

## Western Native Voice

# Youth Program Handbook

Western Native Voice’s Expanding Horizons program brings Montana high school students together to champion the preservation of tribal identity and culture and foster relationships between tribal and urban Native Americans. This handbook provides guidance for young people who take part in Expanding Horizons and all our programs, and for volunteers and staff who work with young people. We seek to create a safe, supportive, and culturally inclusive environment.

Chief Rocky Boy, the Chippewa leader whose name the Rocky Boy’s Reservation bears, said “[Love one another and take care of each other.](#)” Western Native Voice seeks to embody this principle in our work, including our work with young people. We approach our efforts in a spirit of learning. We expect this handbook will change over time and welcome all feedback. You may provide feedback to Youth Program Director Tristen Belgarde at [tbelgarde@westernnativevoice.org](mailto:tbelgarde@westernnativevoice.org) or (406) 869-1938.

### **Ensuring Engagement and Inclusion**

Western Native Voice seeks to provide a welcoming environment for all young people. That means we will:

- Ensure that physical environments for programs can support people with varying ability levels, including access for mobility and assistive devices.
- Create and adapt program schedules wherever possible to meet participant needs, such as changing the hours of an after-school program if it conflicts with work or transit schedules.
- Learn and use youth participants’ correct names and pronouns, store this information securely, and make it available to all staff who interact with them. (If a young person doesn’t want to disclose their pronouns to staff or doesn’t want them to be public knowledge, we respect that. One alternative is to refer to them by name only: “Could you grab Mona’s backpack and hand it to Mona?”)
- Involve young people in major decisions about the program. Give them a chance to share their opinions and concerns and explain how you will follow up on their feedback.

- Provide options for young people to take leadership roles in youth programs.
- Whenever possible, involve young people in decisions about consequences for inappropriate behavior, and give youth a voice in healing and repair for wrongs they did or contributed to.
- Designate a person who participants can go to if they have needs or questions about accessibility or program access. Provide that person with resources on accessibility and access, such as those on the American Camp Association website.
- Provide parents and guardians with monthly written information about the content and schedules of youth programs; feedback on their child's participation in the program, including health and behavior; and introductions or re-introductions to program staff.
- Allow parents and guardians to observe programs as appropriate.
- Inform parents and guardians of our youth protection policies.
- Conduct regular surveys of program participants and their families to gather feedback on the relevance of services provided and ways to continue to improve them.

With youth at the center of our work, we call out below the code of conduct for all young people who participate in Western Native Voice programs. We provide this code so young people know what behaviors we foster and encourage and what behaviors we do not allow.

We ask all youth participants to sign and return the code of conduct to us, and welcome any questions and feedback they have about it.

### **WESTERN NATIVE VOICE YOUTH PROGRAMS CODE OF CONDUCT**

Western Native Voice brings Montana students together to champion the preservation of tribal identity and culture and foster relationships between tribal and urban Native Americans. We ask all participants in our programs to abide by the statements below. Program leaders will mediate disputes when possible, but any participant who violates this code could face discipline, including removal from the program.

- I will respect program leaders, other participants, and the natural world when I take part in Western Native Voice activities.
  
- If I need a trusted person to confide in, quiet time to myself, or other support while participating in Western Native Voice activities, I will ask a program leader for help.
  
- I will take care of program facilities and equipment.
  
- I will attend all classes and events on time.
  
- I will complete work honestly and without cheating.
  
- I will use technology devices responsibly during programs.
  
- I will not use abusive language toward a staff member, volunteer or another participant.
  
- I will not possess or use alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs on Western Native Voice property or report to the program while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- I will not bring dangerous or unauthorized items such as explosives, firearms, or weapons to Western Native Voice property or programs.
  
- I will not verbally or physically harass another participant, staff member or volunteer.
  
- If I witness misconduct in the program by anyone, including adults, I will report it to a program or organization leader. I understand that I do not have to make the report to the person I witnessed acting in a way prohibited by our policies.
  
- I will not commit or threaten a violent act against any person, group, or animal.
  
- I will follow all Western Native Voice rules. If I don't understand a rule, I will ask questions.
  
- I will not bully or take unfair advantage of a participant in a Western Native Voice program.
  
- I will abide by the instructions of program leaders unless it would harm me or another person to do so.

I have read and I understand the Western Native Voice Code of Conduct. I agree to abide by the rules described above and understand that I may be removed as a participant if I violate any of these rules.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**WESTERN NATIVE VOICE VOLUNTEER CODE OF CONDUCT**

I will provide a healthy, safe, and supportive environment for young people.

I will use respectful and appropriate language in all interactions with young people and not use profanity, derogatory terms, age-inappropriate jokes, or name calling.

I will not discuss intimate personal details of my life with young people.

I will respect the personal space and boundaries of the young people Western Native Voice serves and avoid inappropriate physical contact, including tickling, wrestling, sitting on laps, and back rubs.

I will treat young people and their families fairly, no matter their gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, disability, medical needs, and sexual orientation.

I will not inflict any physical or emotional abuse such as striking, spanking, shaking, slapping, humiliating, ridiculing, yelling at, threatening or degrading young people.

I will notify Western Native Voice immediately of any safety issues in the life of a young person that I become aware of in my volunteer role.

I understand that failure to adhere to this code of conduct may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

**I agree to abide by this Code of Conduct.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **Western Native Voice Youth Protection Policy and Guidelines**

This policy applies to all Western Native Voice programs designed for or primarily involving people age 18 or younger. That includes:

- Online programs
- In-person programs, whether on-site or off-site

### **Screening and Training**

All Western Native Voice staff and youth program volunteers will complete a review of our youth protection policy as part of their orientation. Staff will complete additional training as follows:

- Review of policies on aquatic safety, transportation, emergency procedures and prevention and reporting of child abuse – within the first week of work
- Training in recognizing signs of suspected child abuse – within three months of start  
<https://www.childcaretraining.org/mod/page/view.php?id=4007>
- Training in bullying prevention – within three months of start  
<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/laws/montana>  
<https://www.stopbullying.gov/resources/training-center>
- Hiring and screening staff (for supervisors) - within three months of start  
<https://www.associatedemployers.org/training/>

- All Western Native Voice staff that work closely with youth programs will sign and complete a written application that includes a Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) compliance release allowing the organization to conduct a background information search. The application will request basic information, including the applicant's previous experience working with children, references and employment information. Western Native Voice will maintain this information in an applicant file.
- Management will interview the applicant about the position and the applicant's talents, qualifications, and abilities. Additional interviews may take place as appropriate.
- All applicants must provide contact information for three professional references. Management will confirm references and document them in the applicant's file.
- Western Native Voice will conduct criminal background checks on all individuals who pass initial stages of screening. Background checks will comply with regulations governing programs. More details on disqualifying criteria appear in the next section.

Western Native Voice will update staff training and orientations annually and maintain documentation of all training in each individual's personnel file.

### **Requirements for Western Native Voice-Hosted or Sponsored Youth Programs**

**Designate a representative and back-up:** Every sponsored youth program must have a designated representative and back-up to ensure the program meets Western Native Voice youth protection rules and requirements. When the sponsored program is led by Western Native Voice, the representative and backup are likely to be employees.

**Obtain required forms from the parents and/or guardians of participating young people:** Participants in Western Native Voice youth programs must supply a registration form completed by a parent or guardian, including medical and emergency contact information.

**Complete criminal history background checks:** Western Native Voice requires all staff and volunteers working with minors in our youth programs to undergo a criminal history background check to determine

whether the individual has prior criminal convictions relevant to their participation that would make them ineligible to participate. Western Native Voice also requires that partner organizations confirm that they comply with local laws, regulations and organizational policies to protect young people.

*Disqualification Criteria:* Western Native Voice will deem applicants ineligible for any volunteer or staff role involving the care or supervision of young people if they:

- Fail to complete the screening process or provide information needed to conduct a criminal history background check
- Are a registered sex offender
- Have been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony involving force or threat of force against a person
- Have been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony defined or characterized as a sex offense
- Have been convicted of a crime involving contributing to the delinquency of a minor
- Have been convicted of any crime related to child neglect or abuse
- Were previously terminated from a paid or volunteer position due to misconduct of any kind involving a child
- Have been convicted of any crime involving dishonesty
- Have been convicted of any crime involving illegal substances
- Have been convicted of any crime involving indecency

**Ensure Appropriate Supervision:** Supervision of youth programs, facilities, and staff will be designed to protect youth at all times. Our staff will wear ID badges with their photos. Management will make unannounced observation visits to youth programs at least twice per month.

Sign-in and sign-out will be in place for all youth programs. Staff will release youth only to authorized parent(s), guardian(s), or people authorized by parents/guardians in writing or by phone. Staff will check for signs of physical injury or emotional distress each time a child reports to the program.

Staffing needs for youth programs may vary depending on the type of program, activities, and other circumstances. At a minimum, we require the following staff ratios for in-person programs we host:

Participant Age Range	Ratio	Examples
11-13 years	1 adult staff leader for every 15 participants, with a minimum of 2.	2 staff members may supervise up to 30 children ages 11-13. 3 staff members for 31-45 youth.
14-18 years	1 adult staff leader for every 25 participants, with a minimum of 2.	2 staff members may supervise up to 50 youth ages 14-18. 3 staff members for 51-75 youth.

**Appropriate Behavior with Young People**

Adults should be positive role models for young people, and always treat them in a caring, honest, and respectful manner consistent with the mission and guiding principles of Western Native Voice.

All members of the Western Native Voice community are responsible for the well-being of young people while they participate in our programs or use our facilities.

We prohibit these behaviors or conduct with or in the presence of young people:

- Sexual activity, sexual comments, sexual jokes, or sharing sexually explicit material
- Bathing, showering, or dressing/undressing
- Sleeping in the same room, tent, or cabin with a young person
- Physical discipline of any kind (hitting, slapping, swatting)
- Verbal abuse, such as teasing, taunting, yelling at or bullying of any kind
- Contacting youth participants outside established time frames for a program or activity
- Inviting a youth participant to your home
- Inviting a youth participant to a personal virtual space, like Discord, Steam, Facebook, etc.
- Communicating with a youth participant through email, text, social networking, chat rooms or any form of electronic or social media outside official Western Native Voice channels
- Inviting a young person to be a ‘friend’ or connection on any social media channel

- Touching a young person in any manner or place that could be deemed or perceived as inappropriate
  - Never touch a young person in a place on their body that would be covered by a bathing suit
  - Never request a hug or touch from a young person to meet your needs
  - Gentle hugs or touch are only ok if a young person is extremely upset or needs medical assistance that requires you to touch an area near an injury. In these instances, ask first. Example: “Would it be ok if I placed a Band-Aid on your knee?”
- Photographing young people unless doing so is part of your official responsibilities. If you have been asked to take photographs, do not proceed unless you know Western Native Voice has a waiver from the parent or guardian allowing photos of the young person to be published.
- Use of alcohol or any drug that causes any kind of impairment while on duty in a role supervising or supporting youth participants
- Asking or suggesting that a youth participant keep a secret

The following behaviors or conduct are permitted only in rare, special circumstances:

- *Transporting a young person alone in your vehicle.* In rare instances, you may be the only person able to transport a youth. If that happens, inform others that you are doing so and confirm before getting in the vehicle that a responsible adult is waiting at your destination.
- *Being alone with a young person.* In some cases, one-on-one interaction is expected, such as in a mentoring relationship. If these interactions take place, they should be held in open, well-illuminated spaces or offices providing clear visibility to adult passersby. If such a space is not available for your conversation with a young person, reschedule the conversation.

The following situation requires special care:

When possible, designate a bathroom for youth use. If a separate bathroom is unavailable, staff should make sure a restroom is unoccupied before allowing youth to use the facilities. When youth use the restroom, the door should be propped open and staff should stand next to the open door, within earshot. If multiple youth use the restroom, the door should be fully open and the staff member should be able to

view the sink and any other shared area. This practice ensures privacy for youth and supports staff by not placing them in the position of being alone with a young person.

### **How to Report Incidents or Inappropriate Behavior**

If you believe something inappropriate or unsafe has happened to a young person, almost happened, or might happen, say something. When in doubt, report.

### **Reporting Procedure**

All Western Native Voice staff are mandated reporters, which means they are legally required to immediately report known or reasonably suspected child abuse or neglect to authorities. Mandated reporters will be protected from criminal and civil liability for making a report in good faith. Western Native Voice does not allow any kind of retaliation against anyone who makes a good faith report of suspected abuse or neglect.

Any staff member, seasonal staff, volunteers, contractors, and victims of child sexual abuse or misconduct should immediately report any suspicion or concerns that child sexual abuse or misconduct has happened or could happen to [name, title and contact information of responsible team member and a backup in case that person is unavailable]. We do not require that you confront the person you believe is the perpetrator before notifying the designated contact people.

Staff will follow an internal chain of command to report abuse and may report abuse directly to local authorities if their supervisor does not do so immediately.

If you have a concern about sexual harassment involving adult employees, you should report it to any member of management at Western Native Voice. We will take every reasonable measure to protect any person who has been victimized or is at risk.

If abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at or during Western Native Voice programs or activities:

- The child's parent or guardian will be notified.

- Authorities will be notified in accordance with local, state, federal and tribal regulations.
- The alleged perpetrator of abuse or misconduct will immediately be put on leave from Western Native Voice pending an investigation.
- Our insurance company will be notified and an incident report completed.

Staff will cooperate with any investigation by authorities. If authorities do not investigate, Western Native Voice will form a management team to investigate the incident. The team will act in consultation with our attorneys and insurance company.

- Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or neglect will be removed from their position with Western Native Voice.

### **Emergency Procedures**

When planning for emergencies that may affect the youth program, consider:

- Who will need to make decisions (like whether to evacuate a building)?
- When and how will you notify parents/guardians of an emergency?
- Who will decide what to tell your youth participants and when?
- How will you let people in your program or facility know about the emergency?
- How will you account for everyone in the facility after an evacuation?
- Where will you evacuate children, staff, and others to?
- How will you coordinate with public safety and emergency management officials?
- Who will be responsible for each of these actions?

### *Evacuations*

- Before any emergency, identify at least two evacuation routes from every room that will serve youth participants. Make sure routes are well-lit and accessible. Clearly mark exits and post evacuation maps.
- To evacuate, walk briskly with youth participants to leave the building by the nearest evacuation route. Help people who need assistance, including people with disabilities.
- Assemble at your evacuation site.
- Take attendance each time you arrive at a new location.
- Call 911 if necessary. Report the incident up Western Native Voice's preidentified chain of command.

Document your evacuation plan here:

## *Active Shooter*

Assess the situation and consider which of these options would be safest for the youth in your care:

- Leave the scene - If it is safe to leave the building with youth participants, do so. Move quickly and leave belongings behind. Go to a safe place and find cover if you can. Take attendance when you reach a secure location.
- Find a place to hide - Lock the door and lock and cover windows to the room you are in. Turn off lights and silence electronic devices. Make the room look empty. Instruct youth participants to remain calm and quiet. Take attendance of participants if you can.
- As a last resort, distract and disable the shooter.

When it is safe to call 911, do so. Provide as much info as you can, including the location and number of shooters, description of shooter(s), weapons used, and number of potential victims.

Document your active shooter plan here:

## *Medical Emergencies*

If a young person experiences a medical emergency:

- Remain calm and call 911
- Provide location (address, building name and room number, if applicable), a description of the injury or symptoms, condition of the participant and any other requested information
- Stay on the phone until you are told to hang up
- Do not move the participant unless their location places them in immediate danger
- Stay with the participant and have someone else meet the emergency responders
- Inform emergency responders of any medical information listed on the participant's medication treatment authorization form
- Contact the participant's parent/guardian to inform them of the incident
- If the participant is taken to the hospital, stay with them until their parent/guardian arrives or they are released. Bring the medication treatment authorization form to the hospital with you.

For non-emergency medical incidents, staff should have the knowledge and tools to provide basic first aid to participants, or contact the nearest first-aid certified individual.

Document all injuries, whether they are emergencies or not.

Share your medical emergency plan here:

### *Reunification*

After an emergency, work with emergency management officials to designate a location for children within mass assembly areas. Consider:

- an area that allows youth groups to congregate together
- proximity to supplies and support
- proximity to likely reunification points for parents/guardians
- backup locations

Create a plan for how you will release young people to their parents/guardians.

- What staff will you assign roles in this process? How will you train them?
- What documentation/identification will you require to release a young person to an adult?
- How will you document who the young person left with?
- How will you communicate among staff when a staff member must accompany a child to receive first aid or other care somewhere else?
- How will you communicate to parents in your orientation or handbook about reunification location and procedures?
  - When communicating with parents after an emergency, which methods of communication will you use? (Choose more than one, and obtain that contact information)
    - Text, phone call or email to parents
    - Message left on a designated voicemail
    - Notification on program website (e.g., banner at top of page) and/or social media pages, as applicable
- Consider sending periodic updates to let parents/guardians know their children are safe during the reunification process. Even if there is no news it can help to let parents/guardians know things are status quo.

Document your reunification plan here:

*The emergency preparedness section of this Handbook was adapted from the University of Washington Youth Program Emergency Preparedness Plan Template.*

**Statement of Understanding and Acceptance of This Policy**

I hereby acknowledge that:

- I have read the Western Native Voice Youth Protection Policy and Guidelines
- I agree to abide by the Western Native Voice Youth Protection Policy and Guidelines
- I have raised any questions I have about the Policy and Guidelines and received the information I needed
- I am part of the team at Western Native Voice working to keep Youth participants safe
- I will report, in a timely and thorough fashion, any incidents I witness involving the safety of young people, including near-miss situations and instances where policies were not followed
- I am subject to discipline, up to and including termination or disqualification from a role involving young people, if I am found in violation of any provision in the Policy and Guidelines
- I will raise any concerns I have or suggestions to improve safety with [team member name]

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_