

# Arizona ACEs Consortium – Rural & Indigenous Communities Subcommittee

## Monthly Meeting Notes

**Date: June 3, 2026 | Time: 12:59 PM (GMT-7 / MST)**

## Focus Topic: Implicit Bias and Its Impact on Indigenous Communities

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### Key Outcomes

The Arizona ACEs Consortium Rural and Indigenous Communities Subcommittee held its June monthly meeting with a focus on implicit bias and its impact on Indigenous communities.

1. Chair Casandra Stouder facilitated a 15-minute TED Talk by an Indigenous speaker who explored implicit bias through a cultural lens.
  2. Participants reflected on historical trauma, language loss and revitalization, boarding school legacies, border town racism, and ongoing discrimination.
  3. Members connected implicit bias to intergenerational trauma and emphasized the need for cultural healing practices, community spaces, and continued dialogue.
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### Subcommittee Purpose & Structure

1. Purpose:
    1. Monthly gathering of the Arizona ACEs Consortium subcommittee focused on rural and Indigenous communities.
    2. Core mission is to share resources, solutions, and learning related to trauma, ACEs, healing programming, articles, websites, and tools—learning from one another on a range of topics.
  2. Format:
    1. Resource sharing, collaborative learning, and discussion-based sessions.
    2. Held the first Wednesday of each month at 1:00 PM MST.
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Interactive Opening Activity: “Drawing Trees”

Design:

Participants were asked to draw a tree on paper as a lead-in to the TED Talk on implicit bias.

Reflections & Observations:

1. Nanmathi shared a drawing of a palm tree.
2. Adrian shared a drawing of a full tree with birds and butterflies.
3. Most participants did not initially draw roots, mirroring the TED Talk's central metaphor.

Purpose & Insight:

The activity illustrated how implicit bias functions like unseen tree roots—present, powerful, and shaping what is visible, but often not consciously acknowledged or examined.

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## TED Talk Summary: Indigenous Perspectives on Implicit Bias

Speaker's Personal Journey:

1. Identity & Background:
  1. Mixed heritage, including Silk ancestry and fifth-generation settler German and English ancestry.
2. Childhood Shame Experience:
  1. As a child, when she wore her Auntie Millie's buckskin dress, she felt shame and anger instead of pride—already having internalized the message that “to be Indigenous was to be inferior.”
3. Adult Transformation:
  1. Through ceremony, family teachings, and learning the history of colonization, she moved from internalized shame to pride in her Indigenous identity.

Indigenous Cultural Teachings Highlighted:

1. “White chiapt” Concept:
  1. Emphasizes that we have all arrived together in this moment, full of possibilities, and that we are not alone.
2. Triangle Framework:
  1. Ancestors (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents) stand behind us.
  2. Future generations (children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren) are in front of us.
  3. We, the current generation, serve as the bridge between past and future.

3. Snach Silch Principle:
    1. “We all share one membrane, one skin” with one another and with all relations: land, water, animals, plants.
  4. Indigenous Greetings:
    1. Instead of “How are you doing?”, the question is closer to “Are you you?”—asking if someone is their whole self, and what is needed to support their wholeness.
  5. Anaokan Wih Practice (Four Food Chiefs Origin Story):
    1. Each chief brings unique attributes and strengths.
    2. Wholeness requires diversity and processes that bring in wisdom from many perspectives.
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## Historical Context: Colonization, Assimilation, and Genocide

### Assimilation Policy Goal:

1. Explicit aim: “to rid the Indian of the Indian” and eliminate the “Indian problem.”

### Boarding / Residential School System:

1. Children as young as 5 were forcibly removed from their families by police.
2. Transported in cattle trucks, often a day’s drive from home.
3. Upon arrival:
  1. Traditional clothing taken; hair cut (deeply spiritual in many Indigenous cultures).
  2. Names replaced with numbers.
  3. Children were punished for speaking their language.
4. Families often only saw children in the summer.

### Kamloops Residential School Discoveries:

1. 215 unmarked graves found at a school where the speaker’s ancestors attended.
  2. It was the first site where missing children’s graves were publicized.
  3. Over 1,800 unmarked graves have since been found across Canada, with ongoing searches.
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## Contrasting Family Histories: “Same Bar, Different Realities”

### German Great-Grandfather, Frank Sorge:

1. Born under a wagon in a winter storm in Nebraska.
2. Family emigrated from Germany seeking a better life; they went bankrupt and fled Nebraska at night with two wagons and seven children, settling in southern Alberta.

3. Frank moved to British Columbia, survived his first winter living in a chicken shack with only a sack of potatoes.
4. He eventually built a successful orchard and later said, looking over his land, "This is the land of milk and honey."

Indigenous Great-Grandfather, Paul:

1. Lived more than 100 years, possibly nearing 110.
2. His community lost about 90% of its population to smallpox.
3. Moved from a sustainable, land-based life to confinement on a small reserve.
4. After many years, started an orchard.
5. When water became contested by new settlers, he was told to obtain a water license.
6. Not understanding the concept of needing a license to use water, he continued using it to feed his family and was jailed for doing so.
7. One last standing tree from his orchard remains as a symbol of his resilience and refusal to accept unjust conditions.

Key Insight:

"Our lived experiences are so different, yet we hold the same bar for people." One great-grandfather could see the land as "milk and honey," while the other had his access to land and water violently restricted.

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## Closing Exercise: Embodying the Tree

Guided Visualization:

Participants were invited to:

1. Stand and imagine themselves as trees.
2. Feel roots growing down through their bodies and feet into the earth.
3. Sense those roots connecting to all the experiences, stories, songs, and wisdom that came before them.
4. Notice their roots intertwining with others'.
5. Look around to see themselves as part of a forest.

Central Message:

"We are stronger together when we recognize that our roots are all intertwined."

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## Working Definition: Implicit Bias

Cassandra offered a shared definition:

Implicit biases are the unconscious attitudes, stereotypes, and learned associations we hold about specific social groups. They operate automatically, shaping our perceptions and decisions without our conscious awareness, even when they contradict our stated values.

Key Points:

1. The “roots” of implicit bias go deep, much like tree roots.
  2. Humans are habitual; we often rely on routine norms even when they are harmful.
  3. Addressing implicit bias requires:
    1. Noticing when something doesn’t feel right.
    2. Questioning norms and practices.
    3. Asking hard questions and seeking to learn.
    4. Creating spaces like this committee for ongoing reflection and discussion.
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## Participant Reflections & Lived Experiences

Cheryl: Language Loss, Revitalization, and Border Town Racism

Identity & Education:

1. Lives on the reservation
2. Her father emphasized education as the path forward:
  1. “Everybody goes to school, everybody graduates from high school, everybody graduates from college, everybody gets a degree.”
3. Five of six daughters obtained college degrees; two have master’s degrees.
4. Cheryl is now learning Apache

Language Revitalization:

1. Apache language is being reintroduced into schools.
2. Youth running for pageants now introduce themselves and share their talents in Apache.
3. Cheryl described seeing this as something “we haven’t seen in generations,” and that it “warms my heart.”

Parent Educator Program:

1. Superintendent helped create a parent educator program to:
  1. Teach parents and community members traditional stories.
  2. Translate oral tradition (now written down) for children.
  3. Bring in Apache storytellers and basket-makers.
  4. Teach community members how to introduce themselves in Apache and reclaim history and culture “that we’ve lost.”

### Cultural Programs in Schools:

1. The community had crown dancers in the 1970s, then the practice dropped off.
2. Now, there are drum groups and Apache Clubs in every school (K–12) across four schools.
3. Students have:
  1. Performed at a Diamondbacks game.
  2. Won an award during the Fiesta Bowl parade.
4. Cheryl described this movement as “really building on bringing our culture back into our schools, into the community... it’s been a long haul, but to see it happening now is just amazing.”

### Border Town Racism:

1. “Living in a border town, we are constantly, on an everyday basis, subjected to racism.”
  2. As a child in Globe, AZ, she and her family were followed by store employees while shopping for school clothes.
  3. She recalled thinking, “I don’t steal, but you’re making me feel like I’m a thief in here.”
  4. She asked her father if they could shop in Phoenix, where “these ladies aren’t really nice to us here.”
  5. Her father replied, “Nope, you’re gonna have to learn to live with it... you’re just gonna have to learn to cope with this.”
  6. Now in her 60s, she still encounters racism weekly in town. She shared how exhausting it is to “just try to be normal” while facing constant discrimination.
  7. She reflected that “things you try to think are gone just never really go away,” and wondered whether youth today notice and understand what is happening.
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### Adrian: National Celebration and Grief

1. With the U.S. approaching its 250th anniversary, Adrian noted:
    1. “There’s so much not to be celebrating; there’s so much to be grieving.”
  2. Adrian named the difficulty of finding shared spaces to hold grief about what national milestones mean to those who do not feel celebratory.
  3. They pointed out that:
    1. “It’s really messed up right now, but it’s been messed up many times and probably will continue to be.”
  4. Adrian also lightly remarked on having “a bias against technology” during technical issues with video playback.
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## Dearlynn: Roots, Displacement, and Imposter Syndrome

1. Tree Drawing Reflection:
    1. As a Navajo participant, she struggled with what kind of tree to draw—considering a Christmas tree, palm tree, even a cactus—before settling on trees from her home reservation that shade the homestead and livestock.
    2. She realized that when she feels overwhelmed or begins to second-guess herself, she mentally returns to home and her roots.
    3. She added literal roots to her drawing after reflecting on this.
  2. Community Raising Model:
    1. “We don’t have one person that raises us. We have a village, a community that raises us.”
  3. Higher Education & Belonging:
    1. Her parents and grandparents did not teach the language due to boarding school experiences.
    2. She felt displaced when leaving the reservation for the University of Arizona.
    3. Native Student Affairs created a home for Indigenous students and helped them recognize: “We’re meant to be here.”
    4. She was taught that “imposter syndrome is obsolete.”
  4. Current Phase:
    1. Now 30 and working in her career, imposter feelings still surface, but she is reminded:
      1. “We’re meant to take up these places, we’re meant to be here, we’re meant to do great things.”
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## Sandy: Nervous System Awareness

1. Sandy noticed how relaxed her nervous system felt at a recent conference in a more culturally affirming space.
  2. She became aware of bracing for judgment again once she returned to the airport, naming how quickly old patterns can resurface in different environments.
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## Historical Trauma and the Nervous System

### Intergenerational Trauma Framework:

1. The speaker described colonial violence as having “raped” Indigenous worldviews—destroying beautifully woven webs of ways of living.
2. Multiple harms happened simultaneously:
  1. Land theft and forced removal.
  2. Removal of children without consent.
  3. Imposition of laws without education, preparation, or relationship-building.
3. In an Indigenous worldview:
  1. “The pain of one is the pain of all.” Collective nervous systems carry the weight of these experiences.

#### Biological and Emotional Responses:

1. Entering places like hospitals, courthouses, adoption agencies, and other institutions can trigger strong nervous system responses for many Indigenous people due to historical and ongoing trauma.
  2. Not everyone’s biology responds in the same way—some may not experience strong activation, but that does not negate the collective or historical impact.
  3. Over generations of continual oppression and re-traumatization, the nervous system of individuals and communities can become deeply strained and weakened.
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## Healing Through Culture, Ceremony, and Community

#### Ceremony and Community as Solutions:

1. The group discussed focusing on what can be done within:
  1. Ceremony and cultural practices.
  2. Community meetings and gatherings.
  3. Honest conversations and truth-telling.
  4. Sharing empowering resources (e.g., videos, talks, tools).

#### Neural Rewiring & Regulation:

1. These practices help rewire the brain and offer alternatives to chronic states of tension and hypervigilance.
  2. When doing things like singing traditional songs, participants noted:
    1. These practices are also breathwork, supporting the parasympathetic nervous system.
    2. “That feels good, so then I’m going to do it again,” creating a positive feedback loop.
  3. Over time, consistently practicing culture and being in community can strengthen individual and collective healing.
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## Solutions and Path Forward

### Individual Wholeness as a Foundation:

1. Drawing on Indigenous greetings, participants explored asking:
  1. "Who are you right now? Are you your whole self?"
  2. "How can I help you recognize that in yourself?"
2. When individuals are closer to being their whole selves, they can approach "mountainous issues" with clearer minds, spirits, and hearts.

### Self-Care and Collective Care:

1. Emphasis was placed on:
  1. Resting.
  2. Nourishing ourselves.
  3. Making time for ceremony and gatherings.
  4. Reminding one another to pause, say no when needed, and return when ready.

### Embracing Difference:

1. "We need differences."
2. Diversity of colors, experiences, and perspectives strengthens communities and problem-solving.
3. Accepting that change is constant and choosing to elevate what keeps us strong, healthy, and honest are key steps.

### Challenging Implicit Bias Through Inquiry:

1. If something does not feel right:
  1. Question it.
  2. Ask about it.
  3. Learn more.
  4. Bring it into spaces like this committee for discussion.

### Dual Reality: Harm and Resolution:

1. While harmful realities and discrimination persist, it is also true that solutions exist and can be built:
  1. Mapping out better paths and roadmaps.
  2. Coming together in collaboration.
  3. Understanding why discrimination appears in certain systems, areas, and neighborhoods.
  4. Recognizing that everyone has their own worldview and experience, and that understanding this is foundational for change.

### Systems of Help:

1. Sometimes systems meant to help young people are staffed by people who have not had opportunities to understand historical trauma or implicit bias.
2. Solutions include:
  1. More gatherings and ongoing education.

2. More resources and making them accessible.
3. Creating time and space for learning to occur within and across systems.

Long-Term Perspective:

1. "It's long work, and it takes a long time."
  2. Each interaction is "valuable medicine" that we can pour into one another.
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## Meeting Logistics & Next Steps

1. Chair's Reflection:
  1. Casandra shared that this committee is "a huge part of my own healing and understanding with my own human experience" and that hearing from participants is "really inspiring."
2. Next Meeting:
  1. First Wednesday in July at 1:00 PM MST.
3. Follow-Up Communication:
  1. A follow-up email will be sent with:
    1. Meeting recording link.
    2. TED Talk link.
    3. Notes and resources shared during the meeting.
4. Future Plans:
  1. Continue to grow the committee by bringing in more participants and expertise.
  2. Eventually reintroduce short presentations, which have been meaningful in the past.
  3. Continue working toward "seeing the strength of Arizona when it comes to ACEs and finding some ways to heal our people."
5. Contact:
  1. Participants are encouraged to reach out via email with questions, concerns, or comments.