

Indigenous and Rural Communities Subcommittee Session
Arizona ACE Consortium

Session Date: January 7, 2026

Session Time: 1:00 PM Arizona Time

Subcommittee Chair: Casandra Stouder

Complete Session Recording

View the entire session recording at this link: [Meeting Recording](#)

Session Summary

This gathering brought together Native American community advocates, educational professionals, and organizational leaders to examine crucial matters related to electoral participation, civic involvement, and institutional obstacles confronting Indigenous populations throughout Arizona. Our distinguished guest presenter, Gabriella Cázares-Kelly, who serves as Pima County Recorder, recounted her transformative path from classroom teacher to government official while offering critical perspectives on community-based organizing, political activism, and dismantling obstacles to democratic engagement.

Distinguished Guest Presenter

Gabriella Cázares-Kelly – Pima County Recorder

Groundbreaking Accomplishments:

- Inaugural Native American individual elected to Pima County governmental position
- Among merely four Indigenous Americans to achieve county-level elected positions throughout Arizona's history
- Manages electoral processes for 680,000 registered constituents within Pima County

Professional Background:

- Previously worked as public education instructor and grassroots organizer
- Founding member of Indivisible Tohono, a community-driven organization supporting the Tohono O'odham Nation
- Advocate for electoral accessibility and Indigenous political representation

Contact Details:

- Electronic mail: GabriellaForRecorder@gmail.com
- Online platform: GabriellaForRecorder.org

Attendees that shared or displayed info

Waylon Honga – Hualapai Tribal Member

- Completed decade-long tenure on tribal governing body
- Created extensive PowerPoint educational materials addressing political awareness for Indigenous populations
- Successfully championed tribal declaration endorsing immigration policy reform in 2015
- Resides within Navajo Reservation territory (spouse from Navajo Nation)
- Electronic mail: waylonhonga@hotmail.com

Cheryl Haozous – San Carlos Apache Tribal Member

- Supervises Parent Education initiatives at San Carlos Unified School District
- Coordinates McKinney-Vento assistance program for families experiencing homelessness
- Confronts obstacles to educational access and civic participation within her tribal community

Marlo McCabe – First Things First Organization

- Serves as Community Engagement Coordinator throughout Navajo Nation territory
- Champions early childhood development for children below five years of age
- Collaborates with tribal authorities and community stakeholders on childhood development priorities

Kimber Olson

- Registered member of Chiricahua Apache Nation
- Currently based in Anchorage, Alaska while maintaining professional work in Arizona
- Electronic mail: juniperpineconsulting@gmail.com
- Digital presence: <https://www.juniperpineconsulting.org/>

Sandra Sandoval – Department of Economic Security (DES)

April Jones – Department of Economic Security (DES)

Louanna Benslow – Youth Wellness Specialist

- Winslow Indian Health Care Center

Rhonda Etsitty – Arizona PBS

Adrian and Carol Park Aden – Community Participants

Central Discussion Themes

1. Electoral Registration Obstacles Within Native Populations

Unconventional Location Descriptors

Gabriella illustrated compelling examples of residential address complications confronting remote Indigenous populations:

> "The location descriptor for my childhood residence in Pisinemo: Travel westward along Highway 86, proceed southward on Indian Route 15, enter the village, make a right turn at the red fence, continue down the unpaved road, bear left at the Y intersection, and it's the initial dwelling in the grouping of three opposite the large tree."

This illustration demonstrates how conventional voter enrollment documentation fails to accommodate remote Native populations where:

- Residences lack numerical street designations and standardized location identifiers
- Navigation instructions rely upon landmarks and family names
- Emergency response personnel depend on community members providing roadside guidance
- Standardized documentation creates participation obstacles

Institutional Obstacles Recognized:

- Confusion distinguishing tribal versus county electoral processes
- Restricted availability of voting information and civic education
- Geographic remoteness (Waylon mentioned his tribal community sits 50 miles from the closest Walmart)
- Insufficient diversity and limited exposure to comprehensive political discourse
- Inadequate resources and infrastructure development

2. Gabriella's Path Toward Elected Leadership

Unplanned Introduction to Voter Enrollment

Gabriella's engagement with electoral systems commenced when an acquaintance requested assistance registering constituents at a tribal community college. What appeared straightforward became complicated upon encountering:

- Students experiencing difficulty with enrollment documentation
- Location verification complications
- Insufficient comprehension of electoral procedures
- Institutional obstacles preventing democratic participation

Border Barrier Opposition

The Tohono O'odham Nation maintains 69 miles of international boundary with Mexico. When Donald Trump advocated constructing a border barrier, the tribal community confronted:

- Dangers to cross-border kinship connections and traditional practices
- Suspension of federal environmental and cultural safeguards
- Anxiety and frustration manifested through social media platforms
- Ambiguity regarding legal protections and available options

Community Action:

Gabriella and associates convened an educational gathering that:

- Attracted more than 200 attendees (capacity crowd)
- Included tribal leadership and legal professionals
- Informed community regarding Congressional powers and advocacy techniques
- Resulted in establishing Indivisible Tohono

Implementing the Indivisible Framework

The collective modified the nationwide Indivisible manual (initially developed by former Capitol Hill interns) through:

- Indigenizing the methodology to incorporate tribal and state government
- Understanding how elected representatives respond to constituent coalitions
- Accessing political forums and gatherings
- Comprehending procedural rules, agenda development, and decision-making mechanisms

Determination to Seek Office

Gabriella's inspiration emerged from understanding that:

> "The individuals making determinations about discussion topics, financial allocation, and priorities—these are simply people who possessed the courage to pursue elected positions."

Critical Insights:

- Government officials frequently possessed limited understanding of Native populations

- Representatives emphasize matters that motivated their candidacy, not necessarily community priorities
- Indigenous concerns remain secondary rather than being actively championed
- Concern that an antagonistic candidate might dismantle tribal outreach initiatives

Despite financial hardship and confronting a \$5,000 automotive repair that nearly terminated her campaign, Gabriella pursued office because:

> "It wasn't simply that I desired to pursue elected office, it's that I was compelled to. I needed to make the attempt."

3. Community-Based Organizing Approaches

Establishing Community Confidence

Gabriella highlighted that years of community engagement prior to campaigning meant:

- Community members already recognized her as reliable and dedicated
- She required only to announce her candidacy rather than introduce herself
- Rapid endorsements and community backing materialized
- Genuine presence and consistent involvement outweighed campaign financing

Continuous Advocacy

Illustration: LGBTQ Pride Declaration

1. Initial year: Challenging procedure, "pulling teeth" to secure tribal council endorsement
2. Substantial positive community reaction
3. Following year: Declaration approved more expeditiously
4. Third year: Different organization submitted declaration autonomously
5. Fourth/Fifth year: Tribal administration initiated declaration independently—now an established practice

Teaching: Divisive concepts become accepted through persistent, continuous advocacy

Accessing Political Forums

Gabriella described participating in Democratic Party gatherings where she frequently was:

- Sole attendee below age 50
- Sole person of color present
- Sole Native American participant

- Encountered resistance despite expressed commitment to inclusion and fairness

Approach: Maintain consistent attendance, bring allies, master procedural rules, understand agenda-setting processes

4. Waylon's Political Awareness Initiatives

Educational Material Creation

Waylon developed an 80-slide PowerPoint presentation addressing:

- Distinctions between Democratic and Republican philosophies
- Government assistance initiatives (food stamps, WIC, entitlements)
- Political dimensions of social support programs
- Republican emphasis on self-reliance versus Democratic endorsement of social safety nets

He created these educational materials specifically for tribal constituents after observing their disengagement from voting and political discourse.

Tribal Declaration Achievement

In 2015, the Hualapai Tribal Council:

- Reviewed Waylon's educational presentation
- Approved declaration supporting immigration policy reform
- Established foundation for alliance-building with Latino populations

Strategic Vision for Tribal Participation

Waylon's approach:

- Encourage tribes to approve declarations on nationwide concerns (immigration, firearm regulation, wage standards, educational vouchers)
- Develop alliances with additional communities sharing parallel concerns
- Demonstrate tribal solidarity: "We supported your priorities, here's our declaration, we require your assistance on this matter"
- Mobilize tribes to become active participants rather than passive observers

> "Tribes remain uninvolved in the political arena. We lack participation. We observe from the periphery within our sovereign cultures... we believe we possess sovereignty and immunity, and remain invisible publicly, but that's inaccurate. We exist in someone's consciousness somewhere, and we must become active participants."

Waylon extended offers to distribute his educational presentations to Indigenous populations and organizations. Interested individuals may contact him at: waylonhonga@hotmail.com

5. Obstacles Within San Carlos Apache Territory

Cheryl Haozous described substantial challenges confronting her tribal community:

Minimal Electoral Engagement

- Merely 37-38% register and participate in tribal elections
- Substantially reduced participation in county/state electoral processes
- 80% unemployment rate throughout the community

Educational Impediments

- Numerous parents completed only 5th or 8th grade education
- Initiated families during youth, never resumed schooling
- Fail to recognize educational value
- Cycle continues through subsequent generations

Civic Participation Disconnection

Community members lack understanding of:

- How electoral participation influences daily circumstances (food stamps, AFDC, WIC)
- Significance of registering children as tribal members
- Relationship between political determinations and community resources

Generational Attitude Transformation

Cheryl noted a transition from "What actions can I take to improve my situation?" to "What can you provide me? What free benefits are available?"

Present Tribal Controversies

Significant disagreement regarding tribal membership criteria:

- Maintain Blood Quantum standards?
- Transition to matrilineal clan methodology?
- Utilize blood percentage calculations?
- Despite significance, anticipating minimal voter participation

McKinney-Vento Program Obstacles

Supporting families experiencing homelessness where:

- Dramatic increase in homeless children compared to prior year
- Parents demonstrate minimal interest in civic participation
- Challenges conveying significance of democratic engagement

Session Documentation & Chat Discussion Highlights

Significant Connections Established

- Waylon Honga extended offers to distribute his political education materials with interested populations and organizations
- Gabriella Cázares-Kelly and Sandra Sandoval arranged to meet at upcoming Tribes Legislative Day
- Kimber Olson welcomed all attendees to establish contact via electronic mail or online platform
- Numerous attendees expressed enthusiasm for Waylon's educational materials

Technical Documentation

- Read.ai automated documentation was initially activated at 1:00 PM
- AI transcription was deactivated at 1:56 PM following DES protocol requirements
- April Jones and Sandra Sandoval from DES were restricted from speaking while AI transcription operated due to liability considerations regarding public documentation and precision
- Discussion continued following recording cessation, with adverse childhood experiences designated for future session exploration

Participant Appreciation

Attendees conveyed sincere gratitude and acknowledgment:

- Cheryl Haozous expressed thanks to Gabriella
- April Jones acknowledged Cassandra and Gabriella
- Kimber Olson remarked "this has been so great!"
- Louanna Benslow introduced herself and conveyed appreciation
- Rhonda Etsitty expressed gratitude for the excellent dialogue and information, anticipating future gatherings

- Gabriella transmitted affection from the desert and acknowledged everyone for their vital contributions

Subcommittee Chair's Statement

Cassandra Stouder, subcommittee chair, communicated that this marks her fourth month leading this subcommittee and enthusiastically invites all Indigenous individuals to bring professional associates, relatives, and community participants to upcoming gatherings. She underscored the significance of expanding this practice community and amplifying our unified influence.

Reference Materials: Gabriella Cázares-Kelly

Official Digital Platform

Pima County Recorder – Gabriella Cázares-Kelly

Her official county platform contains her biography, governmental responsibilities, and administrative information.

 <https://www.recorder.pima.gov/BioPages/Gabriella>

Significant Articles & Professional Profiles

Wikipedia – Gabriella Cázares-Kelly

Thorough biography encompassing her formative years, academic preparation, and historic election as the inaugural Native American elected to a countywide position in Pima County.

 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gabriella_C%C3%A1zares-Kelly

Arizona List Professional Profile

Emphasizes her grassroots organizing, voter-enrollment initiatives, and administrative leadership as Recorder.

 <https://www.arizonalist.org/elected-officials/gabriella-cazares-kelly/>

Ballotpedia

Documents electoral history, term specifications, and campaign connections.

 https://ballotpedia.org/Gabriella_C%C3%A1zares-Kelly

Media Documentation & Journalism

AZ Central – "Gabriella Cázares-Kelly makes history in Pima County election"

Documents her historic victory and her platform emphasizing voter accessibility.



<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/12/03/gabriella-cazares-kelly-makes-history-pima-county-election/6353273002/>

Arizona Mirror – "How a Native elections official is breaking down voting barriers in Arizona"
Comprehensive journalism on her initiatives improving accessibility for remote and Indigenous populations.



<https://azmirror.com/2024/09/03/how-a-native-elections-official-is-breaking-down-voting-barriers-in-arizona/>

The 19th News – "What it looks like to make voting accessible in Arizona's rural and Indigenous communities"

Concentrates on her administrative modernization initiatives and community outreach.



<https://19thnews.org/2024/09/how-a-native-elections-official-is-breaking-down-voting-barriers-in-arizona/>

Tucson Sentinel – Q&A on Pima County's new voting system
Comprehensive interview regarding electoral system modifications.



https://www.tucson sentinel.com/local/report/022322_cazares_kelly_voting/qa-pima-recorder-cazares-kelly-countys-new-voting-system/

Upcoming Session

Scheduled Date: Wednesday, February 4th, 2026

Scheduled Time: 1:00 PM Arizona Time

Distinguished Guest Presenter: Randy Begay

A promotional flyer containing additional details will be distributed electronically to all attendees in upcoming weeks.

Concluding Remarks

This session proved extraordinarily productive, characterized by substantive dialogue, collective experiences, and implementable approaches for advancing Indigenous civic participation and political engagement. Profound appreciation to Gabriella Cázares-Kelly for her dedication, knowledge, and motivational leadership.

We anticipate continuing this essential collaborative work.