



AMERICAN INDIAN
HIGHER EDUCATION
CONSORTIUM

2025–2030

STRATEGIC PLAN



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Introduction

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) has been the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) since 1973. After a leadership transition in 2024, and facing the expiration of the previous strategic plan, AIHEC was poised for change. The organization embarked on a strategic planning process that embraced the rich history, explored new opportunities, and remained firm in the commitment to excellence in Tribal higher education. Using a deliberate, people-centered strategic planning process, AIHEC incorporated necessary refinements to the organization's priorities, underscored the value of the TCU movement, and embraced opportunities for growth.

AIHEC chose to partner with Student-Ready Strategies (SRS), a postsecondary education-focused organization that supports strategic planning and other student success initiatives, to conduct the planning process. In parallel, AIHEC also partnered with rpk GROUP, a firm that supports colleges and universities, systems, and nonprofits with growth and resource allocation strategies. While SRS co-developed the strategic plan with AIHEC and their constituents, rpk GROUP was crafting an aligned business model for the organization.

Approach

To develop a full strategic plan with input from all of AIHEC's constituents, AIHEC's community was deeply engaged in the process. The approach began in July 2024 with a two-day retreat for the AIHEC's Board Members to set the overarching vision, mission, and priorities. Then, AIHEC identified key constituents to interview or with whom to conduct focus groups to discuss challenges and opportunities for AIHEC, and to vet the reenvisioned vision, mission, and priorities. These constituents included TCU representatives, including a student, the current AIHEC leadership and staff, and external partners and funders.

Next, AIHEC's staff were convened to review the vision, mission, and priorities and create aligned services and strategies to support the plan. In December, AIHEC leadership finalized the service lines, strategies, and metrics aligned to the four priorities. The Board was also surveyed to determine the specific wording of one of the priorities. In January 2025, AIHEC leadership developed a work plan for staff, aligned with the strategic plan, priorities, and strategies. The staff was convened virtually to review the strategies and metrics, as well as understand the work plan and provide feedback. Staff completed work plans in Spring 2025.

In early February 2025, a draft of the strategic plan was sent to the Board for review. At the end of February, the Board convened virtually to discuss the draft plan and provide feedback. Feedback was incorporated and presented to the Board for final approval in April 2025.

The Board approved the plan as the guiding document for AIHEC from 2025 to 2030.

Vision and Mission

The vision and mission of AIHEC are responsive to the collective priorities set by the AIHEC's Board, constituents, and its staff.

Vision

A unified group of Tribal Colleges and Universities that cultivates student success and perpetuates the lifeways and sovereignty of Tribal Nations.

Mission

Amplifying the collective voices of Tribal-led higher education to empower TCUs through culturally grounded policy, advocacy, research, and capacity building.



The Braided Threads Model

This strategic plan is based on a culturally grounded model that was co-created by AIHEC staff and board members. The board members expressed that the Pillars that served as the conceptual frame for the last strategic plan did not resonate with Tribal communities, and the imagery conjured more thoughts of ancient European structures and societies. One board member suggested using an image with Tribal meaning, like a braided thread. The group was enthusiastic about this suggestion, and thus Threads became the name for AIHEC's key priorities in this new strategic plan.

The Board wanted to ensure that developing distinct Threads would not lead to work happening in isolation. They favored an integrated, holistic approach to the Threads that would weave them together, like a braid. Thus, Braided Threads became both the metaphor and the model for organizing AIHEC's priorities in the new strategic plan.

While some of the Threads are appropriately outward-facing, centering the TCUs that AIHEC serves, the strategic plan also needed to encompass goals and accountability that are inward-facing, embracing excellence for the organization itself, not just the broader network. This portion of the strategic plan was so foundational to success of the whole, that this became the Knot in the model - the component from which the Threads stem and that which keeps the Braid from unraveling.



The three Threads represent AIHEC's three key priorities: Transformative TCUs, TCU Student Success, and Culture, Honor, and Ceremony.

The Braid intentionally weaves the Threads together to ensure they are approached in a holistic and integrated way.

The Knot represents AIHEC organizational excellence and is both the component from which the Threads stem and that which keeps the Braid from unraveling.

Braiding through Services

The Threads represent *what* AIHEC does, but strategic planning discussions also focused on *how* AIHEC advances the mission. These were categorized as distinct Services. Through careful analysis of all programming and functions, and with staff input, four service categories were identified.

AIHEC's Services are:

- **Policy and Advocacy**
- **Convening and Knowledge Building**
- **Seeding and Resourcing**
- **Training and Development**

Each of these Services is relevant to multiple threads. For example, AIHEC might engage in Seeding and Resourcing by giving grants to TCUs, which supports the Transformative TCU Thread, but also provide grants and internship opportunities to students directly, which supports the TCU Student Success Thread. The Services, therefore, are the mechanism through which the Threads are Braided. The specific strategies of this plan were created at the intersection of each Thread and each Service, as shown in the matrix below.

KNOT		SERVICES			
THREADS	Organizational Excellence	STRATEGIES			
		Policy and Advocacy	Convening and Knowledge Building	Seeding and Resourcing	Training and Development
	Transformative TCUs	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY
	TCU Student Success	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY
	Culture, Honor, and Ceremony	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY	STRATEGY

A completed version of this matrix can be found in the Appendix.



Strategies

This section lists the concrete strategies that AIHEC will pursue to realize the Vision, Mission, Threads, and Knot. These strategies were created by the AIHEC staff for the AIHEC staff and refined through multiple rounds of input. Each strategy is denoted with an icon to reference the relevant Service.

The Knot

Organizational Excellence

AIHEC is a dynamic, people-centered organization that serves a pivotal role in the TCU movement and in the values of service, transparency, and accountability.

Organizational Excellence Strategies:

- Re-envision internal staffing, policies, and communications to support strategic plan threads.
- Ensure AIHEC staff routinely participate in meaningful training and development opportunities.
- Diversify funding streams to align with the new business model.
- Structure and continuously improve AIHEC membership to maximize value and impact.

Services Icon Key



Policy and Advocacy



Convening and Knowledge Building



Seeding and Resourcing



Training and Development

The Threads

Transformative TCUs

AIHEC supports member TCUs as student-centered institutions with visionary leadership and data-informed governance, financial prosperity, and state-of-the-art facilities.

Service

Transformative TCU Strategies



Develop and deploy an annual advocacy agenda that includes legislative initiatives, policy proposals, and general advocacy for TCUs.



Leverage data, research, and existing platforms to inform and promote institutional transformation, and support shared knowledge related to current and ongoing TCU priorities.



Create and use a culturally grounded, sustainable capacity building strategy to coordinate the delivery of technical assistance from experts outside of AIHEC and provide funding support to TCUs.



Curate training, professional development, and networking opportunities for AIHEC member institutions.

TCU Student Success

Students at AIHEC's member TCUs are supported through best practices that reflect Tribal values and cultural autonomy, driving success as defined by each institution.

Services TCU Student Success Strategies



Engage students consistently and intentionally to inform the AIHEC policy agenda and serve as advocates.



Convene, teach, and learn from TCU students to strengthen Tribal values, histories, cultures, and languages.



Cultivate opportunities for student scholarships, student scholarly research activities, and internships within the AIHEC organization and its network.



Train TCU campus communities in academic and operational innovations that facilitate student success.

Culture, Honor, and Ceremony

AIHEC builds mutual respect among Tribal Nations and TCUs to advance the TCU movement, honoring history and ceremony, celebrating culture, and sharing the success of TCUs.

Services Culture, Honor, and Ceremony Strategies



Secure new, and leverage current strategic partnerships with Native and non-Native organizations to advocate for Tribal prosperity.



Design all AIHEC activities and events to intentionally strengthen connections between language, culture, and Tribal higher education.



Assess and structure funding opportunities for alignment to cultural priorities and protocols.



Support TCUs to align Native lifeways to their learning systems, including courses, facilities, and programs.

Measuring Progress

This strategic plan establishes a clear direction for AIHEC's work. The success of the strategic plan includes an intentional process to measure progress and to highlight achievements to enhance the foundation and refinement of operations.

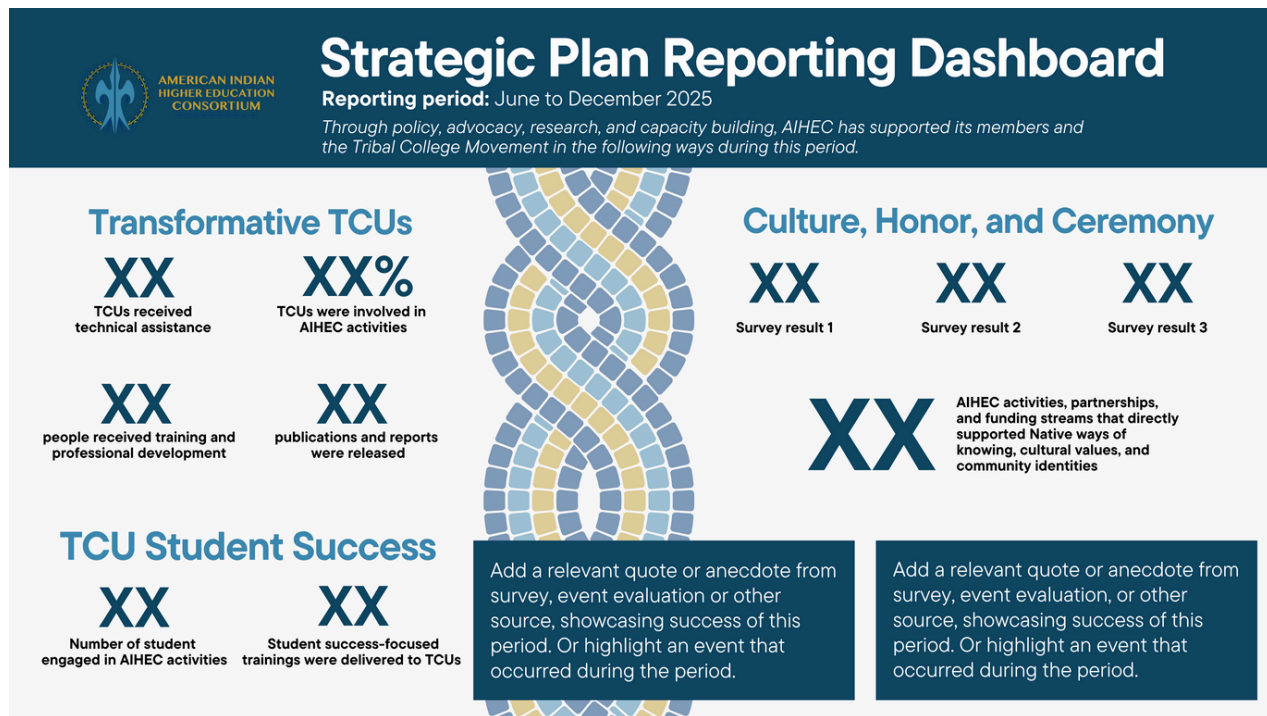
AIHEC will collect, monitor, and work to continuously improve the following measures:

Knot + Threads	Success Measures
Organizational Excellence	<p>Success Measure 1: Number of funding streams and levels of resourcing for each, including both externally and internally funded streams</p> <p>Success Measure 2: Number of policies and process reviewed</p> <p>Success Measure 3: Staff retention rate</p>
Transformative TCUs	<p>Success Measure 1: Number of transformation-related supports provided by AIHEC through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance • Training & Professional Development • Publications/Reports • Number of sub-awards to TCUs <p>Success Measure 2: Percentage of TCUs engaged in activities</p>
TCU Student Success	<p>Success Measure 1: Number of students directly engaged through AIHEC activities. Activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student stipends and contracts • Convenings and summits • AIHEC-led student groups • Focus groups/interviews • Scholarships • Internships <p>Success Measure 2: Number of student success technical assistance/trainings delivered to TCUs</p>
Culture, Honor, and Ceremony	<p>Success Measure 1: Survey results related to AIHEC's support for culture, honor, and ceremony</p> <p>Success Measure 2: Number of AIHEC activities, partnerships, and funding streams that directly support Native ways of knowing, cultural values, and community identities</p>

Examining Numbers through Stories

The progress AIHEC makes within each of these measures is routinely reported to the Board, the staff, and the broader community, as appropriate, using the dashboard presented below.

These presentations create a common understanding of AIHEC's progress, and serve as dedicated space for additional storytelling. For example, AIHEC leaders complement the dashboard's numbers during these regularly-scheduled presentations by sharing the specific efforts of team members that drove progress, visuals of the contributing events and publications, and lessons learned that are important for future efforts.



Conclusion

A strategic plan is only as effective as an organization's willingness to implement and support the plan. AIHEC is committed to making this a living document and embedding the identified processes into the structures of day-to-day activities, ensuring these threads and strategies remain at the forefront of AIHEC work.

This strategic plan will be used to ensure that AIHEC's work stays aligned with strategic priorities and that the organization is held accountable to executing the plan. The strategic plan will be reviewed annually to ensure progress and refinement are relevant to emerging conditions and AIHEC's evolving priorities. Ultimately, the strategic plan will serve as a roadmap toward a successful and sustainable future for AIHEC and the TCUs that it serves.



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About AIHEC

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium, a 501(c)(3) organization governed by a board of directors composed of the presidents of the accredited United States-based Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), is the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's 35 accredited TCUs and 2 developing institutions—a unique community of tribally and federally chartered institutions working to strengthen tribal nations and make a lasting difference in the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

2025 - 2030 Strategic Plan



Vision

A unified group of Tribal Colleges and Universities that cultivates student success and perpetuates the lifeways and sovereignty of Tribal Nations.

Mission

Amplifying the collective voices of Tribal-led higher education to empower TCUs through culturally grounded policy, advocacy, research, and capacity building.

Knot

Organizational Excellence

AIHEC is a dynamic, people-centered organization that serves a pivotal role in the TCU movement and roots its work in the values of service, transparency, and accountability.

Threads

Transformative TCUs

AIHEC supports its member TCUs as student-centered institutions with visionary leadership and data-informed governance, financial prosperity, and state-of-the-art facilities.

TCU Student Success

Students at AIHEC's member TCUs are supported through best practices that reflect Tribal values and cultural autonomy, driving success as defined by each institution.


Culture, Honor, and Ceremony

AIHEC builds mutual respect among Tribal Nations and TCUs to advance the TCU movement, honoring history and ceremony, celebrating culture, and sharing the success of TCUs.



Appendix B

AIHEC Strategy and Service Matrix

Organizational Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-envision internal staffing, policies, and communications to support strategic plan threads • Ensure AIHEC staff routinely participate in meaningful training and development opportunities • Diversify funding streams to align with new business model • Structure and continuously improve AIHEC membership to maximize value and impact 				Success Measure 1: Number of funding streams and levels of resourcing Success Measure 2: Policies and Procedures reviewed/revised (at least once/year) Success Measure 3: Staff retention rate
	Policy and Advocacy	Convening and Knowledge Building	Seeding and Resourcing	Training and Development	Success Measures 
	Develop and deploy an annual advocacy agenda that includes legislative initiatives, policy proposals, and general advocacy for TCUs.	Leverage data, research, and existing platforms to inform and promote institutional transformation, and support shared knowledge related to current and ongoing TCU priorities.	Create and use a culturally grounded, sustainable capacity-building strategy to coordinate the delivery of technical assistance from experts outside of AIHEC and provide funding support to TCUs.	Curate training, professional development, and networking opportunities for AIHEC member institutions.	Success Measure 1: Number of transformation-related supports provided by AIHEC through: Success Measure 2: Percentage of TCUs engaged in activities
	Engage students consistently and intentionally to inform the AIHEC policy agenda and serve as advocates.	Convene, teach, and learn from TCU students to strengthen Tribal values, histories, cultures, and languages.	Cultivate opportunities for student scholarships, student scholarly research activities, and internships within the AIHEC organization and its network.	Train TCU campus communities in academic and operational innovations that facilitate student success.	Success Measure 1: Number of students directly engaged through AIHEC activities Success Measure 2: Number of student success technical assistance/trainings delivered to TCUs
	Secure new, and leverage current strategic partnerships with Native and non-Native organizations to advocate for Tribal prosperity.	Design all AIHEC activities and events to intentionally strengthen connections between language, culture, and Tribal higher education.	Assess and structure funding opportunities for alignment to cultural priorities and protocols.	Support TCUs to align Native lifeways to their learning systems, including courses, facilities, and programs.	Success Measure 1: Survey results related to AIHEC's perceived support for culture, honor, and ceremony Success Measure 2: Number of AIHEC activities, partnerships, and funding streams that directly support Native ways of knowing, cultural values, and community identities.
Transformative TCUs					
TCU Student Success					
Culture, Honor, and Ceremony					