

2024 Native American Library Services: Enhancement Grants Osage Nation - Literacy Expansion Project

Organization Profile

The Osage Nation, a federally recognized tribe in rural Eastern Oklahoma, services an area stretching over two thousand three hundred (2,300) square miles. Its tripartite government structure includes an executive, judicial, and legislative branch enacted through ratification of the Osage Nation Constitution in 2006. Since its establishment, the Osage Nation has strived to meet the following core values outlined within its strategic plan. These values include growth in spiritual strength, cultural preservation, justice, fairness, compassion, protection, and respect for all Osage people along with an emphasis on education, health, and economic development.

Our service population exceeds over forty-five thousand (45,000) people of both native and non-native heritages in the low to middle-income ranges. Limitations regarding the availability of educational support resources outside of primary education standards are of the utmost concern to our community. In response, the Osage Nation actively safeguards and advances education by establishing and endorsing top-tier childhood learning initiatives for tribal youth, as well as, advocating for enhancements with the seventeen (17) school districts within our service area. Currently, our child care program administers a resource mobile, serving as a mobile resource room equipped with necessary classroom and education support tools targeted to all local educators. Additionally, there are thirty-three (33) licensed childcare operators along with four (4) tribally funded early childhood centers that benefit from our mobile library, as known as, the bookmobile.

Due to its existing collaborative relationship with the local school systems, the Osage Nation childcare program staff will spearhead the Literacy Expansion Project. The child care program manages multiple child-centered programs for community benefit such as a child care subsidy, parenting classes, and child care center licensing. The skills and toolsets exhibited by their staff due to these existing programs complement the deliverables outlined within our grant proposal well making their team an ideal administrator of this project.

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Osage Nation - Literacy Expansion Project

IMLS Agency Level Goal: Strengthen Community Engagement; Promote inclusive engagement across diverse audiences

Project Justification

The Osage Nation Literacy Expansion Project will develop and implement a youth summer reading program, expand outreach to address unmet needs within our mobile library program, and allow for collaboration with community shareholders on literacy events hosted within our service area. Deliverables outlined within this project will target children from birth through the age of twelve while engaging their caregivers in reading readiness support activities.

The Osage Nation, a federally recognized Indian tribe, is located in rural Eastern Oklahoma with a service area that expands over two thousand three hundred (2,300) square feet. Expansion and preservation of Osage culture, language, and education are governed uniformly through our triplicate governmental structure that includes an executive, judicial, and legislative branch. The influence of the Osage language and culture is visible throughout our service area as community involvement and engagement within local school districts is prevalent.

The population outlay surrounding our service area includes a mixture of both native and non-native peoples predominantly with no advanced educational certifications within the lower to middle income brackets. Elementary-aged children within this population largely express reading levels at basic or below what is required of their grade level as evidenced through year-end reporting parameters. The remoteness of our service area coupled with the limited financial resources local families possess has resulted in an inadequate availability of reading support tools outside of primary services provided while at school.

Currently, the Osage Nation does have limited resources engaged to assist with literacy support through the use of its mobile library, community book receptacles, and story time events for local children. However, due to financial restrictions expansions of these initiatives are not feasible without the support of grant funding.

Project Work Plan

The Osage Nation, through its childcare program, intends to confront this unmet need through a collaborative project team that includes childcare staff, educators, municipal staff, tribal members, and local authors. Project deliverables are outlined to meet the following parameters for literacy awareness and subject engagement:

- **Goal One:** Promote reading support at home through caregiver involvement
- **Goal Two:** Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility
- **Goal Three:** Support reading readiness through a structured culturally inclusive plan

Internal Project Team and Partners

- **Child Care Program:** The Osage Nation Literacy Expansion Project will be led by the childcare program’s resource specialist, level of effort of thirty (30) percent, with the support of a licensing officer, level of effort of twenty (20) percent who will oversee project planning and implementation. The resumes of these key staff support the necessary skill sets required to drive this plan to fruition. An intern, with a level of effort one hundred (100) percent, with an educational background in Education or Library Services, will be engaged during the summer months to assist with the Summer Reading Program.
- **Language, Culture, and Education Cabinet:** This cabinet will provide auxiliary services such as public speakers and collaborating in the identification of culturally reflective education tools.
- **Daposka Ahnkodapi Elementary:** The Osage Nation immersion school will provide the literacy expansion project with a shared space to interact with children for literacy activities and book distribution events.
- **Wazhazhe Early Learning Centers:** The four Wa-Zha-Zhe Early Learning Centers will provide the literacy expansion project a shared space to interact with children for literacy activities and book distribution events.

Community Partners

Community partners will include, but are not limited to, local school districts, municipal libraries, and area childcare providers. These partners will support this project through the donation of shared spaces for reading activities, collaboration on community literacy events, and accessibility to the project’s target population.

Activities

- **Mobile Library:** The Osage Nation’s child care program administers the mobile library, also known as the bookmobile. The bookmobile is currently targeted towards ages birth through five assisting all children within our service area. The following needs and objectives will be met with this activity:

Activity	Objective(s) Met
A. Library Check System Equipment Expansion	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility

B. Purchase Age Targeted Books for Distribution and Selected Readings	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility; Promote reading support at home through caregiver involvement; Support reading readiness through a structured culturally inclusive plan
C. Increase service frequency and outreach	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility; Promote reading support at home through caregiver involvement

- **Community Literacy Events:** These events are held continuously throughout the school year by area districts to foster reading awareness for youth and caregivers while providing support and strategies to expand skill sets while at home. The following needs and objectives will be met with this activity:

Activity	Objective(s) Met
D. Purchase Age Targeted Books for Event Distribution	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility; Promote reading support at home through caregiver involvement; Support reading readiness through a structured culturally inclusive plan
E. Prepare and distribute reading support materials to caregivers and educators	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility; Promote reading support at home through caregiver involvement;

- **Summer Reading Program:** The development and implementation of a summer reading program for area children will allow a shared space for local authors and tribal members to read and discuss selected literature to encourage positive connotations surrounding reading. The following needs and objectives will be met with this activity:

Activity	Objective(s) Met
F. Purchase Age Targeted Books for distribution and discussion	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility; Promote reading support at home through caregiver involvement; Support reading readiness through a structured culturally inclusive plan

G. Prepare and distribute promotional items supportive of book care (i.e. book bag and bookmarks)	Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility
H. Stipends for Speakers	Support reading readiness through a structured culturally inclusive plan; Alleviate barriers to literature accessibility
I. Hiring of Intern	Support reading readiness through a structured culturally inclusive plan

Project Results

The intended result of the Osage Nation Literacy Expansion Project is to bolster awareness of reading and resource opportunities through the use of community involvement. We anticipate that project activities will encourage young readers with the of their support caregivers to expand reading activities at home while also initiating discussion regarding themes expressed through literature.

Through the incorporation of these activities at home, children’s reading skills will evolve along with critical thinking tools. The inclusion of these advancements in skills in turn will increase reading capacity statistics at the school district level thus improving the statistical probability of higher education attainment into adulthood.

Intended community outcomes derived from this literacy endeavor include a larger percentage of students at basic or higher reading levels, setting a positive tone for youth for reading engagement, and the diversification of juvenile literature available within our service area. Upon conclusion of the project’s pilot year, the Osage Nation along with community partners intend to continue activities outlined if favorable results are returned through the utilization of tribal and non-tribal funding streams.

