

Whidbey Native Connections Initiative Newsletter
September 2026

Hello members of Whidbey Native Connections Initiative,

We send you greetings in this season of transitions. Just as the leaves of maples and elderberry shrubs begin to take on that tinge of yellow, we facilitators of Whidbey NCI are feeling the change of seasons in our uniquely human ways. Instead of turning yellow and plummeting to Earth, we are accepting as graciously as we can that all things change. Our own time of being “elder-berries” has arrived.

The three of us who have co-facilitated NCI since 2021/2022 (Anne Hayden, Corinne Ludy, and Sarah Schmidt) find it necessary for personal reasons in each of our lives, to step back from the way we have structured NCI. To provide us with more time and energy to attend to our lives, health, and families, we are paring down the offerings from NCI in the fall season, and perhaps for an unknown time to come.

The three of us will no longer offer the monthly gatherings and presentations on Zoom, as we’ve done for the past four years. We have treasured, more than words can say, being able to gather with so many of you, with an increasing number of Native people joining in. We consider you all our friends and are committed to staying in relationship with you going forward.

So many of you have volunteered when we sent out a call, have responded to the invitations of our Native friends, have faithfully read our newsletters and attended our monthly gatherings, or have stopped us in the grocery store to tell us what has moved you. We appreciate you all deeply.

We’re intending to continue to send out a newsletter in a loosely monthly rhythm. Our email list has grown to almost 350 people, and we hear often how meaningful and informative the newsletter is. It is one way we can continue to weave the threads between us as “New people” and our Indigenous friends and neighbors.

We’re pleased that there are other offerings that may come through NCI as well. As they emerge, we will keep you informed.

Brief History of Whidbey NCI

Five years ago, a small group of women who shared a concern for Indigenous justice and right relations began meeting with the support of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Whidbey Island (UUCWI). We held a vision of a collaborative group gathered to build relationships among Native and non-Native communities based on truth, respect, and justice. Out of that vision came the Native Connections Initiative.

Our colleagues in a similar organization (Native Connections and Action Group, of the Quimper UU in Port Townsend) generously mentored us and stood beside us.

We soon met members of the Snohomish Tribe of Indians (sduhubš) who were inexplicably thrilled to meet us. They are descendants of the Snohomish Tribe on the south end of Whidbey whose ancestral territories include at least three year-round places. To our delight, some grew up here in recent generations and still live here!

Our small beginnings rapidly gained momentum. Connections became relationships became deep friendships. We immediately began working together to educate ourselves and the wider community about their ongoing Native presence, and about our mutual history. We learned how to listen; how to step back and center Native voices; how to let Native people lead and tell *us* what they’d like to see NCI engage with.

Through NCI, in the past 4 years, we have managed to do many, many things:

- educate ourselves and others,
- host a monthly meeting space online,
- host Indigenous speakers,
- hold book groups, show films, bring people together on field trips,
- learn the complexities of “Land Acknowledgements,”
- inspire activists to send letters,
- learn about Native plants and traditional uses,
- speak with legislators on behalf of our local Tribes,
- learn about our responsibilities with the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott,
- learn about the difficulties of Federal non-recognition for Tribes such as the Snohomish,
- create and send numerous newsletters,
- make a lot of soup, cookies and spreadsheets,
- support Indigenous gatherings with venues,
- support the arrival and encampment of the Blue Heron Canoe Family in Langley for four years,
- accept the invitation to support the annual Coast Salish Intertribal Youth Camas Bake for three years,
- follow, host, and honor the Totem Pole Journey
- learn drum-making and other Native crafts,
- learn and practice collaborative leadership
- work towards decolonizing meetings, events, attitudes and world-views
-and so much more!

But far beyond this “doing” list, the most precious, meaningful, and enduring result of NCI has been the deep friendships that have emerged. It’s hard to find the words to honor what these friendships mean to us. When we let friends in the Snohomish Tribe know about our impending changes, Carly Matthews (sduhubš, and Chair of the Snohomish Council) replied eloquently. Her words are true for us:

“We are in real relationship with each of you.

That does not change because NCI is changing or because the way you gather may look different going forward.

You have become our friends and our relatives, and those relationships will continue.”

We feel the deepest honor, Carly, and take your words into our hearts. We reflect that you have all become *our* friends and relatives, and those relationships will continue.

Instead of calling us “white people” or “non-natives,” Carly has been speaking of us as the “New People,” those who arrived more recently in their ancestral homelands. That feels so respectful and kind. We all have love for this land in common. We are committed to being stewards of relationship and land as we move forward.

Going Forward: Indigenous Peoples’ Day

In the immediate future, we are aware that **Indigenous Peoples Day** is coming up on **Monday, October 12th**. For the past four years, we have collaborated with the sduhubš to hold a gathering on Whidbey to honor the first people of this land. So many people look forward to this annual event!

Unfortunately, NCI cannot be the primary organizers due to circumstances in each of our lives. We would love to see an honoring of that day happen again this year, and reached out to the sduhubš to ask what they’d like to see happen. With our good fortune, Cynthia Campbell has been asked by the sduhubš Tribal council to be their local liaison for the day on Whidbey. Cynthia and Anne have worked together and have found a wonderful venue for a celebration of the day.

The **Organic Farm School** has enthusiastically welcomed us. There are indoor spaces we can use to be out of any inclement weather, as well as a large field to use however the tribe wants. The grounds are spacious, private, with picnic tables in the field, covered spaces, bathrooms, and accessible parking. Cynthia will be working with the Tribal Council to design the event. We'll pitch in as we can.

What we know now is that **we'll meet in-person at the Organic Farm School on Maxwellton Road on the afternoon and/or evening of October 12th to celebrate all Native peoples.** Stay tuned for the details!

With deep gratitude,
Anne Hayden
Corinne Ludy
Sarah Schmidt

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Native Connections Initiative

An Initiative of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Whidbey Island

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You can unsubscribe at any time by replying to this email.

We are honored to live on the traditional and contemporary lands of Coast Salish Tribes, including the Snohomish, Lower Skagit, Samish, and Swinomish.

*We strive to be ethical stewards of these lands and waters,
and to honor our Native neighbors.*