



LOS ANGELES CITY/COUNTY NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN COMMISSION APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AUGUST 19, 2025

The August 19, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian (LANAIC) meeting was at the County of Los Angeles Hall of Administration, Sybil Brand Room 372, 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, California, 90012.

Call to Order & Land Acknowledgement

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith called the meeting to order at 6:31 P.M. and read the Los Angeles County Land Acknowledgment.

Invocation

Commissioner John Only A Chief provided an invocation.

Roll Call

Present: Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith
Treasurer Denise Escoto
Caroline Bhalla
Dr. Andrea Garcia
Dawn Jackson
Mona Morales Recalde
John Only A Chief
Rich Toyon
Rene' William

Absent: Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog
Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor
Chrissie Castro
Vivian Garcia
Rudy Ortega Jr.
Ted Tenorio

Staff: Alexandra Valdes, LANAIC Executive Director
Megan Moret, Department of Arts & Culture Board Liaison and Special Assistant
Julien Tan, LANAIC Administrative Manager

Quorum was met.

Commissioner Introductions

Commissioners provided brief introductions, including their names, appointing office, and tribal affiliation.



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Public Comment

A member of the public named William Bailey shared that he’s currently weighing different paths—whether to pursue a tribal, federal, or state route. He expressed a personal belief that anyone with a Social Security Number is, in a way, is Native American. William mentioned that he’s formed a small political party and is working to get more people involved. He also spoke about an upcoming initiative aimed at making California its own country, to remove federal government authority from the land. However, he noted uncertainty about who would hold jurisdiction if that initiative moved forward.

Action Items

6.1 Adopt absentee excuses

A motion was made by Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia and seconded by Treasurer Denise Escoto to adopt Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog, Vice Chairperson Mark Villasenor, Commissioner Chrissie Castro, Commissioner Vivian Garcia, and Commissioner Ted Tenorio’s absentee excuses for the August 19, 2025, meeting. The motion passed.

YES	Lewis-Smith, Escoto, Bhalla, A. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Ortega Jr., Castro, V. Garcia, Tenorio

6.2 Approve the July 19, 2025, Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) Unapproved Meeting Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia and seconded by Treasurer Denise Escoto to approve the unapproved July 19, 2025, LANAIC Meeting Minutes as presented.

The motion passed.

YES	Lewis-Smith, Escoto, Bhalla, A. Garcia, Jackson, Morales Recalde, Only A Chief, Toyon, Williams
NO	
ABSTAIN	
ABSENT	Imitates Dog, Villasenor, Ortega Jr., Castro, V. Garcia, Tenorio



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6.3 Select the 2025 Native American Heritage Month Honorees: Spirit of Creativity Honoree, Spirit of Community Honoree, and Spirit of Tradition Honoree

Roll call votes were taken for the 3 NAHM honoree categories (the vote breakdown is below.) of The Chapter House and founder Emma Robbins (Diné) were selected as the 2025 Spirit of Tradition Honoree, Tencha Chavez was selected as the 2025 Spirit of Community Honoree, and Metzli Projects was selected as the 2025 Spirit of Creativity Honoree.

2025 Spirit of Tradition Honoree		
	Emma Robbins (Diné) of the Chapter House	Absent
Imitates Dog		X
Villasenor		X
Lewis-Smith	X	
Denise Escoto	X	
Bhalla	X	
Castro		X
V. Garcia		X
A. Garcia	X	
Jackson	X	
Morales Recalde	X	
Only A Chief	X	
Ortega Jr.		X
Tenorio		X
Toyon	X	
Williams	X	



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2025 Spirit of Community Honoree (Round One)						
	Tribal Firefighters	Tench Chavez	Billy Mills	Kimberly Morales Johnson	Dr. Claradina Soto	Absent
Imitates Dog						X
Villasenor						X
Lewis-Smith					X	
Denise Escoto		X				
Bhalla					X	
Castro						X
V. Garcia						X
A. Garcia					X	
Jackson		X				
Morales Recalde				X		
Only A Chief			X			
Ortega Jr.						X
Tenorio						X
Toyon				X		
Williams		X				

2025 Spirit of Tradition Honoree (Round Two)			
	Tench Chavez	Dr. Claradina Soto	Absent
Imitates Dog			X
Villasenor			X
Lewis-Smith		X	
Denise Escoto	X		
Bhalla		X	
Castro			X
V. Garcia			X
A. Garcia		X	
Jackson	X		
Morales Recalde		X	
Only A Chief	X		
Ortega Jr.			X
Tenorio			X
Toyon	X		
Williams	X		



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2025 Spirit of Creativity Honoree (Round One)					
	Metzli Projects	Sierra Nizhoni Teller Ornelas	Ian Skorodin	Ben West	Absent
Imitates Dog					X
Villasenor					X
Lewis-Smith	X				
Denise Escoto				X	
Bhalla				X	
Castro					X
V. Garcia					X
A. Garcia	X				
Jackson		X			
Morales Recalde	X				
Only A Chief			X		
Ortega Jr.					X
Tenorio					X
Toyon			X		
Williams				X	

2025 Spirit of Creativity Honoree (Round Two)			
	Metzli Projects	Ben West	Absent
Imitates Dog			X
Villasenor			X
Lewis-Smith	X		
Denise Escoto		X	
Bhalla		X	
Castro			X
V. Garcia			X
A. Garcia	X		
Jackson		X	
Morales Recalde	X		
Only A Chief	X		
Ortega Jr.			X
Tenorio			X
Toyon	X		
Williams		X	



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Discussion Items

7.1 Discuss AIAN Homelessness in LA County

Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia gave a shoutout to Commissioner Caroline Bhalla for organizing the 2025 State of Los Angeles County Housing and Neighborhoods (SOLACHAN) event at The California Endowment on August 18, 2025. The gathering marked the release of LA County’s first Housing and Neighborhood Report. The report provides key data on homeownership, rentership, demographics, and homelessness, offering the county a starting point to track progress and remain accountable. Commissioner Bhalla will share the report links with everyone, and other commissioners are encouraged to let her know if there’s anything they’d like to add.

Commissioner Dr. Garcia also spoke about her interview with the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), which focused on questions about AIAN homelessness. Commissioner Dr. Garcia strongly urged the GAO to create a separate report on urban Native homelessness, since Native people make up about 80% of the AIAN population and deserve a focused study.

She also presented findings from the 2025 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, focusing on American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous individuals. The percentage of Native people experiencing homelessness rose from 3% to 4%. Although the data are limited due to small sample sizes, they still reveal disparities. A chart with red and green boxes indicates which data is reliable. On the second page, health and disability stats stand out: 33% of Native respondents reported substance use disorders—higher than the Latino population. Mental health issues were reported by 40%, and rates of physical and developmental disabilities were nearly double the county average.

Commissioner Dr. Garcia emphasized that service providers should take these needs seriously. She expressed frustration over the lack of accurate data, calling it “ludicrous” that whole numbers are still hard to get. Still, she noted a small win: the report now includes the full definition of homelessness, which is a step forward.

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith asked if other major cities have similar reports and if so, suggested it may be useful to compare the findings. Commissioner Dr. Garcia said no but agreed it would be a helpful study. She mentioned Seattle as an example—no but pressure, they revised their data collection methods. At one point, Seattle reported a 15% homelessness rate, which later dropped. In comparison, LA County reports 4%, but Commissioner Dr. Garcia noted that unreleased data suggests LA may have the highest homelessness rate across all racial groups. Secretary Lewis-Smith agreed that having accurate numbers is essential and thanked everyone for their efforts to improve the data.



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7.2 Discuss Impacts of Federal Administration on LA County's AIAN Community

Alexandra reported that the county has received Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funding, with the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) receiving a larger share. Legislatively, there's ongoing advocacy to maintain this funding. Although President Trump advocated to cut CSBG funding in his FY25-26 budget, the Senate Appropriations Committee released a budget to maintain CSBG funding levels for FY25-26.

Commissioner Rich Toyon emphasized the importance of honoring tradition and creativity, especially during difficult times. He noted that this year's NAHM honorees play a vital role in keeping that spirit alive and relevant.

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith expressed concerns about UCLA's undergraduate programs, which have faced significant cuts and even potential disbandment. He encouraged anyone who knows college-age students at UCLA to offer support and care. Alexandra added that advocacy and mutual aid should be prioritized. Commissioner Caroline Bhalla noted that USC is facing a federal budget deficit, leading to layoffs and program cuts.

Angel Martinez, Department of Health Services, spoke from his experience at UC Santa Cruz as a mentor and emphasized the importance of mentoring and community support for UC students. Secretary Lewis-Smith encouraged everyone to think about actionable ways to support Native students.

Commissioner Bhalla reiterated that mentoring remains a valuable option, even in tough times. She acknowledged the ongoing nature of these conversations and urged everyone to take personal responsibility in supporting students. Commissioner Rene' Williams agreed, saying it's crucial to get involved—whether through mentoring, showing up, or simply participating once a month in collective action efforts.

Secretary Lewis-Smith proposed a listening session between USC and UCLA to strategize ways to help. Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia suggested that service-related organizations do intentional outreach, especially for students in mental health fields. She recommended that all organizations consider sending letters of support to students to show solidarity and care.

7.3 Discuss LA City Parks Needs Assessment Steering Committee Updates

Commissioner Rich Toyon shared that the LA City Parks Needs Assessment Steering Committee met and is finalizing the Parks Needs Assessment. He shared that they are aiming to release it on September 3rd, with public meetings to follow. The project is moving from Phase 2 to Phase 3, which will focus on sharing results with the public.

Over the past three years, they've studied LA city parks to understand what's needed. Compared to other cities like Dallas, LA invests the least per acre in parks. Areas requiring the most help include Eastern LA and the Western Valley, where there's a lack of green space, shade, and



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places for residents to gather. These areas also face challenges like homelessness and climate impacts.

Phase 3 will include public meetings starting September 3rd. Commissioner Toyon asked for a meeting with the full commission and suggested two tribal outreach options—either inviting tribal members or visiting their communities. He stressed that no parks will be removed, and the goal is to add more.

LA's current parks budget is \$223 million, but \$500 million is needed for proper staffing and services. A full wish list would raise the budget to \$5.2 billion, showing how underfunded the system is. They're exploring ways to use land like watersheds for parks, though it competes with housing and transit needs. More parks could help reduce crime and benefit the city as a whole. Private sponsorships are being considered, especially with the upcoming Olympics. Commissioner Toyon expects to receive the final report soon and will share it. Community meetings are planned for November, and all commissioners are encouraged to attend and give input.

7.4 Discuss the Preservation of Flat Top Rock in Lincoln Heights

Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde shared that the Gabrielino Tongva are the original people of Lincoln Heights, and Flat Top Rock holds deep cultural and spiritual significance. The land was sold five years ago, and someone attempted to build a house on it. Now, the current owner is seeking permits to build not only on Flat Top Rock but also on the surrounding hillside. Commissioner Morales Recalde emphasized that Flat Top Rock is a sacred site, and for the Gabrielino Tongva, conflict resolution traditionally involves song and dance, making this land especially meaningful.

Commissioner Morales Recalde shared that a local tribe is actively opposing any construction on Flat Top Rock. She shared plans to confirm whether the site is officially listed as sacred site by the State of California Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC). She hopes the LANAIC will support preservation efforts by writing a formal letter, which she is willing to draft for Chairperson Shawn Imitates Dog review. She also expressed hope that Mayoral appointees will back the initiative.

Finally, Commissioner Morales Recalde shared that after conversations began with the landowner, fencing was placed on the site, preventing ceremonial use. Beyond its cultural importance, Commissioner Morales Recalde noted the location's stunning views as another reason to protect it.

Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia requested additional information on Flat Top Rock and the efforts to protect it. Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith volunteered to be a thought partner in drafting the letter.



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Presentations

8.1 Presentation on How to Best Serve LA County's American Indian and Alaska Native Community - Andrea Diaz (Outreach Coordinator, Sacred Path Indigenous Wellness Center)

Sacred Path Indigenous Wellness Center Outreach Coordinator Andrea Diaz provided a [presentation](#) on How to Best Serve LA County's American Indian and Alaska Native Community.

Commissioner John Only A Chief asked whether Sacred Path assists individuals who come from Oklahoma for treatment but are removed from the program after violating its term? He also inquired if the organization helps with relocation costs. Ms. Diaz responded that Sacred Path has had opportunities to support in such cases. Commissioner Rene' Williams added that individuals must meet certain requirements, including having a formal diagnosis.

Ms. Diaz explained that Sacred Path is equipped to help streamline the process, remove barriers, and even handle documentation virtually to make access easier. Alexandra shared a personal example, thanking Sacred Path for stepping in to help a young woman in need, and praised the staff for their timely support.

8.2 Los Angeles County Community Engagement Efforts to Address Homelessness and Housing Insecurity – Danielle Tobey (Consultant, Change Well Project) and Angel J Martinez, M.S. (Chief, Equity and Engagement Officer at Community Programs at Los Angeles County Department of Health Services)

Change Well Project consultant Danielle Tobey and Los Angeles County Department of Health Services Chief, Equity and Engagement Officer at Community Programs Angel J Martinez, M.S. provided a [presentation](#) on Los Angeles County Community Engagement Efforts to Address Homelessness and Housing Insecurity.

Ms. Tobey shared that commissioners have been invited to participate in each of the eight SPA (Service Planning Area) community workshops to help inform the design of the new County Homelessness & Housing Department. Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde inquired whether local tribes were being included in the outreach efforts. Danielle confirmed that outreach had begun and asked for suggestions on strengthening government-to-government relationships. Commissioner Morales Recalde recommended requesting a contact list from the Native American Heritage Commission.

Mr. Martinez explained that the two-day workshops are designed to foster deep discussions about the future of the department, touching on issues many commissioners are already engaged in, such as homelessness, housing, mental health, and environmental concerns. Danielle added that the workshops will be safe spaces for people to voice concerns and offer solutions.



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Commissioner Dr. Andrea Garcia asked if participants would be informed ahead of time about the key topics or “buckets” they’ll be asked to address. Commissioner Williams emphasized the importance of preparation, especially for those who may struggle to speak up due to past harms. Even simple bullet points shared in advance could make a big difference in helping people feel ready to participate.

Alexandra inquired if feedback from the recent AIAN Housing Summit had been consolidated and shared. Commissioner Williams said the information is available on a website and can be shared. Alexandra requested that it be sent out before the workshops to help commissioners prepare and be coordinated in their advocacy. Commissioner Caroline Bhalla added that having talking points in advance would be helpful.

Chair’s Report

9.1 General Updates

This item was tabled until the September 16, 2025, meeting.

Executive Director’s Report

10.1 General Updates

Alexandra is currently preparing a draft of the FY 2024–2025 Report for the review and discussion of the LANAIC at their September meeting. She reminded the body that per their Code they are required to submit an annual report to the Board of Supervisors and Commission Services.

Committee & Ad Hoc Committee Reports

11.1 Executive Committee

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith tabled the item.

11.2 Self Governance Board

Alexandra shared that Commissioner Chrissie Castro raised a key question about what would happen to the LANAIC Self Governance Board (SGB) if the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) program was defunded by the federal government. Alexandra shared that she reached out to their CSBG Field Representative James Scott who explained that if CSBG funding were eliminated, it wouldn’t just be a budget issue, it would require a legal change in order for the SGB to be dissolved. The SGB’s role is tied directly to CSBG through statute, so defunding would essentially make the SGB ineffective, but the law would have to change to result in the dissolution of it.



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11.3 2025 Native American Heritage Month Ad Hoc Committee

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith shared that there were no significant updates, except that the honorees were officially voted on during tonight's meeting, and things are moving forward. Commissioner Dawn Jackson is currently working on the 2025 NAHM LA City Hall Bridge Gallery and emphasized the importance of being more intentional this year. She shared that last year, 56 art pieces were submitted so the goal now is to introduce a clear theme and encourage artists to follow it. Commissioner Jackson noted that only one person adhered to the theme last year.

Alexandra added that two of this year's honorees are deeply involved in the arts, which could be a great opportunity to highlight their work and tie it into the gallery.

11.4 LANAIC Bylaws Ad Hoc Committee

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith tabled the item.

Commissioner General Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Commissioner Mona Morales Recalde thanked fellow commissioners who attended the ceremony on Saturday, August 2, 2025, celebrating the return of ancestral Land to the Gabrielino Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians. She noted that once the site becomes ADA-compliant, it could possibly be a meeting location for the LANAIC.

Commissioner John Only A Chief shared that the event featured a thoughtful presentation and was graced by notable guests, including the Mayor of San Gabriel and California House Representative Judy Chu. Commissioner Only A Chief congratulated Commissioner Morales Recalde, who played a significant role in making this momentous occasion possible.

Commissioner Caroline Bhalla shared that during Supervisor Holly Mitchell's commissioner convening, someone asked if anyone was interested in joining the Beach Commission. She encouraged commissioners to speak with mayoral staff or supervisors about open commission seats and suggested referring Native community members for those opportunities.

Alexandra reported that by next month, commissioners will be able to preview the updated look of the LANAIC web page on the Department of Arts and Culture website. She mentioned that the content needs refreshing and asked commissioners to send high resolution headshots and updated bios. She shared that the Department already has strong visuals from its work with Native communities, but she invited commissioners to send additional credited photos, especially close-ups, scenic shots, or group photos that would enhance the site.

Commissioner Only A Chief reflected on the recent community prayer gathering at Griffith Park, calling it a beautiful and well-organized event. He also reminded everyone about upcoming powwows: one in Hawaiian Gardens over the weekend, and another in Pomona at the end of the month.



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Treasurer Denise Escoto raised the idea of revisiting creating an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Committee, a topic that had been previously discussed. Alexandra responded with a recommendation to consider forming either a standing committee or an ad hoc committee to focus on ICWA-related efforts. She explained that while standing committees are subject to the Brown Act and come with more formal requirements, ad hoc committees are more flexible, but they must be project-based and time-limited.

Announcements/Future Agenda Items

No announcements/future agenda items were provided.

Commission Adjournment

Secretary Bryce Lewis-Smith shared that the next LANAIC meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 16, 2025, at 6:30 p.m. in the Hall of Administration, Room 372, 500 W. Temple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 P.M.