

RESOLUTION OF THE
NAABIK'ÍYÁTI' STANDING COMMITTEE
24th NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL -- Fourth Year, 2022

AN ACTION RELATING TO THE HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND HUMAN SERVICES
AND THE NAABIK'ÍYÁTI' COMMITTEES; SUPPORTING AND APPROVING DINÉ
COLLEGE'S APPLICATION TO THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS LIVING
LANGUAGES GRANT

WHEREAS:

- A. The Health, Education, and Human Services Committee is a standing committee of the Navajo Nation Council empowered to review and recommend [r]esolutions relating to social services, health, environmental health, education, veterans and veterans services, employment and labor. 2 N.N.C. §§ 400(A), 401(B)(6)(a).
- B. The Naabik'íyáti' Committee is a standing committee of the Navajo Nation Council empowered to coordinate with all committees, Chapters, branches and entities concerned with all Navajo appearances and testimony before Congressional committees, departments of the United States government, state legislatures and departments and county and local governments. 2 N.N.C. §§ 700(A), 701(A)(8).
- C. The Diné College is a non-profit post-secondary educational institution chartered by the Navajo Nation Council in 1968 for the purposes of providing educational opportunities to the Navajo people and others in areas important to the economic and social development of the Navajo Nation and other purposes outlined at 10 N.N.C. § 2002.
- D. The Navajo Nation is one of the largest Indigenous nations with a strong foundation in culture and language. In recent years, the declining use and fluency of the Navajo language among Navajo citizens is alarming.
- E. In order to address this decline, Diné College is securing innovative opportunities to build language capacity through the preservation, maintenance, and utilization through everyday experience.

- F. Diné College recognizes the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on losing fluent speakers whom are often elders and traditional practitioners.
- G. Diné College is submitting a grant application to the Bureau of Indian Affairs - Division of Economic Development Living Languages Grant to initiate a Navajo Language Documentation and Daily Life Program. The outcomes of this grant application are as follows, but not limited to:
 - 1. Media documentation in videos, writing, and other forms that will be archived in the Diné College Library and accessible to the surrounding communities.
 - 2. Document knowledge that will enhance Diné College Navajo Language curricula.
 - 3. Produce of materials, textbooks and other accessible media assisting in the use of the Navajo language to build fluency.
 - 4. Create and maintain a network of mental health service providers for traditional language and practice.
 - 5. Develop a Navajo only-podcast to demonstrate Navajo language use in contemporary settings.
- H. The Bureau of Indian Affairs - Division of Economic Development Living Languages Grant will convene traditional knowledge holders and other key professionals to build, enlighten, enhance, and establish an institutionalize understanding of ceremonial knowledge and language learning. Living Languages Grant narrative is attached as **Exhibit A**.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

The Navajo Nation hereby approves and supports Diné College to apply for and receive funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Living Languages Grant Application LLGP-FY-2022.

CERTIFICATION

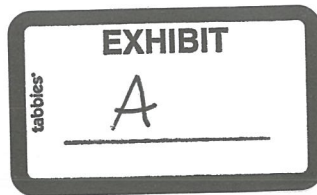
I, hereby certify that the foregoing resolution was duly considered by the Naabik'íyáti' Committee of the 24th Navajo Nation Council at a duly called meeting in Window Rock, Navajo Nation (Arizona), at which a quorum was present and that the same was passed by a vote of 18 in Favor, and 01 Opposed, on this 14th day of April 2022.


Honorable Seth Damon, Chairman
Naabik'íyáti' Committee

April 14, 2022
Date

Motion: Honorable Daniel E. Tso
Second: Honorable Pernell Halona

Chairman Seth Damon not voting



Navajo Language – Documentation and Daily Life

Basic Description

The **Navajo Language Documentation and Daily Life Program** will build language capacity through the preservation of ceremonial language and the exploration of everyday experience. Ceremonial language will be **preserved** by documenting site visits to the homes of Medicine Men, as well as special gatherings that convene Medicine Men together. The Diné Sovereignty Institute will convene Medicine Men from across Navajo Nation and host two gatherings at Diné College's main campus in Tsailé, Arizona, located in the heart of Navajo Nation. At the gatherings there will be dialogues and learning opportunities to explore ceremonies, and we will invite Navajo people of every age who live near Tsailé. The dates of the gatherings will be determined by consulting the Diné ceremonial calendar and according to the availability of Medicine Men. A videographer and program staff will document and record what is learned at the gatherings. In addition, program staff will make site visits to learn from Medicine Men in the specific context of where they live. This is because many linguistic and ceremonial practices are place-based, and informed by the homes and immediate environs of the Medicine Men. The documentation of the gatherings and site visits will result in the production of electronic and print media. The documentary record will be a resource that enhances the understanding of ceremonial language, and will include descriptions of the physical expressions and mental states that attend ceremonial language use. These media will serve as essential resources for language capacity building, and will have many uses that include but are not limited to, increasing the number and proficiency of speakers, enhancing curricula, and improving the mental health and wellbeing of the Diné people. The Navajo language will be **revitalized** through a series of Navajo-only podcasts that invite people to share how they are adapting and transforming Navajo language to describe and deal with the world today. These podcasts will be broadcast across Navajo Nation, and we expect this format to be popular among all generations. The College will keep an archive of this podcast, and expect it to continue well into the future.

Technical Description

Print, audio, and video media are important resources and aids to build language proficiency and skill. However, the Navajo language cannot be properly understood in print form only, or even by hearing a recording or watching a video. To grasp the full semantic import of the Navajo language it must be spoken in person and accompanied by physical gestures in specific cultural contexts, such as ceremonies.

The two gatherings that will be hosted by Diné College create an opportunity to explore ceremonial practices in depth, and make explicit connections between language use, physical gestures, mental states, and spiritual significance. Text, video and other media are important documentary tools, and the staff and videographer will make use of these tools. Even so, the most significant exchanges happen in a community context and with Medicine Men.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic has had such a devastating effect on the Navajo community, so it is critical to document these language practices in the near future.



There is an urgent need to convene Medicine Men, because Medicine Men are elders of the grandparent generation, fluent speakers, and knowledge keepers. Travel restrictions and social distancing protocols, have prevented Medicine Men and communities from congregating in recent years. As a consequence, building capacity for language requires bringing these people together, and the Diné Sovereignty Institute will conscientiously balance the priority of the community gathering, with the imperative of community safety.

The Diné Sovereignty Institute's top priority in planning the gatherings will be the health and safety of Medicine Men and community members. Under this guiding organizational principle, we expect knowledge and wisdom to be shared among Medicine Men, and for that knowledge to be transmitted to people in attendance, which will include faculty, staff, and students at Diné College, as well as people of all ages from the surrounding community. The program staff will document the interactions, and also participate in the dialogues and exploratory practices.

Language as Therapy

At the end of February, 2022, there have been 1,644 deaths and 52,195 confirmed cases of COVID-19 on the Navajo Nation.¹ The majority of deaths have occurred among males and in the older generations. Only 3% of deaths have occurred among those under 30, while 62% of deaths have occurred among people 60 or over. COVID-19 has hit the oldest generation hardest. This is also the generation with the most fluent speakers who serve as the foundation of the community support system. Losing these esteemed members of the communities has exacted a tremendous psychic toll on the Navajo people.

Every person living on Navajo Nation has been negatively impacted by this pandemic, whether or not they have contracted the virus. For example, Rock Point is a small community on Navajo Nation that has lost many of its elders. This community and many like it need strategies for grieving, coping, and moving forward. The Navajo language and Navajo ceremonies have the power to facilitate healing, inspire courage, and build resilience. The gatherings we have planned will improve language use and knowledge so that these healing ceremonies may be continued in future years and by future generations.

Mental health trauma is a widespread problem on Navajo Nation, and it is not limited to the health, education, and economic hardship caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other traumas on Navajo Nation include, but are not limited to, children being forcibly removed from their

¹ <https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19/Data>

families, compelled to attend boarding school, and being punished for speaking their Native tongue. Many of these children were physically and sexually abused. Today, families across Navajo Nation are grieving the bewildering and devastating loss of young women and girls, whose murders and disappearances are – inexplicably and unconscionably – rarely investigated by law enforcement. Economically, historic injustices are compounded by an absence of conventional tools for development which include a lack of private sector understanding, limited access to capital, minimal and sometimes no infrastructure, and insufficient data. This is a short list of the many circumstances related to individual health, community dynamics, and material security that require Navajo language in order to adequately express, cope with, and develop strategies to move the Navajo people forward with fortitude and resolve.

Ceremonial Language and Personal Wellbeing

Blessings, protection, and personal wellbeing flow from a connection to language and ceremonial tradition. At one of the gatherings, Medicine Men will talk about how a *H0zh==j7*, or the Blessing Way ceremony, is conducted. *H0zh==j7* represents the core of Navajo culture, and its ceremonial system.

Hózhó restores harmony and balance to all things. It focuses on making the human mind stronger, and better. *H0zh==j7* also supports the philosophy of Diné College, *S2'ah Naagh17 Bik'eh Hózhóón*, the Diné traditional living system, that places Diné life in harmony with the natural world and the universe. This philosophy is grounded in Navajo cultural traditions and includes principles for protection from the imperfections in life, and for the development of wellbeing.

One example of how language, ceremony, and in-person experience are necessary for the effective transmission of language practice is the use of the sacred medicine bundle *Dził {eezh Nahidiidziih*, breathing in and breathing out, is the practice of learning to control the breath in a way that makes people healthier and calmer. *Nahidiidziih* is at the core of the Blessing Way. An analysis of *Nahidiidziih* could lead to exploring associated words, like *naaldzil* (strengthening) and *h0[dzil* (strong foundation or stability). The root for all these words is *dzi*, breathing.

Etymological and conceptual explorations like these will take place when the Medicine Men are gathered, and at their individual homes. The intellectual inquiry will be accompanied by physical exercises, and include the mental and physical states that result.

In addition to *H0zh==j7*, Medicine Men will talk about how to conduct other ceremonies, depending on the time of year, and the insight, knowledge, and expertise of the Tribal Elders. Together, they will decide which ceremonies are appropriate to consider more closely, and will be most beneficial to the community and for the documentary archive.

Sq'baa ahxééh hwiindzin – being grateful for old age, is part of the Navajo spiritual path to achieve old age, and ceremonies make this life goal explicit. There are certain fundamental practices that are tied to this goal that range from physical exercise, to diet, to cleanliness and hygiene, but most important of all is the language that brings about ways of thinking that result in mental health, wellbeing, balance, and strength. *Sq'baa ahxééh hwiindzin* connects Navajo people to the land, to the past, present, and future and specifies the long-life goal of living to 102

years old. Some of the activities associated with the Navajo language used to describe this are running every morning toward the East, irrespective of weather, how you are feeling, or anything else. This discipline keeps a person fit, strong, tough, healthy, lean, and connected to the world around. In all of these activities associated with daily life, the language conveys more than the surface activity. Language is imbued with ways of thinking and habits of mind. Simple things like drinking water, and the daily habit of refreshing and folding bedding take on personal, cultural and spiritual significance when the practices are expressed in Navajo. These locutions and their reverberations are the foundation of spiritual wellbeing. People need to learn foundational phrases and connect them to essential daily practices to stay centered, balanced, and maintain a strong spiritual foundation.

The spirit of *S2'ah Naagh17 Bik'eh H0zh00n* is present at every stage of life for Navajo people. Even as Diné are born, live, and pass on, they are always infused with *S2'ah Naagh17 Bik'eh H0zh00n*, and must remember these teachings no matter what happens, in order to protect the spiritual being, which may be done through songs, prayers, and rituals. Such a spiritual foundation can only be achieved and maintained through the Navajo language.

***It ééhozin Bitsésiléí* – Ways of Knowing and Being**

Navajo ceremonies include language practices that distinctively represent Navajo epistemologies, ontologies, and worldview. Navajo **epistemologies**, or knowledge systems, are a necessary and concomitant element of documenting, preserving, and extending Navajo language. Navajo language, like any language, is not static, but an ever-evolving, dynamic communication tool that reflects and represents the world in which we live. Therefore, ceremonies will involve traditional locutions in addition to new ones, that describe, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic, PTSD, and other present-day challenges and traumas. In this way, the grandparent and younger generations come together to sustain and reshape the language so that it is simultaneously sustained and transformed. The living language aspect of Navajo is also addressed in the podcast programming, which will be discussed after the documentation program.

Language is also intimately bound up with Navajo **ontologies**, or conceptions and ways of being. This includes understandings of the material and spiritual worlds, and how people can and should relate to other animals, plants, and energies in the natural world. Navajo ideas about being and ways of being are intimately tied to the way these conceptions are named, and further, the way in which those names are invoked. In other words, the conception of being is inextricably bound up with the language used to describe it.

For example, the concept of wind, or *n7[ch'i*, is more dynamic, nuanced, and generative than 'wind' is in English or Romance languages. *N7[ch'i* is imbued with color and characteristics like glossiness, that contribute to understanding the significance of natural elements. A concept such as wind informs Navajo cultural, geological, and geographical knowledge, as well as traditional healing modalities.

Medicine Men are Language Bearers, Knowledge Keepers, and Healers

Preserving and revitalizing the language has significant implications for improving the health

and wellbeing of the Navajo population. Medicine Men are uniquely qualified to use, explain, and transmit culturally-specific ways of knowing and conceptions of being. This is essential for cultural heritage, and also to address the acute need for therapies to deal with pain and trauma on Navajo Nation. Some Navajo Medicine Men have academic credentials and practice in the mainstream mental and behavioral health fields, as well as traditional modes.

It is not uncommon for some people, and young people especially, to be hesitant about approaching knowledge holders and the Hataalii. Convening Medicine Men will create opportunities for friendly conversations with knowledge holders that will make them more approachable to the younger generation. The community will have opportunities for social and emotional learning as they learn about ceremonies. The fact that people rarely take the opportunity to develop close personal connections with knowledge holders is not unlike the Western phenomenon of students failing to take the opportunity to connect with professors, then later wishing that they had. This program will create friendly, inviting opportunities for students and community members to build a rapport with knowledge holders.

Rex Lee Jim, the Executive Director of the Diné Sovereignty Institute, is uniquely poised to convene Medicine Men on Navajo Nation. A Medicine Man himself, Mr. Jim is also a former Navajo Nation Vice President, poet, and playwright. His cultural, governmental, and literary credentials position him to convene and connect the right people, communities, and institutions. Mr. Jim understands and relates to young people just as easily as he chats with Washington officials. A natural bridgebuilder and respected Elder, he has the disposition, wisdom, and experience to make this program a success.

Navajo Language in Daily Life Podcast

Rex Lee Jim will also host the Navajo Language in Daily Life podcast. This podcast will feature academic, community, and political leaders from across Navajo Nation. They will talk about their work, their challenges and successes using Navajo language and Navajo concepts. In this podcast, Rex Lee Jim will interview and tease out the relationships between ceremonies, prayers, rituals, and how these concepts reflect the mental toughness and strength that it takes to deal with bureaucracy and other machinations needed to make positive change on Navajo Nation. This podcast will help many young people make the connection between sacred, ceremonial language and how to use these concepts to get through the day, advance in your career, and achieve material security.

Another example has to do with thinking, or looking to the East, which is about forward thinking, goal setting, and planning out the day and the future beyond. Looking to the west has to do with reflective thinking and taking stock of what you have learned from the day's activities. Any daily use of Navajo language always connects it back to ceremonial foundations. In this way it is an unbroken circle that is consistently and constantly self-reinforcing.

Navajo Language Documentation and Daily Life Program Does Not Duplicate Previous Work

The College, nor any other group on Navajo Nation that we know of, has not previously organized a convening of Medicine Men such as the gatherings planned for this project. Neither

does the College have an archival collection like the one proposed. There is no podcast currently broadcast on Navajo Nation like the one we are currently proposing. This program would be a unique and important contribution to advancing and preserving use of the Navajo language.

Navajo Language Documentation and Daily Life Program Benefits Diné College

Diné College will benefit from the Navajo Ceremonies Immersion and Documentation program in several ways. First, it will provide direct language and cultural benefits to students and surrounding community members who discuss, learn, and write about Navajo ceremonies.

Second, the program will result in media documentation that includes video, writing, and other forms. This archival material will be stored in the College library and will be accessible to students, faculty, and scholars at Diné College.

Third, the knowledge documented through this process will be used in Diné College courses in disciplines such as psychology, social work, and Diné language.

Fourth, a textbook, or other easily accessible medium will be developed to document the practices shared by the Medicine Men and explain how they are relevant to daily and spiritual life in an affordable and accessible format.

Fifth, the Diné Sovereignty Institute will establish and maintain a network of mental health providers affiliated with Indian Health Services. These practitioners will incorporate traditional language and practices associated with the Diné system of *S2'ah Naagh17 Bik'eh H0zh00n*, in their therapies.

Sixth, students will have a clear example of what it means to have *K'é*, or relate to one another, and have reciprocal relationships.

Seventh, there will be a Navajo-only podcast that is broadcast across Navajo language, and that will emphasize the 'living language' aspect of Navajo and give examples of how it is continually being revitalized.

Together, these community, co-curricular, and curricular activities will foster personal interaction, relationships, and build capacity to sustain and evolve Navajo language use.

Goals and objectives

Goal 1: Simultaneously preserve and revitalize the Navajo language by offering and documenting immersion opportunities.

Objective 1.1 Hold two gatherings that convene 15 Medicine Men from across the Navajo Nation with at least 75 people of all ages in attendance at each gathering.

Objective 1.2 Staff visit 15 Medicine Men at their homes to deepen their understanding of language use in a site-specific context.

Objective 1.3 Record and distribute 20 podcasts about Navajo language in daily life.

Goal 2: Create a multimedia repository that can be used to build capacity for language instruction and use in coursework and research at Diné College.

Objective 2.1 Produce and archive video and text documentaries of two gatherings and at least 15 visits to Medicine Men's homes.

Objective 2.2 Incorporate findings from gatherings and site visits into Diné College courses in psychology, social work, Diné language, and other disciplines as appropriate.

Objective 2.3 Archive the podcast and make it electronically available using Diné College IT resources.

Deliverable products, interim deliverables, /reports/ videos/ final deliverables

There will be two video documentaries of Medicine Men talking about language use, and describing its several applications, especially with respect to mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. Ceremonial activities and rituals will be discussed and documented, but the actual ceremonies will not be recorded as a matter of cultural respect and to preserve sovereignty and autonomy on the Navajo Nation.

Print and electronic documents with a catalog of terms, key phrases in prayers, and other language artifacts will be produced. Interview transcripts from staff site visits to Medicine Men at their homes across Navajo Nation will be documented and recorded.

Twenty (20) podcasts will be recorded, broadcast, and available for download.

Resumes of key consultant and/or personnel to be retained / names of subcontractors.

It is not feasible to ask Medicine Men for resumes. Their expertise is not documented in credentials, or a list of achievements. Their stature and expertise are embodied, and known among members of the community by word of mouth and by performing ceremonies.

NAVAJO NATION

1238

4/14/2022

Naa'bik'iyati' Committee Regular Meeting

01:30:31 PM

Amd# to Amd#	Consent Agenda;	PASSED
MOT Tso, D	New Business: Item A.	
SEC Halona, P	-Legislations: 0033-22, 0047-22, 0014-22, 0058-22	

Yeas : 18

Nays : 1

Excused : 3

Not Voting : 1

Yea : 18

Begay, E	Halona, P	Smith	Tso, O
Begay, K	Henio, J	Stewart, W	Walker, T
Begay, P	James, V	Tso, D	Wauneka, E
Charles-Newton	Nez, R	Tso, E	Yellowhair
Freeland, M	Slater, C		

Nay : 1

Crotty

Excused : 3

Brown	Tso, C	Daniels
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Not Voting : 1

Yazzie

Presiding Speaker: Damon