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PARK CITY, UTAH – The Sundance Institute announced at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival that four budding Native American filmmakers have been selected for Full Circle Fellowships. The Full Circle program develops and supports young emerging native filmmakers and is part of the Native Institute's year-round support of offerings for Native artists.

N. Bird Runningwater, the director of the Sundance Institute's Native American and Indigenous Program, said: Through the Full Circle Fellowship we build on our long-standing mentorship and support for three generations of Native filmmakers by focusing on the emerging fourth generation and ensuring these young artists have the tools and resources to share their stories.

"We look forward to a year of full creativity, collaboration and inspiring experiences with these very talented artists."

The 2016 Full Circle fellows are:

• Megan Babbitt is from Flagstaff, Ariz., and is currently a junior at Northern Arizona University studying creative film and media with an emphasis on media production. Babbitt's interest in film began when she was eight years old. Her mother is from Kayenta, Ariz., and her father is from Tuba City.

She founded the Ninjacorn Films Workshop. Initially interested in teaching filmmaking to her siblings and friends, Babbitt said her interest has grown into an annual and week-long summer workshop focusing on film production. At the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, Babbitt and other fellow saw films, networked with peers and received crash courses on the long and short of the film industry.

Babbitt, 20, participated in her high school's Emerging Filmmakers Program.

• Shaandiin Tome lives in Albuquerque. Tome graduated cum laude from the University of New Mexico with a B.F.A. in film and digital media production. Tome's work in filmmaking includes small roles in major motion pictures and with key positions with documentaries in Montana, Washington, Arizona and South Dakota.

• Taylor Bennett-Begaye, 22, is studying to be a graphic designer. She graduated from Kirtland Central High School. Bennett-Begaye completed her associate of arts degree in digital arts and general studies at Mesa Community College in Mesa, Ariz., where she was a member of the school's soccer team. Bennett-Begaye is in her last year of studies at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colo. She'll graduate in graphic design and sociocultural anthropology.

Upon graduation, Bennett-Begaye said she'd like to start a Native American-themed magazine with her sister who is a graduate student in journalism at Syracuse University in upstate New York.

"I want to continue pursuing this career," Bennett-Begaye said of producing and marketing film.

• The half Navajo, half Lakota Razelle "Raz" Benally, 27, was born in Baker City, Ore., and her late father, Anderson Benally, was from Rough Rock, Ariz. Her mother hails from Pine Ridge,

SD.

Benally, who is a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, was the recipient of a $10,000 short film production grant to make a film in 2015. The title of that film, filmed in and around Santa Fe, is “I Am Thy Weapon,” about the way in which Native communities process grief, and one of the stars of that film is Chinle entertainer Ernie Tsosie.

Benally will graduate next year with a degree in cinematography and arts.

“I will be submitting this film to the shorts film program of the Sundance Film Festival in 2017,” Benally said. Benally said the core of the film centers around the processing of grief in Native American communities.

About Sundance Film Festival

Founded in 1981 by renown actor Robert Redford, the Sundance Film Festival is takes place annually in Park City, Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah. The popular festival takes place for 10 days at the end of January and has produced such films as Pretty Woman (1990) and El Mariachi (1992).

It has been estimated that the festival contributes upwards of $80 million to the Utah economy. It is the largest independent film festival in the United States.