

READY for a NEW DECADE:

# Investing

in

**NATIVE  
LANGUAGE  
IMMERSION**



*A SUMMARY FOR*  
**NATIVE COMMUNITIES and  
LANGUAGE PRACTITIONERS**

PRODUCED BY



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# BACKGROUND and OVERVIEW

## INTRODUCTION

First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) is committed to strengthening Native American communities and economies across the nation. First Nations supports six key programmatic areas, including Stewarding Native Lands, Nourishing Native Foods and Health, Advancing Household and Community Asset-Building Strategies, Strengthening Tribal and Community Institutions, Investing in Native Youth, and Achieving Native Financial Empowerment. The Native Language Immersion Initiative (NLII) is situated in First Nations' Strengthening Tribal and Community Institutions and Investing in Native Youth programs, centering Native languages as a core investment and strategy in affirming tribal sovereignty and perpetuating Native resilience solutions and wisdom to address the challenges Native communities face today. Through the NLII, First Nations invested in building the capacity of Native language immersion programming with 32 Native community partners.

The loss of a language brings a loss of knowledge, culture, and identity – the markers of our diverse humanity.

The United Nations International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022-2032 calls our attention to the critical situation of Indigenous languages across the globe. The Language Conservancy estimates that 41% of the 7,000 languages currently spoken are endangered and that, without intervention, 90% will be extinct within 100 years, including the remaining 175 Indigenous languages in the US (Krauss, 1996). The loss of a language brings a loss of knowledge, culture, and identity – the markers of our diverse humanity.

We recognize that the loss of Indigenous languages is not merely accidental but initiated through acts of genocide committed against Native nations as well as government policies targeted to assimilate Native people. One of the most devastating US policies was removing children from their homes and families and placing them in Christian missionary or government-run boarding schools, with the purpose to eradicate language and culture.

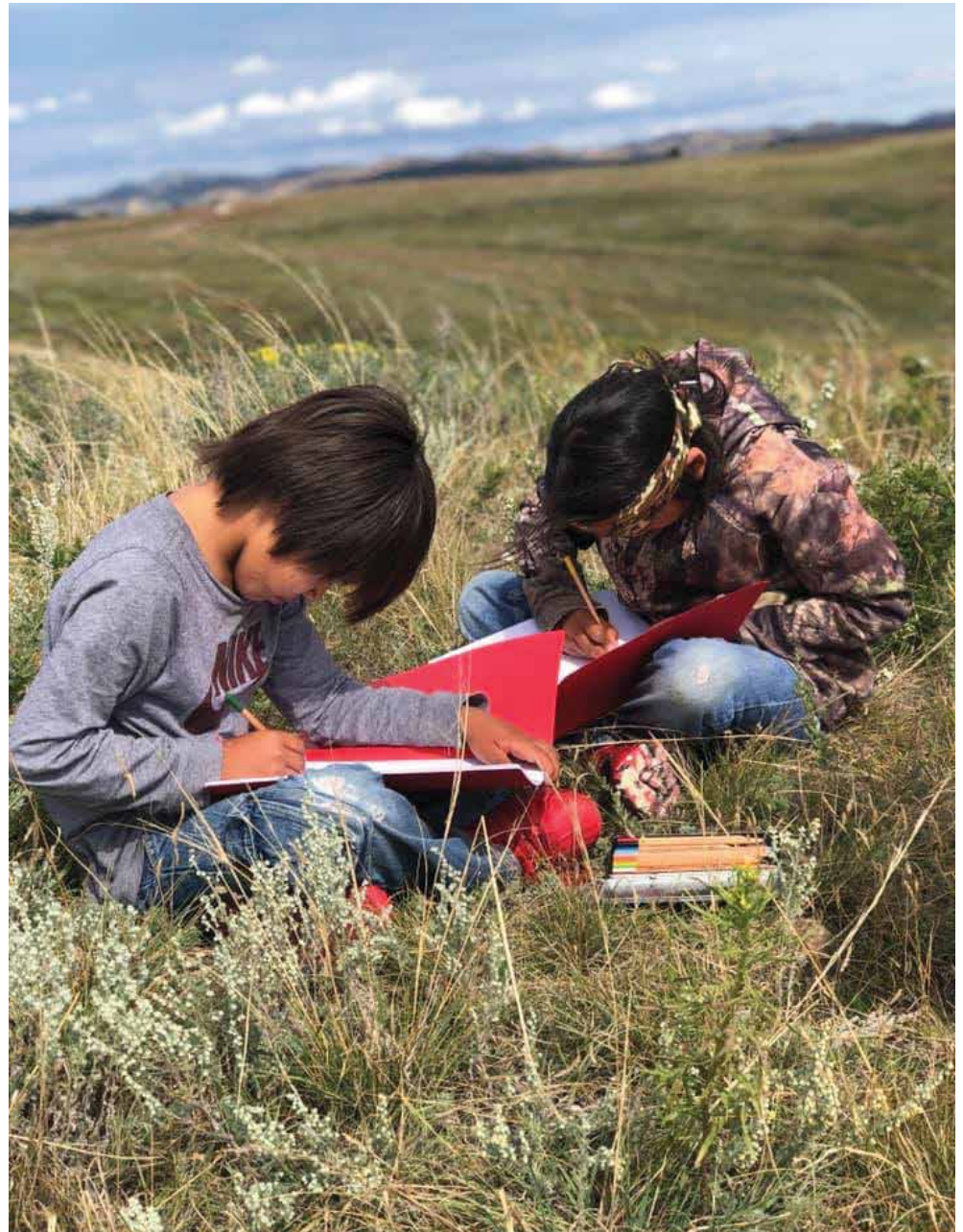
Today, many Indigenous communities across the US and globally are invested in language work in varying degrees and methods. However, language immersion is ideal for regaining language rapidly and producing a new generation of proficient speakers (McIvor & Parker, 2016).

Across Native communities, we know that when investments in Native languages are made, youth are provided a sense of belonging, cultural identity, place and tradition in their communities. Collectively, we affirm that Indigenous languages have the power to provide that sense of place and tradition and are essential to the existence of our tribal communities and culture. Further, research affirms Native languages support academic achievement, mental and emotional health (e.g., as a protective measure against suicide), and community identity development (Morcom, 2017; Battiste, 2013; Singh & Reyhner, 2013). Yet with Indigenous languages rapidly decreasing, a concerted intervention is needed.

In 2017, First Nations launched the NLII as a three-year project to **build the capacity and support** of Native language immersion programs. The initiative was extended to a fourth year thanks to ongoing support from individual contributions. In addition to capacity-building grants, First Nations facilitated a community of practice in which grantees networked, connected, and learned from each other with the intention of building dialogue and gaining consensus and momentum for Native language immersion programs.

First Nations provides this report to share the impact of the NLII and to present findings and lessons learned from four years of targeted investments in Native language immersion programs. More importantly, this report serves as an opportunity to elevate the good work being accomplished in Native language revitalization.

We invite you to share, celebrate, and apply the lessons learned and advice in order to support the collective movement of Native language revitalization.





## FOUR COHORTS

### SNAPSHOT GRANTEES SERVED

The following total individuals, families, and grade levels were served during their grant periods and demonstrate the impressive program impact within their communities:

**625**

PRE-SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

**3,162**

ELEMENTARY AGE YOUTH

**660**

MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH

**396**

HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH

**934**

STUDENTS OVER AGE 18

**223**

OTHER STUDENTS

**546**

ADULT LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS  
(E.G., TEACHERS, MENTORS,  
INTERNS, APPRENTICES)

**3,024**

PARENTS AND FAMILIES

**34**

GRADE LEVELS

With the assistance of several partners, First Nations supported four rounds of funding for Native language immersion programs from 2018 to 2021. Native language immersion criteria included:

- 1 | Having an existing language immersion program (one-year minimum);
- 2 | Providing a minimum of 20 hours of Native language instruction per week for an entire school year; and
- 3 | Serving a minimum of 10 students with a target age of 3 to 22 years old.

First Nations selected programs that were actively cultivating new speakers with priority given to programs with long-term, community-based language plans, as well as additional selection criteria. Overall **46 grants** totaling over **\$4 million** were awarded to support **32 Native language immersion programs**. A summary of each grantee program is included in the full report.

The 32 grantees varied in size, program participants (e.g., children, families, communities), institutional structure (e.g., nonprofit, school, tribal program), length of program operation, and level (e.g., startup, mature). Grantees were geographically diverse and spanned 17 states.





# PROJECT RESULTS

## BUILDING CORE CAPACITIES

Native language immersion effectiveness relies on an organization’s capabilities, knowledge, and resources. While core capacities may vary across organizations, the following capacity-building areas are deemed integral to organizational and programmatic success (Grantmakers for Effective Strategies, 2014):

- Leadership and talent development
- Mission and vision strategy (e.g., planning, assessment, development)
- Program delivery (e.g., design, delivery, evaluation)
- Fund development
- Financial management
- Communications, technology, relationships and collaboration

Figure 1 is a summary of the primary project areas supported by the NLII grants across the grantees. Teacher development and curriculum and lesson development areas were selected the most often for building the capacities of the Native language programs.

FIGURE 1

CAPACITY-BUILDING PROJECT AREAS	COHORT ONE	COHORT TWO	COHORT THREE	COHORT FOUR
<b>Leadership &amp; Talent Development</b> <i>Teacher Development</i>	9	11	8	7
<b>Mission &amp; Vision Strategy</b> <i>Planning, Assessment, Development</i>	2	2	2	0
<b>Program Delivery</b> <i>Language Material Development</i>	1	4	1	4
<i>Curriculum, Lesson Development</i>	5	8	8	5
<i>Parent &amp; Family Language &amp; Engagement</i>	3	4	1	2
<i>Youth Language</i>	4	5	5	6
<i>Intergenerational Language</i>	4	1	2	2
<b>Relationships &amp; Collaboration</b> <i>Community Engagement</i>	2	0	1	1
<i>Partnership &amp; Collaboration</i>	1	1	0	0
<b>Infrastructure</b>	0	1	1	3



# PROJECT RESULTS

## IMPACTS on INVESTMENTS

Investments in capacity building are critical to support the sustainability of programming. Grantees reported that the investments through their project helped **strengthen the work of their program's mission** and will likely result in the **continuation of their programs**.

The intentionality required in capacity-building work supports resilient programs. Grantees shared how and in what ways their mission was strengthened and how their projects supported the sustainability of their programs. Five key areas emerged in which missions were strengthened. These included:

- 1 | Building teaching capacities
- 2 | Developing language resources and materials
- 3 | Broadening involvement across community
- 4 | Increasing language fluency skills
- 5 | Expanding programs

Similarly, the NLII contributed to the sustainability of programs with investments that work to sustain and not just start language programs. Language programs work not only to stem the erosion of Native languages by building new speakers, but also to overcome the barrage of English language throughout mainstream systems and to address challenges encountered when maintaining language programs. **While grantees shared increasing language fluencies and creating new young speakers are at the core of sustaining programs**, the following areas are critical to invest in and support for language program sustainability.

- **Teacher development.** Investments in teacher development, including recruitment of teachers, teacher training, teacher mentorship, and credentialing of language teachers support language program sustainability. Also, investments in language learning across staff and with interns to shore up teaching gaps is important in program sustainability.
- **Language resource development.** Investments in curriculum, teacher manuals, and language materials and books are essential in program sustainability. Also, piloting and revising new language lessons support program sustainability.
- **Parent and community involvement.** Investments to increase involvement and support of parents, tribal leadership, and local partners support program sustainability. Also, increasing awareness and support through social media is an important strategy to sustaining language programs.
- **Increasing language fluency.** Increasing language fluency and creating new young speakers are at the core of sustaining programs.
- **Planning.** Program sustainability is supported through planning, identifying needs and resources, and developing pathways to support next steps and growth.
- **Partnership development.** Program sustainability is also supported through building program partners, including demonstrating project success to other funders and prospective partners for leveraging funding and future support.



# PROJECT RESULTS

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

Community partners identified and committed to meeting a set of objectives during their grant period. Grantees shared their **top project outcomes** in their final reports and can be categorized into four main priority areas and tie to capacity-building investments:

- 1 | Development of language teachers (*Leadership & Talent Development*)
- 2 | Community engagement (*Relationships & Collaboration*)
- 3 | Language materials (*Program Delivery*)
- 4 | Increase in students' language fluencies (*Program Delivery*)

Other priority areas included infrastructure, strengthened traditions, and improved language learning environments. Some unanticipated outcomes included increased language fluency beyond project benchmarks, improved relationships (e.g., morale, collaboration), new partnerships, and higher levels of project outcomes.

Grantees were asked to describe their project's impact on community, including families and children's academic and social development. In addition to increased language fluency across children, families, and community, language programs strengthened the holistic and cultural support systems in families through:

- **Cultural Perpetuity**

NLII community partners shared how their language programs supported continuation of cultural values and worldviews, traditions and practices, ways of being, and knowledge.

- **Intergenerational Community**

Grantees discussed the importance of intergenerational family and community engagement. Awareness, inclusivity, and support across families and communities were shared.

- **Hope**

Native language programs instilled hope, compassion, and community pride and offered connectedness and good memories for people.

Children's academic and social development impacts included:

- **Whole Child Development**

Grantees shared positive characteristics, behaviors, and life skills that developed in children such as peacemaking, healthy lifestyle choices, and healthy peer relationships. Positive characteristics and behaviors were described as caring, helping each other, attentiveness, and emotional freedom.

- **Other**

Some grantees reported that the NLII program helped academically prepare, empower, and motivate students, and others discussed educational sovereignty.

*Further detail on project impacts is described in the full report.*

“The Yuchi House  
has become a ‘cool’  
hang out place.”

Yuchi Language Project

“If we’re not teaching  
our children who  
they are, it’s a real  
disservice to  
humanity.”

Red Lake Band of  
Lake Superior Chippewa

## 'Aha Kāne Foundation

The Native Hawaiian non-profit organization, 'Aha Kāne Foundation, is situated in Honolulu and focused on the advancement of Native Hawaiian males. Through an intergenerational approach to language acquisition, 'Aha Kāne's strategy is to lead with traditional cultural practices. The organization's Executive Director, Keola Chan, explained the intention of focusing on the boys and men of their community: "Our men were not reclaiming our language, yet often engaged in western social norms and practices like sports, military, and blue-color jobs, and years later were looking for their identity and finding no pathways for them." 'Aha Kāne created a space for men and boys to learn traditional practices and professions, including fishing, hunting, house building, carving, and knotting, traditionally a practice exclusively held by their chiefs. The organic transmission of language related to these practices was shared, bringing together those who know the language and those who know or could excel at the practices, creating symbiotic relationships across the groups.

### **Future Work**

"You can heal an individual but, if you include the family in healing, then you have generational impact," shared Keola. The 'Aha Kāne Foundation is working on rebuilding healthy spiritual families, including reviving healing practices and spiritual resolution. He reflected on the systemic and intentional fragmentation of families by government policies that created dependency on systems, the same systems that are now crashing. Reestablishing the family is the biggest investment for 'Aha Kāne's next work. Additionally, Keola reiterated the need to develop their own evaluation metrics and storytellers to more meaningfully measure the acquisition and transmission of their knowledge from their lens.

### **Advice**

When asked what advice they would have for other language activists in the field, Keola provided encouragement to draw upon their own spiritual practices. "We've got the culture now, got the language going. In order for it to manifest you have to engage the spiritual realm." He firmly and respectfully shared that the mainstream religious ideology is based in fear and that the intent was to make our own spiritual ways foreign to them, explaining that "Changing the physical realm requires engaging the spiritual and unlocking the mystery to us."



# PROJECT RESULTS

## PROJECT SUPPORTS

Grantees were asked to describe the supports and resources that contributed to the accomplishments and project outcomes. In addition to support from First Nations, grantees indicated that other **partnerships and parent and community support** were instrumental in carrying out the work and contributed to project accomplishments and outcomes. The impact that partnerships and allies provided to Native language programs and their work cannot be overstated. In addition to describing how partnerships helped them meet project goals, grantees also shared several ways in which partnerships impacted their programs and work. They include five primary areas:

- 1 | Partnership and network development
- 2 | Community engagement
- 3 | Program sustainability
- 4 | Program growth
- 5 | Expertise and resources

Partnerships provided collaboration (e.g., cultural resources), donations and financial support, expertise and direct services (e.g., evaluation) and consultation (e.g., best practices). In-kind resources ranged from staff and volunteer time, infrastructure supports (e.g., utilities), supportive services (e.g., translations, trainings), and materials and supplies (e.g., food). One unique in-kind contribution was college and high school students donating time, and in turn, receiving credit. Parent and community support provided volunteer time, donated supplies, expertise (e.g., culture), and overall support and engagement. Other supports mentioned frequently included value-centered supports (e.g., dedication, trust, resourcefulness). Some also described how prayers and ceremony contributed to accomplishing the work.

Grantees shared an extensive list of external and internal partners across local, regional, state, and national levels. External partnerships spanned across diverse sectors from schools, libraries, and businesses. Internal partnerships included schools, community members, and tribal programs.





## PROJECT CHALLENGES

With any project, there are sure to be challenges, barriers, and issues that arise that may limit or reduce the project's outcomes, create delays or require adaptations. For funders, understanding challenges involved in creating and leading Native language programs can help in adjusting expectations and creating strategies that can support mitigation.

The two primary challenges grantees most often described while implementing their projects during the grant period were:

### 1 | Inadequate planning      2 | Scheduling conflicts and delays

Many grantees indicated they were overambitious with their planning and underestimated the time and energy needed to carry out project activities. Understaffing as well as the lack of access to additional expertise (e.g., language translators, teaching experience), or the need for additional training or better equipment to carry out the work were also described. Scheduling conflicts and delays were often attributed to weather and natural disasters, misalignment of staff and partners' schedules, illnesses and health issues, and community events (e.g., funerals, ceremonies).

Other project challenges included staff recruitment and turnover, low participation, elder health, tribal policies, partnership issues, and assessment issues.

### Policies

While not all grantees shared information on the role of policies in their work, several discussed how tribal, organizational, federal, state, and local policies impact Native languages – both in positive and negative ways. Tribal or organizational policies primarily covered human resource areas and processes that contributed to delays in project timelines. A few discussed supportive language policies, including tribal resolutions proclaiming Native languages as official languages.

### Pandemic Impacts and Challenges

While each community was uniquely affected by the pandemic, most often they were tied to poor or no broadband and internet access. This impacted attendance and participation of students, families, and communities in language programming; effective teaching, delivery of programming, and learning progress; associated challenges as needing and redirecting time, energy, and resources to rework the teaching delivery methods as virtual and hybrid models; challenges for families and elders navigating online learning platforms; and parents and family members needing to assume teaching and coaching roles as school shifted to virtual spaces at home.

However, grantees also found ways to adapt and apply creative solutions during the pandemic. They included shifting and reworking language lessons and teaching methods to virtual and online platforms and take-home learning kits, including creative traditional activities that were accompanied or followed up with recorded and live virtual lessons to reinforce learnings and language acquisition. Furthermore, grantees utilized new virtual learning applications and developed new language recordings, allowing for increased access to language resources and increased participation. What's more, the increased availability of language programming also contributed to parents and families making new connections within their communities.

*To learn more about project challenges, please see the full report.*

“Number  
one thing:  
We are resilient.”

Lisa Wade  
Chickaloon Native Village

## Keres Children's Learning Center



*KCLC elementary children review animal pictures in language and culture lesson.*



*KCLC co-founder and teacher Trisha Moquino gives Montessori geography lesson in Keres language to early childhood students.*

Keres Children's Learning Center (KCLC) is a non-profit educational center nestled within the Cochiti Pueblo of New Mexico. The center holds a primary classroom for three- to six-year-old children immersed in the Cochiti world, their language, land, traditions, and culture. Everything is taught in the language coupled with Montessori approaches and practices. The same Indigenous Philosophy of Education and Montessori pedagogy is applied in their dual language elementary classroom for six- to 12-year-old Cochiti children. Trisha Moquino, Co-Founder and Education Director, and Mara Matteson, Administrator, shared with us their successes and what they believe has contributed to those successes, and some advice for others investing in NLI initiatives.

### Successes

KCLC is soon to celebrate its 10th year, with currently 15 emerging Cochiti speaking students. In 2018, KCLC's leadership launched the Indigenous Montessori Institute (IMI) in support of educational reform using Indigenous knowledge systems and the Montessori philosophy to deliver teacher training. IMI was also launched to address KCLC's need to develop its own teachers using an anti-racist, anti-bias approach. Trisha discussed how KCLC needed to "deprogram" traditionally trained teachers and disrupt the training that happens at universities. She shared, "The erasure of our history, the lack of acknowledgement of settler colonialism, the racism is so insidious that it becomes normalized, and we can't even recognize it. How do we disrupt that?"

### Advice

One of the most surprising factors Trisha and Mara shared was that **they took six years of planning, engaging elders, parents, tribal council, and the whole community.** They shared how critical the planning time was to pave the way and develop a foundation. "We didn't take any shortcuts," shared Trisha. She further explained the energy she spent in researching the school's model so that no one could argue about it. In addition to specific investments by the community (e.g., land), KCLC is dedicated to creating local Cochiti speakers and hiring local staff in support of growing their own.

For Indigenous people working on language efforts, Trisha shared relationship and trust building is central and needed across staff, families, parents, children, tribal leadership, and partners. Trisha closed with challenging each of us: "All leaders have an obligation to build and support the capacity of everyone because you cannot do this work alone. It is the right thing to do, and part of our purpose in life."



# PROJECT RESULTS

## LESSONS LEARNED

While not all project challenges can be foreseen or addressed up front, the following lessons learned shared by grantees may lead to decreased challenges in carrying out future projects.

- Recognize up front that learners have different learning styles and abilities and thus require adaptabilities and varied supports.
- Anticipate projects requiring more time, energy, and resources. Map out a thorough and realistic timeline and budget with the team in advance and create contingency plans.
- Recognize that teacher apprentice/elder or master speaker teams and learning cohorts may require additional supports.
- Ensure that Indigenous worldview, values, and philosophies align across curriculum and environments (e.g., holistic wellness), and maintain consistent boundaries.
- Ensure consistent communication for parent and community engagement. Inclusivity and attention to their feedback is important in building trust and commitment.
- Include evaluation in the work to make improvements in language fluency and teaching. Pilot new curriculum and lessons.
- Take time to develop partnerships. Develop consistent communication. Ask for help from other language programs.

*To learn more about lessons learned, please see the full report.*





# COMMUNITY of PRACTICE

## BACKGROUND

The concept of a Community of Practice (CoP) is that Native language immersion programs are better collectively in fueling the language revitalization movement. A critical strategy beyond grantmaking involves creating space and opportunity for language practitioners to learn from each other; share tools and resources, insights and lessons; and elevate a collective voice in the needs, efforts, and best practices in language immersion work.

## CREATING a NATIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION COMMUNITY of PRACTICE

Native language program leaders joined a CoP dedicated to language immersion models. Grantees and cohorts were supported through peer learning and encouraged to interact throughout and beyond their one-year project period. Each cohort was invited to peer learning sessions led by Indigenous facilitators at Melvin Consulting PLLC, a Hopi-founded and -led business with decades of experience working with Native communities.

**Four CoP sessions** were offered within each cohort. The CoP sessions provided intentional time to interact and nurture relationship building, sharing program successes and inspirational aspects of their work. Session objectives included:

- Create a CoP among NLII grantees by introducing a common understanding and providing opportunity to support, learn, and interact
- Learn about successful models and partnerships from other practitioners
- Identify critical partners for success and better understand the web of support that lifts up language immersion programs through intentional relationship mapping
- Identify a vision for the future (only offered to cohort one due to the pandemic)
- Advance the collective work by considering a future state that provides the resources and networks needed

**Peer learning** opportunities with fellow language practitioners were built into the sessions, and grantee program leaders played a large role in presenting and sharing their knowledge and best practices with other programs. Small groups in individual cohort sessions discussed areas of policy issues, teacher development and training, program sustainability, resource development, and pandemic issues. Small break-out groups during the multi-cohort sessions discussed policy, immersion methods, elder and family engagement, and effective funder relationships.

**Advancing the collective work by maintaining** a NLII CoP was strongly desired by the NLII grantees. They suggested additional opportunities, such as network support, sharing of resources, and peer learning addressing effective program strategies, barriers and challenges, innovative approaches and methods, sustainable funding strategies, and community progress updates.

*To learn more about specific strategies, lessons, and insights from the featured grantee presenters, please see the full report.*



# RECOMMENDATIONS and NEXT STEPS

## PROMISING PRACTICES

Native language immersion has been shown to work and was the investment of choice for supporting language revitalization efforts. Yet, practices of how immersion is supported and implemented is as varied as the NLII grantees. The following promising practices were shared by grantees for language practitioners and Native language programs to consider.

- Blending language immersion with Montessori
- Mixed-age classrooms and intergenerational learning
- Experiential and practical immersion activities and multi-disciplinary approaches
- Place-based learning and traditional practices that incorporate Indigenous science, geography, environment, and integration of language in existing programs
- Master Teacher or Speaker and Teacher Apprentice or Trainee model in which apprentices practice teaching while learning
- Intergenerational community language learning retreats and intensives

*To learn more about best practices, please see the full report.*





# RECOMMENDATIONS and NEXT STEPS

## NEXT STEPS

The NLII project has indeed resulted in providing much needed support to stabilize and sustain Native language programs as grantees reported that the capacity-building investments strengthened their missions and the continuation of their programs. Yet, there is still much to do. First Nations recognizes that this is multi-generational work that will require the same amount of financial resources, time, and energy as it took to eradicate Native languages in the first place. This includes the traditional capacities and structures (e.g., families, intergenerational and community systems) that once held and supported language and contemporary infrastructures (e.g., leadership development, planning, program design, evaluation, fund and partnership development, financial management, communications, technology) that are all needed today to revitalize Native languages. Community partners identified the following top priority needs to support sustainability and continue their work.

### RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

While many of the language projects focused on curriculum and language resource development, there remains significant need in continued investments in this area. This includes documenting the insights of elders, developing curriculum and advanced lessons, and creating books and other language resources and materials.

### BUILDING and RETAINING STAFFING CAPACITY

Another significant need in supporting sustainability of language programs was retaining and increasing program staff. This includes staffing for program coordination, leadership, financial management, social services, and administration.

### INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORTS

Basic infrastructure needs, including buildings and permanent facilities, vehicles for transportation, and remaining recovery needs from the pandemic are needed to support sustainability of programs.

### FUNDRAISING CAPACITY

Several grantees shared the need to establish an endowment, along with capital campaigns, to help shift from short-term grant dependency to financial sustainability.

### TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

This was an equally primary need across grantees. Training, developing teaching skills, including pedagogies and language teaching methodologies, providing certification, and creating training centers were described as needs to sustain teacher development.

### PLANNING

Developing sustainability plans and identifying plans for increased community involvement and family language strategies are needed.



# RECOMMENDATIONS and NEXT STEPS

## ADVICE to LANGUAGE PRACTITIONERS and NATIVE COMMUNITIES

The knowledge and expertise across the NLII grantees are vast and diverse. NLII programs identified some promising practices, including intergenerational learning, experiential learning methods, Total Physical Response, and early childhood programs blending language immersion with Montessori education methods. They also shared lessons learned, including planning for adequate and realistic projects, ensuring full alignment of Indigenous worldviews and community values in curriculum and learning environments, and exercising language immersion with fidelity.

Grantees shared these words of advice to communities working on language revitalization efforts and those interested in starting language immersion efforts. The advice is organized through core capacity-building components.

“Our little ones are not afraid to make mistakes in the language and they learn from mistakes. Adults need to take this lesson from our little ones to gain knowledge of the languages.”

Northern Arapaho Tribe

### I LEADERSHIP and TALENT DEVELOPMENT ADVICE

#### Teaching and Learning Approaches

- Utilize interactive and experiential learning approaches and make learning fun.
- Use visuals, graphics, and hand gestures.
- Integrate language in activities versus a language class.
- Use established routines and be consistent.

#### Tips for Developing Teachers

- Develop a network of potential teachers, including substitute teachers.
- Develop a small core group of learners.
- For teacher apprentices, utilize a 2:1 learner/teacher ratio.
- Pair language learning with teacher credentialing.
- Build additional language training opportunities outside of classrooms.

#### Team Development

- Hire dedicated and energetic tribal community members.
- Develop a committee team with diverse skillsets, backgrounds, and knowledge.
- Require all staff to learn language.
- Provide ongoing development trainings.
- Train everyone on curriculum and approach before launching school efforts.
- Ensure support for teaching staff.
- Include an information technology leader.

## 2 MISSION and VISION STRATEGY ADVICE

### Creation of Language Learning Environments

- Create a culture, environment, and infrastructure that supports language immersion.
- Provide a safe learning environment.

### Values and Principles

- Have courage; be fearless and not afraid to make mistakes; learn as you go.
- Be persistent but flexible.
- Be patient.
- Be positive and optimistic.
- Remember, language is sacred – Respect it.

### Planning and Goal Setting

- Establish realistic goals, outcomes, and benchmarks.
- Include ongoing planning, review objectives, and address issues as they arise.
- Develop language assessments in alignment with teaching methods.

## 3 PROGRAM DELIVERY ADVICE

### Language Approaches and Methods

- Research proven strategies and visit other programs.
- Adapt and customize strategies to one's community needs.
- Remember that what works in one community might not work in another.
- Pilot a method, then reassess.
- Practice immersion with fidelity.
- Lead with Indigenous philosophy, not a colonial lens.
- Start with babies.
- Consider the Montessori model.
- Ensure approach is community-rooted and driven.

### Curriculum Development Tips

- Pilot the curriculum first.
- Assess, revise, document.
- Build in evaluation.

### Working with Elders

- Don't waste time.
- Record elders.
- Place elders in classrooms.
- Don't expect elders to perform reading and writing work, focus on speaking.
- Build lessons based on elders' expertise and interests.
- Maintain ongoing communications across the team.
- Be patient.

“Build partnerships and support because it is a long journey.”

Nk'usm Salish Language School

## 4 LEADERSHIP and TALENT DEVELOPMENT ADVICE

### Strategies for Engaging Family and Community

- Family and community engagement is essential – Gain their support and buy-in.
- Provide community events and activities for everyone to hear, learn, and speak.
- Develop materials for families to learn together.
- Use technology to support family and community engagement.
- Provide consistent communications.
- Inform the community of the language status and include them in planning efforts.

## 5 INFRASTRUCTURE ADVICE

- Develop a digital repository of resources.
- Record teachings and lessons for later use.
- Be well-organized.



## 6 SUSTAINING NATIVE LANGUAGE IMMERSION PROGRAMS ADVICE

### Build a Circle of Support

Consider all stakeholders and work toward community buy-in, engagement, and ongoing communication; Join existing networks.

### Ground Teams in Indigenous Values, Prayers, and Faith

Relationships matter – build a dedicated team from the community and remain committed to the language, have courage, and work hard.

### Research and Invest in Language Immersion Best Practices

Understand and know what teaching and learning methods are effective.

### Plan for Sustainability

Consider realistic goals, create flexible contingency plans, and plan for future expansions.

### Invest in Adequate Teacher Development

Develop curriculum and a fluency transfer system, and provide ongoing training.

### Explore Innovative Fundraising

Develop a portfolio of the program and tell the organization's story with heart and authenticity.

### Develop a Structure that Fits the Community's Needs

This could be a charter school, nonprofit organization, formal accreditation, or tribal program.



## Friends of the Akwesasne Freedom School



*Elvera Sargent, Director of the Friends of the Akwesasne Freedom School, poses with her two granddaughters.*

The Friends of the Akwesasne Freedom School (FOAFS) is a non-profit organization that supports the Akwesasne Freedom School in Akwesasne, New York. It was established as a separate entity so that the school can be protected from outside influence and focus on the students who are immersed in the Mohawk language and culture. The school's origin was a crisis response over a land dispute with the state. Committed to its activist foundation, the school's philosophy is rooted in tribal and educational sovereignty. Elvera Sargent, Director of the FOAFS, shared, "We have the control of what our students learn – we can teach our own kids."

Elvera described the philosophical and value-based factors that contribute to the success of their students. For example, at the beginning of each school year, a receiving ceremony is held for each child to be received by their teacher, while parents introduce their child and share the gifts that their child is carrying. They come to an agreement that the teacher will treat their child as a member of their own family, entrusting the teachers to love and discipline their children as an aunt or uncle might. Leading with Mohawk ceremonies, seasons, and traditions, Elvera offered some of their organization and school's own approaches when asked what advice she would give others working in the language field. It included, having parents lead this work and recognize and exercise the power they have over their children's education, "Trust us, we know what we're doing."



## CLOSING THOUGHTS

The breadth of wisdom shared by the Native language immersion programs and the collective wisdom shared as community partners came together in a Community of Practice is astounding. **Capacity-building investments support sustainability by strengthening programs and building the resiliency needed** to continue language reclamation efforts. As we embark on the United Nations Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032) and prepare to fully exercise language rights we must continue to build the capacities of Native language programs to effectively create and strengthen language speakers across Native communities.

### Reflect & Act

We ask readers now to reflect on the findings, lessons, insights, and advice in this report provided by the NLII community partners. These community partners know and understand that the answers and solutions to many of the problems their communities face are found within language and cultural lifeways.

Collectively as funders, allies, Native language practitioners and community partners, the decisions and actions made today and tomorrow have the ability to reconcile a history of damaging policies and practices, reverse the loss of Native languages, and build a new generation of Native speakers.

Together, we acknowledge and celebrate the good work shared from 32 NLII community partners. Let us support and honor this upcoming decade of Indigenous languages, a time when Native children are able to freely express themselves in their Native languages, fulfilling their right to belonging, cultural identity, and well-being.



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**“The truth is that millions and millions were spent on destroying our languages through the massive boarding school operations, and now we need that same level of support to revive our languages. Nothing is more vital than our languages for the success and cultural health of our communities.”**

— *Richard Grounds, Ph.D.*  
*Executive Director*  
YUCHI LANGUAGE PROJECT