



# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

## Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

In 2017, LLBO member Levi Brown took part in the Native Governance Center’s Native Nation Rebuilders Program, a two-year leadership training experience providing Indigenous changemakers “with Indigenized tools and frameworks they can use to help rebuild their nations.”<sup>1</sup> Through the program, Brown developed an action plan to address a troubling fact – that “Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe civics is underrepresented and in most cases absent from all levels of educational institutions.”<sup>2</sup> Called the Leech Lake Civics Training initiative, the plan quickly gained community support from LLBO’s Local Indian Councils (LICs) and a governmental partner in its Human Resources Department.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing the “study of the political rights and responsibilities of citizens and of the operations of the government” is “essential to a vibrant and robust society,”<sup>4</sup> in 2019 the LLBO Reservation Business Committee passed a resolution requiring “all new Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe employees including Tribal Council members to complete the Leech Lake Civics course and receive certification.”<sup>5</sup> Taught monthly, the four-hour training empowers LLBO staff to ably serve the Band by grounding them in Leech Lake’s culture, traditional governing institutions, colonization’s enduring impacts, and how the LLBO government functions today.<sup>6</sup> It also teaches the responsibilities each LLBO employee is expected to fulfill, including: upholding LLBO’s laws and policies, working for the betterment of every tribal member, safeguarding LLBO’s institutions “because the institutions are the people,” and how their specific roles advance LLBO’s nation-rebuilding priorities.<sup>7</sup> The 1,000+ employees who have completed the training to date are now “better equipped to make and implement decisions in accordance with tribal goals and cultural values.”<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, LLBO’s Gaming Enterprises and other businesses now require new hires to complete the training, which is also provided to community members, Leech Lake Tribal College, LICs, and local school districts upon request with increasingly regularity.<sup>9</sup> Recognizing “an informed nation is a strong nation,”<sup>10</sup> LLBO leaders have requested the launch of a more expansive, “second-tier” curriculum to deepen employees’ understanding of Leech Lake Civics in 2025.<sup>11</sup>

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### **RELATED RESOURCES**

[Native Governance Center: Tribal Civics: A Guide for Fostering Engagement](#)

[Native Governance Center – Native Nation Rebuilders Program](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Native Governance Center, “What Is a Rebuilder?” webpage (<https://nativegov.org/programs/leadership-development/what-is-a-rebuilder/>), accessed September 11, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Leech Lake Reservation Business Committee, *Resolution No. 2019-061 Re: Recognition and Approval of Leech Lake Civics Training*, January 17, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Levi Brown, “Anishinabe Biimadiizii: Indian Way,” PowerPoint Presentation, Leech Lake Civics Training, November 9, 2022, slide 3. According to LLBO, the Leech Lake people “organized their own community councils to give a political voice to their concerns. These community councils are called Local Indian Councils or LICs” (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe (LLBO), “About Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe” webpage (<https://www.llojibwe.org/aboutUs/demographics.html>), accessed September 11, 2024)).

<sup>4</sup> Levi Brown, “Native Nations & Civics: Why and How,” PowerPoint Presentation, February 3, 2022, slide 14; Leech Lake Reservation Business Committee, *Resolution No. 2019-061*, January 17, 2019, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Levi Brown, *Native Nation Rebuilder Cohort 9 Action Plan (Individual)*, Native Governance Center in Partnership with the Native Nations Institute, September 2018, p. 1. The curriculum also drives home the key message that the LLBO government “works on behalf of community as a whole not individuals” (Levi Brown, “Native Nations & Civics: Why and How,” May 18, 2019, slide 14). To sustain the apolitical nature of the training, LLBO’s Human Resources Department coordinates its delivery, but it is taught by curriculum author Levi Brown, who is not an LLBO employee (Levi Brown, *Native Nation Rebuilder Cohort 9 Action Plan*, September 2018, p. 2; Levi Brown, Developer and Instructor, Leech Lake Civics Training, Correspondence with NCAI, September 9, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> Levi Brown, “Native Nations & Civics: Why and How,” May 18, 2019, slide 23; Levi Brown, “Leech Lake Civics: The story begins with us,” PowerPoint Presentation, September 22, 2018, slide 27.

<sup>8</sup> Levi Brown, *Leech Lake Civics: 2023 Annual Human Resource Report*, February 7, 2024, p. 1. As Brown explains, the training also fosters greater teamwork between employees and stronger partnerships between tribal government and outside partners” (Conversation with NCAI, August 22, 2024). For non-Native employees – who comprise more than half of LLBO’s governmental workforce – the training provides them tools to dispel harmful stereotypes they hold about the Band and its members and also a cultural lens through which to view and perform their work (Ibid.).

<sup>9</sup> Levi Brown, Conversations with NCAI, August 22 and September 11, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Levi Brown, *Leech Lake Civics: 2023 Annual Human Resource Report*, February 7, 2024, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Levi Brown, Conversations with NCAI, August 22. The Leech Lake Civics Training initiative and curriculum directly informed the Native Governance Center’s development of its “Tribal Civics” template guide for Tribal Nations (for more information, see: <https://nativegov.org/resources/tribal-civics-guide/>).