



UNDERScore

The Big Picture

Indigenous communities have historically been underrepresented — and often misrepresented — in media coverage. That pervasive underrepresentation has extended to the staff makeup of media organizations themselves, with Native Americans accounting for less than .5% of newsroom employees.

[Underscore News](#), a nonprofit news organization in Portland that focuses on Indigenous reporting in the Pacific Northwest, works to address both shortcomings through our hiring, reporting and education/workforce development programming. Our centerpiece training program is the Underscore Indigenous Journalism Fellowship.

The Details

We launched the fellowship in 2022 as a pilot project in partnership with the University of Montana's nationally reputed [School of Journalism](#) and The Oregonian, the largest newspaper in the Pacific Northwest. We received widespread positive feedback from the intern, journalism professors and news leaders across the country.

The program is designed to help equip and encourage the next generation of Indigenous journalists. Each summer, we host and train an Indigenous collegiate journalism student for an immersive 10-week internship, giving the fellow professional experience with a living wage while offering a scholarship upon completion. We plan to continue the program annually and potentially expand it in the coming years.

Through the fellowship, we seek to reach aspiring journalists to show them a viable pathway into the profession. We hope to help facilitate an Indigenous journalist pipeline that will encourage more diverse representation in an industry that has long grappled with poor representation.

Under the training of our experienced newsroom staff, fellows have a chance to develop and showcase their skills, using our platform and republishing network to give them exposure and tools that will help them pursue a successful journalism career.

We designed the program through an equity lens, providing strong pay and fully paid support for housing and transportation as a way of removing barriers that have traditionally created a non-inclusive media intern system.

Our 2022 fellow was [McKayla Lee](#) (Diné) from the University of Montana. Our 2023 fellow is Carrie Johnson (Chickasaw and Pawnee) from Austin College in Texas.

The program includes the following:

- * An annual 10-week internship for qualified Indigenous journalism students
- * A living wage along with a desk and computer at Underscore's office in Portland, Oregon, where the interns work under the supervision of senior staff and alongside experienced reporters; learn the ins and outs of professional print journalism; report and write stories; and see their work published by Underscore News and its publishing partners

- * Access to weekly intern trainings offered by The Oregonian, which offer the additional benefit of networking and camaraderie opportunities with The Oregonian's roster of interns

- * Housing on the beautiful campus of Lewis and Clark College

- * A \$2,000 scholarship upon completion of the program

The Need for Support

Based on our research and own values, the best way to build this program through a lens of equity was to include housing, travel and transportation costs, a living wage and scholarship support to reinforce the value of education.

We were grateful to receive funding from the Scripps Howard Foundation, Flathead Beacon Foundation and The Leadings Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation to make those ambitions a reality and launch the program in 2022.

We are actively seeking support for the 2023 program and beyond. Our goal is to continue to grow and expand the annual program as funding and partnerships evolve.

If you are interested in supporting this unique program and providing career-launching opportunities for aspiring Indigenous journalists, please contact Underscore News Executive Director Myers Reece at mreece@underscore.news.