



N8V Good Life (Indigenous ROSC) Council – FY26–FY28 Strategic Plan

Submitted January 15, 2026

Lead Agency: Trickster Art Gallery, DBA, Trickster Cultural Center

Council Mission

Supporting healing with Indigenous cultural sharing.

Council Vision

“Living the good life.”

I. Needs Assessment:

Cook County is one of the largest urban population centers for American Indian and Alaska Native people in the United States (IRRPP, 2019). The majority of AI/AN residents live off-reservation and experience persistent inequities including unemployment, housing discrimination, undercounting in public data systems, and limited access to culturally responsive services.

Cook County is the ancestral homeland of the Council of Three Fires; Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi Nations—as well as the Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Miami, Sac, Fox, Kickapoo, and Illinois Nations, whose descendants continue to live, work, and practice culture throughout the Chicagoland area. Despite this deep presence, federal relocation policies, boarding schools, and termination era policies have fragmented families and community ties, contributing to ongoing intergenerational trauma and health inequities, including substance use and overdose risk.[1][2]

Chicago is home to one of the largest urban Native communities in the United States, with an estimated 65,000 American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people from roughly 175 tribes in the metropolitan area. Regional Native-led organizations report that Native people in Chicago experience many of the same opioid and polysubstance harms seen in reservation communities, but without direct access to tribal health systems or many culturally grounded recovery supports.[2][1]

Overdose and substance use context

Nationwide, AI/AN communities have the “highest drug overdose death rates” of any racial/ethnic group, with age-adjusted overdose mortality reaching 42.5 deaths per 100,000 in 2020 and rising to 56.6 per 100,000 in 2021, significantly higher than the overall U.S. rate. Recent national data continue to show AI/AN overdose rates at the top of all racial groups in 2022–2023, underscoring the urgency of tailored responses for Native communities.[3][4][5][6][2]

In Cook County, opioid overdose remains the leading cause of unnatural death: the Medical Examiner confirmed a record 2,000 opioid overdose deaths in 2022 and, while deaths declined to an estimated 683 confirmed opioid fatalities in 2025, the majority still involved fentanyl and disproportionately affected Black, Latino, and other communities of color. Public reporting groups Asian, Native American, and “Other” together, which contributes to under-counting and invisibility of AI/AN overdose deaths in local data systems, even as Native leaders describe a clear and ongoing opioid crisis in Chicago’s Native community.[7][8][2]

From August to December 2025, the N8V Good Life Council reviewed and discussed the data collection tool provided by the grant’s funder. After a few discussions that included tribal diversity, the cultural advisor, and Indigenous People with Lived Experience, it was determined that the only demographic data that would be appropriate to collect would be a question asking the responder if they were Indigenous. The council decided that it was not relevant to ask what one’s tribal affiliation, age, or any social economic indicators would be appropriate given that these indicators would jeopardize the anonymity and openness and trust of Indigenous responders. The Cultural Advisor suggested that the strategic plan only include demographic information about the Indigenous population available in the public, especially given this is a new project and Indigenous-centered trust has not been intentionally built through the dictated process.

The Assessment findings demonstrated local contributing factors to each Illinois State ROSC priority:

Stigma

- 31.2% demonstrated the stigma that people who use drugs do not deserve respect.

Medication Assisted Recovery

- 52% of people in our community believe that Medication Assisted Recovery – MAR is an effective treatment for substance use recovery ;
- Most people (63.8%) do not know how to access Medication Assistance Recovery and other evidence-based practices;

- There is an assumption that “medication assisted” means Western medicine only, thus stigmatizing Indigenous medicine.

Promote Harm Reduction

- Only 49.6% people in our community support evidence-based Harm Reduction strategies; Majority of people in our community do not know where to access Harm Reduction strategies.

Effective Service Delivery

- The majority (80%) of people find it difficult or are not aware of substance use and mental health treatment in our community.

Equity

- Majority (64%) of people surveyed do not believe that there is equitable mental health services based on socio-economic status.
- Only 1 in 3 are aware of cultural healing practices.

Findings from the N8V Good Life Indigenous ROSC Assessment (2025) demonstrate strong community interest in Indigenous healing practices paired with low trust in mainstream behavioral health systems, limited culturally safe referral pathways, and lack of awareness of Indigenous-specific recovery supports.

- The majority of people (75.6%) “strongly agree” that people with mental illness deserve respect.
- 92% of people would like access to more Indigenous cultural events
- 86.3% (majority) of people support increased government funded SU/MH services.

“N8V Good Life ROSC’s seasonal, Indigenous-centered approach ensures that recovery systems remain **living, relational, and accountable** to the community they serve today and for generations to come.”

II. Council Outreach & Communication Plan

A. Purpose

The purpose of the N8V Good Life Strategic Plan is to build trust, increase awareness of Indigenous recovery supports, and ensure community accountability before external reporting.

B. Objectives (general, not SMART – see the Goals and Objective Section for SMART Goals)

- Increase Indigenous community engagement in ROSC activities
- Share information in culturally appropriate formats
- Strengthen transparency with partners and IDHS

C. Target Audiences

Primary: Indigenous community members (primary): Elders, cultural practitioners, and youth

Secondary: Recovery partner organizations (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous led)

Tertiary: Funders (secondary, after community review)

D. Key Messages

- Recovery includes culture, ceremony, and connection
- N8V Good Life ROSC is Indigenous-led and intertribal
- Participation is voluntary, respectful, and consent-based

E. Communication Channels & Frequency

Method	Frequency	Responsible
Knowledge sharing: Community gatherings / feasts focused on healing	Quarterly (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall)	Council

Method	Frequency	Responsible
Direct In-person outreach (individual conversations, circles, gatherings)	Ongoing with a minimum of 6 per fiscal year	Council Members
Written summaries and information sharing (websites, newsletters, social media posts, posters, stickers, etc.)	Two per Quarter (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall)	Lead Agency create in collaboration with Indigenous Leaders and council members; distribution by Lead and council members
Council reports, minutes, resource guide, etc. uploaded to the state's website and the Lead Agency's N8V GL page.	Monthly	Lead Agency

Note on Indigenous Communication:

Indigenous communities require relational trust and consent prior to public dissemination, addressing historic data misuse and erasure.

F. Roles and Responsibilities

The N8V Good Life Council reviewed the required sectors and “Roles and Responsibilities of the council” outlined in the ROSC grant agreement. Through discussion and adjustments to fit centering Indigenous practices and First Voice, the council consented on the following Roles and Responsibilities of the council (November 2025):

- Support the mission, vision, and values
- Regularly attend coalition meetings (minimum of 7 out of 12 meetings per year)
- Actively participate in council activities, workgroups, or initiatives.
- Contributes knowledge, resources, or input to support goals.
- Respect First Voice and Intertribal collaborative processes.
- Provide up-to-date contact information (name, organization, title, email, phone).
- Provide consent to be listed publicly or within coalition communications.

- Help plan and support coalition strategies and action plans.
- Share relevant information with their networks.

N8V Good Life (N8VGL) exists to strengthen Indigenous healing (recovery) by restoring cultural connection, reducing stigma, and expanding access to culturally grounded, community-led recovery supports for Indigenous people across Cook County and the Collar Counties.

III. Council Goals, Objectives, and Outcome Measures

Three Year Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: By June 1, 2028, Increase reported access to Indigenous Healing Practices by 40% over baseline.

G1 Objectives

- 1.1** By June 30, 2026, **N8V Good Life ROSC will promote** two quarterly Indigenous-led healing events **for the Indigenous community.**
- 1.2.** Identify and culturally vet at least five Indigenous healing practitioners by March 31, 2026.
- 1.3.** Host four healing gatherings or practices annually; 12 cumulatively by June 30, 2028/

Goal 1 Outcome Measures:

- Percent of survey respondents reporting access to Indigenous-led healing practices
- Number of practitioners engaged
- Number of healing activities held
- Participant counts (non-identifying)

Goal 2: By December 31, 2027, establish a recommended process recovery support providers and funders can utilize to build the public health field's capacity to engage in Indigenous led healing practices and organizing process in accordance with Indigenous seasonal practices.

Goal 2 Objectives:

Each objective states the end of the season's equinox, however, it is important to mention that the activity should not take place out of the season with which it is

associated, but for the sake of SMART Goals, the last day of the appropriate season is listed.

- 2.1. Convene a Winter governance sessions with Elders and Council members before the start of Spring/ March Equinox (March 20, 2026).
- 2.2. Convene a Spring season Assessment and Engagement discussion(s) and note taking before the end of the Spring Equinox (June 21, 2026).
- 2.3. Provide Summer Implementation opportunities for ROSC partners, practitioners, and funders by the end of the Summer Equinox (September 22, 2026).
- 2.4. Implement harvest, gratitude, and planning for sustainability, celebrating successes, and identifying lessons learned to inform duplication and sustainability the Winter Equinox (December 21, 2026).
- 2.5. Create a training and policy(ies) recommendations for organizations and funders to build the public health field's capacity to engage in Indigenous led healing practices and organizing process in accordance with Indigenous seasonal practices before the end of the Spring Equinox (June 21, 2028).

Goal 2 Outcome Measures:

- Quarterly summary reports of each season's milestones.
- A document describing Indigenous planning for recovery.
- Number of Policy recommendation briefs.

Performance Measurement and Reporting

N8V Good Life will monitor progress toward its SMART goals using both quantitative and qualitative measures, including participation counts, milestones achieved, and community feedback. Progress will be reviewed quarterly by the ROSC council and reported to IDHS/SUPR through required Quarterly ROSC Reports, Periodic Performance Reports (PPRs), and updates submitted via the ROSC HUB. Findings will inform continuous learning and adjustment across the three-year strategic period.

Alignment with Illinois Statewide ROSC Goals

This Strategic Plan aligns with the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (SUPR) Statewide Recovery-Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) goals as follows:

- ***Reducing Stigma:*** *N8V Good Life addresses stigma through community education, cultural visibility, and Indigenous-led healing activities that affirm dignity and respect for people impacted by substance use and mental health conditions.*

- **Promoting Medication-Assisted Recovery (MAR) and Other Evidence-Based Practices:** N8V Good Life supports multiple pathways to recovery, including Medication-Assisted Recovery and other evidence-based practices, alongside Indigenous healing approaches. Education and dialogue around MAR are incorporated into community engagement and provider-facing activities. N8V Good Life affirms that Indigenous healing practices complement, rather than replace, Medication-Assisted Recovery and other evidence-based treatment approaches, and supports individual choice across multiple pathways to recovery.
- **Promoting Harm Reduction:** Indigenous harm reduction principles—safety, balance, consent, and relational accountability—are integrated throughout outreach, education, and healing activities.
- **Ensuring Effective Service Delivery:** The council strengthens service delivery by building culturally safe referral pathways, vetting Indigenous practitioners, and developing a public-facing Indigenous recovery resource guide.
- **Prioritizing Equity:** Equity is centered through Indigenous governance, lived experience leadership, protection of cultural knowledge, and intentional response to data invisibility and historical exclusion.

“Indigenous centered recovery services are essential because they honor our cultural traditions. They provide healing in ways that resonate with our people. In Chicago, our council serves as a vital space where recovery, community, culture and healing can come together and offer strength, balance, and belonging for our generations today and those to come.”

Chicago Area Indigenous Practitioner/N8V Good Life Council Member

APPENDIX

Indigenous Seasonal Practices



1. Winter: a time of inner reflection, storytelling, and planning. The process begins with **relational governance**, building consensus on how the council makes decisions, holds ceremony, and protects cultural knowledge. Convene **Winter Circles**, perhaps around a fire, where Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, and practitioners share ancestral teachings about healing pathways, community aspirations, and seasonal responsibilities. **Ceremonies/Practices:** Winter Solstice prayer, Winter Story Circles, Sweat Lodge to cleanse and set intentions.

2. Spring: Assessment, Asset Mapping & Renewal

As the earth renews, focus on **community listening and mapping strengths**. Use culturally grounded methods like **talking circles, communal meals, and land walks** to surface priorities, healing practices already thriving, and relational needs between urban Native services and Tribal practitioners. This phase is not just “data collection” - it’s **reciprocal knowledge exchange** where people teach and council members listen with deep attention. **Ceremonies/Practices:** Spring Water Blessing, Tobacco Ties to honor voices shared, Medicine Walks (identifying plants/spaces that heal). **Output:** An **intertribal healing needs & assets map** that centers Indigenous-defined indicators (e.g., cultural continuity, family reconnection, safety in ceremony spaces), and a set of **community-led priorities**.

3. Summer: Implementation with Cultural Anchors

Summer’s energy supports **piloting and scaling healing practices**. Guided by Spring’s priorities and ceremonial consent, launch pathways with **cultural accountability practices** built in. Align implementation schedules with ceremonial calendars so that activities are not disjointed from cultural life. For example, a youth intertribal cultural camp could be synchronized with local powwows; a healing circle series could culminate with a midsummer gratitude ceremony. **Ceremonies/Practices:** Mid-Summer Prayer Seeding Ceremony, Grandfather/Grandmother Teachings Circles, Intertribal Drum Teachings.

4. Fall: Harvest, Evaluation & Thanksgiving

Fall is the time of harvest — not just of crops but of learning. Reflect on what worked and what needs adjustment through community forums that **structure both Indigenous evaluation principles and appreciative inquiry** (asking what gifts each activity revealed). Include ceremonial thanksgiving as part of evaluation so that assessment is not abstract but rooted in gratitude and reciprocity. **Ceremonies/Practices:** Harvest Gratitude Ceremony, Tobacco Ties of Thanks, Seasonal Feast & Story Share.

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“*Miigwetch*”, “*Migweth*” “Aabhar (አአባር)”; “**Shukran** (شُكْرًا)” “**Gracias**”

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