



Montana State University Billings | Native American Achievement Center
Sunny Day Real Bird, Director of American Indian Outreach

2025 AIMA Recommendations Action Plan
 (Updated – June 2025)

Montana State University Billings and City College
Action Plan in Response to AIMA Recommendations

AIMA was established to address the mandates enshrined in Article 10 of the Montana Constitution:

- (1) It is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person. Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state.
- (2) The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity.

	Action Plan	Next Steps	Person Responsible	Implementation Date
Recommendation 1: Senior level point of contact	Identify a senior-level staff member to serve as the primary contact for American Indian student support. Communicate this designation to all departments and establish clear referral pathways. Provide guidance on strategies to improve retention and completion rates for American Indian students. Ensure students are aware of this point of contact through outreach and visibility efforts.	Identify appropriate leadership role within NAAC and communicate designation to university leadership Communicate role and referral procedures to advising, financial aid, housing, and support offices Participate in retention-focused meetings and provide input on American Indian student support Develop flyers, update NAAC website, and include information in orientation and advising materials	Kim Hayworth, Vice Chancellor for Student Access and Success and Director of American Indian Outreach, Sunny Day Real Bird Native Student Retention Specialist, Donna Stand Over Bull, Native Success Coordinator, Kenna Bemis, and Financial Aid Navigator, Marlynn Cloud NAAC Team: Native Success Coordinator, Kenna Bemis and Financial Aid Navigator, Marlynn Cloud	Operationalized & Ongoing
Recommendation 2: Department points of contact	Develop a clear and accessible list of department points of contact dedicated to supporting Native students on campus.	Annually reconfirm points of contact to account for departmental changes.	Financial Aid Marlynn Cloud, Financial Aid Navigator, (406) 657-2188, marlynn.cloud@msubillings.edu Advising Center	Operationalized & Ongoing

			-Bryan Grove, Assistant Director, (406) 657-2169, bryan.grove@msubillings.edu -Stephanie Cowen, Director of Jacket Student Central at City College, (406) 247-3005, scowen@msubillings.edu Disability Support Services -Greg Gerard, Interim Director of Disability Support Services, (406) 657-2283, greg.gerard@msubillings.edu Student Health Services -Jerry Girard, Student Health Director, (406) 657-2153, jerry.girard@msubillings.edu Admissions Kealy Dowd, Associate Director of Recruitment, (406) 896-5910, kdowd@msubillings.edu Housing and Residence Life -Codie Warhman, Director of Housing (406) 657-2376, Codie.warhman@msubillings.edu Human Resources -Paula Highlander, Human Resources Director, (406) 657-2117, paula.highlander@msubillings.edu Employment and Career Services Dr. Becky Lyons, Director of Career & Employment Services, (406)- 657-2168, blyons@msubillings.edu Academic Support Services Amber West Martin, Director of Academic Support Services, (406) 657-1714, amber.westmartin@msubillings.edu	
Recommendation 3: Collect/Share/Analyze quantitative and qualitative data to guide and improve American Indian enrollment and student success.	Overview of American Indian Data Resources Available at MSUB: General Campus-Level Information: - OCHE-Generated Data and Reports - MSUB Internal Aggregate Reports - American Indian enrollment, retention, and graduation rate data included in standard internal reporting	A. Semester Reports on Native American Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation Reports are regularly shared with administration and department directors. Data is used to inform decision-making and support the goals outlined in the Strategic Plan and	Responsible Office: Institutional Research -Sunny Day Real Bird, Director of American Indian Outreach, (406) 657-2144, 2630 Normal Avenue -Joann Stryker, Institutional Research Director (*link 2) (406) 247-5752 303 McMullen Hall	Operationalized & Ongoing

	Detailed Student-Level Information: APEX Advisor/Enrollment Reports: Includes student-level data such as enrollment status, class lists, and non-returning students Potential Modifications to Support AIMA Goals: Option to add an American Indian indicator in student records Argos – American Indian Outreach Application: Generates a list of American Indian students with contact information Ad Hoc Data Requests: Submit through the online form (*link 1)	Retention & Graduation Plan.		
Recommendation 4: Request campuses consider how to include American Indian voice in the search process when hiring campus leaders and assess leadership candidate's knowledge and experience working with American Indian students, faculty and staff.	Training and Orientation: - Develop interview questions that specifically address candidates' experience and understanding of working with American Indian students, faculty, and staff. - Offer cultural competency training for all search committee members to ensure a respectful and informed hiring process.	Develop Interview Questions and Evaluation Criteria: - Collaborate with American Indian representatives to draft interview questions focusing on candidates' experience and initiatives involving American Indian communities. - Establish clear criteria for evaluating candidates' responses and experiences. Cultural Competency Training - Provide resources and support for ongoing learning and cultural sensitivity across campus.	-Paula Highlander, Director of Human Resources, (406) 657-2117, paula.highlander@msubillings.edu	Continue refining our approach based on feedback and evolving student needs to ensure ongoing improvement within our department.

		• Highlight the faculty liaison role in supporting implementation and follow-up for cultural competency efforts. • Promote campuswide engagement by inviting all faculty, staff, and students to participate in Elder-in-Residence programs, Talking Circles, and other Native-led events throughout the academic year. These activities foster cross-cultural understanding and build community.		
Recommendation 5: Provide annual professional development opportunities for all faculty and staff in the areas of Indian Education for All, American Indian culture and cultural sensitivity and the history of Montana's First Peoples.	OCHE version of a Higher Education IEFA. Providing annual professional development for both faculty and staff. A. Awarded grant to hire Faculty Liaison to offer ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty to enhance their cultural competence and awareness.	Work with the Chancellor's Cabinet and HR to ensure every staff and faculty member completes the IEFA module.	-Paula Highlander, Director of Human Resources, (406) 657-2117, paula.highlander@msubillings.edu -Andrea Aebersold, Executive Director of Center for Teaching and Learning, (406) 657-247-5720, andrea.aebersold@msubillings.edu	Operationalized & Ongoing
Recommendation 6: Dissemination of professional development	The action plan is to seek support from the Chancellor, Provost & Vice Chancellors to support 5 and 6.	All new hires will view the higher ed. version of IEFA as part of new employee onboarding for all faculty and staff.	-Paula Highlander, Director of Human Resources, (406) 657-2117, paula.highlander@msubillings.edu -Supervisors	Operationalized & Ongoing

Recommendation 7: Strategy to Leverage Apply Montana and FAFSA Completion Initiatives to Support American Indian Students in Accessing the Montana University System	To improve access to the Montana University System for American Indian students, we will leverage Apply Montana and FAFSA completion initiatives. Our strategy includes partnering with Tribal education offices, local and tribal high schools, and community organizations to raise awareness and conduct informational sessions. We will provide one-on-one assistance through dedicated support lines and offer user-friendly guides. Staff and volunteers will be trained to ensure effective support. A tracking system will monitor completion rates, and follow-up communications will ensure timely submissions.	Led by Marlynn Cloud in her grant-funded role, the Native American Achievement Center works in close collaboration with the TRIO Educational Opportunity Center and the Office of Admissions to increase Native student enrollment and engagement. Together with Financial Aid, these four offices form a strong, coordinated team committed to supporting students from first contact through enrollment. Key activities include: • Establishing and strengthening partnerships with tribal communities and schools • Creating culturally relevant recruitment materials and resources • Planning and conducting outreach events at schools, tribal colleges, and community gatherings • Implementing a tracking system to monitor outreach and application progress • Providing timely and personalized follow-up communication with prospective students	Marlynn Cloud, Financial Aid Navigator, (406) 657-2188, marlynn.cloud@msubillings.edu TRIO Educational Opportunity Kimberly Kost, Academic Counselor, (406) 657-2182, Kimberly.kost@msubillings.edu -Laura Gittings-Carlson, Director of Advising and Student Support Services/TRIO, (406) 657-1668, l.gittingscarlson@msubillings.edu	Operationalized & Ongoing
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*Link 1: <https://msubillings.col.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV38BBK33FrAhAll>

*Link 2: Joann.stryker@msubillings.edu