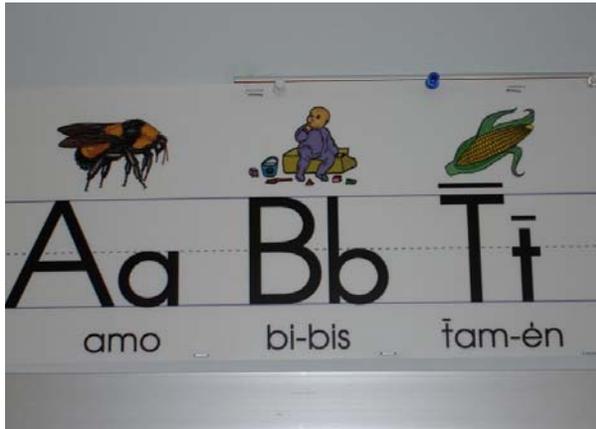


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## PRAIRIE BAND POTAWATOMI NATION



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<b>Project Title:</b>	Revitalization of the Potawatomi Language through an Immersion Technique
<b>Award Amount:</b>	\$328,910
<b>Type of Grant:</b>	Language
<b>Project Period:</b>	9/30/2005 - 9/30/2007
<b>Grantee Type:</b>	Tribe

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### PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 2 jobs created
- 4 Native American consultants hired
- 11 elders involved
- 15 youth involved
- \$125,440 in resources leveraged
- 6 people trained
- 4 partnerships formed
- 2 products developed
- 33 Native language classes held
- 6 adults increased their ability to speak a Native language

### BACKGROUND

The Prairie Band Potawatomi Reservation spans 77,000 acres in northeast Kansas. The Tribe currently counts 4,847 enrolled members, of which approximately half live on or close to the reservation. A 2003 community language survey indicated that only five fluent speakers of Potawatomi remained, the youngest of which was in her early eighties. At the commencement of this Project, the Tribe had lost three of the five identified speakers.

### PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The Project's purpose was to revitalize the language of the Prairie Band Potawatomi through the implementation of a language immersion and teacher-training program. Due to the advanced age of the two remaining Potawatomi speakers, Project staff designed a unique implementation framework which utilized fluent speakers of Odawa, a sister language to Potawatomi, as a bridge to their own language's revival.

The Project's first objective endeavored to engage ten semi-fluent Potawatomi speakers in Odawa immersion classes as a path to achieving fluency. Project staff established a partnership with four Odawa language instructors from Bay Mills Community College in Michigan, and together created a class schedule and syllabus. A total of six students completed the immersion coursework, which included 840 hours of exposure to the Odawa language. The shortfall of students occurred because Project staff was only able to identify two semi-fluent Potawatomi speakers with interest in participating in the immersion classes. Unfortunately, one of these speakers passed away in the early weeks of the Project, and the other speaker was forced

to discontinue his involvement due to blindness. Unable to attract other semi-fluent Potawatomi speakers, six staff members of the Potawatomi Language Program enrolled in the immersion class. Final evaluations indicate that five of these students speak and understand Odawa at a basic level while only one student has progressed to intermediate status. All six participants were awarded college credit for completion of the immersion course.

The second objective planned to create a 1,000-word Potawatomi reference guide to serve as the foundation for bridging the immersion students from the Odawa language. To achieve the objective, Language Program staff hired a Language Specialist to produce a tri-lingual reference guide. By the end of the Project timeframe, the guide contained 800 Potawatomi nouns, including the 70 forms that each noun can take in the Potawatomi language, and the Odawa and English translations. The immersion students utilized the reference guide during 720 hours of language-bridging activities, which also included analysis and translation of the audio tapes recorded during the Odawa immersion classes, and informal master-apprentice sessions with the two remaining fluent Potawatomi speakers.

The Project's third objective aimed to train ten semi-fluent Potawatomi speakers to become language instructors through teaching workshops. The six immersion students were trained in classroom management, immersion teaching methodology, syllabus design and curriculum development. While the students did receive 32 college credits for their participation, none were certified as native language instructors as no student achieved fluency in the Potawatomi language.

#### **PROJECT OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY**

The primary goal of the Project was not achieved as the trainings failed to develop fluent Potawatomi speakers or Potawatomi language teachers. However, the implementation of the Project activities did produce positive results. For the six students participating in the language immersion classes, final evaluations indicated that their Potawatomi language abilities improved. One student, Cindy LeClerq, has progressed to intermediate status, and Language Program staff hopes that she will soon become certified to teach language classes. The Prairie Band has already set aside funds for Cindy to continue her language study with the four Bay Mills College instructors from this Project in order to achieve this goal. Additionally, the Potawatomi Language Program will retain the Language Specialist hired during this Project, and he will continue to develop language materials.

The students' involvement in language activities also strengthened cultural identity and ancestral bonds. Julia Lewis, a Prairie Band elder, shared, "We did not learn to speak fluently, but we learned to better understand Potawatomi and the ideas behind the words. The language must be in your mind and soul before it is on your tongue." Leo Nadeau, also a Prairie Band elder, added, "You learn your second language much like you learned your first. You listen, you understand, and then you speak."

Finally, the implementation of Project activities offers a replicable model for other language programs in Indian Country that are facing desperate language situations. The unique and novel approach of utilizing fluent speakers of a related language achieved positive results and may be replicated by tribes who have already lost their fluent speakers.