



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

FEB - 2 2024

Dear Tribal Leader:

On November 5, 2023, the Department of the Interior (Department) completed the 12th stop on The Road to Healing, further building on the work being conducted under Secretary Haaland's Federal Boarding School Initiative. As part of this Initiative, we announced the launch of an oral history project that will document, and make accessible, the experiences of the generations of Indigenous children who attended the Federal Indian boarding school system.

Through generous investments from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Mellon Foundation, we have provided a grant to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS) to gather first-person survivor narratives. These will help form a permanent oral history collection and ensure stories and experiences that Federal Indian boarding school survivors share can be learned from and heard by current and future generations.

Beginning in March, NABS will begin on-site interviews with survivors who have volunteered to participate through its [website](#). The first stop will be Oklahoma, with visits expected in every Bureau of Indian Affairs region. Interviews will take place in Tribal and urban Indian centers.

All Federal Indian boarding school survivors will have the opportunity to choose how their interview will be shared beyond the Department, to include Federal partners, Tribal governments, policymakers, researchers, and the public. They will be interviewed by a team of qualified oral historians, and have access to on-site support and resources, such as traditional medicine and healers, trauma-informed mental health providers, and counselors. Survivors will also have access to private rooms for their interview and healing needs and be contacted following their interviews to ensure they have continued support and access to resources they might need. We are committed to gathering stories informed by healing principles and Indigenous Knowledge.

The U.S. government has never before collected a comprehensive oral history of boarding school survivors, which Indian Tribes have long advocated for, to memorialize their citizens' experiences who attended Federal Indian boarding schools. But our efforts cannot be successful without your support. As we begin to plan the next phase of interviews, I ask that you begin conversing with the survivors within your Indian Tribe and encourage their participation in this project. Partnering with Indian Tribes, Indigenous organizations, and community leaders, we will ensure proper protocols and traditional practices are followed and respected.

The intergenerational trauma caused by the legacy of Indian boarding schools remains in Indigenous communities and contributes to cycles of violence and abuse, and other undocumented bodily and mental impacts. Only by acknowledging the past can we work toward a future we are all proud to embrace. If you have any questions regarding the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative, please contact Joaquin R. Gallegos, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs, by email at joaquin_gallegos@ios.doi.gov.

Sincerely,

Bryan Newland
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs