



STATE OF MINNESOTA

INDIAN AFFAIRS COUNCIL



♦ website: www.indiansaffairs.state.mn.us ♦

March 25, 2013

Representative Kahn
Chair of the Legacy Committee
365 State Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Kahn:

The Minnesota Legislature has taken a national leadership role in supporting the preservation of American Indian languages. Through an authorization of Arts and Cultural Heritage Funds to the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, the Legislature has made possible: 1) The continued Operation and growth of two Ojibwe-language immersion schools; 2) The creation of a long-range Strategic Plan by a Work Group comprised of representatives from tribal communities and state agencies; 3) Overwhelming support and awareness of grassroots language revitalization efforts on every reservation, among urban Native populations, both nationally and internationally.

The Strategic Plan, attached to this request, lays out a comprehensive effort to move Dakota and Ojibwe languages from a state of crisis to stability and growth over the next generation. The plan calls for a continuing role for the State government in the next biennium, focused on improving the same activities made possible by current support: improving the grant-making mechanism for local projects; stabilizing funding for immersion schools at levels that offer a greater chance for long-term success; and focusing Work Group activities on creating an independent organization to jump start and sustain a broader language revitalization effort.

The Strategic Plan also places the important role of State government in a new context of a broader, more ambitious language revitalization effort. Currently, as the sole source of support for key activities, the Legislature is assisting first hand at keeping Dakota and Ojibwe languages alive. Truly revitalizing the languages will require the involvement of more partners; in the next biennium Legacy Funds will become the foundation of an expanded set of programs, for which 50-70% of funding will be requested from other sources, including federal agencies and private philanthropic groups. State funding at the requested level will maximize the changes of success for this larger effort and the leveraged funds will create even more magnificent changes and results.

The activities to which State support will be directed address every one of the ten Guiding Principles for Arts and Cultural Heritage Funds. Dakota and Ojibwe languages embody the relationships that define American Indian cultures within the borders of Minnesota – cultures that have provided every inch of real estate and all of the natural resources that the State enjoys today. Every time people in Onamia or Mankato, Anoka or Wadena – anywhere in Minnesota – type their addresses, they are using Dakota or Ojibwe language. These languages are irreplaceable components of Minnesota's cultural heritage.

Because language is so integral to American Indian cultural identity, Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization promises benefits that are broader than typical Arts and Cultural Heritage activities. In addition to preserving what could arguably be considered the most important part of the State's historical legacy, language revitalization is vital to restoring the health and welfare of Dakota and Ojibwe American Indian communities. It therefore offers a contribution much broader in magnitude to just the restoration of a language but addresses intransigent social issues that currently attract State resources with only limited or miniscule, long-term success.

For instance, the academic achievement gap between American Indian students and other students in Minnesota is appalling: Minnesota ranks last among all states in its American Indian high school graduation rate. Language revitalization offers not only the well-documented benefits of second-language acquisition – students learning a second language outperform their peers academically over the long haul – but also something even more profound. Language use is the measure of community cohesion, and these languages cannot be revitalized without increased civic engagement, intergenerational communication, family involvement, cultural pride and individual self-esteem among Dakota and Ojibwe people. Language revitalization fosters the participation of entire communities in creating communal well-being, and so promises to ameliorate real social issues -- teen suicide, chemical dependency, health care needs, and incarceration rates – that plague American Indian communities.

In establishing the Strategic Plan's goals, objectives and action steps, the Work Group regularly asked several questions: Is every step that we have identified necessary to language revitalization? Are any other steps necessary to revitalization our languages? If the steps we have identified are taken, will we accomplish our vision of Dakota and Ojibwe as living, thriving languages spoken throughout Minnesota?

The result is a focused but comprehensive approach to accomplishing the revitalization of two languages, with all of its attendant benefits. The Work Group has delivered a workable Strategic Plan at the request of the State Legislature, and requests that the State continue its pivotal role in the implementation of the Plan.

Attached to this email you will find our legacy appropriation request and the supporting reasons why this request follows the guiding principles of the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, and the Feasibility Report completed by the Dakota and Ojibwe Language Revitalization Work Group. Should you have any questions or need any further information, please do not hesitate to contact- me directly, Jim Jones, Cultural Resources Director, or JoLynn White, Legislative and Grant Director. We will gladly connect you with any member of the Dakota and Ojibwe Working group or any individual who contributed to the wealth of knowledge contributed to the years of revitalization work already undertaken and who contributed to the strategic plan and this request for continued support and funding from the legacy committee. Thank you for considering this request.

Respectfully,

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Cc: Kevin Leecy, Chairman