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## NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITY SERVICES OF ERIE & NIAGARA COUNTIES, INC.

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**Project Title:** Haudenosaunee Empowerment through Language Preservation

**Award Amount:** \$76,500

**Type of Grant:** Language

**Project Period:** 9/30/2005 – 9/29/2006

**Grantee Type:** Native Non-Profit

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### PROJECT SUMMARY

- 5 jobs created
- 4 Native American consultants hired
- 9 elders involved
- 146 youth involved
- \$34,534 in resources leveraged
- 2 people trained
- 7 partnerships formed
- 3 language surveys developed
- 395 language surveys completed

### BACKGROUND

The Native American Community Services of Erie and Niagara Counties, Inc. (NACS) is a non-profit social services organization which has been serving the urban Native American community in western New York for 30 years. According to the 2000 Census, an estimated 5,755 Native Americans reside in Buffalo and 2,069 Native Americans reside in Niagara Falls.

NACS serves a Native American community comprised of Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora Indians – all within in the Iroquoian language family.

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### PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Haudenosaunee Empowerment Through Language Preservation (HELP) Project is to identify the current status, interest and available resources for the area's languages. By implementing this Project, the grantee hoped to re-establish a stronger link between the community, its culture, values, models and traditional teachings.

The Project's first objective was to conduct at least eight events in the Erie and Niagara Counties and generate three formal Native language surveys were completed by 395 Native American community members. By July 2006, the Project had developed a strategy for implementing their assessment tool. There were ongoing activities that included the series of community events and speaker presentations, marketing HELP and researching other language initiatives. The Project was promoting a family approach to language learning by consistently including multiple generations in all the community activities, such as traditional social dances and speaker series. Nine elders and 146 youth were actively involved in the Project.

The Project was collecting and organizing language data collection which was

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75 percent complete by the fourth quarter of the Project.

The Project director, in collaboration with a Community Language Advisory Council, planned to utilize the collected data and, with community input, develop long-range language goals. In July 2006, several activities were ongoing including review and assessment of existing resources, language assessment, researching teacher language training methods and developing a language preservation strategy.

The Project assembled a small library that contains a Cayuga/English, Onondaga/English, Tuscarora/English and Oneida/English dictionary. The library also includes other publications relevant to their language program development.

The biggest challenge was how HELP would accommodate the six languages of the Iroquoian language family. Each tribal language differs and each tribal government has different levels of available resources; some Tribes have large, well-funded programs and other Tribes work within very limited budgets. Currently, there is no coordination among the tribal language programs.

The Project director's position was filled six weeks after the Project's start. While this slowed the Project's initial progress, the director had made strides to complete the Project's objectives.

#### **PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES**

This Project reached out to many groups and strengthened support for language revitalization among seven partners. The Project inspired one partner – the Indian Church of Buffalo to start teaching Mohawk classes and using Mohawk hymns during services.

Community members expressed the challenge of overcoming limited resources for teaching their native languages and lack of collaboration among local reservations to promote language programs. Reinforcing this thought, a Tuscarora woman who teaches language classes at the reservation school said, "Native American Community Services has really taken the lead in reaching out to urban, non-reservation Natives. They are one of the first and only organizations that have stepped forward to promote the languages."

For the elders, the Project has encouraged them to think about their history and to begin sharing their stories and histories. One elder expressed, "I feel my role is that of a facilitator between Kathy [Kathy Rodriquez, Elder Coordinator], the community and elders to help the HELP keep going. HELP will become a center that will include all the languages in the area. This is very important for all of us and especially for our youth. I'm raising a granddaughter and feel it is important to pass on our language and traditions."

Another elder who attended a speaker presentation stated, "It helped me reconnect and I have helped others to reconnect through language." She is learning her language now and, by learning it, feels she is forwarding her community's cultural values.

This project has also instilled more respect between generations. One elder stated that she has seen "...the resurgence of the traditional philosophy of respect for elders, for community members and even respect for teens."

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## SHINNECOCK NATION CULTURAL CENTER AND MUSEUM

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**Project Title:** Shinnecock Indian Village and Archival Project

**Award Amount:** \$216,806

**Type of Grant:** Social and Economic Development Strategies

**Project Period:** 9/30/2005 – 9/29/2006

**Grantee Type:** Native Non-Profit

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### PROJECT SUMMARY

- 8 jobs created
- 3 Native American consultants hired
- 20 elders involved
- 20 youth involved
- \$5,000 in resources leveraged
- 26 people trained
- 13 partnerships formed
- 4 products developed

### BACKGROUND

The Shinnecock Nation is a state-recognized Tribe which governs the 900 acre Shinnecock Reservation and its members on Long Island. The Nation had a vision to construct a museum and cultural repository that would preserve artifacts and educate the non-Indian community about them – the true story of the indigenous people of Long Island. The Nation opened the Museum in 2001.

The Shinnecock Nation Cultural Center and Museum is a non-profit organization located on the Shinnecock Reservation, two miles west of Southampton Village on Long Island. The Museum's mission is to serve

the general public and tribal members as an educational and cultural entity for collecting, preserving and interpreting artifacts, documents and other materials related to Shinnecock history and culture.

### PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Shinnecock Indian Village and Archival Project was to research, design and implement an Eastern Woodlands Native Village as it would have appeared prior to European contact, and to establish a Museum library accessible to the general public.

The Project's first objective was to complete research and planning activities in collaboration with the Plimoth (Plymouth) Plantation and Mashantucket Pequot Museum. This included establishing guidelines and planning the site of the Native Village. Activities included planning meetings, a land survey, traffic flow patterns and parking, Village structures and public presentations. Twenty elders and twenty youth were involved. The Project consulted elders for historical and cultural accuracy and recorded oral histories. Twenty-six tribal presenters, including youth, were trained to demonstrate wampum and pottery-making.

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The second objective was to train an archivist intern and museum staff in collaboration with the Mashantucket Pequot Museum Library and Institute of Museum Library Services. Staff visited the two Museums to learn about their archiving processes, established an archival system using Past Perfect Museum software, assessed the Project's progress and developed a needs assessment survey. Finally, Project staff designed a plan that joined archival research within the Museum to the Native Village exhibits. By the fourth quarter of the Project, cataloging Museum objects and artifacts was ongoing.

### **PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES**

From all corners of the community, including the local and regional community of non-Natives and partners, this Project has received exceptionally positive feedback. An elder and volunteer coordinator explained, "This is the most positive thing to happen on the reservation...I used to volunteer here and now I get paid to do something I love."

The Shinnecock community is dedicated to the Project and excited to see their planning efforts for the Native Village move closer to implementation. The Museum's Assistant Curator commented, "We feel much more confident of our goals now and have a better perspective on living history museums as year-two of the Indian Village and Archival Project approaches."

The Project has greatly enhanced the community's appreciation for learning. For example, participants increased their knowledge of Native plant species and their preservation as they surveyed the site planned for the Native Village, as well as era-appropriate items such as thatched houses (wickiups) and Native plants and grasses used to make traditional baskets. An elder and museum docent explained, "I

learned so much when I went to Plimoth Plantation – things that had gotten by me as a young girl. It was a very wonderful experience. I want this Project to continue and want the young to learn to value things and their traditional history." More importantly, it has helped provide direction for the youth. A staff member stated, "Mike, a youth volunteer, has finalized his college plans after working here at the museum."

The Long Island community and visiting tourists have increased their awareness and knowledge of a lesser-known cultural group on the Island as well as future developments such as the Village Project. Tourism has increased as a result of the Project as tourists have heard about the Project and want to learn more about Native culture.

As a result of the Museum-hosted in-services on local Native history, the Project has helped scholars, teachers, and researchers gain a greater understanding of the Shinnecock's historical role. For example, a local folklorist and Project partner explained the Native connection and influence regarding the maritime history of Long Island, "The Anglo fisherman who gave oral histories credit the local Native fisherman for teaching their ancestors where, when, and how to fish."

The grantee is a conduit for many resources available from neighboring communities, partnerships that will continue to provide assistance through the development of the Native Village.