



The Falls Initiative

The First Season

- Part 1 | Native Partnership Council
- Part 2 | Community Engagement
- Part 3 | Early Design Ideas
- Part 4 | Programming & Partnership

Convening the Native Partnership Council

At the core of *The Falls Initiative* Community Engagement Plan, adopted and endorsed by the Minneapolis City Council and Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board in January 2022, is the intention to center Native voices.

We acknowledge that the site of the Upper Lock is within Dakota homeland, and that the conspicuously missing story within this historic district is that of its first inhabitants. Therefore, our engagement process has been structured to seek a fuller understanding of Indigenous experience in our community and on this site and to put Native voices and individuals in a position to lead.

In June 2021, at a government to government consultation meeting between the City of Minneapolis and Mni Sota Dakota tribal leaders, Friends of the Falls and the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI), proposed forming a Native Partnership Council as a channel to share stories about Owámniyomni (known in English as St. Anthony Falls), consider this place from an Indigenous perspective, and set guiding principles for the project.

Tribal leadership endorsed this approach, as a method to center Native voices at the beginning and throughout the community engagement process.

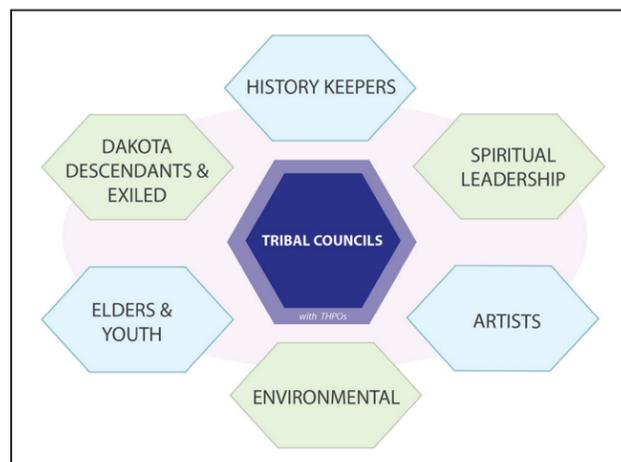
Dakota Leadership

Initially, eighty-five individuals were identified by the Engagement Team from the urban area and greater Mni Sota for their leadership within the Dakota community and broader Native community. Their skills, knowledge, and experience are associated with the following areas:

- Dakota descendants and Dakota exiled
- History keepers
- Spiritual and ceremonial leadership
- Artists
- Environmentalists
- Elders and youth
- Dakota tribal leadership

Elected leaders from all four Dakota tribes in Mni Sota were directly invited to participate in the Council or to name a representative. Friends of the Falls and NACDI were directed to engage with each nation's Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO).

A tier system was developed to identify the strengths of each candidate and ensure representation across multiple categories. The Engagement Team began initial outreach, introduced the project, and asked individuals to make a commitment to lead *The Falls Initiative* as a member of the Native Partnership Council. All Council members were offered a stipend for their participation.



Graphic depicting skills, knowledge, and experience of prospective Native Partnership Council members. Image Credit: CDA Enterprises.

“We’re still here and we’re going to make sure that our voices are heard. We’re going to make sure that the people who need to be here to tell [these] stories, our elders... are given the spotlight to do that.” – Native Partnership Council Member

Image Credit: Drew Arrieta.



Native Voices Lead Decision-Making

Throughout the process, the Engagement Team grew to understand that too often, “engagement” of Native people really means seeking superficial input and “checking a box”, without ceding any power. This practice reinforces the inequity and disenfranchisement that began with broken treaties, displacement, and stolen homeland. We knew we had to start from a different place.

The Falls Initiative established a community engagement framework that began with acknowledgement and welcomed Native leadership at all levels of the planning process.

The creation of the Native Partnership Council (rather than, for instance, a Native Advisory Committee), was intentional and meaningful in that it acknowledges the unique status of sovereign nations and Native individuals as

partners that are central and integral to the decision-making process.

The Native Partnership Council proved to be a place where elected Tribal officials, medicine people, and cultural luminaries could come to the table as leaders to guide broader engagement strategies for *The Falls Initiative*, acknowledging and centering Indigenous worldview and values in the process.

Visit TheFalls.org/EngmtPlan to view the complete Engagement Plan, including:

- Section 2.0 // Engagement Team (pg. 18)
- Section 5.0 // Phases & Timeline (pg.24)
- Phase 2: Inform & Connect (pg. 34)
- Phase 3: Grounding (pg. 41)
- Native Partnership Council (pg. 50)

First Season Members

Through Native Partnership Council discussions, we came to see the evolution of *The Falls Initiative* not in traditional development phases, but rather seasons of transformation.

In the first season of work, we sought to ground ourselves and the project in Indigenous values and practices. The first season might be considered “winter”, a time for connection, storytelling, and preparation for what’s to come.

The following Native leaders directed the first season work, from September 2021 through December 2022.



Jewell Arcoren
Dakota Lakota, enrolled member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate

Jewell Arcoren is a “change agent” and community activist. She is currently serving as Executive Director for Wicoie Nandagikendan and is committed to Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization at the early childhood level. Jewell has a strong interest in behavior health as it relates to recovering our spirits and transcending intergenerational historical trauma in the American Indian community, as well as in non-Native communities. Ms. Arcoren looks closely at parallel trauma © and manifestations of shame, fear, and guilt related to the genocide of America’s Indigenous peoples.



Shelley Buck
Vice President, Prairie Island Indian Community

Shelley Buck is serving her sixth term on Prairie Island Tribal Council, including three terms as president. Buck has a Bachelor of Science in business accounting from Indiana University and a Masters of Art in sports management from Concordia University. She recently finished a second Masters of Jurisprudence in tribal Indian law from the University of Tulsa. Shelley was recently re-elected Regional VP Alternate for the National Congress of American Indians.



Maggie Lorenz
Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe, descendant of Spirit Lake Dakota Nation

Maggie Lorenz is executive director at Lower Phalen Creek Project, a Native-led environmental conservation non-profit on Saint Paul’s east side. Maggie has spent her professional career in the fields of education, cultural resiliency and healing, and environmental justice. Maggie serves on the Friends of the Falls Board of Directors and on a parent committee at Bdote Learning Center.



Juanita Espinosa
Enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Nation, with blood lines that connect to the Ojibwe of Lac Courte Oreilles and Turtle Mountain Ojibwe

Juanita G. Corbine Espinosa has worked as a community organizer since the mid-1970s. She completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Humanities in the Twin Cities. Currently, Juanita works at the University of Minnesota-Department of Medicine as the Community Program Specialist for the Northern Range Satellite Center. She coordinates with 10 institutions across the US focused on American Indian health research in Diabetes, Hypertension, Cardiovascular Disease, and Memory Loss.



Margo Gavle Prescott
Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community

Mergo Gavle Prescott is a member of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community. She studied the Dakota language with Voices of our Ancestors and works at Hočokata Ti as a curatorial assistant, having found that her experience with the Dakota language has been very beneficial in looking at various artifacts. She’s worked steadily with the Scott County Historical Society and has become Secretary for their Board of Directors. She is currently working towards her bachelor’s degree in Art at Mankato State University.



Thorne LaPointe
Sicangu Lakota

Thorne LaPointe, Sicangu Lakota citizen of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, is an Indigenous Human Rights advocate, Lakota singer and storyteller, and Co-Convener of the Mni Ki Wakan: Indigenous Water Decade.



Wakinyan LaPointe
Sicangu Lakota

Wakinyan Skye LaPointe, Sicangu Lakota citizen of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, is an Indigenous Human Rights advocate and Co-Convener of the Mni Ki Wakan: Indigenous Water Decade. He centers Lakota knowledge, language, and ways of life in his work across human rights, working in partnership with Indigenous Peoples and youth.



Mona Smith
Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota

Mona Smith, Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota, is a multi-media artist, educator and co-founder of Allies: media/art and the Healing Place Collaborative. Her media work includes art projects for the web and multimedia installation work. She has served as consultant for the planning for Indian Mounds Park(sic) and provided video work for the site. She has been part of the Dakota Community Council and is currently in pre-production for a commission with M art museum in St. Paul, MN. She is a member of the PLaCE (Place, Location and Context and Environment) Research Consortium based at the University of West England in Bristol, and is a member of the Mapping Spectral Traces International Network. Her artistic and educational work use image, sound and place to work ‘between,’ the place of healing, of relationship, of meaning, where spirit and physical, life and death, fear and strength, night and day intersect.



Janice Bad Moccasin
Crow Creek Hunkpati Dakota Nation

Janice has immersed her personal life in Dakota Culture and Traditions. She has attended the Dakota Wesleyan University In the Psychology program and USD Brookings Business Administration. Janice has served as the Assistant Tribal Administrator for the past 25 years. She has transitioned 4 years later into a Cultural Support Services position focusing on empowering personal and traditional wellness for clients. She is proactive in Native communities as a spiritual advisor for various cultural projects, women and family healing initiatives. She is a Native women writer of memoirs of life experiences. She currently trains in mixed martial arts (MMA) for 4 years as a combat athlete and loves her new lifestyle.

In the first season of work, the Native Partnership Council was joined and supported by the following spiritual and community leaders:



Chief Arvol Looking Horse
Lakota

Arvol Looking Horse was born and lives on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. At the age of 12, he was given the responsibility of becoming the 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe. He is widely recognized as a chief and the spiritual leader of all three branches of the Sioux tribe. He is the author of White Buffalo Teachings and a guest columnist for Indian Country Today. A tireless advocate of maintaining traditional spiritual practices, he is the founder of Big Foot Riders, which memorializes the massacre of Big Foot’s band at Wounded Knee. Chief Looking Horse’s prayers have opened numerous sessions of the United Nations and his many awards include the Juliet Hollister Award from the Temple of Understanding.



Brian Matrious
Ahzhamook Band of Ojibwe

Elder Brian Matrious is of the Ahzhamook (cross roads) Band of Ojibwe. He was taught in the ways of his father and grandfather and practiced his tradition in the old ways using the old Ojibwe language. Brian is a recognized elder and healer of the Ojibwe. He is a member of the Midewiwin Medicine Society of the Ojibwe.



LeMoine LaPointe
Sicangu Lakota

LeMoine LaPointe is a member of the Sicangu Lakota, the Titunwan division of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires). The living legacy of his Indigenous people enlivens his more than 35 years of engagement-centered facilitation and leadership. He chairs the boards of the American Indian OIC and AIM Interpretive Center and is a founding board member of the Tiwahe Foundation and Native Youth Alliance of Minnesota. LaMoine also is a member of the Indian Health Board of Minneapolis.



Carrie Day Aspinwall
Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Minneapolis Urban Band Member

Carrie Day Aspinwall of CDA Enterprises facilitates meetings of the Native Partnership Council. Previously, Carrie engaged residents, stakeholders, and institutions across Minneapolis’ seventy-one neighborhoods in her role with the City of Minneapolis Neighborhood & Community Relations Department.



Robert Lilligren

Enrolled in the White Earth Ojibwe Nation

Robert Lilligren is President and CEO of the Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI), an appointed member of the Metropolitan Council, and Vice Chair of the Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors (MUID). Robert served for 12 years as the Vice President of the Minneapolis City Council, the first Tribal member elected to public office in the City of Minneapolis.



Angela Two Stars

Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate

Angela Two Stars is a public artist, curator, and director of All My Relations Arts, a project of NACDI. Angela received her BFA from Kendall College of Art and Design. Her public art graces the shores of Bde Maka Ska and honors the Dakota people of Mni Sota. Angela was selected for the Walker Art Center’s Indigenous Public Art Commission; her sculpture Okciyapi (Help Each Other) was unveiled in the Minneapolis Sculpture Garden in fall 2021. Angela is a member of the Friends of the Falls Board of Directors.



John Koepke

Anishinaabe; Enrolled member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin

John Koepke is a Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota College of Design and a principal at the firm Urban Ecosystems LLC. With interests in both Native American cultures and environmental science, John has conducted landscape-based research on ancient Native American sites and worked with tribal and other communities to pursue teaching and design opportunities that focus on environmental education, ecological restoration and reclamation. He holds a Bachelor’s of Landscape Architecture degree from the University of Minnesota and a Master’s degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Washington. He was recently elected as a Fellow of the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture. John is a member of the Friends of the Falls Board of Directors.



Melissa Olson

Tribal citizen of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe at Leech Lake

Melissa Olson is freelance journalist for The New York Times and Minnesota Public Radio. Previously, she worked as Deputy Director of MIGIZI and co-managing editor of the MinneCulture program at KFAI Fresh Air Community Radio in Minneapolis. Melissa was a member of the Friends of the Falls Board of Directors from May 2020 - January 2022.



Carrie Day Aspinwall of CDA Enterprises facilitates meetings of the Native Partnership Council.

Image Credit: NeDahNess Greene Photography.

Starting in a Good Way

By Carrie Day Aspinwall, NPC Facilitator

The Native Partnership Council (NPC) convened for the first time in September of 2021.

Spiritual Practice

The initial gathering included spiritual leaders Chief Arvol Looking Horse (Lakota) and Brian Matrious (Anishinaabe/Ojibwe) who welcomed Dakota people back to their homeland through a traditional homecoming or “Ki” Ceremony.

We were directed to maintain our traditions as Native people and start in a good way every time we gather. At the beginning of each Partnership Council gathering, we smudge and recognize that the River has a spirit which we must honor and respect; She is the life vein of our Mother Earth.

Native Partnership Council members recognized the significance of sharing these traditions with non-Native communities and deepening the ways *The Falls Initiative* engagement process is authentically grounded in Native values.

Meeting in Circle

The circle is a sacred symbol of the interdependence of all forms of life. The circle is a key symbol in Native spirituality, family structure, gatherings of people, meetings, songs and dances. It represents the sun, the moon, the cycles of seasons, and the cycle of life to death to rebirth.

The Native Partnership Council meets in a circle, a place where all are equal and each voice has its place. Here, we share thoughts, have intimate discussions, and work to find consensus on issues that affect all of our relatives.



Chief Arvol Looking Horse receiving a gift from NPC Facilitator Carrie Day Aspinwall at the Ki Ceremony, September 2021. Image Credit: Pamela Johns.



Each convening begins with ceremony and smudging - starting in a good way. Image Credit: NeDahNess Greene Photography.



Shelley Buck, Vice-President Prairie Island Indian Community, tears a leaf of sage in preparation for smudging. Image Credit: NeDahNess Greene Photography.

Building Consensus

There is much diversity in traditional systems of Indigenous governance, but the principle of consensus building is a common foundation.

Instead of determining winners and losers, a Tribal Nation must come up with a decision that serves the interests of the entire group. Participants make decisions by agreement rather than majority vote.

We designed a process for finding consensus throughout *The Falls Initiative* planning and design based on these traditional practices. It includes:

- Acknowledging core Dakota principles and values;
- Agreeing on priorities (i.e. Emerging Themes);
- Aligning with the broader community through education (sharing culture, history, ceremony) and healing (processes of truth and reconciliation);

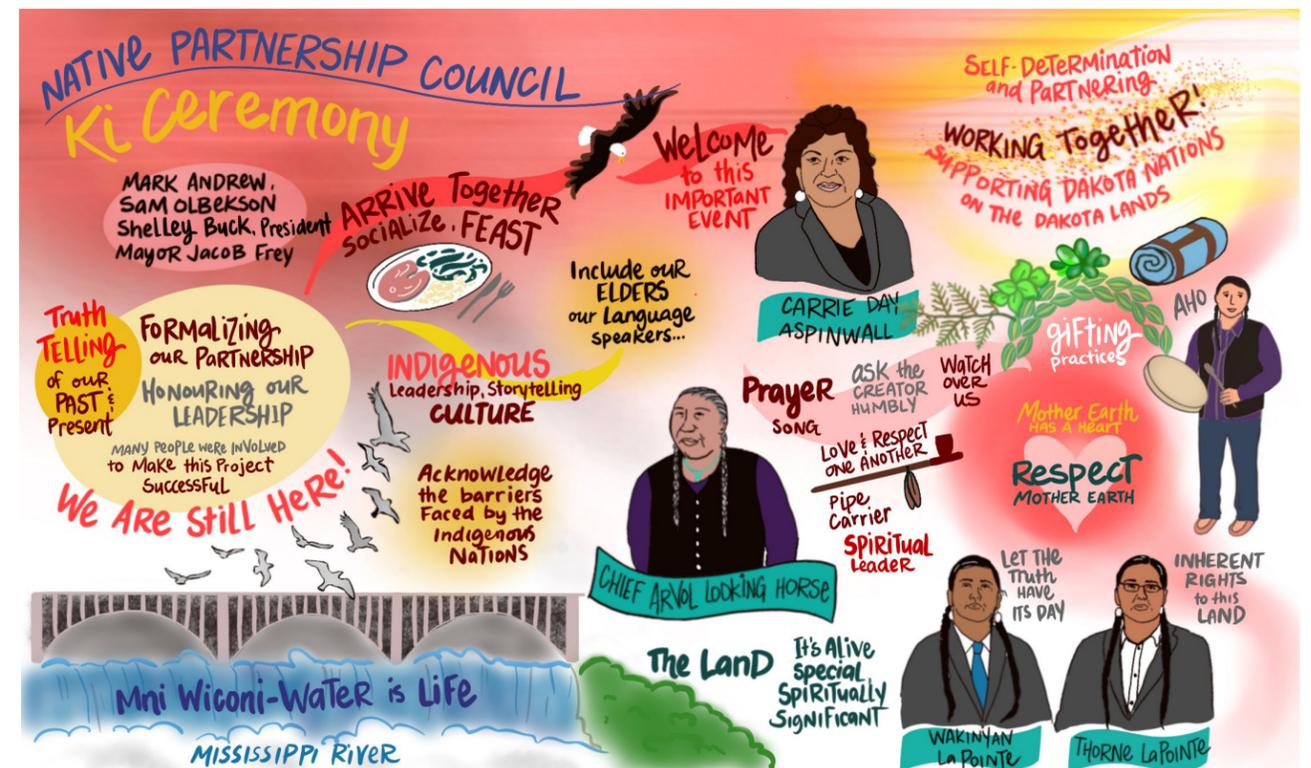
- If there is no agreement, identifying where there is misalignment, giving all members an opportunity to speak, and identifying common areas to build from.

Documenting with Witnesses

We committed to documenting Native Partnership Council dialogue and direction in a way that aligned with Native culture and traditional practices.

Traditional witness bearers are those who are grounded culturally and in community. Their presence guarantees that what is discussed and agreed upon by community members in circle will live on in their truth.

Rather than record traditional meeting minutes, Michelle Buchholz, a Wet’suwet’en artist who leads Cassyex Consulting, was engaged to bear witness to NPC sessions and create graphic recordings depicting key stories and themes.



Graphic Recording depicting the Ki Ceremony, September 2021. Image Credit: Michelle Buchholz, Cassyex Consulting.



The Native Partnership Council meets in a circle, a place where all are equal and each voice has its place. Here, they share thoughts, have intimate discussions, and work to find consensus on issues that affect all of our relatives.

Image Credit: NeDahNess Greene Photography.

Sharing Stories

Early convenings of the Native Partnership Council took the form of open-ended conversations in circle.

We sought to better understand the many histories and relationships tied to this place, Owámníyomni, and to identify shared values that should guide broader community engagement efforts for *The Falls Initiative*.

The Engagement Team asked questions, like:

- How can we look at this place through the lens of Tribal history?
- What is your personal history with this place? Do you have family stories related to the River?
- In what ways has this history been hidden or erased? Are there ways it is still visible?
- How do we define the site's significance?

- How do our people experience the River today?

These prompts led to powerful conversations about familial trauma, personal identity, tribal history, and cultural values.

Native Partnership Council members also advocated for those who cannot speak for themselves. They spoke powerfully about the lasting impacts of genocide, industrialization, and commercialism on all of our relations - the River, the four-legged, the fish, the winged.

At the heart of all discussions was the River - a living spirit and mother of life. The NPC challenged us to consider what the River wants, what can be learned from the water itself, and what would happen if this living force could flow as she wanted again.



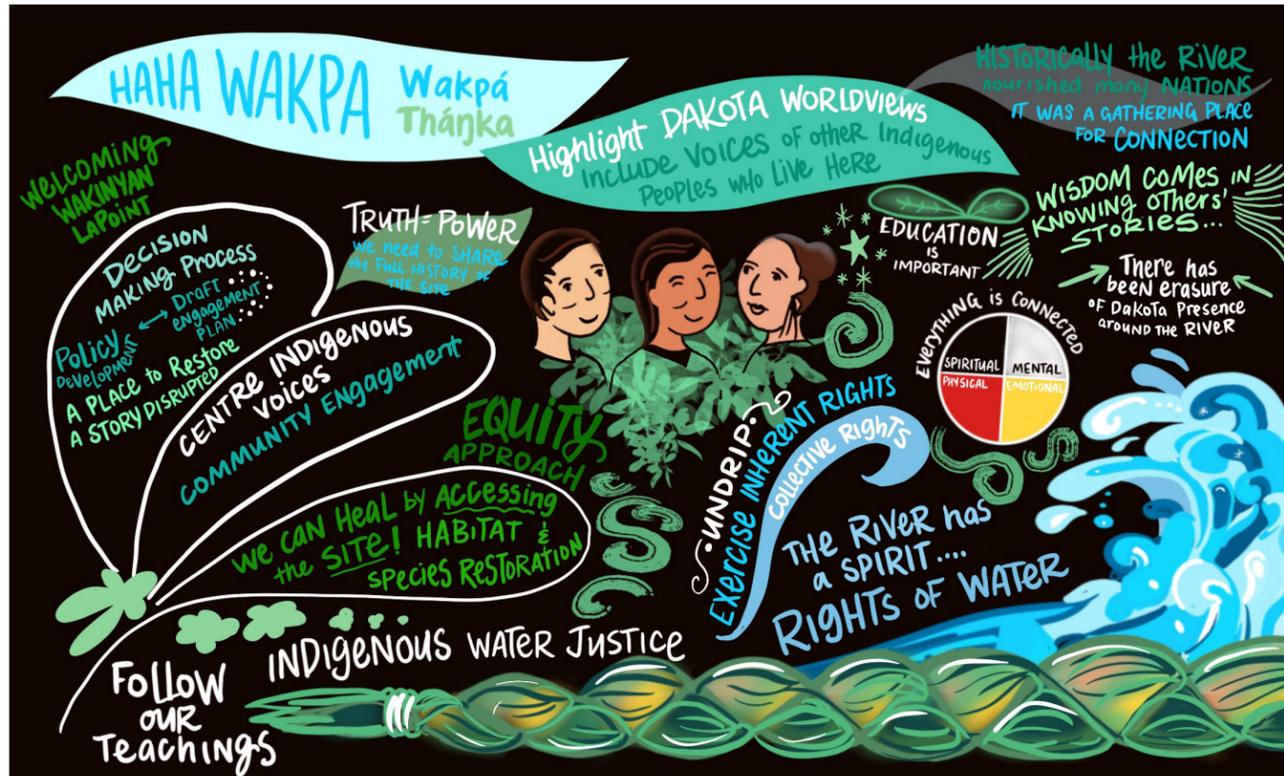
Members of the Native Partnership Council: Juanita Espinosa, Shelley Buck, Wakinyan LaPointe. Image Credit: NeDahNess Greene Photography.



Graphic Recording, October 2021. Image Credit: Michelle Buchholz, Cassyex Consulting.



Graphic Recording, November 2021. Image Credit: Michelle Buchholz, Cassyex Consulting.



Graphic Recording, December 2021. Image Credit: Michelle Buchholz, Cassyex Consulting.

Emerging Themes

In four sessions between September 2021 and January 2022, the stories and sentiments of the Native Partnership Council coalesced into four themes that formed the basis of engagement sessions with the broader public:

- A Place to Restore a Story Disrupted
- A Place of Power
- A Place of Connection / Mitakuye Owas'in (All Our Relations)
- The River is a Spirit / Mní Wičóni (Water is Life)

In addition to the graphic recordings, these themes are further represented and explored in Native Partnership Council Direction for *The Falls Initiative* (ahead) and Part 3: Early Design Ideas (as interpreted by the Design Team, led by GGN).

“We need to recognize the River has been here for ages. The River knows what she wants to happen... She is alive, she is a Spirit.”

- Native Partnership Council Member

Weaving Stories into Design Direction



Graphic Recording, January 2022. Image Credit: Michelle Buchholz, Cassyex Consulting.

In February 2022, *The Falls Initiative* moved into Phase 4: ENGAGE of its Community Engagement Plan.

Phase 4 featured an intensive period of public conversation informed by, and interwoven with, the groundwork, priorities, and emerging themes laid out by the Native Partnership Council.

We launched a series of five Community Conversations to broaden the discussion, connect Native and non-Native communities, and align the priorities of multiple stakeholder groups while continuing to authentically center Native voices.

The Native Partnership Council helped shape the format and content for each Community Conversation, and afterward, met to reflect on the public input. They took on the task of

“weaving” together their guidance with public input in order to find alignment.

Council members engaged with the Design Team, led by landscape architects from GGN and architects from VJAA, to consider how all of the stories, comments, and lessons shared to date could come together into early design ideas.

This series of planning, reflection, and design consideration sessions took place from February - August 2022.

At the conclusion of this first season of *The Falls Initiative*, the Native Partnership Council authored a statement to encapsulate their work, to affirm the engagement and design progress made to date, and to clearly define their vision for the future of the Falls.

Native Partnership Council

Direction for *The Falls Initiative*

Native Partnership Council | December 2022

As Dakota and Lakota relatives, we are born from the water and are spiritually connected to Owámniyomni, the Falls. We joined *The Falls Initiative* as members of the Native Partnership Council, the decision-making body convened to ensure that Native voices are centered in every aspect of the project.

Over the course of a year, we came together in circle, our traditional way, to establish engagement and design principles that acknowledge and center Indigenous worldviews and values. The process began as it should, through acknowledgement and truth and reconciliation.

In our early discussions, we shared stories about our people and this place. The Design Team listened and recognized four central themes that became the basis of their work:

- A Place to Restore a Story Disrupted
- A Place of Power
- A Place of Connection / Mitakuye Owas'in (All Our Relations)
- The River is a Spirit / Mni Wiconi (Water is Life)

From February–June 2022, we joined the project team in a series of Community Conversations to engage the public on these themes. We returned to circle after each session, weaving together the stories and sentiments shared by Native and non-Native communities.

This dialogue affirmed five programming and activation themes to be explored further. These programs must be rooted in partnerships with Native-led organizations.

- Water Is Life
- Arts & Culture
- Ceremony
- Knowledge Sharing & Language
- Indigenous Food Systems

We found consensus around the idea that Spirit Island should be acknowledged and presenced, but not recreated or unnecessarily accessed.

We also support utilizing the existing Upper Lock infrastructure as a way to acknowledge the desecration of this place. Specifically, the lock walls can be transformed into a parallel gallery, featuring art and interpretation that address the parallel trauma of colonization.

Parallel trauma is a term coined by scholar and Native Partnership Council member Jewell Arcoren to describe the trauma carried by the perpetrators of violence, which runs parallel to the intergenerational historical trauma experienced by victims. The concept of parallel trauma challenges those who committed genocide against Indigenous people, or subsequently benefitted from systems of privilege and oppression, to peel back generations of shame, guilt, and fear and recognize the ways we are all connected to each other. By recognizing this dual-trauma, we can level the playing field, open the door to accountability, and move entire communities toward healing and recovery.

Arcoren, Jewell (2022). *Intergenerational Historical Trauma and Parallel Trauma*. Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Schools of Graduate & Professional Programs, Counseling and Psychological Services.

Thus, the vision of the Native Partnership Council is to create a place of healing at Owámniyomni that restores connections to Haha Wakpa, Dakota culture, and language; teaches us to honor and care for all our relatives, including the land and water; and addresses the parallel trauma of colonization by recognizing the transformative power of this place.

Wókizi. Ihdúwitayapi. Waúnspekhiye. Wówaš'ake. Wówakhaŋ.

Heal. Connect. Teach. Strength. Power.

In this first season of the project, we developed a framework for engagement and design grounded in Indigenous perspectives. Now we enter a new season where the Native Partnership Council will guide decision making around programming, partnerships, operations, ownership, and early enhancements to this place.



First Season Members:

Jewell Arcoren	Thorne LaPointe
Janice Bad Moccasin	Wakinyan LaPointe
Shelley Buck	Maggie Lorenz
Margo Gavle Prescott	Mona Smith
Juanita Espinosa	



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Funding for this project was provided by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR), as well as the Saint Anthony Falls Heritage Board.

