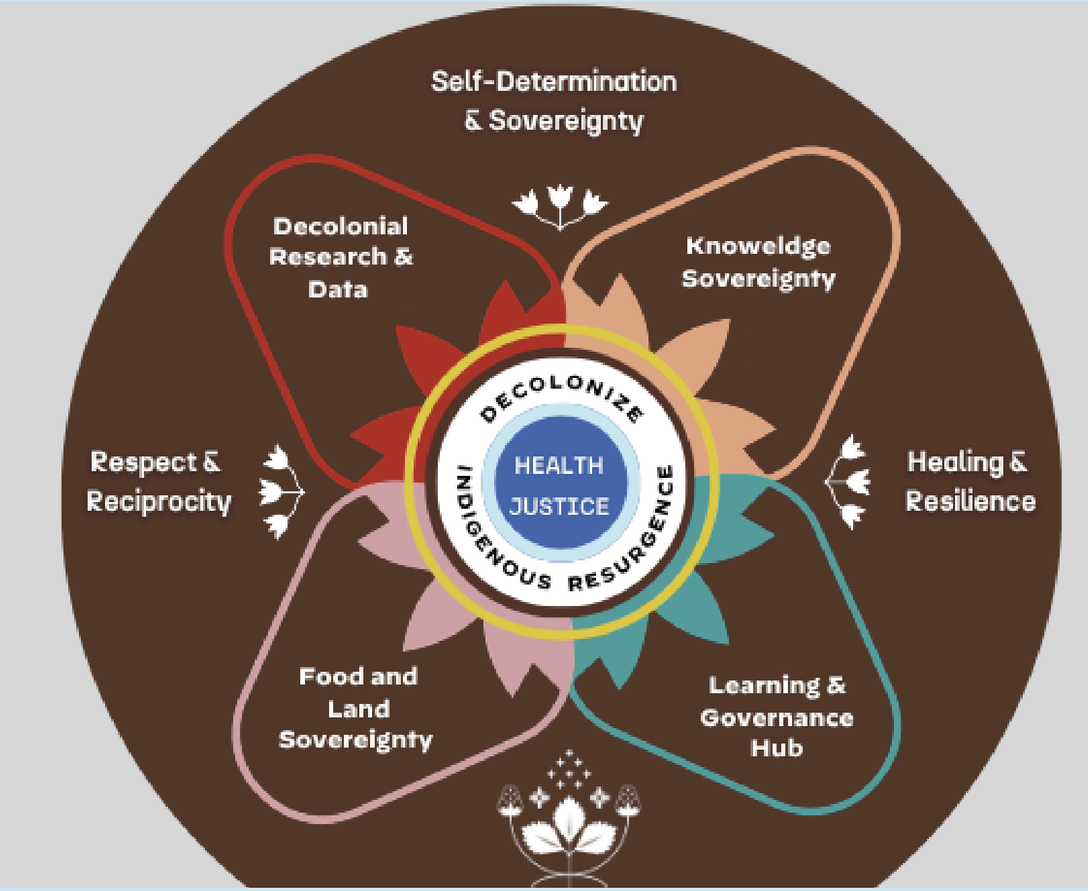
INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUITY INSTITUTE

Mission

Dedicated to advancing Health Justice using the power of Indigenous values, science, and wisdom.

Vision

Generations of thriving Indigenous peoples whose health and well-being are an expression of their culture, prosperity, and liberation.



Rooted in Relationship, Guided by Resurgence

Partnered with practitioners, leaders and public health institutions across the state and beyond.

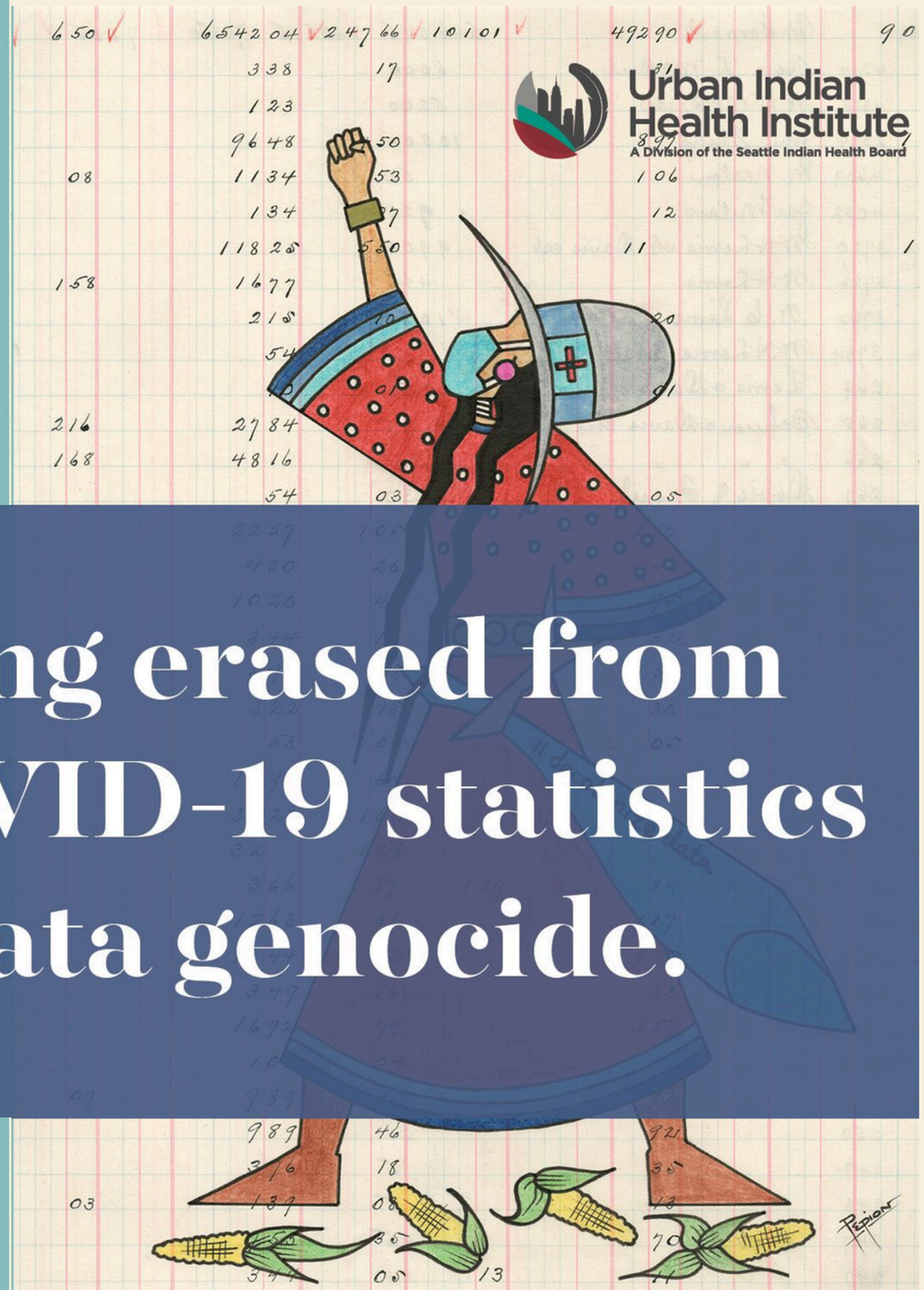
Offer training, research, evaluation, and technical assistance to advance decolonizing in public health

Build tools, resources, and methodologies rooted in Indigenous science

Create space to hold and grow this work and its governance

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Report Findings:

To understand the impact of COVID-19 on Native communities, we need states to collect and report accurate data.

"Health equity will not be achieved until public health surveillance systems properly collect and report race and ethnicity."

- Abigail Echo-Hawk,
  Director, Urban Indian Health Institute

UIHI Report: https://www.uihi.org/projects/data-genocide-of-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-in-covid-19-data/

DATA GENOCIDE OF AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES IN COVID-19 DATA



https://www.uihi.org/projects/data-genocide-of-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-in-covid-19-data/#covid-19-data-report-card

D+

The United States Overall Grade

F

The State of Oregon Overall Grade

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On unceded Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya & Molalla territory | Portland, Oregon

UIHI Report: https://www.uihi.org/projects/data-genocide-of-american-indians-and-alaska-natives-in-covid-19-data/

The Urban Indian Health Institute also reminds us that research, data, and evaluation are Indigenous values.

Our peoples have always observed, learned, and shared knowledge through relationships.

We strive to build from those strengths.

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REFLECTION QUESTION

What Does Decolonizing Require of Us?

A group of community members and colleagues gathered at my kitchen table and met online to dream IHEI and curriculum.



We asked:

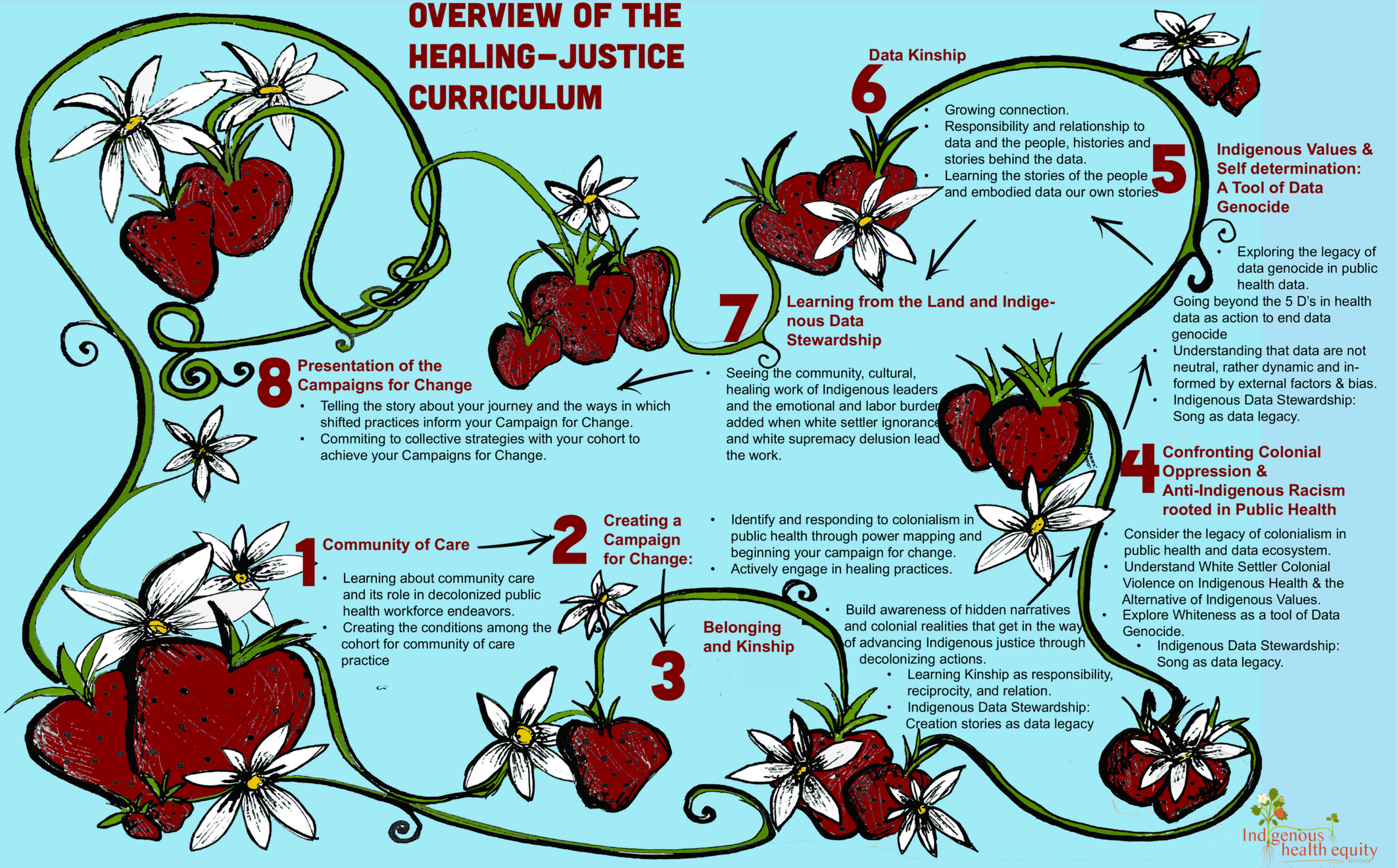
What is decolonizing asking of us?

How do we help people understand it?

How will we know whether their learning changes their work?

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OVERVIEW OF THE HEALING-JUSTICE CURRICULUM



1 Community of Care

- Learning about community care and its role in decolonized public health workforce endeavors.
- Creating the conditions among the cohort for community of care practice

2 Creating a Campaign for Change:

- Identify and responding to colonialism in public health through power mapping and beginning your campaign for change.
- Actively engage in healing practices.

3 Belonging and Kinship

- Build awareness of hidden narratives and colonial realities that get in the way of advancing Indigenous justice through decolonizing actions.
- Learning Kinship as responsibility, reciprocity, and relation.
- Indigenous Data Stewardship: Creation stories as data legacy

4 Confronting Colonial Oppression & Anti-Indigenous Racism rooted in Public Health

- Consider the legacy of colonialism in public health and data ecosystem.
- Understand White Settler Colonial Violence on Indigenous Health & the Alternative of Indigenous Values.
- Explore Whiteness as a tool of Data Genocide.
- Indigenous Data Stewardship: Song as data legacy.

5 Indigenous Values & Self determination: A Tool of Data Genocide

- Exploring the legacy of data genocide in public health data.

Going beyond the 5 D's in health data as action to end data genocide

- Understanding that data are not neutral, rather dynamic and informed by external factors & bias.
- Indigenous Data Stewardship: Song as data legacy.

6 Data Kinship

- Growing connection.
- Responsibility and relationship to data and the people, histories and stories behind the data.
- Learning the stories of the people and embodied data our own stories

7 Learning from the Land and Indigenous Data Stewardship

- Seeing the community, cultural, healing work of Indigenous leaders and the emotional and labor burden added when white settler ignorance and white supremacy delusion lead the work.

8 Presentation of the Campaigns for Change

- Telling the story about your journey and the ways in which shifted practices inform your Campaign for Change.
- Commiting to collective strategies with your cohort to achieve your Campaigns for Change.

Indigenous health equity institute

Workforce Training on Decolonizing Data

We knew the risk: people might learn something without changing the practices that harmed us.

- We wanted the learning to reach into their decisions and daily work for change.
- We trained staff for four counties, OHA, & Division Directors
- Continued through a Community of Practice
- These relationships helped guide our next steps, including our continued work with Washington County

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m7iM0sLPdkaGo8CtIRFZ80TaRnSRqVCb/view?usp=drive_link

A Focus on the Origins, Implementation, and Impacts on Cultivating a Decolonizing Data & Health Justice Workforce

Combined Annual Report 2023-2025



Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aanjih & Nakoda

INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUITY INSTITUTE

Grounding into what is beautiful:

"Our work is fueled by the dreams inspired into us by our ancestors."

-Indigenous Health Equity Institute

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/

Our ancestors were world builders. They carried knowledge and ways of caring through some of the harshest conditions of colonization. They protected possibilities for lives they would never live and generations they would never meet.

We descend from those people. We carry their knowledge, love, and strength into what we build today. We can honor them by becoming world builders too.

We are also world builders: growing the conditions for our people, our knowledge, and our children's children to thrive using the tools of Indigenous research, data, and governance

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Reconnecting Land, Knowledge, and Community

IHEI Healing Science Initiative



There is no ready-made recipe.

We reconnect, nourish, build, and heal together.

REFLECTION QUESTION

The Medicine of passing knowledge from one generation to the next

The practices and teachings remind us that we are part of a network of threaded relatioships



- Reciprocity - The heart-berry teaches, and we receive care and we carry a responsibility to care in return.
- The values of the relationship help us practice our values in how we live, learn, and care for all our relations.
- These relations sustain and thrive life.
- They are also part of what we mean by health.

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Embedding Decolonizing into Data Work is What Makes it. That means ending systems and practices that undermine Indigenous knowledge and life systems.

Equity is not possible when we leave the roots of oppression in place.

We are building: ways for data to support the knowledge and life already growing in our community.

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REFLECTION QUESTION

What Does Our Work Reveal? And What Might It Be Missing?

These questions invite us to examine our own decolonizing praxis, recognize the colonial conditions shaping our work, and consider whether our data honors the knowledge, relationships, and healing carried by Indigenous peoples.



So I want you to consider these questions:

What is your relationship to the words colonialism and settler colonialism?

Can you recognize how they shape public health, data, and your own work?

What is your decolonizing praxis? What are you doing to address those conditions?

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CONSIDER

If your data could tell a story or sing a song, would you hear the heart of the people represented?

Would you learn about their knowledge, their relationships, and the medicines in their values, ways of life, and science? Would you understand what helps that knowledge live and move into the next generation? Would you also learn something about yourself?

Or would you hear only about what is wrong, without understanding what caused the harm or what our people carry to heal it?

If you cannot answer these questions yet, what might your work be missing? Who could be harmed by what remains unseen?

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Our responsibility is to understand what our data practices are doing to support Indigenous peoples' power to guide what grows next

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REFLECTION QUESTION

From Learning to Practice: Measuring Indigenous Self-Determination

Justice invites us to look beyond our intentions and consider how our work transforms systems, addresses colonial conditions, and contributes to the futures we share.



Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aaniih & Nakoda

They also raise another question:

How do we know whether our efforts are addressing colonial harm and strengthening Indigenous self-determination?

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RESPONDING

At IHEI, we developed the Self-Determination Tool and Framework to help us examine that question.

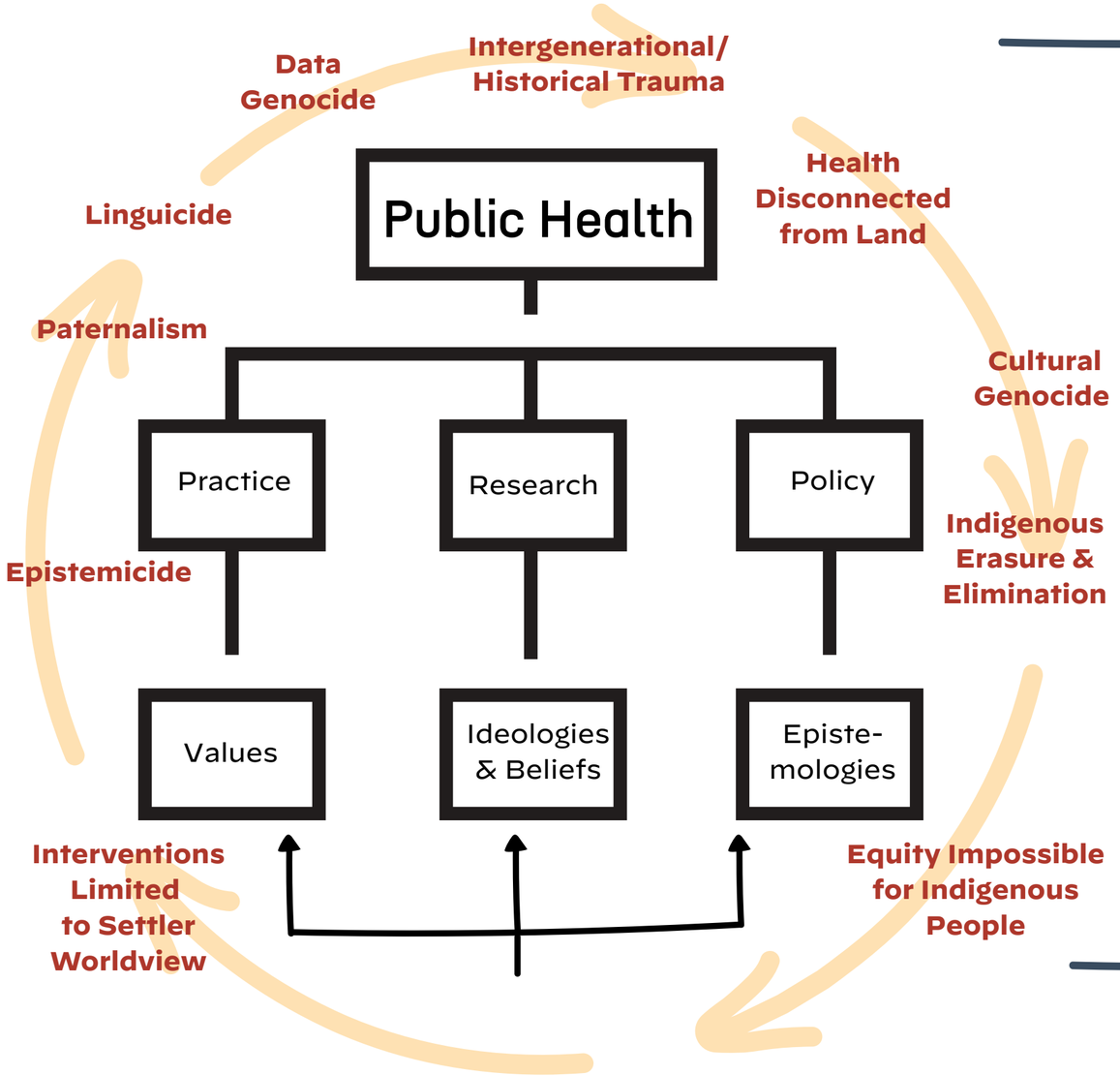
This work draws from earlier scholarship with my colleague Dr. Michelle Jacob at the Universtiy of Oregon and citizen of the Yakama Nation. And grew through community input and the learning that continued in our Community of Practice.

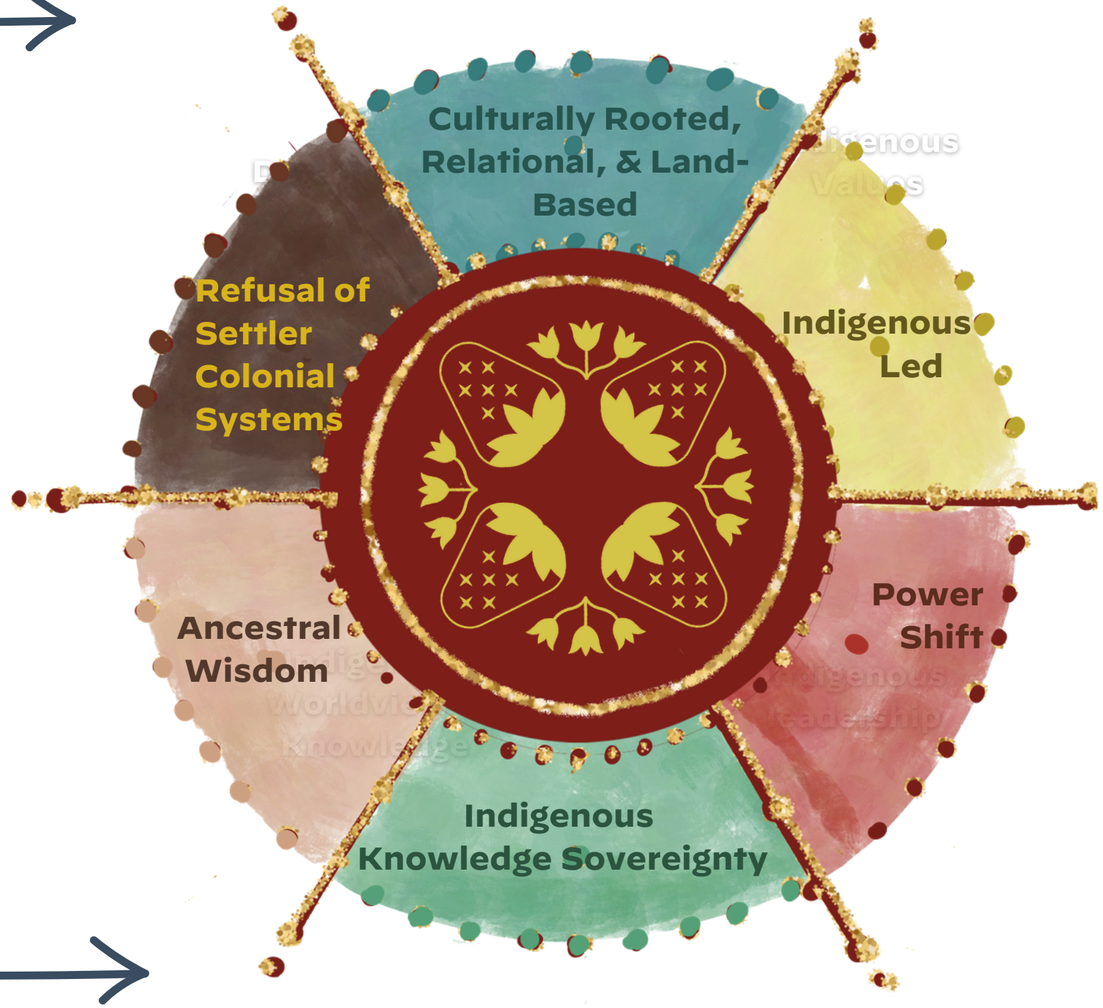
As people worked to apply what they learned in the Decolonizing Data Academy, we needed ways to examine what was changing, and what remained in place.

The framework offers principles to guide that examination. The assessment modules help people look at how those principles show up in policy, programs, and data practices.

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Shifting Paradigms of Public Health for Health & Data Justice





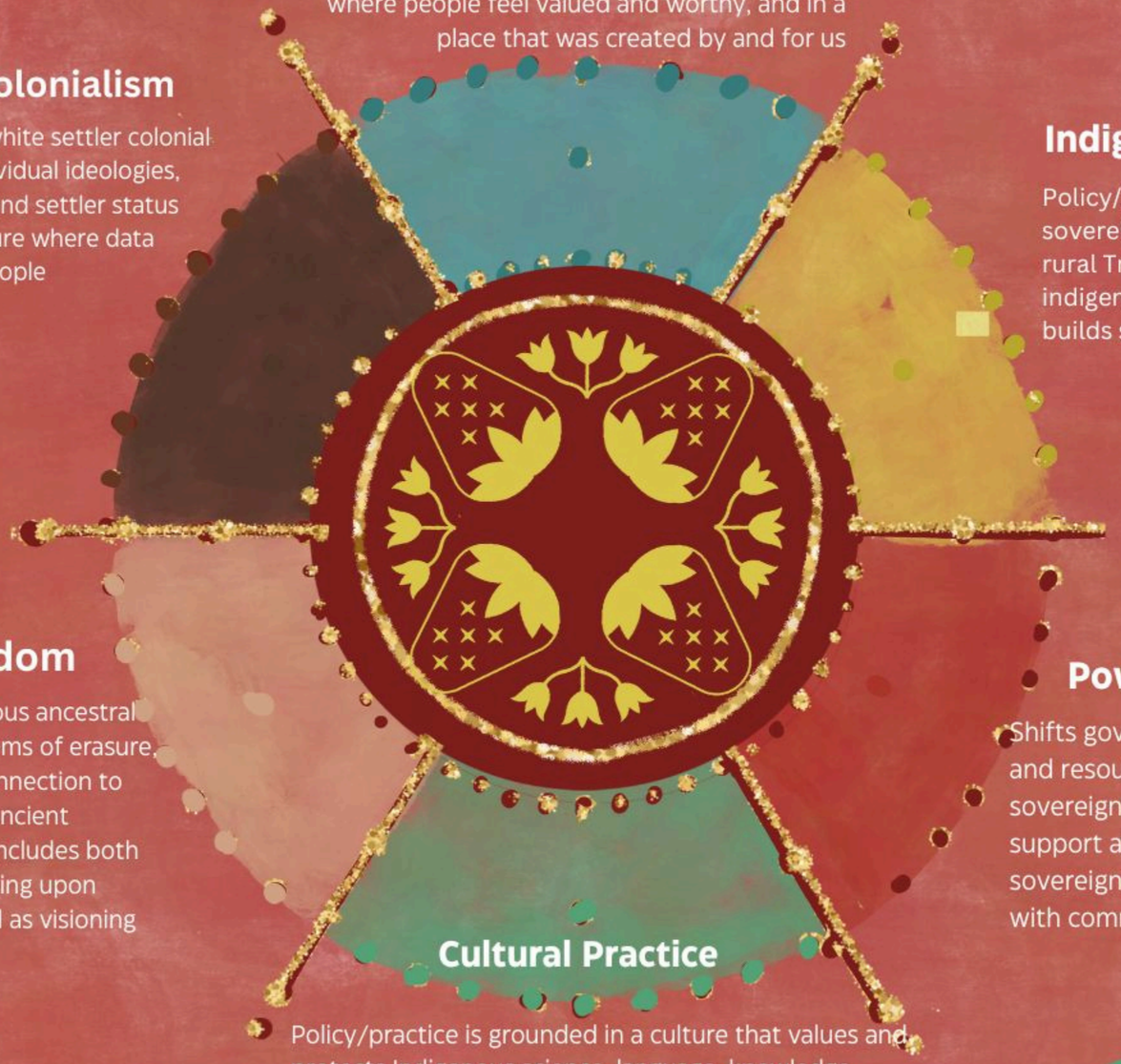
Decolonizing & Indigenous Self-Determination Framework

Cultural Affirming

Policy/practice ensures culturally affirming spaces where people feel valued and worthy, and in a place that was created by and for us

Disruption of White Settler Colonialism

Policy / practice names white settler colonial processes, practices, individual ideologies, and assimilation tactics, and settler status quo is replaced by a culture where data belongs to Indigenous people



Indigenous Led

Policy/practice follows the sovereign interests of urban and rural Tribal nations, recognizes indigenous ownership of data, and builds shared responsibility

Ancestral Wisdom

Values prioritize Indigenous ancestral wisdom, eliminates systems of erasure, and strives to restore connection to our active and evolving ancient knowledge source. This includes both acknowledging and growing upon histories of harms as well as visioning for future generations.

Power shift

Shifts governance, structural power, and resources to communities and sovereign Indigenous nations to support all ways of exercising sovereignty, and replaces over-policing with community-centered governance

Cultural Practice

Policy/practice is grounded in a culture that values and protects Indigenous science, language, knowledge, Mother Earth, and uplifts time and relationship building as a core foundation

Consider the scenario:

Imagine a health agency is preparing a report.

The agency wants to know how many people use a service. Community members want to understand why families cannot reach that service.

Who can change the question?

If the community's question matters, the agency may need to change the budget, the timeline, or who is involved. It may need to pay community members to help interpret what is learned.

Later, when the report is ready, the same responsibilities continue. Who can challenge an interpretation? Who can identify a finding that could cause harm? Who decides what is appropriate to share?

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/

Data Governance: Putting Decolonizing into Practice

Embedding Indigenous self-determination into the rules, relationships, resources, and decisions that shape how data is gathered, interpreted, shared, and used.



Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aaniih & Nakoda

Governance means the rules, roles, and responsibilities that guide decisions about data: who sets its purpose, who gives permission, who interprets it, who shares it, and who can require a change.

Agreements can make those decisions clear. Budgets can support the people and time needed to carry them out. There must also be a way to respond when an agreement is not honored.

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REFLECTION QUESTION

Whose Priorities Guide Your Work?

Consider one activity in your own work and reflect on who shapes its decisions, whose priorities are honored, and what your organization might need to change to uphold Indigenous self-determination.



Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aaniih & Nakoda

Think of one activity within your own work. It might be a survey, a program, a funding decision, or a report.

Whose priorities guide it?

What could the people affected actually change?

What would your organization need to do differently to uphold their decisions?

Keep that example with you.

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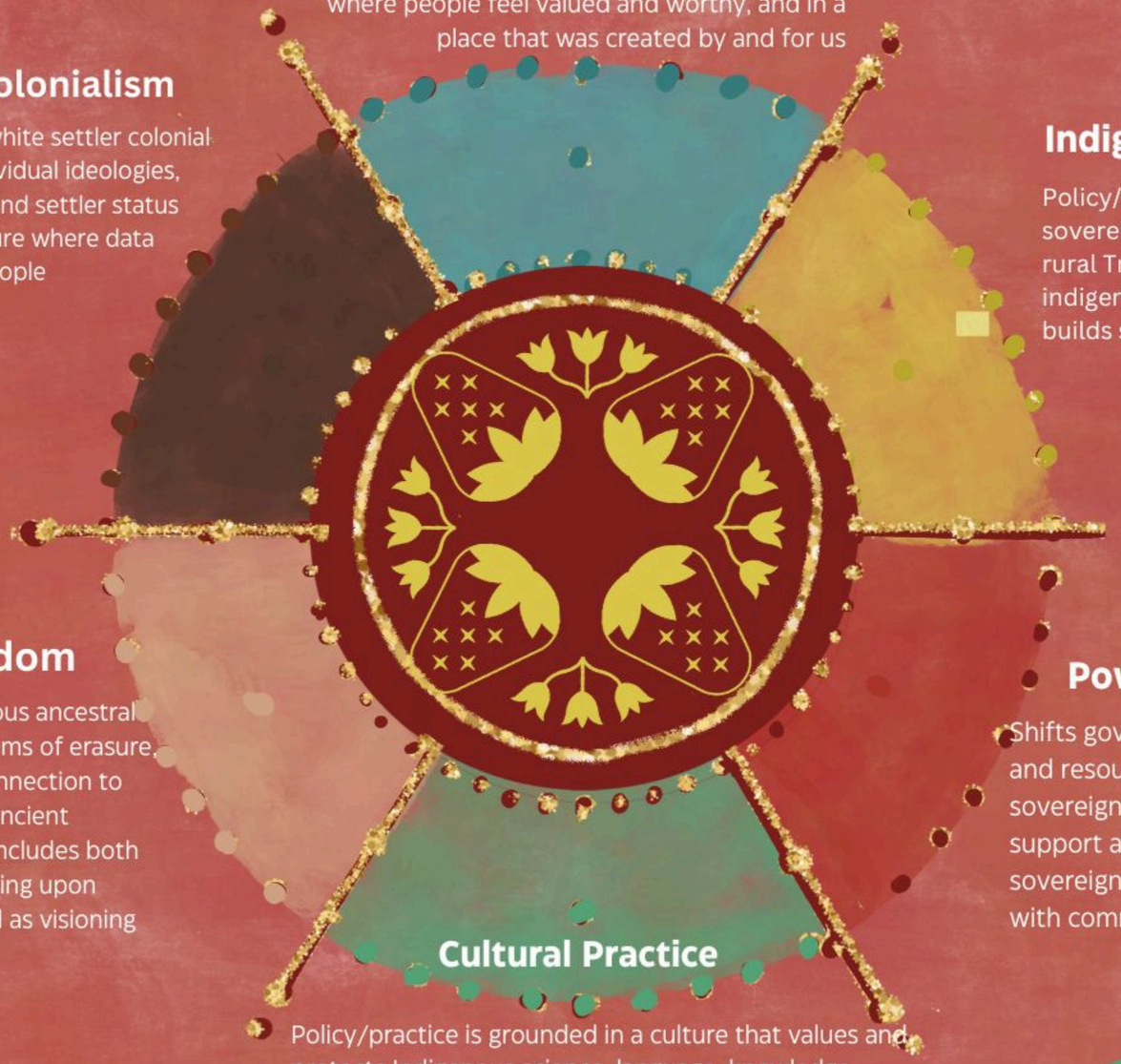
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Growing Food, Nourishing Community, & Caring for Each Other Through COVID-19



Northwest Indigenous Food Sovereignty Alliance (NIFSA)

Growing Collective Power Through Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Founded in 2022, coordinated by Jennie Brixey (Choctaw) of Multnomah County, NIFSA brings together over 100 Indigenous growers, gatherers, land tenders, cultural practitioners, knowledge holders, and community advocates to strengthen Indigenous food sovereignty across the Pacific Northwest.

- Restoring Indigenous Foodways: Protecting and renewing relationships with land, water, traditional foods, and medicines.

- Strengthening Community Connections: Sharing knowledge, resources, and opportunities through collaboration, reciprocity, and collective care.

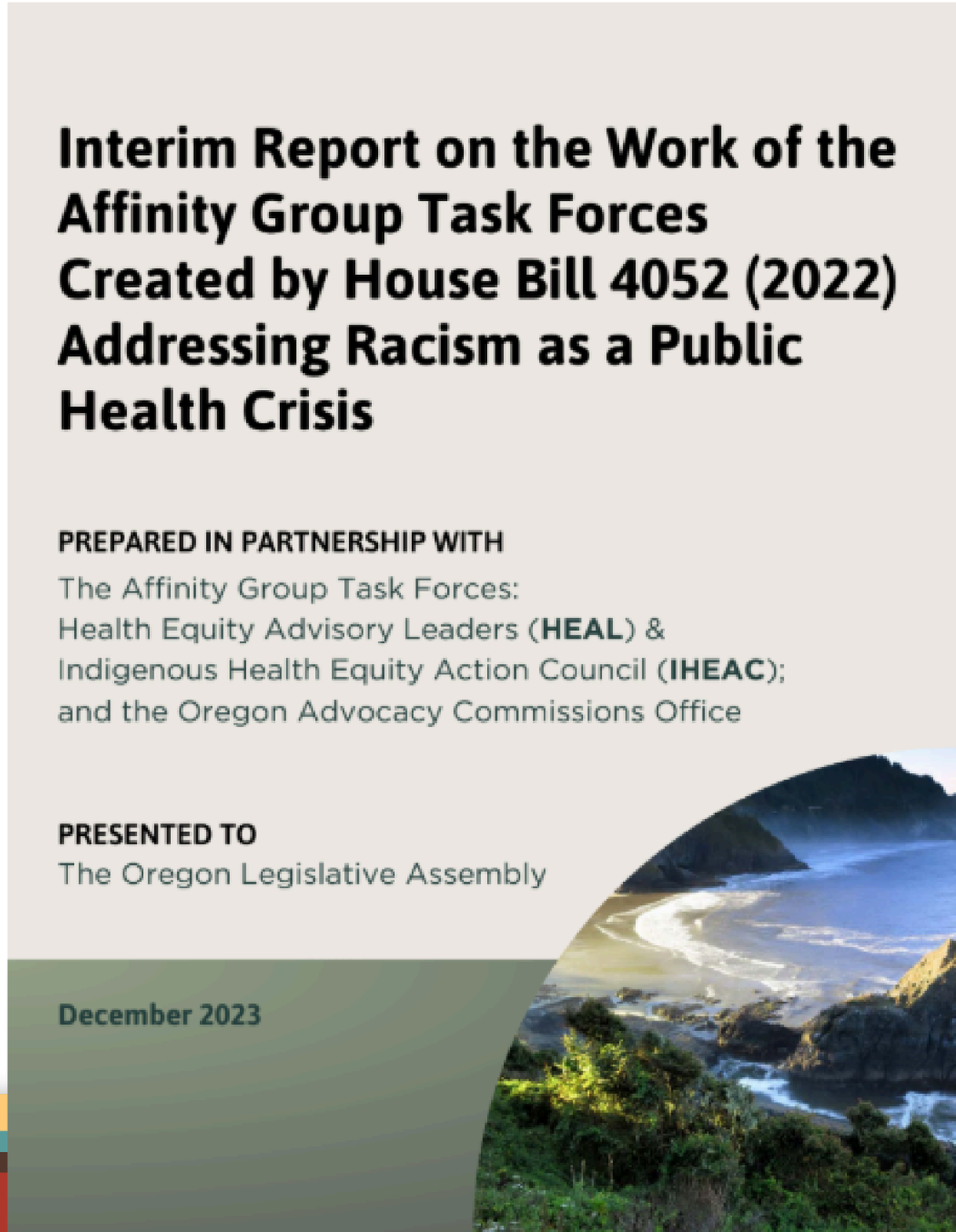
- Advancing Indigenous Self-Determination: Building community power to shape food systems, protect cultural knowledge, and support future generations.

Food sovereignty and data justice belong together

Recommendaions

- •HB 4052 recommendations name colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism
- •Invest in food sovereignty and stronger self-determination
- •Replace data systems that erase our peoples and knowledge

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/oregon-hb-4052-interim-report-2023



The Summit: Together Growing in Our Strengths

September 2026

Nearly 250 people gathered in September 2026
Hands-on learning, shared meals, and Indigenous food producers
The gathering made an existing movement visible to itself



Resource: https://magiccanoe.org/portland-oregon-indigenous-food-summit/

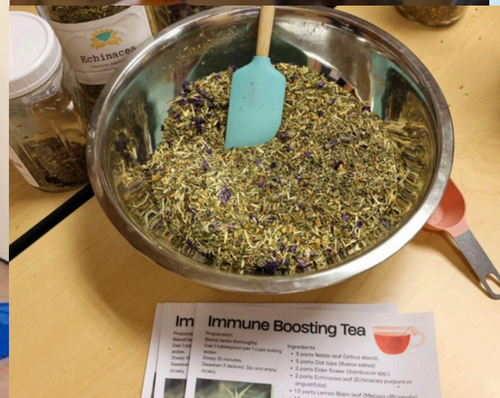
As Nora Frank-Buckner reminded us in her welcome, the gathering was

“not simply talking about the connected food systems, it’s about practicing one.”









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Indigenous Food Sovereignty Summit Survey by IHEI

September 9-10, 2026

Please share a response to the following statements about Land & Food:

Land is health because…	***I know the land heals because…***	***Hearing stories and sharing stories about food ways heals because…***
		I feel… I see… I am… I remember…

Please share a response to following statements about the Food Summit:

KNOWLEDGE: ***Something I learned or remembered…***	**RELATIONSHIPS:** ***Someone, something, or a resource I connected with…***	**NEXT SEEDS:** ***Something I hope grows from this gathering…***

What can NIFSA do for you to support your engagement with Food Sovereignty?

Indigenous Storying as Methodology

Indigenous Storying honors stories as living knowledge, centering relationships, cultural wisdom, and community-led meaning-making throughout the research and evaluation process.

- Indigenous values and knowledge shape the questions
- Stories carry teachings, memory, and understandings of health
- Listen, interpret, and report in relationship

2026 Food Summit Evaluation Report

Prepared by IHEI in Partnership with NIFSA

- These responses tell us what people experienced and valued, and what they hope will grow. Following that growth over time is part of the work ahead.
- This is where data and reporting can serve community building. We can listen to what people say matters, reflect it back, and use it to guide what we grow next.
- The Summit also helped make an existing movement visible to itself. People could see how their individual efforts connected across a wider network—and begin imagining what they could build together.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Gq7GqULJVu5dtsJRk0AZpLfcIjWWlQ82/view?usp=sharing



Mapping & Data Resource

Community-governed • Place-based • Dynamic • In service of Indigenous resurgence

Origin Story

Shares how Indigenous communities in the Portland metro area responded to COVID-19 through a new generation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Community Care. Weaves ancestral knowledges and values and shows Indigenous resurgence is real.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty Profiles

Maps and connects Indigenous growers, stewards, cultural practitioners, organizations, resources, and opportunities to support and engage. Strengthens relationships, coordination, and visibility across the community.

Health & Wellness Impacts of Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Documents and shares community-defined indicators and evidence of how food sovereignty supports health, healing, community care, and relationships with land, and self-determination.

Northwest Indigenous Food Sovereignty Alliance Season Rounds

Allows NIFSA to track, report, and share its activities throughout the year, aligned with its Charter, Theory of Change, and Seasonal Rounds. Supports future planning, coordination, funding, and sustainability.

This is decolonizing embedded into data justice:

For public health, how your work will recognize and support what is already growing and what you are prepared to change so it can thrive

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/

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IHEI Healing Science Initiative



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REFLECTION QUESTION

From Reflection to Action: What Will You Change?

Turning intention into meaningful change requires shared responsibility, concrete commitments, and accountability to the communities our work is meant to serve.



Think of one decision coming up in your work.

Whose knowledge will guide it? What will the people affected have the power to decide? What might need to change in your rules, your budget, or your measures of success?

Write down one change you can begin. Name who needs to act with you and what support you will need. Then consider how you will return to the people affected to learn whether that change served them.

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/



Reflection & Gratitude

Something I have learned about my own responsibility

(Last slide)



Resources at IHEI

Check out our Learning Hub:

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/learning-hub-gateway

IHEI Decolonizing Learning Hub: From Learning to Action

Indigenous-led learning tools and resources for transforming public health systems.

- **Community Non-Negotiables for Use & Accountability**: Establishes standards for Indigenous leadership, knowledge sovereignty, reciprocity, and ethical application of IHEI resources.
- **Relational Accountability & Reciprocity Module:** Builds foundational understanding of settler colonialism and introduces Indigenous relational values as essential practices for health and data justice.
- **Story-Based Definitions Learning Tool:** Uses storytelling, Indigenous scholarship, and guided reflection to connect foundational concepts with decolonizing action.
- **Washington County Statement of Commitment:** Documents an applied, collaborative process for embedding decolonizing principles, community accountability, and Indigenous sovereignty into public health data practices.
- **Multnomah County Decolonizing Academy Impact Report:** Shares evaluation findings, participant learning, and systems-level deliverables, including the Self-Determination Assessment & Advocacy Tool.

Scan to explore the IHEI Learning hub @
indigenous-equity.org/learning-hub-gateway

Community Non-Negotiables

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/community-non-negotiables

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Community Non-Negotiables for Use & Accountability

DECOLONIZING LEARNING HUB MODULE
Fall 2025



Photo by Jarrette Werk, Aaniih & Nakoda

Relational Accountability & Reciprocity

Learning Module

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/relational-accountability-reciprocity

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Relational Accountability & Reciprocity

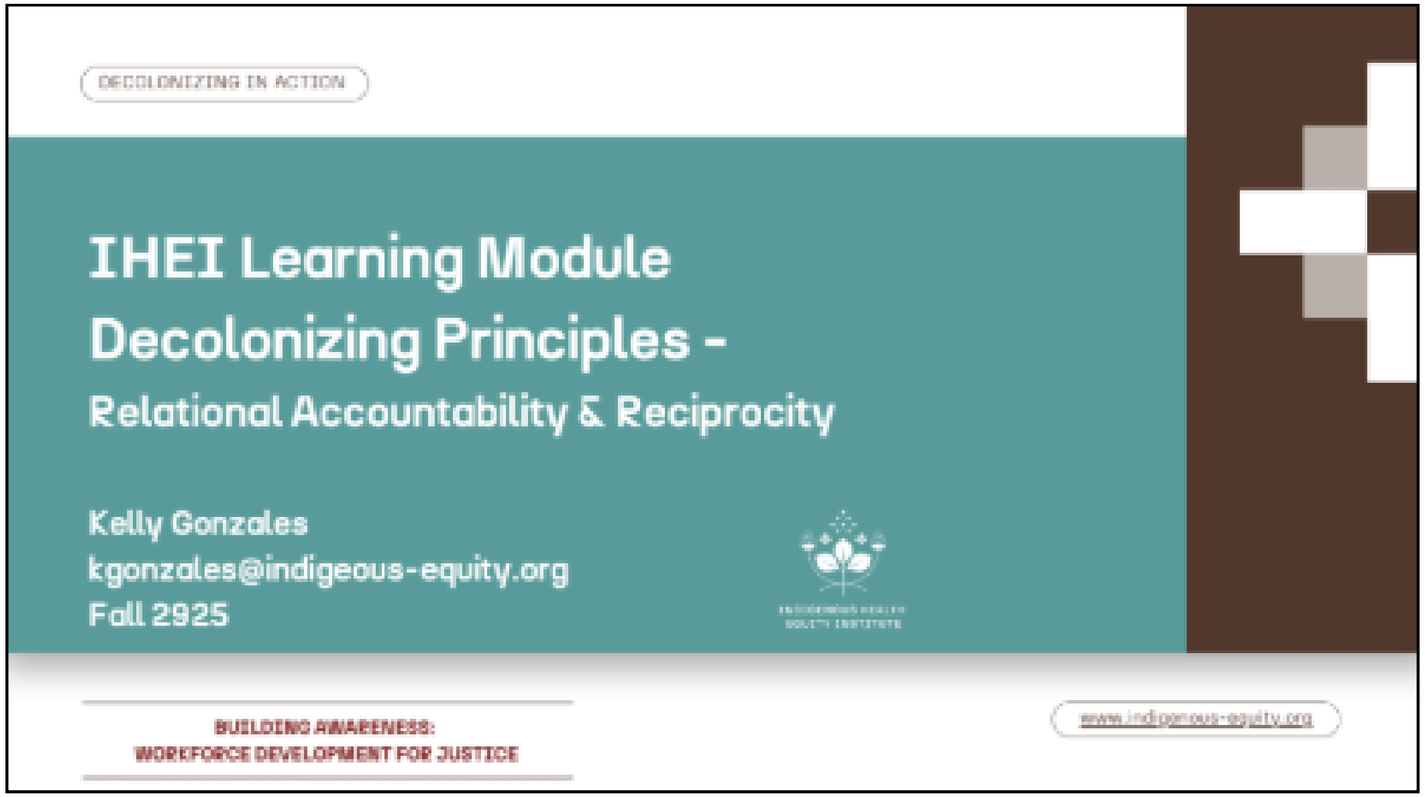
DECOLONIZING LEARNING HUB MODULE
Fall 2025

Module 1 of the Healing Justice Series



Relational Accountability & Reciprocity

Training Slides

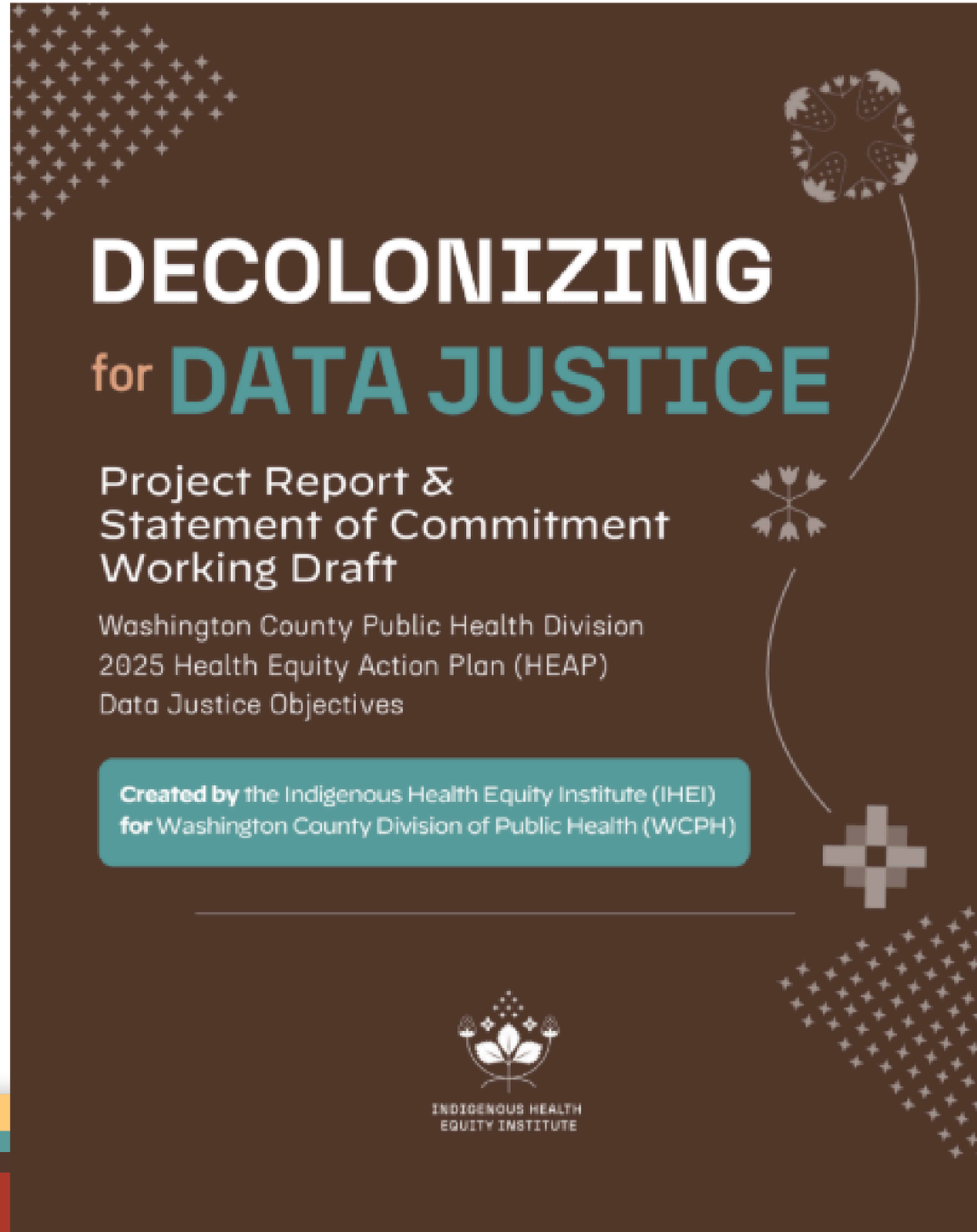


https://www.indigenous-equity.org/relational-accountability-reciprocity-training-slides

Decolonizing for Data Justice

Case Study with Washington County

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/waco-report-2025



IHEI Decolonizing Academy Impact Report

Case Study with Multnomah County

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/multnomah-county-report-nov-2025

The Indigenous Health Equity Institute Decolonizing Academy: Advancing Health Justice Through Decolonization

Introduction to IHEI

The Indigenous Health Equity Institute (IHEI) represents a bold and necessary movement to transform public health through decolonization, Indigenous resurgence, and collective healing. By grounding practice in Indigenous science, relational accountability, and reciprocity, IHEI provides a living model for how health systems can be healed, not merely reformed.

IHEI's vision of health justice—rooted in Indigenous values and sovereignty—charts a path toward thriving, liberated futures where well-being is an expression of justice, culture, and belonging.

Decolonizing Academy Overview

Mission

The IHEI Decolonizing Academy offers transformative workforce development training aimed at reimagining public health through a decolonizing lens. The program enhances the capacity of professionals working across state, county, and local public health institutions, as well as regional health equity and data justice initiatives and community-based health projects.

This initiative moves standard "equity" practices beyond conventional DEI models by:

- Critiquing and challenging settler systems that create and perpetuate health inequities.
- Offering strategies to expose and disrupt cycles of oppression within institutions.
- Proposing pathways for healing and liberation from internalized and systemic settler colonialism.

As the first program of its kind, the Decolonizing Academy centers on naming and addressing the ongoing impacts of colonialism while offering Oregon's public health sector a chance to model transformative practices for thriving futures.

Aim and Origins of Decolonizing Academy Programs

The curriculum used throughout the Decolonizing Academy's programs originates from Indigenous values, knowledges, and principles of reciprocity and resurgence. The aim of this work is to foster an interconnected and self-determined network of individuals, institutions, and systems committed to decolonizing public health—rooting in the perspectives and guidance of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous excellence-liberation. **The curriculum invites participants to critically examine the lasting impacts of colonialism within public health, equity, and justice. It also offers opportunities to build individual and collective power to advance decolonizing actions across health data, policy, research, and programming ecosystems.** Through this work, IHEI is responding to critical and enduring gaps in the field because efforts and investments aimed at building socially just public health systems through decolonizing pathways remain almost entirely absent, and are particularly lacking within institutions and professionals who continue to benefit from and reinforce colonial structures. By bringing visibility and value to these issues, IHEI is actively generating pathways for justice that are not yet present in existing public health structures.

Oregon Public Health Modernization & Roadmap

Naming colonialism as a social determinant of health

https://www.indigenous-equity.org/oregon-public-health-modernization-vision-and-roadmap



Oregon Public Health Modernization: Vision and Roadmap Moving Forward

Presented to Oregon Health Authority
by the Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB) and

Metropolitan Group
the power of voice

April 27, 2026

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Thank you