



NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

NATIVE LANGUAGES

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA) is the nation's largest and most inclusive organization advocating for comprehensive culture-based educational opportunities for American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

Why Native Languages?

Native languages are fundamental to Tribal nations, histories, cultures, and traditions and Native language instruction in educational and community settings is crucial to Native language revitalization, and Tribal Nations and schools serving Native students across the United States have identified Native language instruction as a priority for students and community members. Data shows us that there is a direct link between cultural identity and the cognitive success of Native students.

Due to over a century of assimilative policy, followed by unprecedented loss of Native elders during the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our languages face extinction today. Tribal Nations and schools often lack the capacity and educational resources to develop comprehensive language instruction curriculums on their own. As a result, tribal communities frequently must turn to federal resources and partner with non-profit organizations to develop Native language materials, including curricula, dictionaries, technological apps, and other resources to promote the learning and transmission of Native languages, to revitalize Native languages for Native peoples, and communities. The federal government has a unique obligation to supporting language revitalization in Native communities, not just due to the federal trust and treaty responsibility, but also due to the active role the federal government historically played in language loss through its assimilative policies.

Native Language Programs and Legislation

In 1990, the Native American Languages Act was implemented and would ensure the federal governments acknowledgement of its duty to protect and revitalize the Native Languages its policies systemically decimated during the century prior. Since then, Native Language funding within the federal government has been primarily housed in three main offices: the Administration for Native Americans, Administration for Children and Families; the Office of Indian Education, U.S. Department of Education; and the Bureau of Indian Education, U.S. Department of the Interior. Primarily, these funding streams are project based, as opposed to grant based, and regularly receive significantly more applications than could ever be funded. It is clear that more is needed, and the federal government's duty not fulfilled entirely. Since, Congress has passed the Ester Martinez Native Languages Act, the Durbin Feeling Native Languages Act, and the Native American Language Resource Center Act, among others, which has broadened the landscape of language funding and support for Native Nations and the programs they run. These programs are hungry to expand in every direction, and students are readily available. It is essential the federal government continue to invest in Native Languages substantially.

NIEA Recommendations

- **Funding**

Establish a \$40 million annual fund within the Department of the Interior or the Department of Education, beginning in FY 2025 for Native language research and programs.
- **Removal of Barriers to Native Language program growth and stabilization**

Native Nations consistently speak many issues with the too few funding opportunities for language programs and the consistent barriers which both congress and the federal government should be dedicated to eradicating, including:

 - Phasing out of all grant-matching requirements;
 - Lower and streamline reporting requirements;
 - Funding for both planning and implementation grants;
 - Supporting the increase of program capacity by providing additional technical assistance;
 - Funding for fluent speakers and elders to be directly engaged with language programs;
 - Addressing the gap between early childhood learners and adult learners; and
 - Unequivocal support for data and intellectual sovereignty for tribal Native Language work.
- **10-Year Plan on Native Language Revitalization**

The Administration announced at the end of 2022 that the federal government would release a National Plan on Native Language Revitalization. That report, which was due to be released at the end of 2023, should be comprehensive in its review of which programs could go to support language revitalization, dedicated in the funding the Administration requests for its programs, and fully coordinated in ensure all agencies abide by the support dedicated. This plan, in collaboration with the next two Federal Indian Boarding School Reports, is only the beginning in undoing a legacy left by Federal Indian Boarding Schools.
- **Tribally Led and Guided Research**

With strategic federal funding, Native communities can phase out the amount of outsiders/non-Natives who have to do the work for our communities due to funding and education restrictions. This should include education funding for researchers, linguists, teachers, and speech therapists. In the modern era, this must also include experts in coding and digitization so language communities can digitize older recordings and platform them to showcase language materials.
- **Simplify the process for integration of Native Languages into nationwide educational settings**

Most young Native language students are dual-language learners, focusing on both English and their Native languages. Many early childhood development scholars encourage the learning of multiple languages for brain development, which should be the approach of the American education system towards Native language learners as well. In order for many Native languages to be better integrated, it is necessary for the federal government to support technical assistance to support bi-linguigal literacy assessments for children learning a Native language alongside English, technical support for Native language curriculum building and approval, and dedicated allowances for Native languages to be considered for the fulfillment of foreign language/ world language requirements in states.

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