
PASSAMAQUODDY TRIBE



Project Title:	Passamaquoddy Language Revitalization Planning
Award Amount:	\$73,329
Type of Grant:	Language
Project Period:	Sept. 2009 – Sept. 2010
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 2 jobs created
- 40 elders involved
- \$5,410 in resources leveraged
- 60 individuals trained
- 10 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

The Passamaquoddy Tribe of eastern Maine has the distinction of being the easternmost Native American tribe in the United States. The two largest clusters of Passamaquoddy are on the Pleasant Point Indian Reservation, with 850 people, and the reservation at Indian Township, with about 800 people. The off-reservation population is 1,650, giving the tribe a total population of 3,300.

The Passamaquoddy suffer from high levels of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to educational opportunities. Many also have suffered from a decline in cultural knowledge and awareness, particularly in their ability to speak the Passamaquoddy (or Passamaquoddy-Maliseet) language. This language, of the Algonquian language family, is noted for its complex sounds, “animate” versus “inanimate” nouns, “obviate” system for identifying a person, and its “sentence-words” of encoding as

much meaning as possible into a single word. Retaining and using this language, tribal leaders believe, is a key element of keeping the Passamaquoddy culture intact.

The 2008 Tribal Language Survey found there were only 300 fluent Passamaquoddy speakers and 300 who are partial speakers. Project staff found that of those assessed, individuals 60 years old and over comprehended 90 percent of the assessment content, while those aged 30 to 50 comprehended only 30 percent of the assessment content. This comprehension level dropped to under 12 percent for individuals under the age of 20.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to develop a strategic plan to revitalize the Passamaquoddy language, focusing primarily on tribal language learners between the ages of 30 and 50. Without quick action, tribal leaders recognized, there would be a marked decrease in the number of tribal members who could speak the language, particularly among elders and young people. The 30 to 50 year olds were selected as the target population because they were raised in an environment where the language was spoken, and because they were the best candidates to teach the

language to children in the tribe. The project sought to accomplish this goal by identifying effective native language instructional strategies and developing a curriculum to implement across the Passamaquoddy community.

The first objective was to develop a culturally-relevant curriculum for beginner Passamaquoddy speakers between the ages of 30 and 50, with an accompanying teacher's guide. To accomplish this, project staff met with community elders and conducted home visits to gain information on the fluency level of 100 percent of the 1,650 Passamaquoddy residents. Results from the survey revealed that the target community was in need of a beginner-level curriculum.

Additionally, project staff researched promising curriculum techniques in other Native American communities, including a Micmac community in Canada and a former ANA language grant recipient, the Penobscot Indian Nation in Maine. Project staff developed a detailed language community teaching protocol and curriculum based on the best-practices they learned about from these communities. The curriculum, focusing on Passamaquoddy vocabulary lessons, originally was designed with the target audience of 30 to 50 year olds in mind; however, as the project progressed, project staff recognized that the curriculum could be used with any beginner speaker, regardless of the age group.

The second objective was to compile sound files based on the tribal dictionary (an 18,000-word Passamaquoddy language dictionary published in 2008), recording words beginning with the letters A - E. Project staff identified three elder speakers in the community and worked with an audio crew to produce oral recordings. The recordings and written samples were inventoried and cataloged, and the

recordings were added to an interactive web-based language portal. The portal holds over 300 sound files, each an hour long, with recordings dating back to the 19th century. Through this web-based format open to the public, users can learn about the meaning of vocabulary words, their pronunciation, and their use in context. Users also can record their own pronunciation of a word and post it on the website, as the portal is an interactive, continually evolving platform. To complete the second objective, project staff also developed a language revitalization action plan to outline future steps in language preservation and outreach.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Passamaquoddy Tribe now has a set of teaching methods for language acquisition, including a language revitalization action plan and a language curriculum. In addition, the tribe also possesses a Passamaquoddy teacher's guide with proven instructional strategies utilized by other tribes. Teachers already have begun implementing this curriculum in local classrooms. To complement language instruction and language learning by the public, the tribe has a self-directed web-language portal serving as a teaching method and a tool for language preservation. Furthermore, the tribe has accurate, complete documentation on the fluency levels and usage patterns of speakers in the target community. Propelling the tribe's language preservation efforts forward, a resolution was passed during the project period declaring Passamaquoddy as the tribe's official language. Equipped with interactive learning materials and the support of the tribe, future and present Passamaquoddy learners have gained significant benefits from this project.