



National Team 2025

Project Impact Report

Response	Percentage
Yes	68%
No	32%

A group of female athletes, likely a soccer team, are huddled together on a grassy field. They are wearing black long-sleeved shirts with white accents and black shorts. Some are wearing white socks and colorful sneakers. The background shows a hazy, overcast sky and distant hills. The image is oriented vertically.

INTRODUCTION

2025: a National Team cohort ready to fly.

The 2025 Wings of America National Team supported more than one hundred Native American high school student-athletes through competitive running opportunities, holistic wellness programming, and culturally grounded mentorship. The program centered Indigenous identity, community connection, and youth leadership while reducing financial and logistical barriers to national-level competition.

Throughout the 2025 season, Wings of America served 104 student-athletes representing 15 Tribal Nations across 12 states, providing travel, lodging, meals, coaching support, and culturally responsive mentorship. Athletes competed at premier regional and national events including Nike Cross Regionals (NXR) and the RunningLane National XC Championships, while participating in intentional wellness, leadership, and community-building activities.

Rooted in our new four pillars Wellness framework – Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Cultural – this year's impact is presented in this report through measurable outcomes, participant feedback, and program insights that demonstrate both athletic and personal growth among National Team participants.





1

The National Team

program

The Wings National Team program has existed since **1988**, creating opportunities for Native high school runners to compete at the highest levels of cross country while representing their communities on a national stage. From 1988 through 2025, Wings sent its National Team to race in the Junior Division at the USA Cross Country Championships, where Native student-athletes came together to capture an extraordinary **36 national team titles** over the program's history. Beginning in fall 2025, Wings transitioned to sending the National Team to the RunningLane Cross Country Championships in Huntsville, Alabama, where Wings athletes now compete in the elite Gold Division—continuing this legacy of excellence while expanding access to postseason competition and leadership development for Native youth.

OUR PROGRAM GOALS

- Increase access to elite competitive running opportunities for Native youth
- Support holistic wellness and identity development
- Foster leadership, confidence, and community belonging

CORE PROGRAM COMPONENTS

ACCESS

We ensure Native student-athlete have access to national-level race participation (NXR, RunningLane XC). We provide race entry, fully funded travel, and lodging & meals.

SAFETY

We provide safe, supervised environments led by Wings staff and chaperones. We also provide coaching support and mentorship that ensures both physical (injury prevention) and emotional safety.

CULTURE

Throughout the experience, we provide culturally grounded spaces emphasizing identity, community, and balance.

Our 2025 National team

structure & process

1

Application process

Native student-athletes apply to be part of the Wings National Team. The application entails:

- background information about themselves
- their commitment to participate in the Nike cross-regional races
- their track record of running this past season

Try-out process

2

Participants need to compete in a cross-regional race. Wings provides race registration support and covers race registration fees for applicants who need it.

Our programs team tracks applicants' results to get ready for the selection process.

4

Selection process

The Wings team selects the top 7 girls and top 7 boys across all regions.

Outreach to them and their parents happens to let them know they have been selected. They are given a few days to confirm participation in the Wings National team.

Competing in the National race

3

Members of the Wings National team get to spend four days together on location of a National race, supporting by the Wings team.

This time together includes:

- race preparation
- individual & group coaching
- cultural activities & grounding (prayers, running history conversations, etc...)

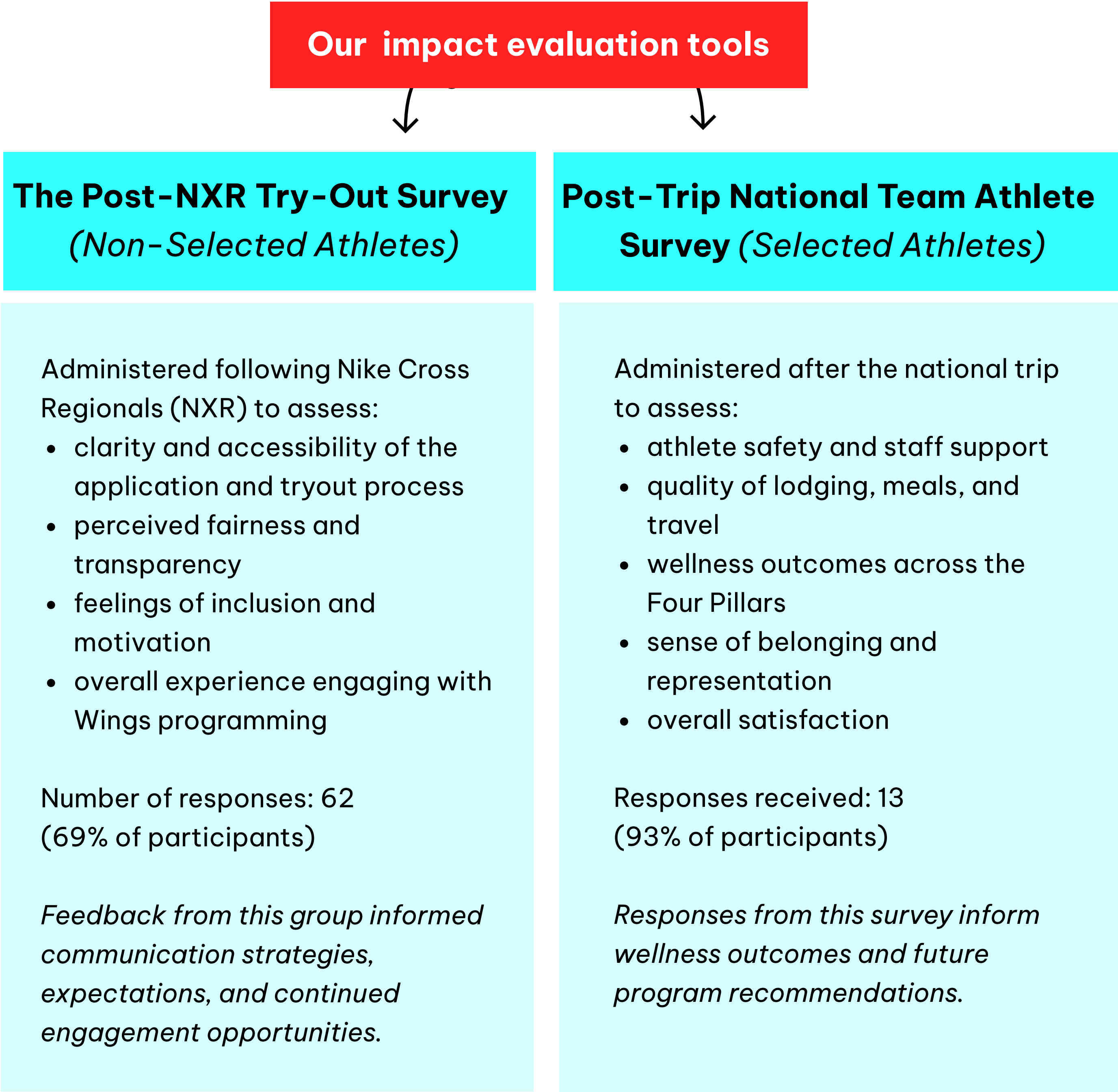


This year, the race was Running Lane in Alabama.

HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

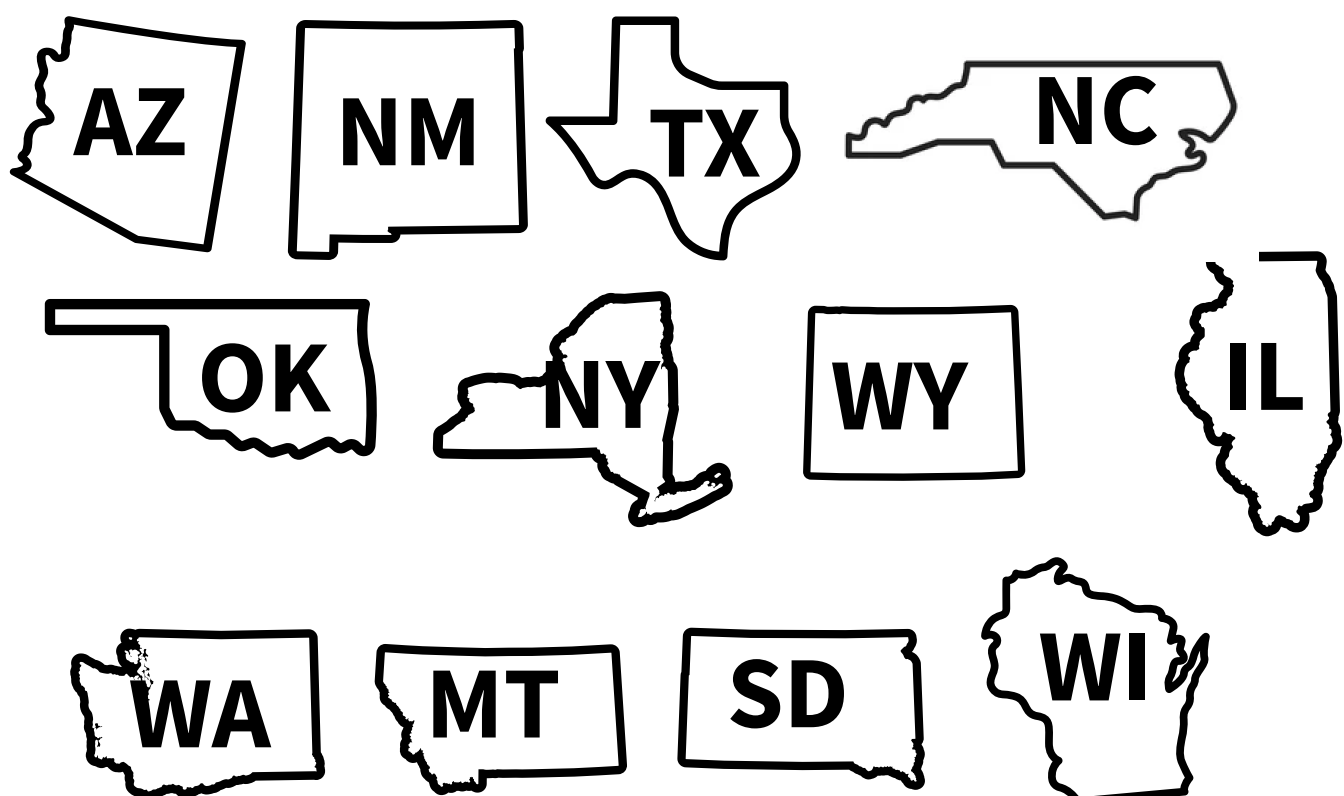
In 2025, Wings reinforced its Monitoring and Evaluation framework, intentionally deepening its system to capture impact data throughout its programs.

For National Team, we utilized a two-survey evaluation approach to capture feedback from both selected and non-selected athletes involved in the 2025 National Team cycle. This approach allowed the program to assess not only trip-based outcomes, but also the broader impact of access, communication, and athlete experience throughout the selection process.



GEOGRAPHIC REACH

This year, National team participants were from **12 different states!** The breadth of participation reflects Wings' ability to reach Native youth from rural, reservation-based, and urban communities. Here are the states that were represented:



- Arizona
- New Mexico
- Texas
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- New York
- Wyoming
- Illinois
- Washington
- Montana
- South Dakota
- Wisconsin

TRIBAL REPRESENTATION

This year, participants in our National Team program represented **20 Tribal Nations**. Several athletes identified multiple Tribal affiliations, reflecting the richness and diversity of Native identity. Here are the Tribes represented:

Alaska Native • Blood (Kainai) Nation • Cherokee Nation • Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes • Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe • Cochiti Pueblo • Crow Tribe • Eastern Shoshone Tribe • Hopi Tribe • Jemez Pueblo • Jicarilla Apache Nation • Laguna Pueblo • Lumbee Tribe • Menominee Tribe • Navajo Nation (Diné) • Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe • San Ildefonso Pueblo • Taos Pueblo • White Mountain Apache Tribe • Zuni Tribe

PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

Try-out participants were from grades 9 to 12 (14 to 18 years old). Out of 104 participants, 65 were male (62.5%) and 39 female (37.5%).



2

National Team

Our Impact this year

OUR IMPACT WITH TRY-OUT PARTICIPANTS

Participation in the try-out process produced **strong positive outcomes** – even among athletes not selected. We asked try-out participants to share their thoughts on how this experience impacted the following four pillars: cultural and community wellness, mental and emotional wellness, physical wellness and connection to land. Here are the results.

RELATIONAL WELLNESS

- 91.9% of participants had a stronger sense of community and belonging post participation.
- 92.0% felt pride in representing their Tribe/community
- 91.9% gained deeper appreciation for Native running traditions
- 87.1% had increased access to Native role models
- 85.5% felt connection to family running traditions

- 91.9% of participants felt they increased their mental toughness through this experience
- 93.6% shared having a greater gratitude for running post participation
- 96.8% shared being motivated to set new goals
- 92.0% shared being inspired to run for life

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

PHYSICAL WELLNESS

- 90.5% of participants shared having improved their physical endurance
- 90.3% shared having increased their physical toughness
- 85.7% feel better equipped to train safely
- and 93.5% shared having gained meaningful race experience

- 90.3% of try-out participants shared feeling a stronger connection to Mother Earth through movement.

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS





OUR IMPACT WITH SELECTED NATIONAL TEAM MEMBERS

Data collected post race with those who were selected to be part of the Wings National Team highlights positive growth across all Four Pillars of Wellness.

PHYSICAL WELLNESS

- 100% felt better equipped to run/train safely
- 92% reported increased endurance and physical toughness
- 100% said running provided valuable competitive experience

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

- 100% said the experience helped them set new goals
- 92% reported increased motivation to continue running
- 92% reported growth in mental toughness
- 100% felt safe with Wings staff and chaperones
- 100% reported strong team friendships and support
- 100% were glad they participated

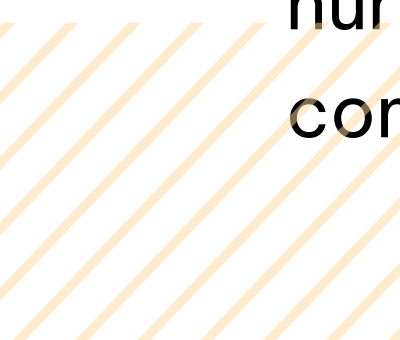
RELATIONAL WELLNESS

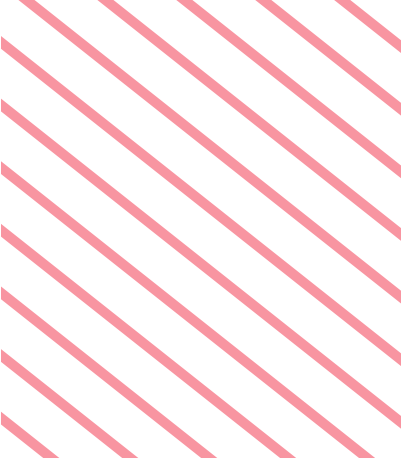
- 100% felt proud representing their Tribe/Community
- 92% reported deeper appreciation for Native running traditions
- 92% felt inspired to give back or create positive change in their communities

SPIRITUAL WELLNESS

Spiritual wellness was woven into the National Team experience through grounding exercises, breath work, meditation, prayer, and opportunities for athletes to honor their cultural identity in ways meaningful to them. While not formally measured, these practices created space for reflection, focus, and connection—supporting athletes as whole individuals in a high-pressure competitive setting.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the National Team experience nurtured confidence, belonging, identity, and long-term wellness – alongside competitive performance.





FAMILY FEEDBACK

Families reported appreciation for:

- clear communication and itineraries
- financial support and logistical organization
- trust in Wings’ supervision and athlete care



of try-out participants had family members previously involved in Wings programs, demonstrating multi-generational engagement and community trust.

STUDENT - ATHLETE FEEDBACK

“I felt that being on the 2025 Wings team was an incredibly rewarding experience – in education, training, and gaining new connections. I’m inspired to continue through track season and into college, and to share this experience with my community so others know about Wings...”



Reed Emanuel

2025 National Team Member from North Carolina, Lumbee Tribe

“Being part of Wings has shown me that running is more than competition—it’s a connection to culture, history, and community. I will always be grateful for what this program has taught me. The lessons I’ve gained here will stay with me long after my time as a runner and will continue to shape the way I approach challenges in the future.”



Jazelle Thompson

2025 National Team Member from New Mexico, Navajo & Apache Tribe





2025 Performance & Results

Gold Division Results

Boys: 6th of 21 teams

Girls: 9th of 21 teams

*Multiple athlete PRs,
including a 23-second PR by Kylie Ovah*

THANK YOUs

Wings extends deep gratitude to the individuals and partners who made the 2025 National Team experience possible through their generosity, mentorship, and support throughout the season.

- A special thank you to **Phil and Wendy Castillo**, who graciously hosted the team in Birmingham. Phil brought invaluable experience and guidance to the athletes, and both Phil and Wendy supported the group by helping secure trip logistics, providing mentorship, and offering encouragement every step of the way. Their generosity, care, and familiarity with the Huntsville area helped create a smooth and meaningful experience for all.
- We are also incredibly thankful to **Coach Michael Benally**, who served as a chaperone and mentor while traveling with the team from Phoenix. His continued support, coaching, and leadership were essential in helping athletes feel prepared, confident, and supported throughout the championship weekend.
- We also extend sincere appreciation to **Will Rogers and the RunningLane Cross Country Championships team** for welcoming Wings into this elite-level postseason meet. Will's support was instrumental in offering the Wings National Team a spot in the Gold Division, as well as providing customized racing singlets and official race packets that made our athletes feel fully included on the national stage.
- Finally, Wings is deeply grateful to **Nike N7** for their continued investment in Native youth through sport. Through N7's support, Wings was able to provide racing singlets and Nike Pegasus shoes not only to National Team athletes, but also to many of the student-athletes who participated in the tryout and qualification process.

Thank you to **every student-athlete who applied and competed in the National Team** selection process this year. The dedication shown by Native runners across the country reflects the strength and future of Indigenous distance running. Even for those not ultimately selected, your effort, courage, and commitment to showing up at the highest level is deeply valued. To our National team athletes, thank you for representing your communities with pride, humility, and excellence. Your leadership, teamwork, and resilience throughout this experience embody what Wings is all about! We are equally grateful to the **families and community supporters** who make this program possible. Your trust, encouragement, and sacrifices behind the scenes ensure that Native youth are able to pursue opportunities that often require significant travel, time, and support. Wings recognizes that every athlete's journey is shared with the people who stand beside them.

CONCLUSION

At its core, the Wings National Team is about more than competition—it is about access, identity, and possibility. For decades, Wings of America has worked to honor the cultural, spiritual, and competitive legacy of Native runners by creating pathways that allow Native youth to thrive. The National Team represents the highest expression of that mission.

From the first conversation with families to the final steps on a national course, this program affirms a simple but powerful truth: Native athletes belong on the biggest stages in the sport. When provided with opportunity, preparation, and support, they do not just participate—they compete, they improve, and they inspire.

For Wings as an organization, the National Team is a responsibility we carry with purpose. It connects community-based programming to national opportunity, transforms potential into performance, and turns legacy into lived experience. Each personal best, each team placement, and each shared moment strengthens the foundation of an organization committed to empowering Native youth and their families.

This work is about ensuring that future generations of Native runners can see themselves reflected in the sport—confident, capable, and supported. With continued investment, Wings of America will sustain this pathway, expand access, and continue building a future where Native youth are not on the margins of opportunity, but at the center of it.

Through the Wings National Team, we are not only preserving a legacy—we are building the future of Native running.

Want to help Wings continue creating elite running opportunities and holistic wellness pathways for Native youth? There are many meaningful ways to support the Wings National Team in 2026:

- **Make a donation** to help cover travel, lodging, race entry, and gear for Native student-athletes
- **Sponsor an athlete or family** by supporting the cost of postseason competition and championship travel
- **Partner with Wings** as a school, tribe, or community organization to expand opportunities for Native runners
- Share our mission by uplifting Indigenous excellence in sport and spreading the word

To donate, please visit Wings website.

To learn more about Wings and our programs, visit: wingsofamerica.org



Thank you for your support!

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