

NAAC September 2021 Bi-Monthly Newsletter



Figure 1. The Great Kiva at Chetro Ketl in Chaco Canyon National Historical Park in New Mexico. The kiva is a ceremonial structure that was the center of the community.

August and September have seen a lot of activity for the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) as we help prepare schools across the nation for back to school! Thanks to our Native American Advisory Committee (NAAC) members, we have continued to make connections and meet new people, some of whom are interested in partnering with ICN in multiple capacities.

This edition of the newsletter:

- Features our NAAC Hangout presenter
- Introduces you to a new NAAC member
- Shares insight from the New Mexico site visit
- Reports on conference activities
- Gives an update on the next NAAC meeting
- Provides an update on the Needs Assessment progress
- Requests your review on an ICN presentation

NAAC Hangout



Figure 2 Carol Chong, NAAC member and retired National Nutrition Advisor at Alliance for a Healthier Generation

ICN is hosting quarterly informal Zoom meetings called NAAC Hangouts. At these Hangouts, ICN and NAAC members share their perspectives on Native American/Alaskan Native child nutrition, as well as personal stories and concerns about Native American communities and schools in their part of the country.

The third quarter Hangout featured NAAC member Carol Chong and took place on Wednesday, September 29th at 12:00 pm ET. Thank you for attending!

If you missed it, email ICN Program Manager Chris Aloia at craloia@olemiss.edu, and he will send you the link to view the meeting.

Please reach out to [Chris Aloia](#) if you are interested in sharing your story for the first quarter of 2022!

Meet NAAC's Newest Member: Andrea Alma



Figure 3. Andrea Alma

Andrea Alma is the Farm to School Regional Lead for USDA's Mountain Plains Regional Office based in Denver, Colorado. She works with schools, farms, and partners to get fresh, local food to schoolchildren, and has worked with many Native Farm to School programs around the region. Prior to joining the USDA, Andrea was the Farm to School Coordinator for Minneapolis Public Schools. Her career began in Washington, DC, where she founded and directed the DC Farm to School Network. Andrea earned a BS in Environmental Engineering from Tufts University.

Relationship Building, Outreach, and Recruitment in New Mexico

ICN wants to give a **BIG** shout-out to members—**Felix Griego**, Deputy Director at the Student Success and Wellness Bureau, State of NM, and **Paula Szloboda**. Paula worked for the Taos Pueblo for many years in diabetes prevention. Their guidance was invaluable as Chris prepared for the trip. They connected him with people who would offer the Native American Initiative insights into working in New Mexico. At the end of August, Chris traveled to New Mexico and met with five contacts in four cities across the state, including a site visit to the Taos.

Felix Griego, NAAC Member and Deputy Director, State of New Mexico



Figure 4 Felix Griego, NAAC member and Deputy Director at the Student Success and Wellness Bureau, State of NM

In Santa Fe, Chris met with Felix, who discussed his first-hand experience working with Native American schools across the state. Felix painted a vivid picture of the Native American school nutrition landscape, describing the complexity of how Pueblos and Tribes interact with State agencies. [Note: the term “Pueblo” is used to describe the independent Tribal groups of the “Indian peoples living in pueblo villages in NM and AZ since prehistoric times.” (dictionary.com, 2021)]

DID YOU KNOW?

- New Mexico recognizes 23 tribes, including 19 Pueblos, 3 Apache tribes, and the Navajo Nation.
- There are subgroups of the Navajo Nation and Apache tribes.
- The Pueblos and Tribes are sovereign nations with their own governments, cultures, and languages.

Debbie Trujillo, Bernalillo School District Food Service Director

Felix introduced Chris to Debbie Trujillo, the Bernalillo School District Food Service Director, who shared her long experience working with Native American foodservice programs in New Mexico. She provided a wealth of information about Native American school nutrition programs. Given her extensive experience, Debbie is interested in becoming a consultant for the Native American Initiative. As a token of appreciation for her time, Chris shared a packet of ICN resources with her. She expressed excitement for the assortment of school nutrition training materials and inquired about receiving an ICN training for her staff.

Tiana Suazo, Director of Red Willow Center

In Taos, Chris met with Tiana Suazo, the director of Red Willow Center, an organic farm and youth development center on the Taos Pueblo. Tiana is a younger generation member of the Taos Pueblo and is very energetic and passionate about food sovereignty. Chris shared a packet of ICN resources with her as well. She was excited about ICN’s food safety training and materials. She said she is constantly educating people on food safety, especially at Pueblo feasts. Tiana also expressed interest in becoming a consultant. Given that Tiana works with

high school-age youth, she is in a position to connect ICN with a younger demographic of Native Americans who might be interested in seeking careers and training in foodservice. Tiana is looking to increase the farm's reach to schools and would like training on farm to school nutrition. Red Willow farm donates produce to the elders, to other organizations at the Pueblo, and to the larger community in Taos.

Vicky Karhu, Consultant for First Nations Development Institute

Chris also met Vicky Karhu, who is a veteran Tribal liaison and grant writer for food sovereignty and farm to school programs. Vicky has Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) certification and has trained many Native American farmers. She has presented on food sovereignty and experience working in Indian Country. Vicky was eager to complete the consultant application process that will allow her the opportunity work with the Native American Initiative team.

Jerome Armijo, NAAC Member and Central Consolidated School District Food Service Coordinator

In far western New Mexico, in the area of the Navajo Nation (Dineh), Chris met with Jerome Armijo, a new NAAC member and the Central Consolidated School District Food Service Coordinator. Jerome worked in the State Office of Compliance and has experience working with Native American schools in New Mexico. He shared with ICN many insights on working as Food Service Coordinator for a Native American public school, such as how lack of computer skills affects his staff, especially when it comes to virtual training.

Conference Presentations and Upcoming Events

- **National Indian and Native American Women, Infants and Children (NINAWIC) Virtual Conference**, July 20–22, 2021
 - ICN had a virtual exhibit and provided two presentations:
 - Meeting the Needs of Child Nutrition Professionals through Free, Research-Based Trainings and Educational Resources
 - Building Community Connections with Native American Communities to Improve Family and Child Nutrition
- **National Tribal Health Board Conference**, virtually October 4–8, 2021
- **American Public Health Association Conference**, Denver, CO, October 24–27, 2021
- **Intertribal Agriculture Council Annual Conference**, Las Vegas, NV, December 7–9, 2021

Next NAAC Advisory Meeting

Thank you for all the feedback regarding the next NAAC. The committee strongly feels that the meeting should be postponed until the spring of 2022. ICN will continue to offer virtual NAAC Hangouts. Committee members prefer the face-to-face format, and COVID-19 current case counts will limit attendance should ICN hold a fall meeting.

Needs Assessment Update

The goal of the Needs Assessment study is to determine the foodservice needs of school nutrition (SN) professionals working in schools that serve Native American students across the country. Once the study is complete, ICN will use the information to create trainings to assist SN professionals who serve Native American students' meals that meet nutritional guidelines while preserving their cultural values and practices. The pilot of the Needs Assessment instrument is complete and has been validated. Nationwide interviews with SN professionals are currently in progress.