

ACCOHANNOCK INDIAN TRIBE, INC.



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| Project Title: | Bending Water Park: An Authentic Living Village |
| Award Amount: | \$740,102 |
| Type of Grant: | Social and Economic Development Strategies |
| Project Period: | Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2010 |
| Grantee Type: | Native Nonprofit |

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 11 jobs created
- 6 businesses created
- 12 elders involved
- 42 youth involved
- \$2,130 in revenue generated
- \$102,000 in resources leveraged
- 2 individuals trained
- 16 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

The Accohannock Tribe is an 80-member non-federally recognized tribe located in Marion, Maryland, a rural town in Somerset County. Because the tribe is not federally recognized, it is currently organized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit entity. The tribe’s mission is to preserve and promote Accohannock history, traditions, and culture; foster sound education, health, social, and economic well-being for tribal members; and achieve self-sufficiency and self-determination.

Tribal administrators have identified rural poverty as the biggest challenge currently facing the tribe. In the region’s economic

environment, only a few tribal members are able to continue the traditional occupations of their ancestors. Most tribal members are 50 years or older, and work in small family businesses or local minimum-wage jobs. In addition to poverty, tribal members face challenges including unemployment, substance abuse, family violence, lack of education and job skills, health and medical problems, and lack of affordable child care.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the project was to create Bending Water Park, a 33-acre authentic living village to preserve and educate tribal families and the public on the history, traditions, and culture of the Accohannock tribe while providing self-sustaining economic opportunities for tribal members. The project’s first objective was to open the park, including a restaurant, museum, gift shop, 12 demonstration sites of Indian craft making, 25 tent camp sites, five RV camp sites, and an Indian water trail to support canoeing. The park, to be open on a daily basis, would be sustained through revenue from admissions, food sales, camping, canoe and paddle boat rentals, and gift shop proceeds. Unfortunately, the project was beset by challenges from the outset. Prior to

the project, tribal leaders had discussed with county administrators receiving a \$1 million U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to construct the park's main building, a 12,000 square foot visitor center intended to house the restaurant, museum, classrooms, and gift shop. Early in the project period, however, a new group of county leaders was elected, who obligated the funding for other uses. Meanwhile, county planning and zoning officials declined to issue land use permits for the park due to environmental concerns about how the park would affect surrounding wetlands. This further hindered site development and rendered \$200,000 in state construction matching funds inaccessible.

While working to gain support for the project from the newly elected county leaders, the team continued with project activities. The team set up an outdoor pavilion and operated temporary facilities including a mobile kitchen, small museum, gift shop, nine round houses, and 15 rough tent camping sites. The team also developed a scaled-down events calendar, an entry fee schedule, and many of the park's operating, maintenance, and financial management procedures. In May 2009, at the park's grand opening, a small group of community and tribal members camped, canoed on park water trails, and enjoyed performances by guest vocalists, drummers, and dancers. However, most were dissatisfied that the visitor center, the park's centerpiece, yet was to be constructed.

The project's second objective was to attract visitors, an average of 150 per day during warm weather months and 50 per day during winter months. To do this, project staff and consultants created promotional brochures and a website, and communicated with a local tour bus company to discuss bringing daily visitors on tours from Ocean City.

However, the tour bus company declined to schedule tours until the tribe constructed a permanent dining facility at the park.

Objective three was to hire 50 employees and provide a venue for 10 microenterprises, with 75 percent of new employees and entrepreneurs improving their standard of living. The project team hired and trained 11 staff, including administrative and gift shop staff, a park superintendent, a groundskeeper, and security guards. Six microenterprises were created, including a canoe, paddle boat, and kayak rental business, two hand-crafted jewelry businesses, an oyster sandwich shop, an arts and crafts business, and a tent and RV camping business. Though none of the businesses earned enough to serve as the sole source of income for their proprietors, each business reported a steady increase in volume and income over the two project years.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The tribe has used Bending Water Park to host small music and entertainment events, a cultural arts festival, weekly swap meets, and other activities bringing tribal and community members together and allowing small park businesses to generate needed income. The park also has attracted outdoor groups, including bicycle and canoe clubs, Boy Scouts, and youth groups.

By project's end, however, there were no permanent facilities at the park, park attendance and revenues were short of expectations, and there was no funding readily available for the construction of the welcome center. Nonetheless, tribal leaders continue to work with local officials to overcome these obstacles, and continue to look for ways to fund the welcome center. Chief Rudy Hall stated, "It might take longer than we'd thought, but we are going to finish what we started here."