

RESTORING BALANCE COLLABORATIVE

Our Ripple Effect: Exploring Our Impact 2021-2024

*Ā Mua, i Muri ō Kōrero (Māori proverb)
Walking backwards into the future.*



REDSTAR
INTERNATIONAL

Realizing Indigenous Aspirations

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the sacrifices of those who have gone before for it is on their shoulders that we stand as we continue to steward and protect the land and water for all of us.

We acknowledge our origins:

Together with Te Pou Tupua (represented at the time by Turama Hawira and the late Dame Tariana Turia) and the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, Inc., Red Star International, Inc., planned and facilitated the Indigenous knowledge exchange that seeded this work. Te Pou Tupua - a single role held by two persons to be the face and voice of Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River).

We respectfully acknowledge the passing of Dame Tariana Turia in 2025. E te kahurangi, moe mai rā.

Through the generous support from a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—Global Ideas for U.S. Solutions, we explored how a multi-sector global learning space for Indigenous networks and leaders can help transform inequitable institutions, systems, and social practices, and actively integrate those insights to advance health equity. The Collaborative continues to receive support through a 3-year grant from the Foundation.

Seven Directions, A Public Health Institute at the University of Washington (Seven Directions), led the environmental scan during the 18-month exploration period to gain an understanding of published theories, concepts, and frameworks related to Indigenous stewardship practices.

We acknowledge our Advisory Council, who journeys with us at every step:

- Julia Bernal, (Pueblo/Yuchi-Creek), Executive Director, Pueblo Action Alliance, U.S.
- Turama Hawira, Te Pou Tupua (face and voice of the Whanganui River), New Zealand
- Judith LeBlanc (Caddo) Executive Director, Native Organizers Alliance, U.S.
- Kelley Lehuakeaopuna Uyeoka (Kanaka Maoli) Executive Director, Huliauapa’a, Hawai’i
- Ken Paul, Member of the Wolastoqey Nation at Neqotkuk, Tobique First Nation, Canada
- Raukura Naani Waitai, Te Puwaha Project, Whanganui, New Zealand
- Shannon Seneca, PhD (Haudenosaunee) Research Assistant Professor, University at Buffalo Indigenous Studies Department, U.S.

We acknowledge our Advisory Council who journeys with us at every step:

- Aleena M. Kawe, (Yoeme) President & CEO
- Theresa M. Cariño, (Yaqui Descendent) Senior Projects Manager
- Frank T. Kawe, (Ngāti Ranginui/Ngāti Kahungunu) Cultural Liaison
- Danielle Lucero, (Pueblo of Isleta/Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa), Project Consultant
- Hud Oberly, (Osage/ Caddo/ Comanche) S.M.I.L.E., Communications Lead
- Roanhorse Consulting, LLC, Evaluation Team

*Suggested citation: Cariño, T., & Kawe, AM.
(2025) Restoring Balance Collaborative, Our
Ripple Effect: Exploring Our Impact 2021-2024.
Red Star International, Inc.*



Water Story

My journey to *A Meeting of Sacred Waters* began on a chilly March morning, along the coast of the ancestral lands of the Ohlone. But truthfully, I've been journeying for generations—shaped by mountains, guided by moonlight, remembered in songs. This was just the next ripple in a very old current. I was out of my element traveling east -- confined and rushed, stuffed in metal wings high above the earth, soaring 30,000 feet! The air was dry and thin, no coastline, to guide the way. But still, I moved -- carried by purpose.

Many of us traveled from near and far, across oceans and over mountains to gather. When we arrived on the lands of Isleta Pueblo, something stirred within me—a mixture of anticipation and recognition. Newness combined with something ancient in me. I was coming home to my relatives.

The gathering space was copper and cool. I was joined by others who traveled from rivers, lakes and mountain springs across the globe. As we poured in, we jumped and embraced, dancing and laughing like children! The joy and memories bubbling to the surface.

Inside, the air was thick with intention. It felt as if all the words, blessings and prayers were being spoken directly to us. Because they were! The people there knew us as living, feeling relatives. They knew our stories. They knew how long we had been unwell -- how we've been fought over, poisoned, dammed, diverted. Our flow stifled by concrete and control instead of guided by roots and soft, silty riverbeds. Still, we listened. We absorbed. We healed.

Some of us wept. The tears weren't just sorrow -- they were reunion, they were healing. The people asked us to carry their prayers home. To remember. To ripple them outward. To help restore the health of all our communities. When it was time to leave, it was bittersweet. Departing from relatives is never easy. But we were not the same waters that arrived. Our spirits had mingled. Our memories reawakened. We were not leaving—we were carrying each other forward.

The journey back to the Ohlone Coast felt hopeful. I was overflowing with blessings, carried by purpose. When we reached the shore, I heard more prayers and a quiet sob as my human relative returned me to the sea.

*This story, written by **Theresa Cariño**, was inspired by the water she brought to the gathering.*

A Meeting of Sacred Waters always begins and ends with water, acknowledging its sacred life-giving power. This year, participants brought water from their homelands to be blessed. All waters were collected in an olla (pictured to the left) and placed in the center of the stage. Elder Kathy Wan Povi Sanchez (San Ildefonso Pueblo) Sayain Circle of Grandmothers and Wisdom Keeper of Tewa Women United, and her husband blessed the water. There, the waters remained throughout the gathering to listen and hold our hopes, aspirations, and prayers. [The blessed water was then redistributed to everyone to return the blessings home.](#)



Our Origin Story

Our journey began with water. Water is the living source, the lifeblood of all ecosystems, flowing through rivers, streams, and washes, forming lakes and oceans. Without water, life would be impossible. We are water; it connects us. Water is sacred.

The Restoring Balance Collaborative was seeded in 2020, when Indigenous leaders from Arizona and Aotearoa/New Zealand came together for a powerful exchange about water. At its heart was the Whanganui River, which had just been recognized by the New Zealand Government as a living entity through [Te Awa Tupua \(Whanganui River Claims Settlement\) Act 2017](#). This unprecedented legislation is the legal framework by which the innate relationship of the River to the People and the People to the River is upheld - a relationship built on mutual respect, accountability and care.

**Imagine if we cared for all rivers with the same reverence,
seeing them as an interconnected whole from their source to the sea.**

Due to a global pandemic, the exchange culminated a year later in 2021, when leaders came together again to share the power of their exchange with others at [A Meeting of Sacred Waters](#). More than 300 participants from 104 Indigenous nations joined this virtual gathering, creating a global circle united by purpose. The experience created a ripple effect.

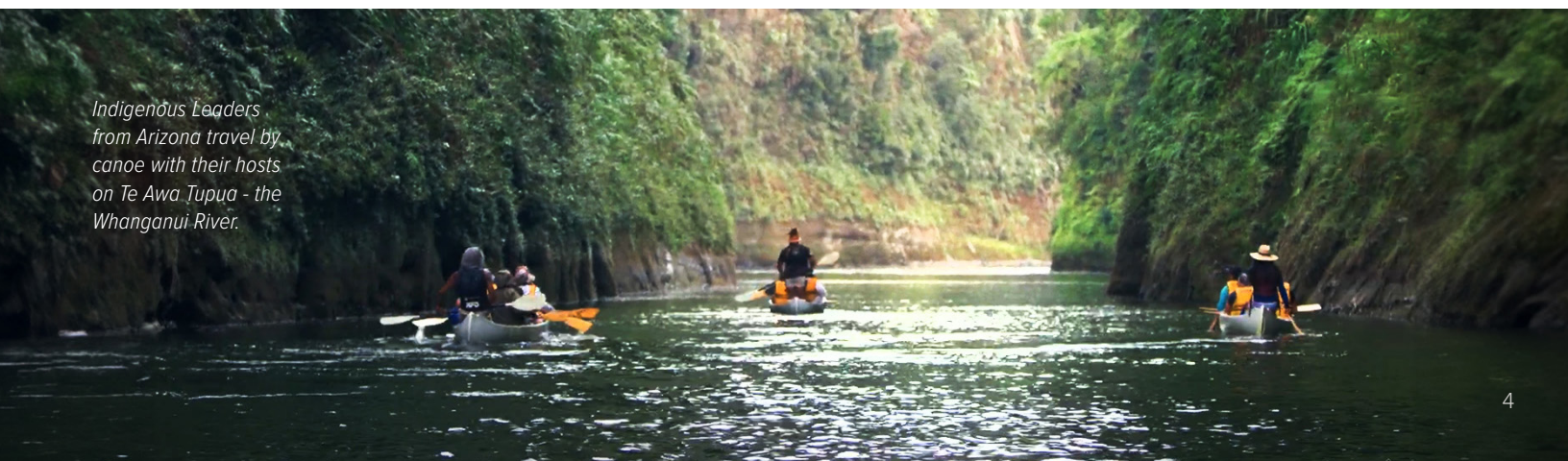
Red Star documented the exchange's profound impact in a short documentary titled [From the Mountains to the Sea](#), an American Indian Film Festival 2021 Selection and Indie Film Festival 2023 Best Documentary.

Later that year, Red Star International, Inc. (Red Star), an Indigenous-led non-profit organization, began exploring how Indigenous leadership could guide global action on climate change as a worldwide threat to our collective wellbeing. Red Star invited Turama Hawira (who serves as Te Pou Tupua - a single role held by two persons to be the face and voice of Te Awa Tupua) and six other Indigenous leaders to serve on an international Advisory Council to guide the effort.

Over 18 months, through exchange, dialogue and reflection, it became clear that something was needed: a space led by Indigenous Peoples, rooted in relationship with the land and water, and focused on restoring balance for the wellbeing of humanity and our natural world. That space became the [Restoring Balance Collaborative](#).

[Learn more about the 18-month exploration that led to the development of the Collaborative.](#)

*Indigenous Leaders
from Arizona travel by
canoe with their hosts
on Te Awa Tupua - the
Whanganui River.*



The Collaborative - Ways of Connecting

Today, the Restoring Balance Collaborative (Collaborative) is dedicated to advancing Indigenous-led systems transformation to meaningfully address critical responses to climate challenges and their health impacts. Launched in 2023, the Collaborative is a global stewardship community that connects people and ideas. It expands and strengthens local, regional, and national networks by creating a learning space to innovate and generate solutions in a collaborative environment. Our community includes nearly 50 Indigenous stewards leading system transformation from over 40 Indigenous Nations, organizations, and communities across Turtle Island, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, and the Pacific.

The concept of restoring balance is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and living. It is about ensuring an abundant future for the next seven generations. It aims to inspire organizers, advocates, funders and decision-makers to reimagine what is possible and to support our movement.

We are guided by the following principles and values to restore balance for us all:

- Self-Determination: Respect Indigenous Peoples' rights to determine our future.
- Indigenous Wisdom: Prioritize local knowledge, values and practices.
- Relational Accountability: Nurture relationships built on mutual respect and cooperation.
- Collective Will: Uphold shared aspirations to restore balance through dedication and perseverance.
- Guardianship: Protect and care for the well-being of humanity and the earth.

Why Indigenous-led systems change?

Systems thinking is inherently Indigenous. It is rooted in place-based knowledge and emphasizes relationality and the interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. The colonial systems, structures and practices that are negatively impacting the land and the people are the SAME. Rapid changes in climate are disrupting social, cultural, political, and environmental systems at every level—from local to global—placing our collective wellbeing at risk. Despite the evidence that [Indigenous knowledge systems are key to transformative change](#), non-Indigenous systems continue to create barriers to these solutions. If we are going to make meaningful change, we will have to make changes in the following ways:

- Cultural shifts in beliefs, attitudes and behaviors
- Relational evolution through trust, connection, and collaboration and shifts in power dynamics
- Structural adjustments in resource flows, practices, policies and laws

Indigenous Peoples' relational approaches are needed to re-establish sustainable solutions to the climate crisis. Now is the time to restore balance and deconstruct the systems and practices that reinforce colonialism and perpetuate inequities. The Collaborative aims to achieve this vision collectively.



Mauna a Wākea with host Mauna Kea Education and Awareness.

“Indigenous resilience for a sustainable environment – the diversity that sits amongst the collective group and shared experiences – it all has value – it is a recognition of Indigenous values and laws.”

– Collaborative Member

The Collaborative - Ways of Being

Indigenous Peoples know the way forward.

Indigenous Peoples are leading systems change within their own communities and there is immense value in coming together in a synchronized effort. Over the past three years, Red Star has served as the backbone organization to the Collaborative. Red Star brought stewards together from across the Pacific to support Indigenous self-determination and traditional knowledge systems as key solutions to today's climate and health challenges. Although our local contexts are different, our communities face similar barriers and we draw strength from each other.

Guided by an international advisory council, the Collaborative provides a shared space, or 'hub', for people to:

1. Generate and explore ideas in a collaborative environment.
2. Solve challenging problems through dialogue and exchange.
3. Connect with people who share similar aspirations.
4. Create new, mutually beneficial opportunities to network.
5. Contribute individual strengths to support collective impact.

Red Star facilitated meaningful exchange through a variety of activities during 2023 and 2024:

- **Virtual roundtables, webinars, and workshops** centered on capacity building, funding, facilitation, systems transformation, and other topics.
- **A Meeting of Sacred Waters**, a global gathering to highlight Indigenous-led solutions in support of our ancestral waters and lands.
- **Publications**, including practice briefs, reports, and tools for systems change



Walking to the base of the Grand Canyon with our hosts, Hualapai Nation and the Hualapai Youth Council.

Focus



Uplift
Indigenous
Agency



Multidirectional
Learning



Global
Connections

Priorities

Connect
Indigenous
peoples, nations
and organizations

Identify
opportunities to
build capacity
across the
collaborative.

Activate the
collaborative to
amplify Indigenous
narratives for
systems change.

Synchronize
efforts for
long-term
sustainability.

Our impact and growth align with the three focus areas and priorities identified in the Collaborative's Strategic Plan 2023-2024. Through its relationships with aligned Indigenous organizations, ally t organizations, funders and other partners, Red Star has been able to grow the Collaborative. It has set forth a new strategic plan for 2025-2027, encompassing strategies for funding development, regranteeing opportunities, and place-based learning exchanges within the Collaborative.



Getting To Meaningful Change - Ways Of Doing

Collaborative activities are designed to uphold Indigenous knowledge systems as the bedrock for collective leadership to continue from generation to generation. Collective leadership is needed to restore balance and achieve long-lasting equitable change, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things.



Most modern threats to the climate are due to human actions. However, climate solutions rarely focus on changing the systems that perpetuate the values, perceptions, and behaviors that contribute to the problem. To create change, we need to work together to find common ground and better align existing systems with an Indigenous worldview and knowledge that is tied to place. By uplifting Indigenous agency to lead systems change at the local level, we raise awareness and inspire people to change in a way that ripples out beyond our local community and contexts to surrounding and distant ones, ultimately leading to global impact.

“We are fierce in the love of our Land.” -
*Pua Case (Kanaka O’iwi), Mauna Kea Education and Awareness Project
Speaker at A Meeting of Sacred Waters 2024*

We believe that to create meaningful change, we need to work towards change across three contexts:



Uplift Indigenous Agency **Our Collaborative as Individual Stewards within our Circle**

Build will, motivation, and capacity to enact change.



Share and Learn Together **Our Collaborative as Stewards Making Local Impact in their Communities and Amongst Allies**

Increase awareness, understanding, and commitment to change.



Amplify Indigenous Solutions **Our Collective Global Impact**

Amplify Indigenous solutions.

Our Ripple Effect: Restoring Balance Impact 2021-2024

Ā Mua, i Muri ō Kōrero – Māori Proverb
Walking backwards into the Future.

This proverb reminds us of the power of reflecting on the past as we embark on the next phase of the Restoring Balance Collaborative (Collaborative). What is our impact? What did we learn? What can we celebrate? Where can we grow? This three-year impact report highlights the progress, achievements, and impact of a growing practice community. It tells the story of our creation, expansion, and growth. It demonstrates the value of coming together as a global community to create systemic change through laws, policies, economic, and management practices that are centered on Indigenous values and perspectives.

This report is, first and foremost, for the Collaborative. It is for Indigenous practitioners, earth protectors and stewards, organizations and communities seeking to make meaningful change and restore balance in the face of a changing climate and world. We hope that everyone who reads this will be inspired by what has been achieved in a short time and be motivated to participate in our next chapter.

Whanganui River in Aotearoa



Turama Hawira, Te Pou Tupua
(face and voice of the Whanganui River)
Advisory Council Member

To understand our ripple effect is to understand the power of Indigenous Peoples coming together for meaningful dialogue and exchange. Since the introduction of colonial systems, our assimilation into the mainstream can be likened to an Indigenous branch being grafted to a foreign tree producing a peculiar hybrid fruit.

When we come together as Indigenous Peoples and step into sacred spaces, we are able to share our stories in relationship to place. Like traveling up our river into the heartland or standing before a sacred mountain, it is through experience that we are able to share why we love and are passionate about our ancestral land and waters. When we make these connections and return home, we know we are not going home alone. Like the ripple effect, we return home with a tangible outcome: the affirmation that we are not alone as we forge our return to our Indigenous rootstock.

Uplift Indigenous Agency

Build the will, motivation, and capacity amongst the Collaborative to enact systems change based on Indigenous values.

Successful collaboratives often start small by connecting people who might not otherwise have the opportunity to interact. We began by hosting virtual roundtables and inviting Indigenous Leaders with diverse perspectives, backgrounds, experiences, expertise, and practices related to stewarding ancestral lands and waters. Roundtables sought to:

- Build relationships and trusting connections across national boundaries.
- Seek opportunities to align around a deeply shared intent.
- Highlight our shared values to guide this work.
- Discuss practical steps to collectively advance Indigenous-led systems transformation.



Due to similar colonial experiences, treaty relations, shared language, and healthcare delivery systems, we focused our initial learning on the United States, Canada, Australia, and Polynesia. Plans to expand into other regions of the world are being explored.



Participants, A Meeting of Sacred Waters 2024

“Today, most Indigenous advocacy is in response to colonialism. We are trying to find ways to protect our rivers and land impacted by industry and climate change. We can learn how others are working to deconstruct those systems.”

– Roundtable Participant

**Restoring
Balance
Collaborative**

20
Members

38
Members

48
Members

2022

2023

2024

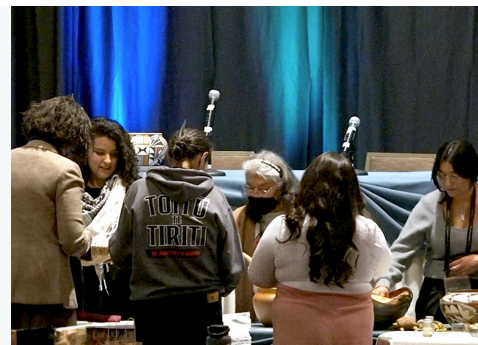
Today's active members represent a diverse range of sectors, organizations, and Indigenous Nations, Peoples, and Communities across Turtle Island (the U.S. and Canada), Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. The figure below represents the 48 core stewards who are currently active in the Collaborative.

Figure 1. Restoring Balance Collaborative – Core Stewards by Country, Organization Type, and Sector



Here's what they had to say about what they valued most:

- Meeting of like-minded Indigenous individuals with different perspectives/ experiences to have great discussions on issues that affect us all.
- Learning about evolving processes of climate change that need the attention by Indigenous knowledge systems through global networking.
- The opportunity to meet virtually as a global community.



Foster Multi-Directional Learning

Increase awareness and understanding of what needs to change; inspiring the Collaborative and others to enact change; and building commitment to change.

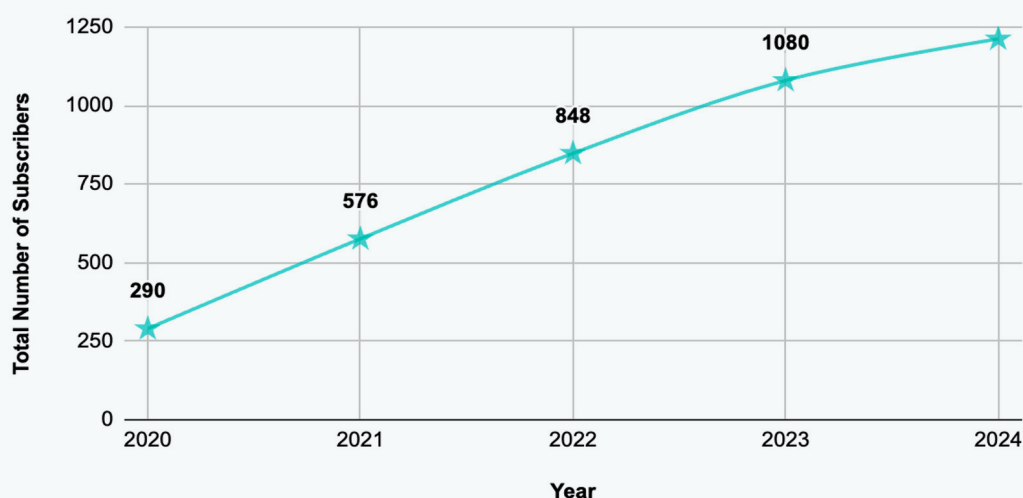
Indigenous-led spaces shift power dynamics and facilitate opportunities to create an 'ethical space' for engaging non-Indigenous allies within an Indigenous context, worldview, and values. Ethical space of engagement, first coined by Cree Elder, Dr. Willie Ermine, is a process that allows for authentic intercultural exchange, and opens doors to learning, reconciliation, and the indigenization of existing systems. Engaging a broader audience helps us to facilitate dialogue, explore strategic topics, and foster multi-directional learning, while stressing the imperative for change.



Growing Our Community

Since its inception, the Restoring Balance Collaborative has grown by convening members and others through global gatherings, webinars and other activities. Our community has grown, reaching over 1200 Indigenous people and allies.

Subscriber Growth *Red Star International (Mailchimp Data)*



“I valued being together in the same space (whether it’s virtual, in-person or hybrid), and learning from one another about the similar values, goals and knowledge each attendee brings to the table regarding their respective Tribal Nations, or from their profession. The support from each for all has been empowering.”

– Webinar Participant





828

Attendees representing over **120 Indigenous communities** participated in Collaborative activities

1,243

e-Subscribers to our newsletters
Subscribers grew from 290 in 2020 to 1243 in 2024

4

Webinars delivered to 264 registered guests

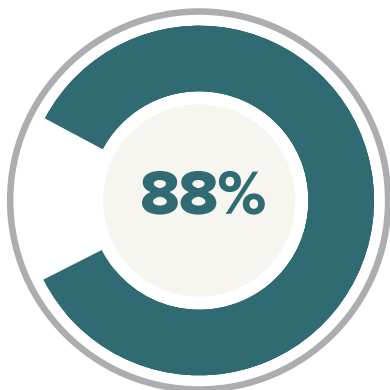
13

Newsletters, publications and blogs were produced

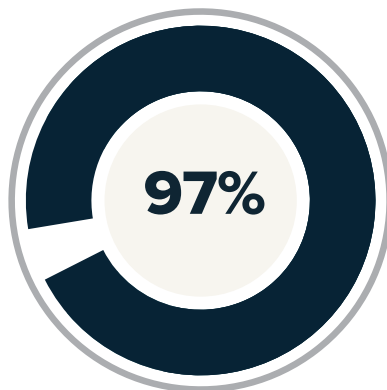
33

Public gatherings, webinars and activities were hosted

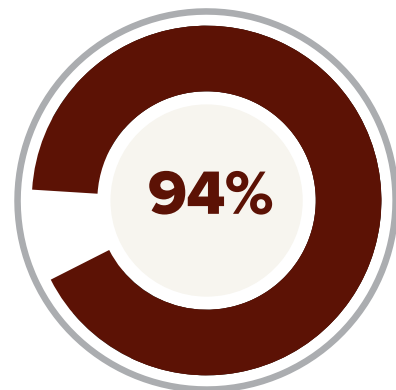
Post-event evaluations highlight the value:



Agree or strongly agree that the webinars met their intended objectives and were relevant to their work.



Found the information easy to follow which ensures accessibility and inclusivity across learning styles.



Looking forward to attending future webinars, demonstrating continued engagement and motivation.

What Our Growing Community Values Most:



Hairini Marae, Tauranga Moana in Aotearoa

Raukura Naani Waitai

Te Puwaha Project, Whanganui
Advisory Council Member

I value the Restoring Balance Collaborative because I can just be myself in this space. I can strip away all the distractions and get to the source. I can bring to light my whole self and my source. I also need everyone to do their part to be well in order for all of us to be well.

This Collaborative could not have happened if it hadn't been for the exchange between Indigenous leaders in Arizona and Whanganui. So much work goes into the lead up, the relationship and trust building takes time. Our hui (meetings) are just the icing on the cake. It's all the things that happen beforehand that make us who we are and help us on our journey. I hope it continues.

As we slowly build our relationships with our non-Indigenous allies, we are realizing that many are really craving connection. They may not know their roots because they may not be connected to their culture. As long as our values remain inclusive, and we create an ethical space where we can have these hard conversations, we can change the paradigm of how people think. We can get to the core of people and change hearts. Every meeting is an opportunity to strengthen our relationships with this higher vision in mind.

Ignite Global Connections

Amplify Indigenous solutions to realign the values that underpin colonial systems, structures and policies, and shift power dynamics towards sustainability.

Coming together as a global community deepens our understanding of the issues, helps us to think differently, and sparks innovation. That's why the Collaborative provides a platform to amplify Indigenous voices and solutions. We utilize multimedia to create awareness and increase representation of Indigenous perspectives on climate and wellbeing. By convening global gatherings that highlight Indigenous agency and impactful practices, we aim to reinforce Indigenous worldviews and values, focusing on intergenerational impact.



What if Indigenous knowledge systems and values guided climate solutions?

Water is at the center of the climate crisis, according to the [United Nations](#). Many important headwaters, wetlands, rivers, and other [water sources are found on the traditional territories](#) of Indigenous Peoples, who steward about one-quarter of the world's lands. In the United States alone, flawed water policies that have historically divided and controlled waterways have resulted in more than one million acres of tribal land being flooded by dams. With climate change leading to unpredictable rainfall, floods, and drought, it is now more urgent than ever to support Indigenous stewardship locally to deliver global impact and protect people's ability to live healthy lives, farm, maintain cultural practices, and earn a livelihood.



Connecting with local Indigenous land and water stewards at Māua in Tautanga Moana in Aotearoa.

Danielle Lucero

Pueblo of Isleta

Sacred Waters 2024 - Personal Testimony

I have been amazed by the numerous connections that had to be made to bring A Meeting of Sacred Waters to Isleta Pueblo, the Tribal Nation I belong to. From flight connections to community ties to waterways, Isleta became the meeting point for all of them. We came together to share and collaborate on Indigenous-led solutions to address today's water challenges. I felt lucky to hear stories from my elders, such as Governor Max Zuni, former Governor Verna Teller, and Stephanie Zuni, about our Tribe's fight to protect our mother, our river, the Blue River, also known as the Rio Grande. Sitting in the room with relatives from over forty-six Indigenous Nations, I know that my community's story is part of a larger movement, and we are all part of a legacy of standing up for our land, our waters, and our peoples.

While the meeting has ended and we have all gone our separate ways, I invite you to keep the conversations that started at Sacred Waters in mind. Let them inspire you to join us in our efforts to change power dynamics and return to practices that respect sovereignty and enable Indigenous knowledge systems. Even if you couldn't attend, there are many ways to continue engaging in the teachings from the meeting. The Meeting Summary offers a space to revisit the values that guide our work, our communities' practices, and opportunities to build on our commitments. The event platform hosts recordings from keynote speakers. Social media is also a space to stay updated with actions and resources led by Sacred Waters participants.

The Meeting of Sacred Waters will continue to guide my work with my community, including Pueblo Resurgents, the Isleta Cultural Committee, and our Tribal Government.



Coming Together as a Global Community

A Meeting of Sacred Waters is a gathering that provides a space for sharing Indigenous worldviews, values and perspectives to reclaim the health of the world's water sources. It was borne from an exchange between Indigenous leaders from the Colorado River Basin in Arizona and the Whanganui River in New Zealand. They came together on behalf of the health and healing of their ancestral waters to share their experiences and engage in dialogue with others about the value and importance of Indigenous knowledge in improving the health of all rivers. Hence the name *Te Huinga Wai Tapu (in Māori) - A Meeting of Sacred Waters*.

A Meeting of Sacred Waters aims to:

- Highlight the interconnectedness between the wellbeing of humanity and the environment.
- Share examples of Indigenous-led guardianship, stewardship and management practices.
- Provide a space to engage, exchange and explore new ideas.
- Explore pathways to heal our ancestral waters through Indigenous-led systems change.

“Connecting helps us all understand we are not alone and that there is something bigger that we are a part of. It is important to acknowledge that knowing this is empowering in itself.”

- A Meeting of Sacred Waters Participant



After the inaugural gathering in 2021, we were overwhelmed with requests for another gathering. We have since held two more *A Meeting of Sacred Waters* gatherings, the second in Phoenix, Arizona in 2023 and the third in the Pueblo of Isleta near Albuquerque, New Mexico in 2024. Our next gathering will be in 2026.

A Meeting of Sacred Waters gatherings combined reached:

624

PARTICIPANTS

some attended more than once

5

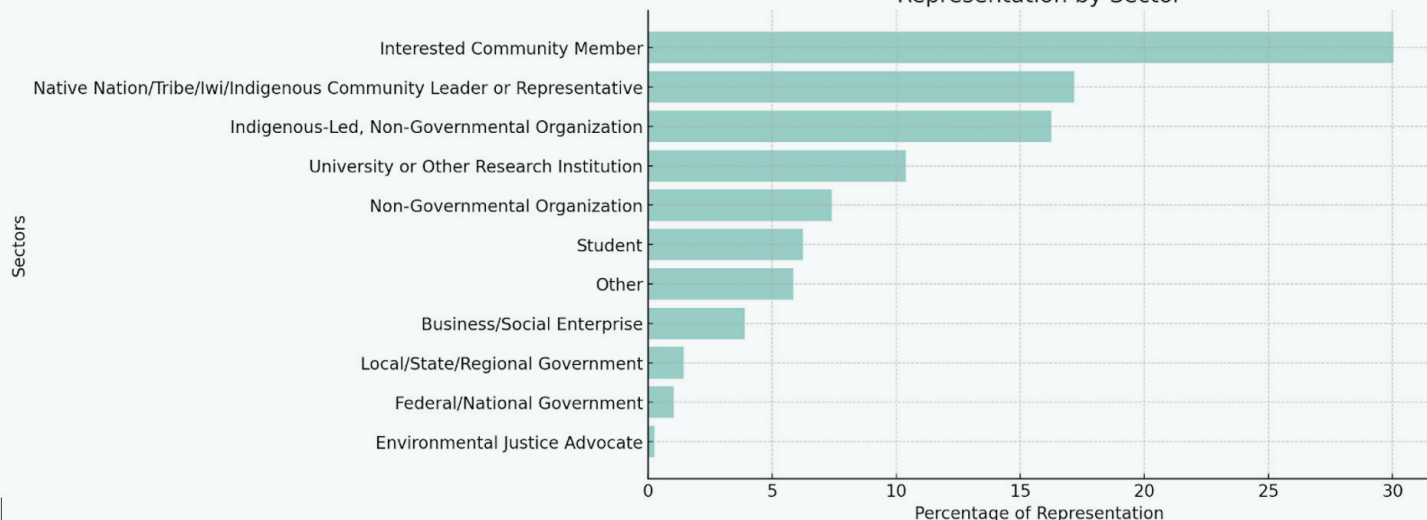
COUNTRIES

(US, NZ, CAN, AUS, MX)

120+

More than 120+ First Nations/
Iwis/Peoples represented

Representation by Sector



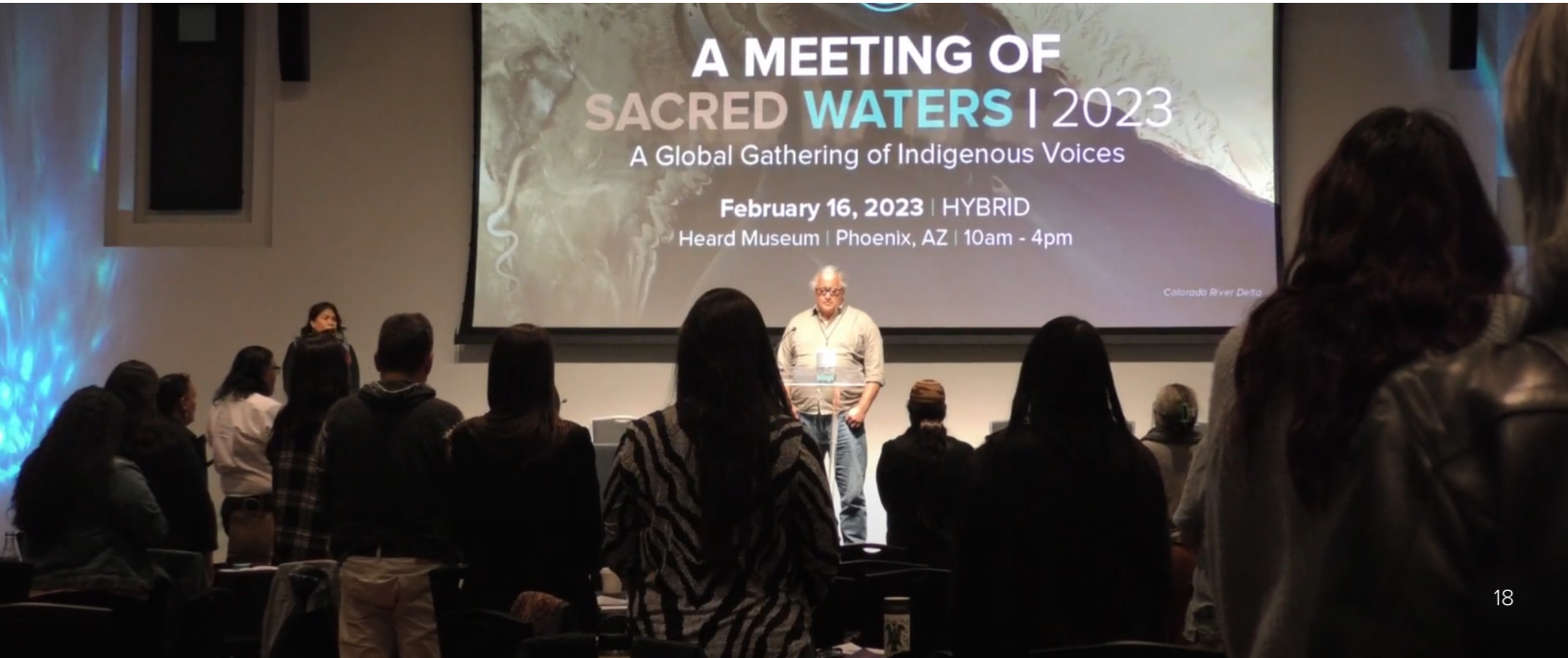
*Attendees may represent more than one sector

Following highlights the percent of participants agreed completely or exceedingly with the following statements:

Year	Event met participant expectations.	Event highlighted the interconnectedness of the wellbeing of humanity and the environment.	Event provided a space to explore global ideas that you can apply locally.
2021 (virtual)	90%		
2023 (hybrid)	100%	95%	85%
2024 (in person)	86%	89%	75%
Average accross all 3 events.	92%	92%	80%

Knowledge is deepened when learning experiences foster connection, mutual respect, and a shared vision.

A Meeting of Sacred Waters welcomes all those who envision a sustainable future, including leaders and representatives from Indigenous Nations and communities, Non-Governmental Organizations, local, state, regional, national, and international governments, universities and research institutions, businesses and social enterprises, students, and others. In order to realign the values that underpin colonial systems, structures, and policies, and shift power dynamics towards sustainability, we need to create safe spaces to explore solutions and provide a pathway forward. When others can see what’s possible, they are more likely to re-evaluate their contribution to change and commit to removing the system barriers that restrict Indigenous solutions.



The following are testimonials from allies who attended A Meeting of Sacred Waters in 2021 and 2023:

Just had to share a note of gratitude for the wonderful event yesterday! It was an incredible opportunity to experience the power of the journey between New Zealand and US Indigenous cultures and their reflections reminded me of my own experiences of the power of cross-cultural exchange...It gave me a lot to think about in regards to how we live with the Mississippi River and our waterways in southeastern Louisiana.

– *Virtual attendee, public health sector, Sacred Waters 2021*



Two of my team members and I had the privilege of attending “A Meeting of Sacred Waters 2023.” We all felt that it was one of the most powerful convenings we had ever attended. [Red Star] did a masterful job of bringing voices and perspectives into a safe space...You could see the hope and connections being made between Arizona tribal leaders and members in the room.

My team was so grateful to be able to attend. They already made a list of practices and perspectives that they want to bring to our work based on their experience at the gathering.

– *In-person attendee, government sector, Sacred Waters 2023*



Local artist for A Meeting of Sacred Waters Summary Report, 2024



About the Artist:

Autumn Dawn Gomez they/she (Comanche/Taos Pueblo) was born in Oga PoGeh Owingeh, Santa Fe, NM and calls the Northern Rio Grande Valley home, from Albuquerque to Taos. Autumn studied art and writing at the Institute of American Indian Art and now supports Pueblo Youth through Tewa Women United. Here artwork can be found at pimikwusii.com.

Future Directions

We continue to seek and focus on Indigenous-led solutions by living our principles and practices, restoring and maintaining balance within ourselves. There is space to innovate, to provide a home camp – a place for participants in the Collaborative to heal and recharge.



In this section, we share the challenges and aspirations of our members, as well as our plans for action in 2025-2027 to move the Collaborative forward.

Challenges & Aspirations	Restoring Balance Actions
Quantity versus Quality Members expressed an interest in meeting less often, but for a longer period to allow for more meaningful engagement.	Quarterly Meetings - The number of Collaborative meetings was reduced from bi-monthly 1.5-hour meetings and webinars to quarterly 2.5-hour meetings, allowing for more quality time and deeper conversations and engagement. Open Webinars - The frequency of open webinars for multidirectional learning was reduced from quarterly to semi-annually.
A Meeting of Sacred Waters The Advisory Council agreed that this is one of our most significant gatherings. They stressed the importance of engaging the local people face to face.	Local Engagement - We will host another Meeting in Sacred Waters in 2026 with a two-year gap from the last one held in 2024. This will allow time to plan, and to deepen our relationship with the local community, and seek their blessing and support to bring this gathering to their community.
Regional Partnership and Global Conversations Members wanted support for regional dialogue, and to share what is learned. This will provide opportunities to explore regional commonalities and differences in a global setting.	Regional Roundtables - Small grants will be made available to support regional roundtable discussions on climate solutions and systems change. Roundtable outcomes will be shared at A Meeting of Sacred Waters 2026. Practice briefs describing Indigenous-led solutions to offer partners and allies, such as governments, policymakers, and local non-profit organizations, with real-world examples to learn from and adapt in other regions and communities.
Limited Resources There is limited funding available to support local Indigenous-led climate work, particularly core, multi-year backbone support required for collective impact initiatives. This is a challenge for those starting out as well as for more established collaboratives.	Small Grants - The Collaborative will now offer small grants to Collaborative members through 'Request for Proposals' opportunities. Small grants will support local work, build capacity, and decrease barriers to participation in peer networking.

Challenges & Aspirations	Restoring Balance Actions
<p>Investing in the Next Generation of Indigenous Leaders Members identified the importance of preparing emerging leaders for the future and involving them in Collaborative activities.</p>	<p>Emerging Leaders Fellowship (EL Fellowship) - The Collaborative will pilot the fellowship in 2025-2026 to nurture early-career Indigenous professionals who are working on environmental and health initiatives in their own communities.</p> <p>Fellows will receive a small grant to implement a community-based project, participate in peer learning, and global networking opportunities. These emerging leaders will inspire Indigenous-led health and climate solutions in their own communities and beyond.</p>
<p>Sustainability Ensuring the Collaborative is sustainable over time is a priority.</p>	<p>Diverse Funding - The Collaborative is developing a Sustainability Plan to diversify funding sources and to support programming, communications, and impact evaluation.</p> <p>Theory of Change - The Collaborative is deepening its understanding and articulation of its impact through an Indigenous understanding of impact.</p> <p>Evaluation Framework - Once the Theory of Change is developed, a framework will be created to evaluate the Collaborative's impact and support sustainability.</p>
<p>Indigenous-Led systems change There is an opportunity to teach others an Indigenous framework for making and measuring systems change.</p>	<p>Becoming Butterfly is an Indigenous framework is a relational approach to leading systems transformation through a four-phase, strengths-based, participatory process.</p> <p>The Collaborative is seeking funding to build capacity of the Collaborative to implement the framework to better understand our collective impact.</p>

...Water Story continues

Returning to the Ohlone Coast, I felt transformed. I had not only connected with other aspects of myself; I now carried the prayers of many. Feeling restored and whole, I allowed the healing to ripple out far and wide. To river mouths and distant shores, I took the blessings to the depths of my being.

I am water. I have always been and always will be. In my lifecycle, every ending is a beginning. As I travel from source to sea, I rise to form clouds and descend as rain, blessing the land and starting anew. Every phase serves a life-giving purpose.

At A Meeting of Sacred Waters, I heard familiar prayers and songs. They brought me back to the time of Creation. Receding into rivers and lakes over millennia, I once raged with great force across what is now the desert landscape. Steep drops forming jagged edges along mesas reveal colored layers carved into the land – my history told by the land you inherited. My signature etched on all things more than human.

I swell with gratitude as your voices bring healing. There was a time when our sacred relationship – water and humans – was honored by all. You give me hope that one day you, my human relatives, will restore balance, ensuring an abundant future for generations to come.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark purple quilted jacket and black pants, is sitting on a rocky shore. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a river flowing through a landscape with mountains under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Wahianoa River, located on the slopes of Mount Ruapehu, central volcanic plateau, Aotearoa.

A Message from Red Star CEO:

When I wrote the continuation of the Water Story on the previous page, I was reminded of the words spoken by my dad that remain with me —

In 2014, I moved to Aotearoa from Tucson, Arizona. During the first few years of living here, I struggled to ground myself being so far from my desert home, surrounded by water. One day, I was talking with my dad. He asked how I was doing, and I shared how much I missed home and the still expanse of the desert. He reminded me that the desert was once an ancient sea and that I'm just learning another dimension of it. This conversation with my dad was a pivotal moment for me as I embarked on what I often refer to as my new water life, which, years later, led me to create the Restoring Balance Collaborative.

After 18 years of service, Red Star International, Inc. will sunset as a US-based nonprofit organization on the fall equinox in the Northern Hemisphere, September 22, 2025. At the same time, the Restoring Balance Collaborative will rise as an extension of our work, carrying forward and building upon our legacy—a legacy grounded in Indigenous innovation, reclamation, and connectivity. I, along with the Red Star team, remain deeply committed to leading the Collaborative as it relaunches as an independent project.

This time marks the ending and beginning of a season and cycle. In the Southern Hemisphere, this transition will occur during the spring equinox, the season of the Red Star - te pahore o Rehua. As the founder of Red Star International, Inc., this is a powerful reminder of my own new beginnings as I fully embrace my “water life” here in Aotearoa. I look forward to sharing more as our journey continues.

Tua Lios enchim hiokoe utte'esia.

Aleena M. Kawe
Founder and CEO
Red Star International, Inc.

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