

Language Grantee Promising Practices: Advice from Previous Grantees

From 2006-2012, ANA conducted on-site impact evaluations with over 130 language grantees throughout the continental U.S., Alaska, and the Pacific. During these visits, grantees shared their promising practices to pass along to current and prospective grantees. The advice below comes from a range of grantees, including tribal language programs, Native nonprofits, and tribal colleges, most of which met or exceeded ANA project objectives and had a significant impact on their communities. We strongly recommend applicants follow the guidance in the Funding Opportunity Announcement to which they are applying, but we provide the following opinions, experiences, and suggestions of previous grantees as their recommendations:

Planning a Project for Your Community

- Language projects need to have close ties with their local school systems; it's good if language project offices are located near or within school grounds
- Really try to involve the whole community rather than just hiring outside people or "experts." When tribal people get involved and give a piece of themselves to the project, they become invested
- Get the curriculum established first, before implementation
- Incorporate your traditional and cultural learning and teachings

Managing Your ANA Project

- Include an administrative staff person in the budget to handle those activities for the project so you can focus on language
- Keep an organized grant file, and communicate well with staff to let everyone know where you file. Track and document everything

Community Involvement

- Having support is huge. You need full community support and strong parents. People have to believe in doing this, even be a requirement for parental involvement, to put their kids in a language program
- Have the tribe involved throughout the process so they can be there when you have the successful conclusion. Then it will feel like it's a success for the whole community
- Keep language classes going even with low attendance; the consistency is good for the community
- Communicate with and share successes with all stakeholders regularly. Annual potluck dinners are also a great way to raise awareness, showcase accomplishments, and get feedback from the community

Partnerships

- Secure key partnerships before the project begins, and have Memoranda of Understanding to set out the expectations and goals of the partnerships
- Look at expertise of other indigenous organizations/populations and the work that they have done. Work with and visit other tribes and language institutes to see what they are doing

Elder Involvement

- Work with Elders to ensure language being used is correct and historically accurate
- Pair elders with language teachers, young adults, and/or youth, which is a win-win for all involved

Elders and staff from the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's "Wiyat'ish Naknumit 'For the Future' Master-Apprentice Language Project" from 2005-2008. Project staff said, "Teach kids to respect and honor their elders."



Language Grantee Promising Practices: Advice from Previous Grantees

Staffing and Working with Consultants

- Even if a person is a good speaker, they might not be a good teacher, so it is important to recruit people with good teaching skills or else teach them to teach if they can learn and are motivated
- Hire a linguist—this is very important for language projects
- Pay consultants by the deliverable. Clearly define duties beforehand in the contract/scope of work

Language Learning Methods

- It can be very difficult to select the best language learners and teachers, so it's good to have direct, face-to-face experience with individuals. Use an internship program to identify and try out candidates
- Shoot for immersion programming rather than just classes if you want to revitalize the language
- Immersion requires being very adamant to not speak English. Don't be afraid of losing the English!
- Explore using Accelerated Learning Acquisition, Total Physical Response (TPR), and Master-Apprentice
- Don't be afraid of empty pages—don't over-instruct. Always think from learner's perspective
- Use creative incentive items, like giving away bracelets with words on them, to encourage younger learners
- Never exclude kids, even if they're of different abilities or different tribes. Have them help each other
- Encourage learners to speak the language, even if it's not correct or completely accurate. A lot of people have hang-ups because they are worried about having the wrong accent. Reinforce that "this is our language;" speak it and be comfortable with it
- Classes can be more enjoyable by incorporating language learning with learning of traditional activities, such as cooking demonstrations, carving, or dances

Using Media

- One young man, prior to the project, used old recordings to learn the language. The Elders saw this, respected his success, and became more willing to be recorded
- Plan for a back-up of electronic files
- Use teams of two to record, and have multiple levels of review for the recordings to make sure the highest possible quality of recordings are preserved
- Hire a media person who can develop recordings and online and visual tools. It takes a lot of time for filming and editing
- Use YouTube or other video sharing program to reach a large audience. A lot of viewers sign up for the channel, and comment on wanting more

The Master-Apprentice team for the "Sauk Language Master Apprenticeship Project," (2009-2012). Using the M-A model with immersion, the project developed five fluent speakers. Staff recommended "Don't speak English, even if it's frustrating to do."



Conducting Language Surveys

- Have good up-front communication with target community about the survey, such as its purpose and what is required
- Use focus groups to develop and test survey questions
- Involve youth in language surveys; engage youth in documentation process
- Go house to house to collect data. Be persistent in getting surveys completed