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Sunday, 18 February 2024 08:07 - Last Updated Tuesday, 20 February 2024 11:44

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Arizona has joined a nationwide initiative to document and preserve the oral histories of Indigenous individuals who experienced life at federal boarding schools as children, marking a significant effort to create a permanent oral history collection.



[The Oral History Project](#) strives to document the experiences of Indigenous individuals subjected to the federal boarding school system. The Oral History Project is a crucial part of the [Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative](#), which the Department of the Interior launched in June 2021 to address the harrowing legacy of these institutions. These boarding schools operated from the late 19th to the late 20th century and sought to assimilate Native American children by separating them from their cultures and families.

Arizona has played a central role in this narrative, with its 22 federally recognized Indigenous tribes and history of having the second-highest number of boarding schools in the nation. This initiative not only confronts the painful legacy of these schools but also strives to preserve the cultural heritage that the institutions aimed to eliminate. Local efforts, including story and artifact collections, are vital to this research.



Efforts at the local level, such as the [Heard Museum's](#) exhibitions in Phoenix, complement this project. The museum's "[Away From Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories](#)" exhibition provides immersive insights into boarding school life through various mediums.

The Phoenix Indian School, which now serves as a visitor center, maintains a collection that reflects the boarding school students' experiences. This historical site further contributes to The Oral Project's efforts by educating the public on the impact of boarding schools on Indigenous communities. These efforts are essential in acknowledging the profound effects—physically, culturally and emotionally—of boarding schools, and offer a pathway toward healing and learning from these historical injustices.



The Oral History Project is led by the [National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition \(NABS\)](#), which received \$3.7 million in grants from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Dedicated to addressing the long-standing trauma inflicted by Native American boarding schools, NABS focuses on healing and justice for those impacted. Through its work, NABS raises awareness and promotes healing by advocating for those affected by these boarding school policies.

NABS's goals with this project extend beyond documentation to healing, advocacy and community resilience. By providing a platform for survivors to share their stories, this project offers a means for healing through storytelling. These personal accounts serve as educational

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resources, bringing to light a neglected part of American history and also support NABS's advocacy for justice and reparations.

Click [here](#) to learn more about The Oral History Project.

*Photos: "Away From Home: American Indian Boarding School Stories" exhibition at Heard Museum. Images courtesy Heard Museum.*