



Voices of the Diné: Bridging Science, Culture, and Community in
Genetic Research Summit
May 29-30, 2025
Report from Feedback Surveys

Introduction

The Voices of the Diné: Bridging Science, Culture, and Community in Genetic Research Summit was held from May 29 – May 30, 2025 in Flagstaff, AZ at Northern Arizona University (NAU). The Summit's goal was to increase understanding and awareness around genetics and genomics, focusing on future possibilities for Diné and Indigenous peoples across the nation to engage in discussions about genetics. The Summit was educational, and was open to a mixed audience of academics, scientists, policymakers, tribal leaders, trainees, and the Navajo and Indigenous community more broadly. Because of this, Summit presentations were tailored for a general audience to keep everyone engaged in learning and joining the conversations, regardless of pre-existing genetics knowledge.

The Summit featured both main presentation sessions, which deeply engaged topics of importance to the main goal of the Summit, and concurrent platform sessions on both days. The concurrent platform sessions featured presentations running in four separate rooms simultaneously, selected from a pool of talk submissions and invited speakers. These presentations were on a range of topics but were united by the common theme of genetics and education with all presentations expected to speak to culturally-informed and/or community-involved research.

Funding

The views expressed in written conference materials or publications and by speakers and moderators do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Department of Health and Human Services; nor does mention by trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

Funding for this conference was made possible (in part) by the following entities:

- Native American Research Centers for Health (NARCH), sub-award to University of Colorado (S06 GM142121)
- Conference Grant from the National Human Genome Research Institute (R13 HG014112)
- Alan T. Waterman award from the National Science Foundation (awarded to K. Claw)
- Dr. Katrina Claw (University of Colorado institutional funds)
- Dr. Jani Ingram (Northern Arizona University institutional funds)
- Dr. Nanibaa' Garrison (University of California Los Angeles institutional funds)

Attendance

A total of 240 people registered for the Summit. Of that total, 189 registered for in-person attendance and 51 for virtual attendance. Due to in-person space limitations, the Organizing committee ended in-person registration at 170 people and allowed last minute registrations on a case-by-case basis. We estimate that 142 people attended in-

person based on conference bag and name badge pickups. Virtual attendance fluctuated throughout the event, with a low of 15 and a high of 40. On average, an estimate of 35 people attended virtually.

To increase reach and accessibility for in-person attendance, organizers provided travel scholarships for both community members and trainees. In addition, travel support and honoraria were offered to all invited speakers. We supported travel and lodging for:

- 17 community members (16 Navajo, 1 from a different Tribal Nation)
- 12 trainees (11 Navajo, 1 from a different Tribal Nation; 4 Undergraduate Students, 6 Graduate Students, and 2 early-career professionals)
- 46 speakers used our lodging and/or travel support

There was a total of 50 speakers of whom 40 were Navajo (80%) and 10 were non-Navajo (10%; including 1 from a different Tribal Nation).

Summit and Session Feedback Survey Design

Participants were asked to complete two evaluation surveys at different points during the conference. The surveys were hosted on Qualtrics and had associated QR codes that were projected on the main screen following each session or group of sessions. Physical copies were available for those that needed them, although no physical copies were requested or completed for either of the two surveys.

The first survey asked questions specific to the concurrent sessions that were held each day of the Summit. This survey asked participants to indicate which session they had attended, their level of satisfaction with the session (Likert scale 1-5, with 1 being extremely unsatisfied and 5 being extremely satisfied), one main idea they took from the session, and if they had any questions lingering afterwards.

The second survey asked questions regarding the Summit as a whole and was only made available after the end of the second day of the Summit. The QR code was projected onto the screen, and the link to the survey was emailed to all attendees following the Summit. Questions included: registration method (in-person or virtual);

how they heard about the Summit; views on conference organization, how understandable the main presentations were, the balance of education and cultural values, and the use of information in daily life; which presentation they enjoyed the most and why; and their key takeaways from the entire Summit.

Concurrent Session Feedback

The Concurrent session survey received 33 responses, split across 7 of the 8 sessions. Overall, 30 of the 33 responses (90%) indicated that attendees were “Extremely Satisfied” with the presentations they attended. 2 responses indicated “Somewhat Satisfied”, and 1 response indicated “Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied.”

Attendees reported several main takeaways from the sessions, with many being specific to the session itself, but there were a few broad themes that appeared in answers connected to all of the sessions. Several responses across the different sessions spoke to the fact that these presentations did an excellent job of communicating the importance of community-engaged science. Several attendees also commented on learning specifics about how Diné cultural interests can be incorporated into science and scientific presentations, with one expressing the opinion that keeping cultural teachings relevant in the research will prompt more positive reception in the broader community.

Full Summit Feedback

The main Summit feedback survey received a total of 54 responses. Of those 54 responses, 45 respondents reported attending the Summit in-person and 8 reported attending virtually, with 1 respondent not indicating how they attended.

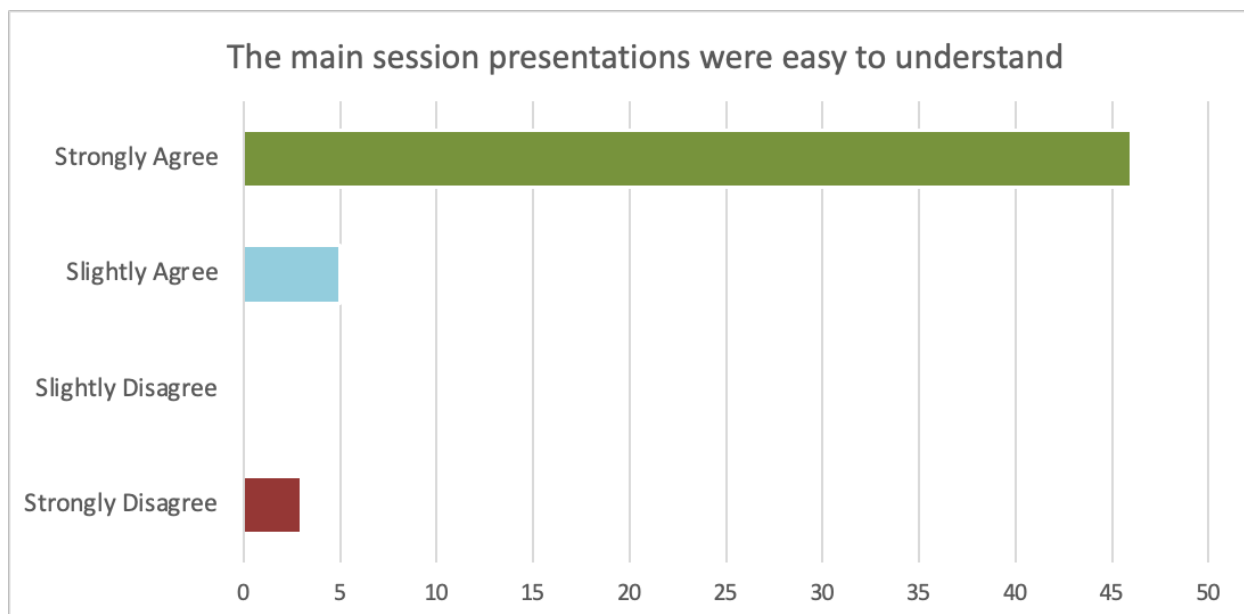
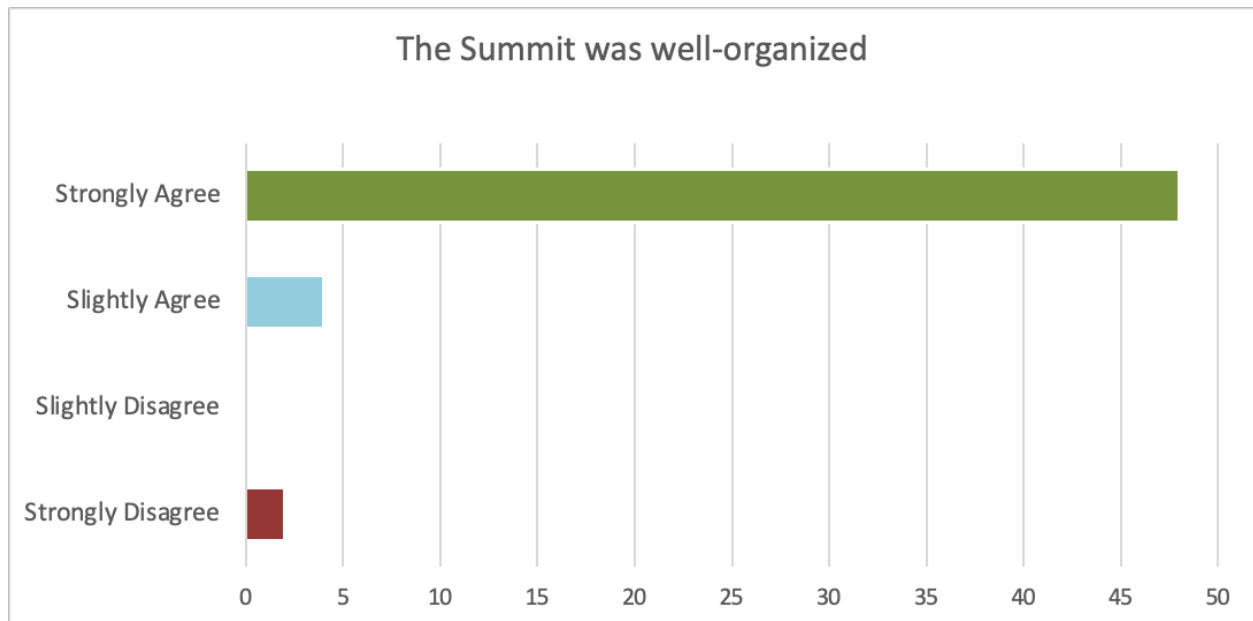
Registration Type	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total Attendees
In Person	45	32%
Virtual	8	23%

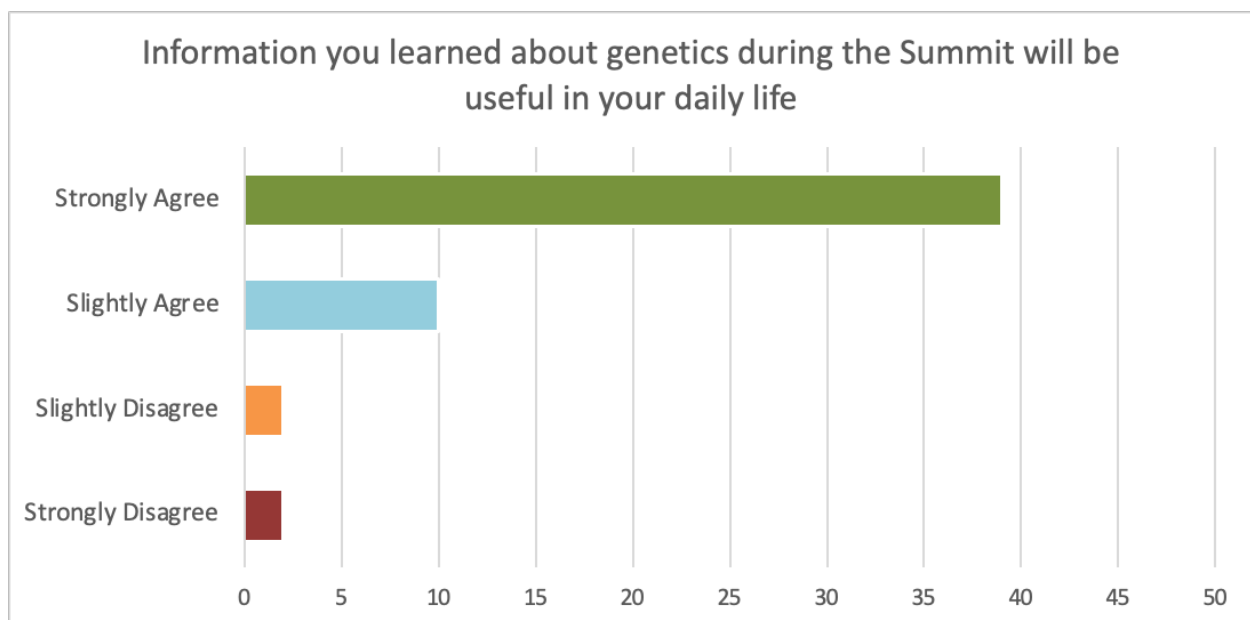
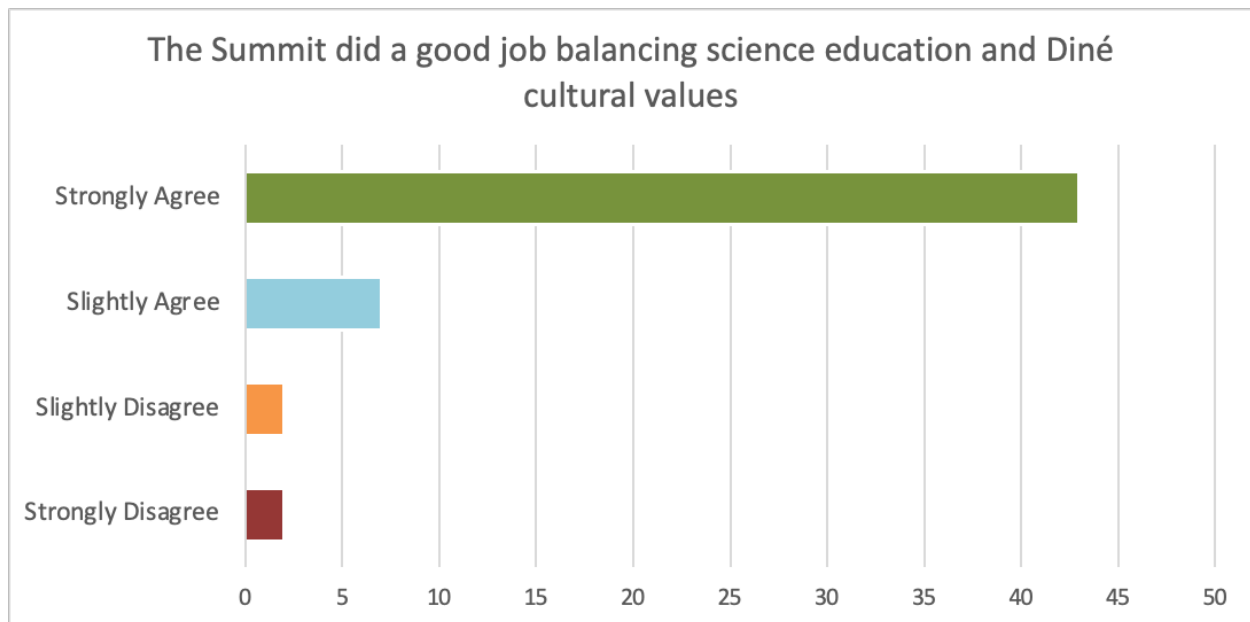
The survey also requested information on how the respondent heard about the Summit, information that will inform the organizers as to how effective various outreach efforts were. The results are summarized in the table below. Of the 14 individuals who reported “Other” as their method of hearing about the Summit, four were directly invited to give a talk, two had it recommended by a colleague or professor, and two heard about it from participating in previous research done by Drs. Claw and Garrison.

Method	Number of Responses	Percentage
Email	27	50%
Advertisement	3	6%
Word of Mouth	10	18%
Other (Specify)	14	26%

Respondents were asked to indicate which presentation they enjoyed the most out of the entire Summit and the reason(s) why. Fifteen (28%) of the respondents named one of the two Keynote sessions, with the majority citing former NHGRI director Dr. Eric Green’s Keynote as the one they enjoyed the most. They praised his sense of humor and the fact that he presented information in a way that was easy to understand. One respondent stated, “I thoroughly enjoyed the explanations he gave, the historical timeline he presented, and an honest account of the impacts the new administration has had on his work and science. It was all incredibly moving.” Dr. Nanibaa’ Garrison’s Keynote was praised for having information that was “relevant and timely.” One respondent also noted the difference in the perspectives between the Keynotes and stated that it was “...great to get perspectives from two brilliant minds about their current work and trials, one from a Diné person’s view and the other from a NIH director.” Ten (19%) responses indicated an inability to select a favorite presentation, stating that they all had something unique and impressive to offer. One attendee stated that they were “impressed and appreciative of how the cultural aspects were brought into the discussions, either through prayer, song or language.”

Respondents indicated overall positive feedback on their views of the conference through four Likert-scale questions, with the results summed up in the charts below. It is worth noting that the two respondents who selected “strongly disagree” for all questions also provided very positive feedback in the allotted free answer questions.





Finally, attendees were asked to share their key takeaways from the Summit as a whole. Feedback from this question indicates that the Summit achieved its goal as an educational conference and also functioned to raise community awareness about important issues within the Navajo Nation.

Several attendees reported learning about the existence of the genetic research moratorium, with additional attendees discussing their new in-depth understanding of what needs to be done to move the moratorium conversation forward. Attendees additionally explained that their key takeaway from the Summit were that they should get more involved in discussions around genetic research and would like to help in their local areas. One respondent said, “I would definitely be an advocate or liaison to assist when bringing genetics education and awareness to the Navajo Nation communities.” Notably, many attendees were very happy to see that the Summit was led by a team of primarily Diné scientists. A feedback comment that summarizes these opinions well was: “The Diné genetics program is in the hands of very capable individuals, this makes me feel safe and happy.”

Many attendees voiced support for genetic research, so long as a policy is in place that would ensure the research is beneficial to the Navajo Nation. Attendees largely recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done on this topic, with several expressing worry that federal funding issues will delay much-needed developments around the moratorium. This sense of impatience around delays in the conversation about the moratorium was not an isolated opinion. One attendee expressed that work should be done, even before the community was fully educated on the topics of the moratorium and genetic research. They said, “Waiting until all Dine' have an ‘understanding’ of the moratorium, does not empower our people to learn and move forward using genetics to improve our health.”

Survey Limitations

It should be noted that these surveys have two main limitations. The first is that the captured responses did not speak to the opinions of all attendees, as the Full Summit survey received a response rate of 30.5% (54 responses out of an estimated 177 total attendees, including in person and virtual attendees) and the Concurrent Session survey received a response rate of 19% (33 responses out of an estimated 177 total attendees, including in person and virtual attendees).

Additionally, both surveys were designed to be brief for Summit attendees to take on their phone, ensuring that the surveys were accessible and easy to take. For this reason, the surveys could not adequately capture opinions related to every aspect of the Summit quality.

Authors

Lucas Rozell (Claw lab, University of Colorado) analyzed survey data and wrote the initial draft.

Katrina Claw (University of Colorado) and Kyle Coulon (Claw lab, University of Colorado) edited and distributed the final version.

The Summit Organizing Committee approved the final version: Katrina Claw, Nanibaa' Garrison, Jani Ingram, Gilbert John, Mae-Gilene Begay, Ursula Knoki-Wilson, and Carmenlita Chief.

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