# 2023 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



# WAYFINDERS CIRCLE

# Table of Contents

3 Introduction

#### 4 Summary

- 6 The Wayfinders Circle: A Diverse Yet United Collective
- 7 PART 1: Broadening Our Impact Public Events and Outreach
- 8 United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- 11 Climate Week New York City
- 12 Sharing Indigenous Perspectives to Build Allyship
- 13 Stories That Transform: The Impact of Wayfinders Circle Films
- 15 Expanding Visibility and Amplifying Indigenous Narratives in 2024
- 16 PART 2: Inspiring and Sharing Knowledge Member Gatherings
- 17 Global Gathering, Mongolia, July 2024
- 18 Regional Gathering, Blackfeet Territory, United States, August 2023
- 19 Virtual Global Meetings

#### 20 PART 3: Stewardship and Self-Determination in Wayfinders Ancestral Territories

	22		Achuar Nation, Ecuador
	23	2.	Heiltsuk Nation, Canada
	24	3.	The Blackfoot Confederacy, United States and Canada
	25		The Gabbra People, Kenya
	26	5.	The Mayangna Nation, Nicaragua
	27	6.	The Wampis Nation, Peru
	28	7.	The Native American Land Conservancy, United States
	29	8.	Rapa Nui, Chile
	30	9.	Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, Australia
	31	10.	Udege Community, Russia
	32	11.	Sámiid Riikkasearvi, Sweden
	33	12.	Sungai Utik Community, Indonesia
	34	13.	Hin Lad Nai Community, Thailand
	35	14.	Lhoba Community, Nepal
	36	15	The Ju/Hoansi San of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, Nami

37 Conclusions: Strengthening Unity, Spirituality, and Vision



#### INTRODUCTION

The inception of the Wayfinders Circle traces back to 2019 discussions between the Pawanka Fund, Nia Tero, and the Council of Elders of the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners. The Circle is a global collective of 15 members, Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and communities from the seven sociocultural regions of the world who are **protecting 47 million hectares of land and 72 million hectares of oceans.** From tropical and temperate boreal forests to oceanic islands, semi-arid regions, grasslands, and mountain communities, the Wayfinders live in and steward some of the planet's most vital landscapes. While each member brings unique cultural traditions, governance systems, and decision-making mechanisms ingrained in their bioregions, they are united by a shared commitment to self-determination, guardianship of their territories, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge.

Despite the diversity, Wayfinders members share three key common elements. First, they are anchored in governance systems well-entrenched in Indigenous worldviews, affirming their rights to self-determination. Second, they embrace holistic management and guardianship of their ancestral lands and waters, safeguarding them for future generations. Finally, the transmission of traditional knowledge and spirituality remains central, ensuring continuity with their ancestors while fostering resilience and identity amidst modern challenges. Together, the Wayfinders embody both unity and diversity, demonstrating profound wisdom and leadership in protecting their territories and cultures.

3

PAWANKA

FUND

WUISP



# Summary

During 2023-2024, the Wayfinders Circle took remarkable steps in a collective journey of empowerment and collaboration. The participation and commitment of its members have been key, with each contributing unique perspectives to discussions and decisions. Through tacit consensus, several key milestones have been achieved.

Members have reaffirmed the foundational framework established by the Council of Elders of World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners (WUISP), emphasizing the central role of spirituality and cultural expressions. Spiritual leaders have been recognized as essential in preserving and transmitting knowledge, ensuring that the legacy of



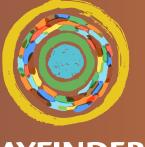
ancestors is upheld and shared with future generations. This commitment links the protection of territories with spiritual values, highlighting the responsibility to honor ancestral heritage.

After the restrictions experienced during the pandemic, when members quickly adapted to maintain connections virtually for nearly two years, the past two years have seen bonds strengthened through in-person gatherings. These opportunities allowed members to deepen their relationships and share more profoundly. Wayfinders have also remained committed to preserving its core identity as an Indigenous institution. Members have been clear about avoiding over-formalization or adopting an NGO-like structure, ensuring that the Circle retains its unique cultural and spiritual essence. Decisions continue to be made organically and flexibly, with a focus on consensus and respect for diversity.

A strong emphasis on peer-to-peer learning has enriched the Circle's activities. Members actively share experiences, stories, challenges, and solutions, fostering mutual support and inspiration. This approach has deepened the network's cohesion and enhanced its effectiveness in addressing shared challenges.

The Wayfinders Circle has recently begun to gain greater visibility and recognition on the global stage. Members are emerging as exemplars of guardianship and self-governance, showcasing effective practices that inspire others. In 2024, the members' commitment to sharing their knowledge and experiences became more evident than ever, extending far beyond the Circle itself. Through films, events, and social media, they actively showcased their roles as caretakers of their territories, highlighting the critical contributions these efforts make to addressing the climate crisis and preserving biodiversity. The achievements of 2023-2024 emphasize and validate the Wayfinders Circle's mission and values, which are deeply rooted in its collective process. Built on a foundation of spirituality, cultural identity, and collaborative learning, these accomplishments strengthen the Circle's capacity to inspire and lead efforts to honor and safeguard indigenous knowledge and heritage.

We invite you to read the 2023-2024 Annual Report, where we will highlight the most relevant and meaningful milestones in the journey of the Wayfinders Circle.



### WAYFINDERS CIRCLE

# Hin Lad Vai Horon Wardeleven Land Management Achuar Nation / Blackfoor Confederation Horon Wardeleven Land Management Achuar Nation / Blackfoor Confederation Horon Confederation (Confederation) (Confeder



# Broadening Our Impact Public Events and Outreach



## Outline Of the second secon

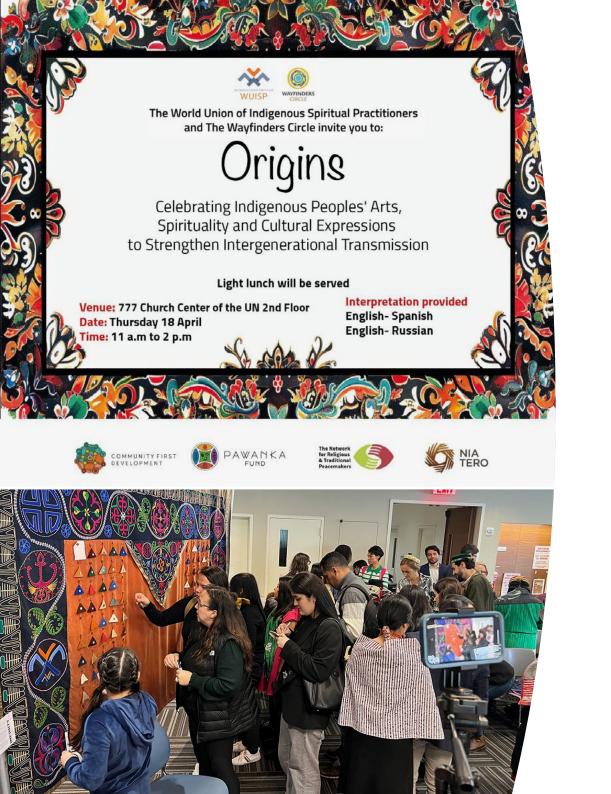
The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) held its first session in 2003 and has since established itself as a vital platform for participation, visibility, and connection for Indigenous peoples at a global level. It serves as a space for advocacy and to build collaboration with Member States, the United Nations system, funders, NGOs, and other key stakeholders.



As exemplars of Indigenous guardianship and self-governance within their territories, the Wayfinders Circle recognizes the UNPFII for advancing initiatives that inspire and amplify its collective messages, including the transformative power of traditional knowledge systems and the urgent need to elevate and protect them as solutions to many of today's most pressing global challenges. The Wayfinders Circle, with the participation of various members, has actively participated in the annual sessions using the Forum to amplify their agendas, foster connections, and build strategic alliances.

In 2024 the Wayfinders Circle, in collaboration with the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners, organized a special event, "Origins: Celebrating Indigenous Peoples' Arts, Spirituality, and Cultural Expressions to Strengthen Intergenerational Transmission," co-sponsored by Nia Tero, the Pawanka Fund, Community First Development, and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers. The event promoted cultural exchange and empowered Indigenous youth artists to share their stories and experiences with a global audience.



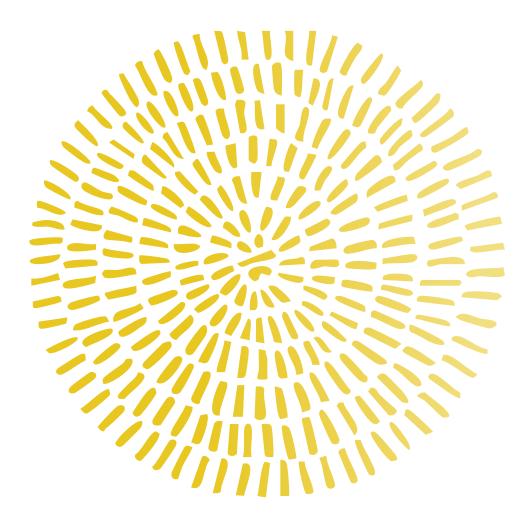


"Origins" highlighted the importance of cultural preservation, intergenerational knowledge transmission, and collective rights while addressing key issues such as environmental sustainability and peace. Through the Origins Youth Fellowship, a program initiated by the WUISP in 2021, youth artists showcased their art, music, dance and poetry. This program supports young artists to reconnect with their heritage and deepen their commitment to Earth guardianship through artistic and cultural practices.

The event also included the art exhibition, "Infinity," which showcased diverse artworks from Buryatiya, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, and Pamir. These works, including sculptures, embroidered panels, and paintings, beautifully fused modern and traditional cultures embedded in ancient knowledge. Encouraging self-reflection, the artworks provided an interactive space to explore symbolic meanings and contexts of Indigenous identity.

As "Origins" got underway, word got out about its unique and engaging message and methodology, and a steady stream of Indigenous leaders and allies left the main UN building to cross the street to participate. The standing-room-only event ended with song, dance and food, as elders, youth, UN officials, high-level Indigenous leaders, and others dancing together in celebration of Indigenous art and culture. "Origins" was praised for offering a new and impactful way to advocate for Indigenous issues on the international stage. Unlike traditional advocacy efforts that focus on threats to territories, the event emphasized the celebration of Indigenous culture and the role of elders in transmitting traditional knowledge. It underscored the importance of revitalizing ancestral knowledge as a key to addressing today's global challenges, such as climate change. The event stood as a powerful platform for highlighting the vitality of Indigenous cultures, while providing a space for both youth and elders to engage in meaningful exchanges, leaving a lasting impact on attendees and global audiences alike.

In addition to "Origins", the World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners, in collaboration with Indigenous youth from Australia, delivered a powerful statement at the official plenary session of the UNPFII. The message highlighted the importance of elevating the voices of Indigenous youth in discussions surrounding self-determination and their role in advocating for their communities. A key recommendation called for the establishment of a robust system to facilitate the repatriation and return of sacred objects and ancestral remains from museums and galleries to Indigenous communities and their states of origin.











#### O Climate Week New York City

Three members of the Wayfinders Circle-representatives of the Blackfoot Confederacy (U.S. and Canada), the Sungai Utik community of the Dayak Iban people (Indonesia), and traditional landowners of Warddeken (Arnhem Land, Australia)-participated in 2024 Climate Week activities in New York in September.



This involvement underscored the Wayfinders Circle's role as a global network supporting Indigenous self-determination, cultural preservation and Indigenous guardianship. By fostering dialogues with institutions like the American Museum of Natural History and sharing their stories through our film series, which premiered at the museum during this week, Wayfinders members advanced the mission of mutual support and advocacy, ensuring their voices resonate widely in global efforts to protect cultural heritage and the environment.

The Blackfoot delegation also led the group in a spiritual ceremony in Central Park, offering prayers and songs before entering the museum. Inside, they participated in the culmination of a years-long process to repatriate a Blackfeet sacred medicine pipe, demonstrating a tangible step toward addressing historical grievances surrounding museum collections. The museum offered a private tour, displaying cultural artifacts such as a Yukaghir shaman's coat, ancient Iban textiles and loom tools, and bark paintings from Arnhem Land. These encounters evoked deep reflections among the Circle about the importance of preserving cultural heritage within their communities and the potential for repatriation of sacred objects.



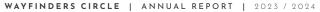
#### Sharing Indigenous Perspectives to Build Allyship

Wayfinders engaged in knowledge exchanges and discussions that highlighted their cultural heritage and resilience, inspiring diverse audiences. Rosemary Nabulwad and Conrad Maralngurra joined a discussion organized by Nature4Climate, emphasizing the inseparability of Indigenous economies from nature-positive solutions. Kynan Tegar contributed to the 10th-anniversary celebration of the Pawanka Fund and spoke on Indigenous narratives and climate justice alongside partners from *If Not Us Then Who?* Additionally, the Karrkad Kanjdji Trust hosted a panel with Warddeken Land Management members, screening the film *Ngarridurndeng Kured* at the American Australian Association. These engagements showcased Indigenous wisdom as a cornerstone of climate solutions and encouraged meaningful exchanges with global audiences.

The Wayfinders' presence extended beyond advocacy, fostering profound cultural and spiritual connections. Events like the private museum tours and screenings provided a platform for members to reconnect with ancestral artifacts and share their heritage. These exchanges strengthened both the individual and collective identities of the Wayfinders while elevating their global visibility. Climate Week also catalyzed a surge in public interest, with online engagement growing by 50%, reflecting the impact of

Indigenous voices in broader climate and cultural discussions. Through these efforts, the Wayfinders not only inspired change but also demonstrated the power of collaboration and Indigenous-led advocacy in addressing the climate crisis.









#### NGARRIDURNDENG KURED (We Going Home Now)

TE PITO O TE HENUA



NIITSITAPI

(The Real People)

#### 01: BROADENING OUR IMPACT - Public Events and Outreach

#### **Stories That Transform:** The Impact of Wayfinders Circle Films

In 2024, the Wayfinders Circle Film Series strategically leveraged international film festivals as a critical platform for global Indigenous narrative transformation. Films screened in more than 40 festivals across 13 countries, positioning Indigenous storytelling as a powerful mechanism for narrative sovereignty, cultural diplomacy and environmental advocacy.

The festival strategy demonstrated remarkable strategic depth, with two films achieving significant industry recognition through Oscar-gualifying festivals and a Jackson Wild Award nomination. Key strategic moments—such as the FestPAC Hawaii preview at the Honolulu Museum of Art and the Climate Week New York series premiere event at the American Museum of Natural History-strategically amplified Indigenous voices within prestigious cultural institutions.

Beyond visibility, the Wayfinders film distribution strategy prioritized community agency. By developing collaborative impact plans in close collaboration with Wayfinders Circle member communities, the films distribution strategy was a participatory process, ensuring that film dissemination remained rooted in Indigenous self-determination, and prioritized each Circle member's own community screenings. This approach transformed the films from mere cultural artifacts into dynamic tools for community empowerment and global consciousness-raising.

The narrative strategy successfully bridged local experiences with global perspectives, creating a nuanced dialogue that authentically represents the complex realities of Indigenous communities. Through strategic storytelling, the Wayfinders Circle has established a compelling model of cultural representation that centers Indigenous agency, resilience, and interconnectedness.

#### **FILM Series**



#### INDAI APAI DARAH (Mother, Father, Blood)

2024 | 15 min | Kynan Tegar (Dayak Iban) | Indonesia | Bahasa, Iban

A young girl growing up in the Indigenous-held forests of central Borneo follows ancient connections to earn the gift of a story - her People's 1973 fight to preserve their lands amid rampant deforestation.



**TE PITO O TE HENUA** (The Navel of the World)

2024 | Martin Kingman, Nils Cowan | Rapa Nui Island/Chile | Rapa Nui, Spanish

An Indigenous community on the most remote island in the world prepares to host its most important annual celebration, and reinforce deep connections to their culture, language and land.



#### INIA IKIAMPRI (Our Jungle)

2024 | 20 min | Martín Kingman | Ecuador | Spanish, Achuar

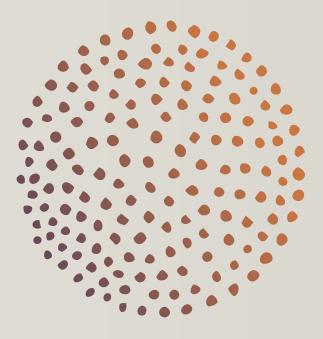
A thriving Indigenous community in the Ecuadorian Amazon clings to tradition and connections to land while preparing for an uncertain future



#### TUHAYMANI'CHI PAL WANIQA (The Water Flows Always)

2023 | 20 min | Gina Milanovich (Cahuilla, Cupeño) & Nils Cowan | US | Cahuilla, English, Chemehuevi

A father seeks to reconnect his daughter with her Indigenous roots and the ancient springs of the Mojave Desert, just as a new water-mining project threatens their very existence.





#### **NGARRIDURNDENG KURED** (We Going Home Now)

2024 | 18 min | Emma Masters, Dean Dean Munuggullumurr Yibarbuk | Australia | English, Bininj Kunwok

Dean Yibarbuk, his family and community, return to their traditional homeland in Kuwarddewardde – Rock Country - to help protect their territory from devastating wildfires and reestablish their traditional communities and way of life.



NIITSITAPI (The Real People)

2024 | 15 | Bryan Gunnar Cole | Traditional homelands of the Blackfoot People / USA and Canada | English, Siksiká

Journey across the vast ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy – an ancient alliance of Blackfoot-speaking people bound together by land, language, and culture.



#### THE WAYFINDERS 2024 | 24 min | English

Indigenous leaders from around the world, known collectively as the Wayfinders Circle, gather in person for the first time in the sovereign territory of the Achuar Nation of Ecuador to share ideas, strategies and spiritual strength for the health of the Earth.

#### **Expanding Visibility and Amplifying** $( \bigcirc )$ Indigenous Narratives in 2024

In 2024, the Wayfinders Circle made significant strides in expanding its communication and visibility, effectively establishing itself as a key voice in shifting global narratives around Indigenous guardianship, sovereignty, and cultural preservation. A major achievement was the complete revamp of their website, which now includes dedicated pages for each of The Wayfinders films and a central hub for the series. This revamped website experienced a remarkable 769% increase in active users compared to the previous year.

Additionally, the Wayfinders Circle established a strong presence on social media, particularly Instagram, where they saw a dramatic growth in followers, reaching 7,260 by December 6, 2024, up from less than 500 at the start of the year. This surge in visibility was driven by strategic collaborations and the launch of new channels on LinkedIn and Facebook.

Examples of these communication efforts include successful collaborations with other Indigenous organizations and networks, such as Rapa Nui, the Native American Land Conservancy, and Sungai Utik, as well as prominent partners like the Pawanka Fund, If Not Us Then Who?, the American Museum of Natural History, and Earth.org. A notable achievement was the Wayfinders Circle's feature in the Natural History museum's mailing, which reached over 60,000 new contacts, many of whom were not previously familiar with the initiative. Social media campaigns also generated impressive engagement with the film trailers. For example, the trailer for "Niitsitapi" reached 119,000 views, marking the largest reach for a Wayfinders Circle social media post in 2024, amplifying the Circle's overall message and expanding its audience.

WAYFINDERS CIRCLE | ANNUAL REPORT | 2023 / 2024

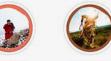


245 following 246 posts 10.3K followers

Following

Wayfinders Circle Sharing Indigenous wisdom from around the world Inspiring stories through films & podcasts + Follow our journey @ www.wayfinderscircle.org and 2 more

Followed by niatero, karasolar2030 + 3 more



ED BY



I POSTS

wayfinderscircle







Voices

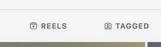




Wayfinders

Seedcast

Articles





NGARRIDURNDENG KURED

Community

Thailand.

# **Inspiring and Sharing Knowledge** Member Gatherings







#### 02: INSPIRING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE - Member Gatherings

#### **(6)** Global Gathering, Mongolia, July 2024

This was the second global in-person meeting, which was hosted by World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners and Mongolia-based Secretariat, Arga Bilig. Fourteen out of 15 members participated in this gathering, which became a defining moment in the Circle's journey, deepening their connections and strengthening their shared commitment.

#### **OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED:**

- 1. Relationship Building: Members engaged in meaningful interactions, sharing experiences and knowledge that reinforced bonds within the Circle.
- 2. Ceremonial and Cultural Exchanges: Led by spiritual practitioner elders, these exchanges highlighted the spiritual essence of rituals, songs, and dances, enhancing the members' understanding. The natural elements further enriched these ceremonies, symbolizing ancestral blessings.
- 3. Strategic Discussions: Members discussed future steps for the Circle, including enhancing documentation practices, promoting knowledge exchange, and strengthening their collective capacity.

Discussions covered diverse topics such as Indigenous language preservation, fire management practices, pastoralist and nomadic strategies in the face of climate change, and the protection of sacred sites. The dialogue showcased the resilience and innovative strategies of Indigenous communities in addressing global challenges. This exchange of knowledge among members served not only to inspire but also to reinforce the Circle's commitment to mutual support and collaboration.



#### 02: INSPIRING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE - Member Gatherings

#### **KEY INSIGHTS:**

- Decision-Making: Decisions were made by consensus, emphasizing unity, respect for diversity, and the enrichment brought by different perspectives. Members reaffirmed their commitment to preserving the Circle's essence as an Indigenous-led and informally structured entity, avoiding overly formalized systems.
- Next Steps: Priorities include fostering intergenerational knowledge transmission, empowering younger leaders, and organizing smaller regional meetings and exchanges in 2025, with a global meeting planned for 2026.

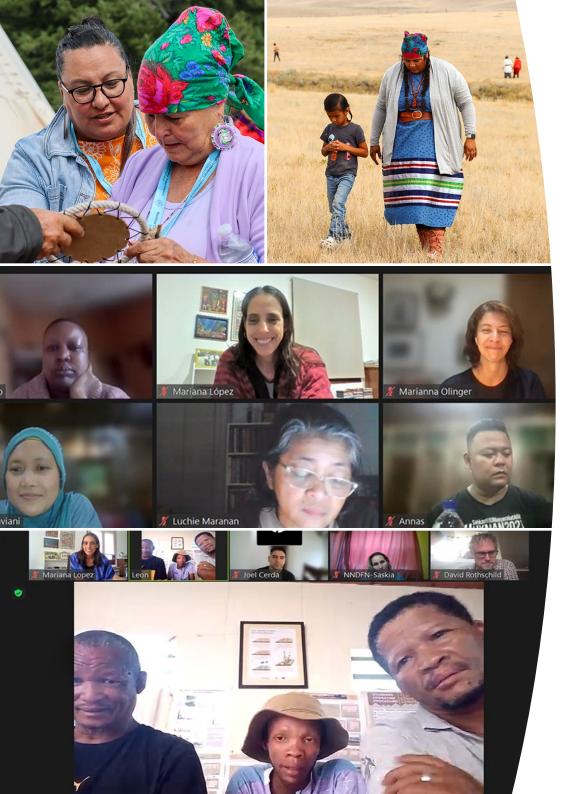
This gathering marked the most profound interaction among members since the Circle's inception, transforming it into a stronger and more unified entity. Members embraced their shared vision and mission, demonstrating a collective ownership of the Circle's identity. Their commitment to sharing the Wayfinders Circle's vision with broader audiences emerged as a key takeaway, reflecting a renewed dedication to advancing their work together.

The Mongolia gathering reaffirmed the Wayfinders Circle as a unique, Indigenous-led initiative rooted in traditional practices of decision-making, learning, and collaboration, ensuring its continuity as a space for mutual support and collective growth.

#### Regional Gathering, Blackfeet Territory, United States, August 2023

The Blackfoot Confederacy hosted and organized the regional gathering in Montana, bringing together Circle members from the Native American Land Conservancy, Sámiid





#### 02: INSPIRING AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE - Member Gatherings

Riikkasearvi, and the Gabbra Peoples, along with World Union of Indigenous Spiritual Practitioners members. Participants exchanged traditional knowledge, learned about Blackfoot cultural practices—such as Buffalo management, language preservation, and sacred ceremonies—and discussed the Circle's future plans. The gathering blended discussions, ceremonies, and interactive activities to foster a deep appreciation of Blackfoot traditions and their broader significance.

#### **(i)** Virtual Global Meetings

Virtual meetings have become an essential tool for connecting members, despite the challenges of time zone differences and virtual communication. At least two virtual global meetings are held annually, typically at the start of the year to plan activities and at the end to evaluate and gather feedback. These two-hour sessions are facilitated by the convening organizations—Pawanka Fund, Nia Tero and the Council of Elders, who provide spiritual openings and closings. Simultaneous translation allows participants to share insights, ask questions, and enhance insight across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

During the October 2023 discussions, members reflected on their transformative visit to Blackfoot territory and began preparations for the 2024 annual in-person gathering. In March 2024, participants explored the newly launched Wayfinders Circle website and Instagram, reviewed survey results, and initiated discussions on key topics related to the upcoming gathering in Mongolia. During the November 2024 meeting, members shared heartfelt reflections on the year's progress, setting the stage for collaborative planning for the year ahead.

Stewardship and Self-Determination in Wayfinders Ancestral Territories

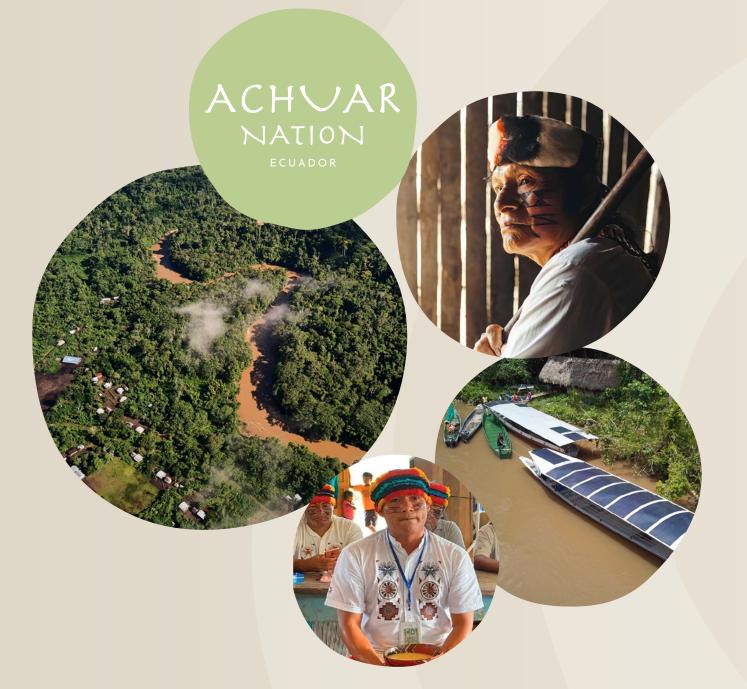
In addition to collaborative initiatives, Wayfinders actively supported each other in their individual efforts within their own territories. For decades, members have dedicated themselves to preserving collective management of their lands, fostering guardianship and self-governance, and ensuring the transmission of their cultural identity to future generations.

In 2023 and 2024, the Circle made significant strides across various areas, with a focus on strengthening their governance systems and improving the well-being of their communities. Key priorities for grant investments included economic systems, education, and health, alongside the protection of sacred sites, spirituality, and cultural practices. Members also focused on enhancing food systems, promoting the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, and safeguarding Indigenous languages. Their efforts in biodiversity conservation, adapting to climate change, and defending their territories and natural resources were complemented by investments in technology, mobility, and equipment. These initiatives were designed not only to address immediate needs but also to build a resilient foundation for future generations.

Furthermore, in 2023 and 2024, members worked to enhance their capacities for collective decision-making and response to emergencies, strengthening their administrative, financial, and legal organizational structures. These achievements highlight the Circle's commitment to empowering Indigenous communities and ensuring the sustainability of their cultural, ecological, and governance systems in a rapidly changing world.

Following is a brief summary of select activities undertaken by each member in their respective territories during 2023 and 2024 with support from the Wayfinders Circle.





The Achuar people, residing for thousands of years in the Amazon regions of Ecuador and Peru, hold a legally recognized territory of 680,000 hectares in Ecuador, which extends to 800,000 hectares overall. This area encompasses one of the world's most biodiverse and pristine tropical forests. Their governance structure includes 88 communities and 21 associations, each led by elected representatives. Formed in 2005, their representative organization, Nacionalidad Achuar del Ecuador (NAE), advocates for their rights and interests nationally and internationally. Guided by Arútam, their sacred source of energy and guidance found in visions from nature, Achuar life and governance are deeply rooted in spirituality and the connection to their ancestral lands.

Over the past two years, the Achuar made significant progress preserving their territory, culture, and traditions. They intensified forces to protect their lands from threats like mining, logging, and oil extraction, safeguarding the integrity of the rainforest. They strengthened endeavors to revitalize spiritual practices, including tobacco rituals and Ayahuasca ceremonies, which continue to reinforce their identity and leadership. They bolstered education and youth engagement initiatives to instill deeper respect for their natural and spiritual heritage. Infrastructure improvements, such as the expansion of radio communication systems and the distribution of medical kits, have enhanced connectivity and healthcare within their communities. Through dialogue and collaboration, they have fostered greater community unity, integrating territorial protection with cultural preservation and ensuring resilience and sustainability for future generations.



The Heiltsuk Nation, located along the coast of British Columbia in western Canada, stewards over 3.5 million hectares of ancestral lands, including some of the world's largest unspoiled temperate rainforests. Guided by their *ğviļás* (customary laws) upheld by *Yimás* (Hereditary Chiefs), the Heiltsuk emphasize environmental stewardship alongside sustainable economic development. Colonization disrupted their traditional ways of life, eroding cultural practices, while environmental changes like declining salmon populations have further strained their resources. Despite these challenges, the Heiltsuk remain committed to reviving their cultural heritage, reclaiming their language, traditional food systems, and ceremonial practices as part of their journey of healing and restoration.

In 2023 and 2024, the Heiltsuk made significant progress in revitalizing cultural practices and strengthening community resilience. They expanded the Qqs (Eyes) Projects Society to promote food sustainability and enhancing relationships between youth, culture, and the environment. Family and children's camps brought elders and knowledge keepers together with younger generations to teach traditional harvesting methods and bridge generational gaps. Despite challenges such as diminishing natural resources and barriers to traditional fishing, the Heiltsuk advanced sustainable practices and language revitalization efforts. Their partnership with Simon Fraser University resulted in a full-time immersion program, doubling the number of fluent speakers. Through cultural programs like the Children's Cultural Celebration and the Language Nest, the Heiltsuk ensured the transmission of their language and traditions, fostering leadership and cultural pride among their youth.



## BLACKFOOT CONFEDERACY

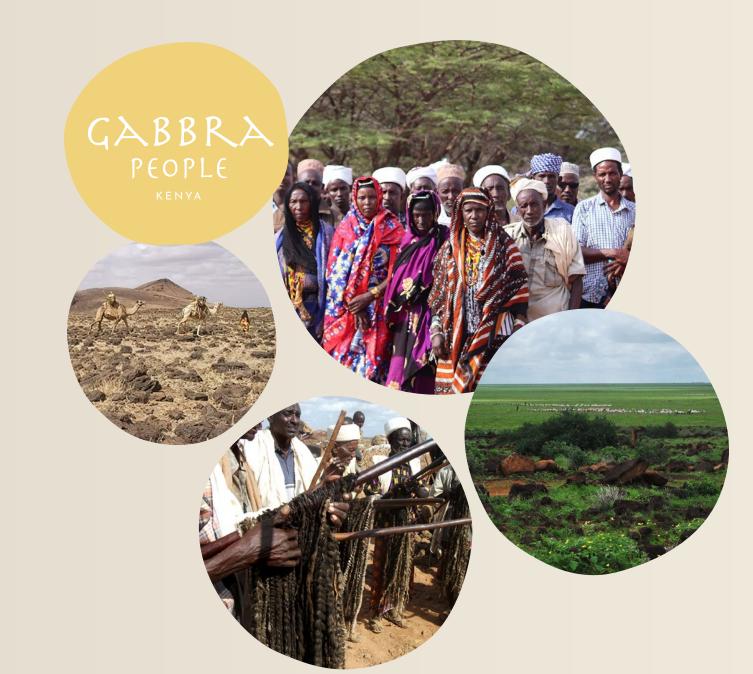
JNITED STATES AND CANADA

The Blackfoot Confederacy is a collective of Indigenous nations whose traditional territory spans across Canada and the United States. While the four Indigenous nations all predate the United States and Canada, today's Blackfoot Confederacy is rooted in the historical treaties signed between its four bands and colonial powers. As the international coordinating body for Blackfoot nations, the Confederacy works to unify their efforts in preserving cultural, spiritual, and environmental heritage. In 2022, Blackfeet Eco Knowledge was established as a non-profit organization to revitalize and reintroduce Indigenous knowledge systems intrinsic to the Niitsiitapii (Blackfoot) culture. With a mission focused on land-use knowledge and environmental justice, Blackfeet Eco Knowledge serves as a key initiative in reconnecting the Blackfoot people to their ancestral landscapes and values.

In 2023 and 2024, the Blackfoot Confederacy and Blackfeet Eco Knowledge achieved significant milestones in cultural and environmental revitalization. Efforts to preserve the endangered Blackfoot language have expanded through immersion schools, language programs, and intergenerational projects linking language to the landscape. Rituals like name-giving ceremonies have strengthen the bonds between children, elders, and ancestral traditions, fostering cultural pride and continuity. Blackfeet Eco Knowledge's focus on bio-cultural restoration extends to initiatives tied to the buffalo, a sacred and life-giving animal central to Blackfoot identity. Through these efforts, the community has made progress in reclaiming its cultural practices, addressing historical trauma, and envisioning a future where buffalo roam freely in their lands, symbolizing spiritual renewal and ecological harmony.

The Gabbra, a nomadic pastoralist people, inhabit an extensive territory of approximately 35,000 square kilometers spanning Ethiopia and Kenya, with an estimated population of 140,000. Known as "the people of the five drums," they organize their lives and governance through the Yaa, traditional assemblies that uphold laws protecting the environment and community. Each of the five Yaa independently manages specific grazing areas, following prescribed circuits and pilgrimages determined by the Gabbra calendar's solar and lunar cycles. Their way of life emphasizes the integration of traditional governance, environmental stewardship, and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge to maintain social cohesion and bio-cultural heritage.

In 2023 and 2024, the Gabbra advanced several key initiatives to strengthen their governance systems and preserve their heritage. They organized a community resource governance forum, fostering inclusive dialogue on innovative land resource management amidst environmental and political challenges. This included mapping their ancestral territories, identifying resources, and affirming cultural and spiritual ties to the land. Youth engagement was prioritized, with discussions on their roles in sustaining Gabbra traditions. The community also enhanced its institutional capacity through the Tokkumma Aadaa Trust, blending traditional and modern governance structures to better manage their development. Investments in mobility, monitoring, and communication equipment further enabled the Gabbra to protect their territories and reinforce their resilience.



NATION NICARAGUA The Mayangna Nation, also known as the Nación Sumu Mayangna, spans nine territories in Nicaragua, covering 8,101 square kilometers of tropical rainforests and pine savannas, home to 45,000 people in 75 communities. Decision-making processes are anchored in tradition, with assemblies involving men, women, youth, and elders, guided by the Council of Elders and Leaders.

The Mayangna Nation has prioritized the revitalization of its four languages–Panamaska, Tuaska, Ulua, and Yusku–through the establishment of the Mayangna Language Academy. Notable accomplishments in 2024 include publishing the first Tuaska dictionary and advancing the Yusku language with the collection of over 2,000 terms. Collaboration with Tuaska-speaking communities in Honduras has further enriched these efforts through linguistic exchange and standardization. Progress in revitalizing the Ulua language has also been significant, with the reorganization of the Ulua Language Rescue Committee (CODIUL) and the reconstruction of its office in Karawala. These initiatives are complemented by the creation of a linguistics bachelor's program in partnership with universities, empowering future Indigenous linguists with culturally relevant curricula.

The Mayangna Nation also took critical steps to safeguard the Saunyas territory within the Bosawás Biosphere Reserve, one of the most biodiverse areas in the region. This process, aligned with Nicaragua's Indigenous Territories Law (Law 445), aims to address environmental degradation and territorial conflicts caused by the migration of settlers. Efforts include six strategic field visits, collaboration with national and regional authorities, and comprehensive assessments to regularize land use and protect natural resources. These initiatives reflect the Mayangna's commitment to preserving their territories while ensuring their communities' rights and livelihoods in the face of external pressures.

The Wampis Nation, comprising approximately 20,000 people, occupies 1,327,760 hectares in the northern Amazon of Peru, spanning the Río Santiago basin in Amazonas and the Río Morona basin in Loreto. In 2015, they established the Autonomous Territorial Government of the Wampis Nation (GTANW), the first Indigenous-led governance model in Peru encompassing a single collective territory. Their governance, guided by a statute, integrates their cultural values, spirituality, education, and ancestral knowledge, while ensuring collective decision-making and the inclusion of women. Their primary focus is on sustainable management of their forests and natural resources, promoting territorial administration practices that align with their cultural heritage and vision for self-determination.

In 2023 and 2024, the Wampis made significant advancements in protecting their territory and addressing environmental threats. They implemented an "ecological security" strategy to combat illegal mining and environmental contamination in the Río Santiago and Río Morona basins. This included the use of drones to monitor activities, coordinating with state environmental police, and directly intervening to remove illegal miners. To empower future generations, the Wampis emphasized education, engaging women and youth in learning about territorial management and environmental care. They also expanded their communication network with support from partners, training community members in Wampis-language media and acquiring transportation resources to facilitate mobilization and governance efforts. These initiatives reflect their resilience and commitment to protecting their land, culture, and natural resources.

## WAMPIS NATION





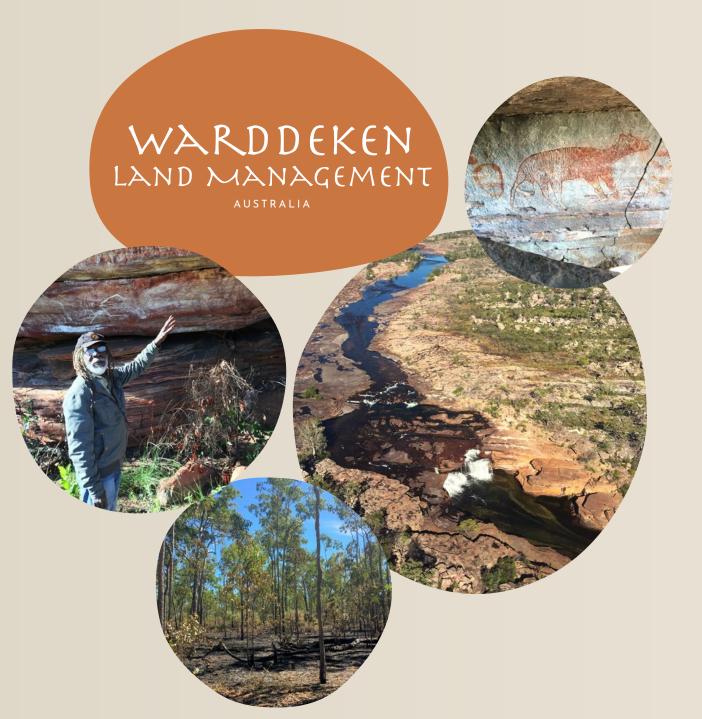
The NALC is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the acquisition, protection, and management of sacred sites across southeastern California. Guided by Indigenous communities, particularly tribes from the southern California desert regions, the NALC bridges cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and education. Founded over 25 years ago, the organization's mission is rooted in the protection of culturally and historically significant lands, ensuring these spaces remain accessible and meaningful for current and future generations. Governed by a diverse board of tribal elders, leaders, and ceremonial specialists, the conservancy focuses on cultural reconnection, shared governance, and education to empower Indigenous communities and foster respect for ancestral lands among Native and non-Native audiences alike.

Over the past two years, the NALC celebrated key milestones in its ongoing work to safeguard sacred lands. The organization successfully acquired a 60-acre property in the Mojave Desert, marking a significant step in its mission to reclaim ancestral territories. This achievement was honored with traditional bird singing and dancing ceremonies, emphasizing the cultural importance of the land. The conservancy also continued its stewardship of key sites, including the Old Woman Mountains Preserve, Coyote Hole, and Horse Canyon in the Santa Rosa Mountains, while addressing challenges like environmental degradation and land exploitation. Through its advocacy for Indigenous sovereignty, co-management strategies, and the "land back" movement, the NALC remains a vital force in promoting cultural preservation and environmental sustainability.

The Rapa Nui Municipality is located on Rapa Nui (Easter) Island, Chile, and encompasses a territory of 16,360 hectares. It is one of the most isolated inhabited places on Earth, situated over 3,800 kilometers from Chile and 4,000 kilometers from Tahiti in the southeastern Pacific. The municipality is governed by community leaders focused on advancing territorial, environmental, and cultural development while protecting the rights of the Rapa Nui people. The island is home to the largest Marine Protected Multi-Purpose Area in Chile, covering 728,000 square kilometers, and its national park, which covers 40% of the territory, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995.

In 2023 and 2024, significant progress was made in the Rapa Nui Municipality's efforts to integrate cultural preservation, education, and community empowerment. The Apoki Genua project, which focuses on teaching children about environmental care and traditional knowledge, expanded to include all schools on the island, reaching children aged 10 to 12 years. This year, a new component focused on human rights education was introduced, emphasizing both Indigenous and universal rights. The project also launched consultative councils for children to encourage political engagement and civic education. On a larger scale, the municipality collaborated with the UN system in Chile to localize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, incorporating local indicators and aligning them with the community's vision for self-sustainability, continuous improvements, resource optimization, and respect. Additionally, initiatives to protect the sea and pursue political autonomy for the Rapa Nui people continue to advance, with ongoing efforts at both the local and international levels.





The Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area is located in Arnhem Land, northern Australia, covering 1,394,951 hectares of land rich in natural and cultural heritage. The traditional owners of the land belong to 36 clan groups of the Bininj Kunwok language group. Together they own and manage the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area. Established in 2009, it is situated on the West Arnhem Plateau, an area of significant cultural importance, with some of the world's densest rock art galleries that record the way Indigenous Peoples have lived, with rock art dating back 65,000 years. The plateau is also home to numerous threatened species, making it a priority for environmental conservation. The protected area is governed by its traditional owners, supported by Warddeken Land Management Limited, a not-for-profit company owned and run by the traditional owners that oversees land management activities while adhering to traditional governance systems and practices.

In 2023 and 2024, Warddeken made significant strides in cultural and environmental conservation through its various programs. The Mayh (Species) Recovery project, supported by the Wayfinders Circle, focuses on monitoring and preserving endangered species, particularly the Northern Quoll, and combating mammal declines in northern Australia. In the past year, the project utilized camera traps and monitoring equipment to gather data on species presence and feral predators. The program also emphasizes cultural engagement, with rangers and children (Wurdurd) participating in hands-on learning activities like making fishing spears and weaving pandanus, while also gaining skills in GPS navigation and technology. This work aligns with fire management and carbon abatement efforts, contributing to both environmental sustainability and cultural heritage management. The Warddeken initiative ensures that the Indigenous owners remain central in managing and defining the future of their lands, reinforcing both their ecological and cultural priorities.

The Udege people, residing in the subarctic Bikin region of Russia, are an Indigenous people with approximately 1,600 members. Their territory, which spans over 1.5 million hectares of pristine boreal forest, is part of the Bikin National Park, a region they co-manage with the Russian government. This unique co-management model values Indigenous traditional knowledge of resource management. The Udege people live in six small villages spread across two administrative regions, with their communities dispersed along rivers and the Taiga. The Udege language, culture, and traditions have long been the foundation of their survival, though their practices have faced challenges from modernization and past policies aimed at discouraging Indigenous languages.

In 2023 and 2024, the Udege community made significant progress in preserving their language and cultural heritage (although they did not receive financial support from the Wayfinders Circle). They continue to employ a variety of methods, such as creating educational materials and promoting language courses. One notable achievement is the continued implementation of a teaching methodology for the Udege language that was created by an elder in the 1970s, now extended up to the eighth grade in some schools. The Udege have also adapted to modern technologies, producing contemporary Udege songs to engage younger generations and help revitalize interest in their language. Despite the tragic loss of elders, including those lost to COVID-19, the community remains committed to preserving their language as it is deeply tied to identity and spirituality. Their efforts in education, language revitalization, and cultural pride continue to grow, reinforcing the importance of maintaining their heritage.

**VDEGE** community

RUSSIA



The Sámi are an Indigenous people living in the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, with a shared cultural identity despite being divided by national borders. Traditionally, they rely on reindeer herding as a livelihood, which is profoundly intertwined with their environment and seasonal changes. In Sweden, reindeer herding communities occupy approximately 40% of the country's northern territory, with these communities holding usufruct rights to their lands. The Sámi have long practiced sustainable resource management, with their traditional knowledge guiding the responsible use of the land and its resources. However, they face significant challenges, including industrial encroachments, climate change, and ongoing conflicts with national governments over land and resource rights.

In 2023 and 2024, Sámiid Riikkasearvi, an organization representing reindeer herding communities in northern Sweden, has taken legal action to protect their traditional rights to hunting small game and fishing within their grazing lands. This action follows the successful legal victory of the Girjas community, which won the right to manage hunting and fishing in their area. Samiid Riikkasearvi advocates that all other Sámi reindeer herding communities in Sweden should be given equal fishing and hunting rights within their reindeer-grazing area. They have appointed experts to the committee concerning the Reindeer Husbandry Act and the working group of the Swedish Sámi Parliament concerning the future organization of the reindeer herding communities. In the face of ongoing environmental pressures and legal challenges, the Sámi continue to advocate for the preservation of their rights and the sustainable management of their ancestral lands, reinforcing the importance of protecting their traditional way of life and natural resources.

The Dayak Iban community of Sungai Utik, located in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, occupies 9,504 hectares and is part of the larger Ketemenggungan Iban Jalai Lintang group. Their traditional longhouse, which spans 216 meters with 28 rooms, serves as the center of social, economic, cultural, and political life for more than 300 people. The longhouse terrace is a vital space for communal activities such as traditional celebrations and decision-making processes. The Sungai Utik community has an inherent kinship to the land, relying on Indigenous knowledge to maintain sustainable practices in agriculture, including shifting cultivation and fire management techniques that protect both their land and the surrounding ecosystems.

In 2023 and 2024, the Sungai Utik community made significant strides in strengthening its guardianship over their territories through the revitalization of Indigenous community economic institutions. They formed Bumma, a community-owned business entity in 2022, which produces a range of products including coffee, rice, weaving, crafts, and ecotourism. This initiative focuses on institutional strengthening by developing business plans, management systems, legal frameworks, and communication tools such as a website. Furthermore, the community has emphasized intergenerational knowledge transfer, maintaining a traditional school for children to learn about their customs, culture, and sustainable practices. The youth actively participate in preserving local wisdom, acting as knowledge recorders, and linking their community's practices to broader global issues, ensuring the continuity of their traditions and adaptation to modern challenges.



## HIN LAD NAI COMMUNITY

Hin Lad Nai is a Karen community located in the Khun Jae National Park of Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, nestled within a mountainous forest region. The community manages approximately 1,645 hectares of land, including forest conservation zones, agricultural and agroforestry gardens. Traditional practices such as rotational farming, livestock rearing, and non-timber forest collection are central to their sustainable livelihood. The community enforces zoning regulations to ensure the sustainable use of land, protects their forests through firebreaks, and upholds customary laws. Hin Lad Nai is committed to preserving traditional knowledge and promoting sustainable resource management, with a strong focus on balancing economic development with environmental conservation.

In 2023 and 2024, Hin Lad Nai made significant progress in community development and environmental sustainability. Notable achievements include the continued implementation of fire prevention measures, including firebreaks and forest fire extinguishing efforts, as well as infrastructure improvements with the construction of roads and water tanks. The community also made strides in agroforestry, planting moisture-retaining trees and improving waste management. Capacity-building activities, such as training in media, communication, and project proposal writing, enhanced the community's ability to share their story and engage in global markets. Additionally, the community focused on economic development by launching training programs in traditional crafts, culinary skills, and product packaging, which supported local entrepreneurship and sustainability. These efforts were complemented by the establishment of a community library and marketplace to promote and sell locally produced goods.



The Lhoba Indigenous community, located in the remote village of Lo-menthang, Nepal, has a rich cultural heritage rooted in traditional institutions that guide their way of life. Central to their governance is the Kghyamba/Ghyamba system, a customary framework based on collective decision-making, shared responsibilities, and social harmony. This system fosters community cohesion and ensures that every household has a voice in resolving issues. The Lhoba people rely on this structure to manage essential resources like irrigation water, which is crucial in the arid, trans-Himalayan environment. Alongside resource management, the community is deeply involved in preserving their cultural heritage, including the renovation of sacred places and the development of sustainable practices such as waste management to address environmental challenges posed by increasing tourism.

In 2023 and 2024, the Lhoba community undertook significant initiatives aimed at improving their infrastructure and cultural preservation. They constructed and renovated irrigation canals, including 250 meters of concrete channels and 150 meters of underground pipelines, benefiting 147 households. The Tsodzong Monastery, a centuries-old cultural site, was renovated to prevent its deterioration, and waste management practices were improved through training and the distribution of 180 dustbins to households and community spaces. Despite challenges such as geographical remoteness, high transportation costs, and extreme weather, the community achieved notable results, including reduced labor demands for irrigation repairs, improved road safety, and strengthened volunteerism. These efforts not only safeguarded their cultural heritage but also enhanced local governance, environmental sustainability, and the community's resilience in the face of modern challenges.



## JU/'HOANSI SAN of the Nyae Nyae conservancy

NAMIBIA



The Ju/'hoansi, one of the oldest Indigenous groups in Africa, are the second-largest of the San people in Namibia. They have lived in the Kalahari region for thousands of years, sustaining an inherent bond to the land through their traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle. This way of life reflects their profound commitment to sustainable resource use, where they take only what is needed to ensure the land and wildlife can thrive for future generations. The Ju/'hoansi maintain a unique system of resource management through their customary practice of nloresi, areas of land tied to family ownership and stewardship, which are passed down through generations and cannot be sold or transferred.

In 2024, the Ju/'hoansi have made significant strides in preserving their cultural heritage and addressing modern challenges. A major focus of their efforts has been on water infrastructure, with grant funding being used for borehole drilling and other water-related projects to tackle the severe drought affecting the region. Additionally, legal action has been initiated to protect Ju/'hoansi land from illegal cattle owners through an interdict aimed at the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. Cultural preservation has also been a priority, with the Ju/'hoansi organizing a cultural festival from October 3-5, 2024, which served as a platform for engaging youth and reconnecting them with elders, healers, and traditional knowledge. This festival addressed cultural erosion by promoting spiritual practices and ceremonies while also providing a space for different villages to collaborate on the protection of their land, language, and heritage.

# Conclusions: Strengthening Unity, Spirituality, and Vision

# THE WAYFINDERS EMBODY BOTH UNITY AND DIVERSITY

During these last two years, the Wayfinders Circle has experienced steady growth, collaboration, and shared learning. The Circle's members have taken important steps to strengthen connections and share their message with the world.

Participation remained strong, creating a space where members could share life stories, challenges, and successes. These exchanges helped build trust, highlighted the variety of knowledge within the Circle, and supported learning across generations.

Along these years, the Circle has reaffirmed the key role of spiritual leaders and ancestral values. The continued practice and preservation of spiritual and ceremonial traditions has been a central part of this process, helping to shape the Circle's identity as an Indigenous-led space. This consolidation has come from within and guided by the wisdom, priorities, and shared vision of its members. The Circle continues to rely on a simple, flexible structure that respects Indigenous ways while welcoming others to join. The Wayfinders Circle will continue to inspire the world by reconnecting people to their roots, grounding actions in the principles of reciprocity, and honoring the true bonds that sustain life.

# 2023 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

#### CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writers: Mariana López, David Rothschild Design: Daniel Romagosa Photography: Daniel Lin, Gabriel Ripa Alsina, Mariah Gladstone, Mariana López, David Rothschild, Pablo Alberenga and the Wayfinders Circle members photographic archives.

Contact **info@wayfinderscircle.org** for more information about the Wayfinders Circle initiative.

## WayfindersCircle.org



