Haskell, Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy Launch Tribal Energy Leaders Fellowship℠ with Harvard, MIT, and UNLV Faculty

First-of-its-kind program draws on Indigenous Knowledge Systems to build the technical and governance capacity Tribal leaders need for clean energy sovereignty

LAWRENCE, KS, UNITED STATES, March 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Haskell Indian Nations University and the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy have launched the Tribal Energy Leaders Fellowship℠ (TELF), a first-of-its-kind program designed to strengthen Indigenous leadership in the self-determined pursuit of clean energy across Tribal communities. Housed at Haskell and featuring faculty from Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, TELF provides Tribal leaders with more than 100 hours of specialized training to build lasting capacity, advance energy sovereignty and confront long-standing inequities on Tribal lands.

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> *Chéri Smith, President & CEO, Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy*

Through rigorous instruction grounded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and informed by leading research institutions, the fellowship prepares participants to design, finance and lead energy projects that generate economic opportunity, strengthen community resilience and ensure that the clean energy transition is shaped by Tribes, for Tribes.

Acting President of Haskell, Dr. Alex Red Corn, applauds this new partnership: “We are excited that the Haskell Foundation has built these new relationships with the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy and connected our campus with experts in the field. We see this as a great opportunity to expand how we serve Indian Country through professional and workforce development programming, but we also see this as the beginning of something that can grow into broader programming and partnership growth over time.”

Conceived by Alliance founder, president, and CEO Chéri Smith (Mi’kmaq descendant), after years of working alongside Tribal leaders advancing clean energy in their communities, TELF responds directly to a gap she witnessed repeatedly. Even when the vision and determination

are strong, these champions are often asked to lead complex, high-stakes projects with little to no formal training, technical background or institutional capacity.

“For generations, energy development has happened to Tribal Nations rather than being led by them,” said Smith. “True sovereignty requires control over the systems that power our homes, our economies, and our futures. The Tribal Energy Leaders Fellowship℠ is about shifting that dynamic. It prepares Tribal leaders to design, finance and govern their own clean energy solutions so the benefits remain in their communities and the decisions reflect the values, priorities and long-term vision of their people.”

By combining rigorous fellowship training at Haskell with the Alliance’s ongoing technical assistance, policy guidance and capital access support, TELF closes the capacity gap that has too often slowed Tribal clean energy projects and ensures leaders are equipped not only to launch initiatives but to carry them through to completion.

What sets TELF apart is its approach to energy education. Indigenous peoples have always maintained deep, place-based relationships with the natural systems that power their communities: sun, wind, water and geothermal heat. These relational ways of knowing, passed down across generations, offer practical insights into how energy is generated, distributed and governed in Tribal communities today. TELF treats this Indigenous Knowledge not as a context for energy science but as a generative force within it, shaping how fellows assess resources, design projects and engage their communities. By housing the program at Haskell, one of the nation’s most storied institutions of Indigenous higher education, the fellowship creates a space where Tribal leaders can draw on both Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the latest in renewable energy technology to build solutions that are technically rigorous, culturally grounded and rooted in the places and peoples they serve.

“Clean renewable energy, along with its efficient use, is the gateway to self-reliance and economic security that strengthens Tribal sovereignty,” said John Spengler, Akira Yamaguchi Professor of Environmental Health and Human Habitation at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “The journey starts with a vision of what is possible, and this course illustrates the pathway, which is never straight. Sharing knowledge will enable leaders to secure funding, avoid predatory agreements, and implement projects that improve public health, generate sustainable economic benefits, and build more resilient Tribal communities.”

The fellowship draws on a distinguished, multidisciplinary faculty. Haskell’s Dr. Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi, Muscogee Nation), a leading voice on Indigenous relationships to the environment and the power of place-based knowledge, and Mackie Moore (Cherokee Nation), Dean of the School of Business, ground the program in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, environmental leadership from Native perspectives and economic development rooted in Tribal values. The Alliance’s Chief Knowledge and Innovation Officer, Dr. Ramon Sanchez (Mayo, Yaqui), anchors the technical curriculum across multiple sessions, bringing expertise in renewable energy systems, site assessment and advanced energy applications. Additional Harvard faculty contribute depth in

building science and energy efficiency, while MIT faculty lead instruction in environmental and cultural impact assessment and sustainability metrics. The Indian Nations Gaming & Governance Program at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas provides instruction in sustainable hospitality and gaming operations, a critical sector for many Tribal economies.

“What makes this collaboration so powerful is that it brings together institutions and knowledge systems that are rarely in true partnership,” said Sanchez. “When faculty from Haskell, Harvard, MIT and UNLV sit alongside Tribal energy leaders and the entire experience is grounded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems, we create something no single institution could achieve alone. These fellows will leave not only with strong technical expertise, but with the confidence and capacity to lead energy projects that reflect who they are, honor their Nations and meet the real needs of their communities.”

The 10-week curriculum moves from foundational policy through hands-on technical training to applied project development. Fellows begin with Tribal energy sovereignty and the federal Indian energy policy framework; then move into renewable energy technologies such as solar, wind and geothermal systems and site assessment and feasibility; followed by advanced applications including energy storage, microgrids for Tribal energy independence, and sustainable gaming and commercial operations. Dedicated sessions cover energy auditing fundamentals, building efficiency strategies and Tribal housing weatherization. Fellows gain practical skills in financial modeling, federal grants, tax credit mechanisms, Tribal ownership models, offtake agreements and procurement strategies for Native-owned firms.

“Nature contact provides a range of physical and emotional health benefits, which are essential to human beings. Learning how to use nature to identify appropriate sites for renewable energy projects is essential, as siting determines the economic and technical viability of solar, wind, hydro and geothermal projects,” said Dr. Linda Powers Tomasso, a Research Associate at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and an Instructor at the Harvard Extension School. “When leaders understand how to evaluate resource potential, they can maximize energy output while minimizing ecological disruption. This knowledge strengthens Tribal self-determination as leaders design projects that generate sustained revenue, reduce energy costs and create long-term job opportunities while increasing economic and environmental resilience within their communities.”

The program also addresses environmental and cultural impact assessment, compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, community engagement best practices and the design of Community Benefit Agreements with employment and revenue-sharing provisions. Throughout, fellows integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Indigenous Knowledge Systems into every phase of project design, learning to scope bankable projects, build workforce development strategies and create implementation roadmaps that reflect Native leadership, values and long-term goals.

"The Tribal Energy Leaders Fellowship℠ signifies a pivotal departure from conventional energy

development approaches, revolutionizing the landscape with projects that are culturally relevant, community-driven and manifest the true essence of Tribal sovereignty, which is in direct alignment with our mission at the Indian Nations Gaming & Governance Program at UNLV," said Danielle Finn (Húŋkpapa Lakota, Iha□kto□wa□ Dakota, Hohé Nakota), Director of the Indian Nations Gaming & Governance Program, at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

The fellowship is a hybrid learning experience combining an intensive online curriculum with an in-person capstone presentation. Each fellow develops and completes an applied capstone project tied to a clean energy initiative or policy they will steward within their Tribal community, translating clean energy vision into actionable plans and local economic impact. The program culminates in formal capstone presentations. Inaugural cohort members will present their projects at the Alliance's Tribal Energy Evolution Summit (TEES) in Tulalip, Washington, during the week of May 11, 2026, before an audience of Tribal leaders, faculty, policymakers, funders and energy professionals.

Fellows receive free tuition, travel assistance, access to a professional network of energy experts and Tribal leaders and ongoing mentorship.

For more information about applying to or supporting TELF, email TELF@tribalcleanenergy.org.

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About the Haskell Foundation
The Haskell Foundation is a not-for-profit 501 (c) (3) organization, created to financially support Haskell Indian Nations University, an educational institution that fosters the growth, education and leadership development of Alaska Native and American Indian students from across the United States and Alaska.

About the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy
The Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy is an Indigenous-led 501(c)(3) nonprofit advancing self-determined clean energy transitions for Native American Tribes and Alaska Native Villages. Founded in 2016, the Alliance is fully philanthropically funded and offers catalytic funding and no-cost technical, financial, policy, educational, and workforce development support to help Native Nations build resilient, sustainable economies and achieve their energy sovereignty goals while honoring and protecting Mother Earth.

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