
COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION



Project Title:	Menominee Language Revitalization: Teaching the Community
Award Amount:	\$600,976
Type of Grant:	Native Languages
Project Period:	Sept. 2009 – Sept. 2012
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 3 full-time equivalent jobs created
- 5 Elders involved
- 112 youth involved
- \$108,932 in resources leveraged
- 15 partnerships formed
- 10 language teachers trained
- 892 Native language classes held
- 342 adults increased their ability to speak a Native language

BACKGROUND

The College of Menominee Nation is a 2-year Tribal College and land grant institution located on the Menominee Reservation in Keshena, Wisconsin. The college has a student body of approximately 500, serving Menominee Indian Tribe members and the neighboring Tribes of Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee Potawatomi, and Forest County Potawatomi.

Of the 8,300 Menominee members, only 50 speak the Menominee language fluently. The college has been working closely with the Tribe since the early 1990s to revitalize the language and implement the Tribe's

Language Development Ordinance 96-22, which calls for the preservation and promotion of Menominee in local schools, government affairs, and community functions.

In 1998, to meet part of the ordinance mandate, the college began developing a robust training and licensure program for Menominee language teachers. The teacher-training program includes immersion language lessons, or “tables,” which are open to community members. In response to community demand and in an effort to preserve the small student-teacher ratio of the tables, the Tribal Administration asked the college to provide additional tables and tailor them for the larger community.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The project purpose was to implement a community-wide language project to revitalize the use of Menominee. The first objective was to teach the language to 85 community members over the course of 3 years through language tables. Project staff held short-term immersion tables in six separate locations, where teachers and Elders engaged a small group of speakers with varied language ability.

The tables were wildly popular and project staff greatly exceeded target numbers, with 454 people attending, including a core group of 50 who regularly participated. The teachers held 892 tables, almost 30 more than originally planned.

The project also included a teacher-training component, whereby 1 year of attendance at language tables earned a provisional teaching license, 2 years resulted in an additional year of licensure, and 3 years of attendance resulted in a 5-year certification. During the project period, the college certified or renewed certification for 10 teachers through this program.

The second objective was to establish multimedia training materials for teaching the Menominee language. The project technology specialist created a website to reach remote learners; website content included vocabulary lists, lesson plans, an online dictionary, videos, and high-quality recordings of Menominee Elders. The specialist recorded Menominee Elders' teachings and shared his appreciation of having that valuable time together, saying "You take an hour's worth of an Elder's time and get 15 hours of multimedia learning materials out of it." Staff expected to provide multimedia materials to at least 35 individuals; by the end of the project, 500 Tribal members accessed the website.

Staff also created a DVD for use in local public schools that features scenario-based teaching, such as vignettes of women demonstrating how to weave baskets narrated in Menominee. Project staff distributed 1,200 copies of the DVD to teachers and community members.

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Menominee Language Revitalization project increased the use of Menominee in everyday life, and encouraged people to speak the language outside the home. The

project director witnessed this in the project's third year, reporting that "people would bump into each other at the store and speak in Menominee... [It became] a spoken language, rather than a taught language."

The expanded number of tables provided many more language learning opportunities for adults. In addition, the increase in digital materials allows remote learners to access resources online and be part of the language movement. Elders who participated in the recordings expressed they felt valued for their language expertise, and their stories and wisdom are now preserved in a digital archive to be shared in the future. Many Menominee adults resettled on the reservation after relocation, or still live outside of the reservation. Project staff said the tables connected these adults to a part of their heritage that was long silenced or out of reach.

Furthermore, the Tribe uses a point system during the hiring process, and applicants receive additional points for language proficiency. Due to participation in the tables, many Tribal members have increased proficiency and are stronger candidates for employment with the Tribe.

The 10 Menominee language teachers who obtained or renewed their certification also have increased their language and professional skills, to the benefit of students in the local schools. The College plans to continue the language tables on a weekly basis and hopes to offer classes through an online platform in the coming years to carry on the process of Menominee language revitalization.