

NATIONAL INDIAN COUNCIL ON AGING



Project Title: Helping Grandparents Raise Grandchildren Across Indian Country

Award Amount: \$495,958

Type of Grant: Social and Economic Development

Project Period: Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2011

Grantee Type: Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 4 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 117 elders involved
- 135 youth involved
- \$7,692 in resources leveraged
- 26 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

Located in Albuquerque, the National Indian Council on Aging (NICOA) is a national nonprofit member organization that advocates for health and social services for American Indian and Alaska Native elders. NICOA's membership consists of approximately 2,000 native elders age 55 and above from the 12 areas of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Recognizing that 56 percent of American Indian and Alaska Natives are the primary caretakers of grandchildren, NICOA saw a need to create support systems for grandparents. Grandparents raising grandchildren provide stability; however, they sometimes struggle to take care of the financial, emotional, and physical health of a family. Some feel grief, stress, and anxiety,

having assumed this role due to their children being in crisis.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to assist grandparents raising grandchildren through support groups, benefits counseling, legal referrals, and educational materials. The project focused on working with elders from the Comanche Nation in southwestern Oklahoma, the Laguna Pueblo in central New Mexico, and with First Nations Community Healthsource in Albuquerque.

The first project objective was to assist at least 200 grandparents and/or grandchildren with benefits assessments, legal referrals, and support groups in each of the three target tribes and organizations. Project associates were hired at the three sites and provided services to 135 grandchildren and 117 grandparents through home visits and support group meetings. Project associates did not collect records of how many people received benefits assessments or legal referrals.

Attendance at group support sessions and outreach meetings was not consistent at any of the three sites. The project design rested

on the assumption that grandparents would freely join group settings and meetings with project associates, but project staff learned this assumption was not true for their communities. Due to challenges in recruiting participants, project associates did not provide the level of services planned.

Staff turnover in the project director position within the first two years also slowed the project's momentum; a project administrator was hired to fill this role midway through the third year. Working with NICOA's executive director, the project administrator shifted the project focus away from on-site services to the development of an internet platform to reach grandparents in an anonymous and convenient manner. NICOA developed a draft Web site featuring nine frequently asked questions fact sheets that covered topics relevant to grandparents, including: how to address challenges in raising young people, how to handle emotions, how to make time for rest, and how to register for social service benefits. The project administrator gathered information for these sheets from in-depth interviews with 24 social service professionals who work closely with grandparents and were able to provide frequently asked questions and answers.

To achieve the second objective, to disseminate a guide of best practices and recommended interventions for professionals assisting grandparents raising grandchildren, project staff developed a how-to guide for social services personnel and included it on the Web site. By the end of the project period, the Web site development was near completion, with a projected launch date of winter 2012. Prior to the launch, NICOA planned to share the website with tribal programs serving elders and tribal leaders to solicit feedback on the utility of the site.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Web site provides an online support group for grandparents raising grandchildren, who often feel alone in their struggles. Once the site is live, grandparents will be able to find social services in their area and post questions anonymously to receive answers from professionals. While benefiting thousands of people, the website is a scalable model; the infrastructure is in place and will take little staff time to maintain.

Through project implementation, NICOA learned important lessons about recruiting grandparent participation. Most grandparents did not wish to share concerns publically, some feared qualifying for benefits entailed disclosure of reasons their children are unable to parent, and many lacked the time, transportation, or access to daycare to attend support group sessions. These valuable lessons will inform NICOA's future programming.

Furthermore, through development of fact sheets, NICOA is now able to fully articulate the problems associated with grandparents raising grandchildren to policymakers. With added awareness of this issue, project staff hope more policies and programs will arise to complement NICOA's important and timely work with grandparents raising grandchildren.

PUEBLO OF POJOAQUE



Project Title:	Pueblo of Pojoaque Nutrition Project
Award Amount:	\$526,528
Type of Grant:	Social and Economic Development Strategies
Project Period:	Sept. 2009 – Sept. 2011
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 5 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 4 elders involved
- 30 youth involved
- \$178,000 in resources leveraged
- 43 individuals trained
- 9 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

The Pueblo of Pojoaque is located 15 miles north of Santa Fe, New Mexico in the Rio Grande Valley, and has been a federally recognized tribal reservation since the 1930s. As of 2009, the pueblo had approximately 400 enrolled tribal members.

The reservation is geographically isolated; with only one retail grocery store within 15 miles, access to fresh produce is limited. In 2004, the tribal administration established a Department of Agriculture to teach community members sustainable and traditional farming methods and improve community health by developing a farm. The pueblo began developing the 12-acre farm site in that same year, along with a cultural gathering space called the Family Learning Center (FLC).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to improve the pueblo's nutrition and local food economy by expanding capacity of the pueblo farm, and by teaching the community about healthy diets and culinary arts at the FLC.

The first objective was to increase production and capacity of the farm and provide fresh produce to two tribal programs. The pueblo hired an agricultural director and a farm operator with extensive experience to increase farm production. Under the agricultural director's leadership, project staff were able to plant 490 fruit trees and vines, harvest 3,200 pounds of tomatoes, zucchini, watermelon, cucumbers, jalapenos, and onions, and produce 2,500 pounds of blue corn meal. Impressively, staff reached these production levels in spite of a water shortage that resulted from drought conditions and a series of devastating fires in 2011. Staff shared the harvest with the community, including over 30 children at the pueblo's Early Childhood Development Center and FLC, and 40 adults and elders at the Senior Center.

The agricultural director applied innovative techniques to maximize safety of food produced, using organic pest repellents and rotating crops to eliminate the need for inorganic fertilizers and pesticides and to keep the soil nutrient-rich. She also consulted with elders and farmers in the Rio Grande Valley to deepen her understanding of dry season and traditional farming.

The second objective was to improve nutrition of 60 tribal youth and adults by providing hands-on culinary classes at the FLC. To accommodate classes, project staff renovated the center to include a kitchen and planted a garden outside of the building. The FLC director taught weekly classes in healthy, ceremonial, and traditional cooking to three groups: Early Childhood Development Center children, Boys and Girls Club youth, and the larger pueblo community. Thirty youth and 75 adults greatly benefited from classes by learning ideas to decrease obesity and diabetes, and by reconnecting with traditional practices, such as using a *horno* (clay oven).

The third objective was to provide educational workshops and classes in sustainable agriculture for the entire pueblo community. The FLC director implemented an Edible Classroom project, and 200 youth took field trips to the farm to learn how to work in the orchard, plant and harvest garden vegetables, plan a menu, and cook lunch with the produce harvested. Project staff also coordinated 10 Growers Outreach seminars at sites throughout the area, teaching 40 tribal and non-tribal community members about sustainable agricultural practices at locally-owned farms.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

This project connected the pueblo to traditional cultivation methods, such as waffle gardens and terraces, which staff

reintroduced to the farm. Staff also discovered heirloom and traditional seeds, enabling the pueblo to enjoy the same crop varieties as their ancestors.

As a result of this project, the pueblo farm has expanded production and families have started home gardens and the entire community has greater food security. With the assistance of project staff, six individuals grew more than enough for their households, and sold the excess at the Pojoaque farmers' market. In addition, local growers have a social network to share information about cultivation and dry climate farming.

Due to renovation, the FLC is a more comprehensive center where youth can learn about cooking, food processing, and traditional arts such as drum making, pottery, and basket weaving. Furthermore, tribal members understand that a diet full of fruits and vegetables is a powerful tool against diabetes and obesity as a result of FLC classes.

At the conclusion of this project, the pueblo secured a new grant that will finance construction of a well, insuring against fire-induced water shortages in the future. With the well in place, the agriculture department plans to explore other avenues of financial sustainability, such as expanding the Pojoaque farmer's market.

Agricultural Director Frances D. Quintana said, "The time is going to come when you grow your own food." The pueblo has invested in their farm and in nurturing generations of future growers; they will be prepared when that time comes.

SHIPROCK HOME FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN



Project Title:	The Navajo Healthy Marriage Opportunities Project
Award Amount:	\$1,011,850
Type of Grant:	SEDS - Strengthening Families
Project Period:	Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2011
Grantee Type:	Native Nonprofit

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 2 full-time equivalent jobs created
- \$18,493 in resources leveraged
- 16 partnerships formed
- 310 couples served

BACKGROUND

The Shiprock Home for Women and Children is a nonprofit domestic violence and sexual assault shelter located on the Navajo Reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico. The home primarily serves Navajo communities of Shiprock (97 percent Native American) and Farmington (17 percent Native American).

Through her close work with women and children in crisis, the director of the shelter witnessed the difficult burden carried by single parents. Upon learning that over 50 percent of infants in the shelter's service county were born to single mothers in 2000, she strove to put a program in place to strengthen relationships and families in the community.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to develop a program that would increase the percentage of parents in a healthy marriage who use culturally rich parenting practices. The first objective was to provide marriage enrichment and relationship strengthening activities for 150 couples, both unmarried and married. Project staff chose to implement the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) curriculum and trained six staff members in teaching it. Throughout the five-year project, staff continually held weekly two-hour PREP sessions, attended by a total of 100 married couples and 102 unmarried couples. PREP sessions included lessons on communicating proactively, managing stress, and working as a team with partners. Couples who finished the six-week session were eligible for a wilderness retreat, at which marriage mentors taught concepts of trust and communication through equine therapy, mountain hiking, and learning about traditional ways.

The second project objective was to provide relationship and parent skill-building workshops to a group of 125 single fathers

and mothers. To reach single fathers, project staff began a fatherhood program engaging 414 fathers in 38 group activities, including campouts, trail rides, water fights and barbeques. Through these events, fathers developed a peer network and discussed issues such as the role of fathers and the importance of tradition in family life. Project staff observed at least 20 fathers developed more committed relationships. Single mothers primarily received training through the PREP sessions; a total of 114 single mothers and 92 single fathers completed the PREP training.

The project's third objective was to teach the Center for American Indian Health's Family Spirit curriculum, administered through Johns Hopkins University, with a group of 125 single parents or committed couples with children. Staff from Johns Hopkins University traveled to New Mexico yearly to administer six-day trainings in addressing parent-child struggles, identifying one's parenting style, creating structure for children, and addressing behavioral issues. Johns Hopkins staff trained 108 single parents and 58 committed couples in these parenting concepts, equipping participants with curriculum copies to extend the lessons in their communities.

The fourth objective was to build the shelter's capacity to sustain healthy marriages by forming five new partnerships. Project staff started a Restoring and Celebrating Family Wellness Taskforce comprised of volunteers working in regional social service organizations. Taskforce members planned conferences and events to share ideas about child well-being and healthy relationships. Project staff also developed partnerships with San Juan County, Head Start, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Navajo Department of Workforce Development;

these agencies all referred clients to the shelter's healthy marriage program.

The fifth project objective was to identify variables that place native marriages at risk, and demonstrate interventions that effectively address those variables. Project staff hired a professional evaluator to create assessments that would identify such variables. Unfortunately, the assessments did not collect relevant data, and were inconsistent from year to year, resulting in an inability to aggregate information in a meaningful way to fulfill this objective.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Project staff found exceptional leaders to teach the PREP curriculum and guide fatherhood sessions, and trained seven couples to serve as marriage mentors. These teachers incorporated Navajo teachings and personal discoveries into their work with couples, and served as role models and counselors to their communities. This project served over 300 couples and reached an additional 200 single people through the relationship and parenting curricula. Twenty people who were unmarried were married by project's end, and many more couples strengthened relationships.

Furthermore, many more Navajo tribal members are now aware of the program and understand, by word of mouth from past participants, how a relationship or parenting program can be of benefit. Project staff succeeded in identifying local talent to administer the program and carry it back to their smaller communities, ensuring concepts from the curricula and Navajo tradition will continue to strengthen relationships for Navajo families.

"Something about tying this to native traditions opens the native men up. They listen when we bring in tradition."

Gloria Champion, Project Director