

Organizational Profile

The Seneca Nation of Indians is a federally recognized Indian tribe; it is the largest tribe of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy in New York State. The enrolled membership of the Seneca Nation stands at 8,540 members (*Seneca Nation Enrollment, March 2024*). Among the Seneca Nation territories, 4,325 enrolled members and their families live on territorial lands, with a substantial portion of the remaining membership and their families living in proximity to the territories in Western New York State (*Seneca Nation Enrollment, March 2024*).

Today, the people of the Seneca Nation live and work on the same lands that Seneca people have inhabited for over 1,000 years. The Nation holds title to five territories in Western New York: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Buffalo Creek, Niagara Falls, and Oil Spring. The territories, which are adjacent to portions of five counties (Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Niagara), are not contiguous and each parcel is unique in its economic, social, and environmental profile.

The Seneca Nation's largest population concentrations are located on the Allegany Territory and Cattaraugus Territory. These territories are primarily residential; each is also home to Seneca Nation governmental departments and offices.

The Allegany Territory, located in southern Cattaraugus County near the New York-Pennsylvania border, encompasses 48.43 square miles. It is the only instance in which Native American territorial land has a non-Native American municipality almost entirely within its boundaries: the city of Salamanca, NY. The Allegany Territory has a population of 1,721 enrolled Seneca members (*Seneca Nation Enrollment, March 2024*), with a total population of 5,874 in the city of Salamanca (*American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, Table DP05, 2022*).

The Cattaraugus Territory is adjacent to portions of northern Cattaraugus County, southern Erie County, and northeastern Chautauqua County and is 35 miles northwest of the Allegany Territory. This territory encompasses 34.47 square miles and has a population of 2,603 enrolled Seneca members (*Seneca Nation Enrollment, March 2024*). The Cattaraugus Territory is rural, located eight miles from the village of Gowanda, NY and 40 miles from Buffalo, NY.

The Seneca Nation's Buffalo Creek Territory is non-residential and is situated on 9.8 acres of land in downtown Buffalo, NY. This territory, located 30 miles northeast of the Cattaraugus Territory, is a short distance from the historic location of the original reservation. In October 2013, the Nation opened a newly constructed Class III gaming facility in this entertainment/retail district.

The Seneca Nation also holds title to 56.2 acres of land in the city of Niagara Falls, NY. The Nation converted a former convention center into a casino and hospitality enterprise. The Nation has made considerable investment in the infrastructure of the Niagara Falls Territory, resulting in employment for its members and for the community at large.

The remaining Seneca Nation tract is the Oil Spring Territory, 35 miles from the Allegany Territory. Oil Spring is situated on one square mile of land in a wooded area in Allegany County that includes lakefront parcels at Cuba Lake, a popular residential/recreation area. In 2014 the Seneca Nation opened a Class II Gaming Facility at Oil Spring. The Nation also owns and operates a gasoline and convenience store enterprise, as do several private Seneca entrepreneurs.

The Seneca Nation of Indians is a federally recognized Native nation, listed in the January 8, 2024 Federal Register Notice as recognized and eligible to receive services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior. The Seneca Nation is recognized under Public Law 93-638, Indian Trust Self-Governance and Self-Determination Programs, and, as such, functions as an autonomous and sovereign nation. The Seneca Nation reorganized its tribal governmental structure in 1848 with the adoption of a formal written Constitution providing for leadership by elected officials in executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The mission of the Seneca Nation may be gleaned from the Nation's Constitution: "We the people of the Seneca Nation of Indians...grateful to Almighty God of our national preservation, growth and prosperity, for the freedom and manifold blessings heretofore by us enjoyed honoring the traditions of our Nation, trusting in the present, with confidence in the future advancement and better condition of our race and desiring greater enlightenment in order to perpetuate our national relations to provide for ourselves greater safeguards to pursuit of life, liberty and happiness, and to bring ourselves, as a Nation, to as high a plane intellectually, socially, morally as possible..."

The Nation has extensive experience in writing and managing grant-funded projects and currently administers several million dollars in federal grants annually through its Fiscal Affairs Department. The mission of the Seneca Nation Fiscal Affairs Department is to provide accurate, timely, and comprehensive financial and information services. Key department operations and responsibilities include accounting, budget management, grants and contracts management, fixed asset inventory control, invoice and payroll services, and procurement.

The Nation's financial management system will facilitate effective fiscal control over the proposed project and meet all requirements of the grant. All accounting records will be maintained

through accounting software, a computerized system that conforms to generally accepted accounting principles and allows activity to be posted and documented in one central structure.

The Grants and Contracts Office coordinates and facilitates all aspects of outside funding coming into the Nation: more than 100 federal, state, and private foundation grants and contracts. This office is responsible for ensuring that all required financial and performance reports have been submitted to the appropriate agency. Grants and Contracts will facilitate effective procurement and contract control over the proposed project.

The Seneca Nation Library has two branches, one at the Nation's Allegany Territory and one at the Cattaraugus Territory. The Kids' Reading Project will take place at both branch libraries for a two-year period beginning September 1, 2024 and ending August 31, 2026. The Director of the Seneca Nation Library, Krista Jacobs, will be Project Director for the Kids' Reading Project.

Background Information

Seneca Nation: The Seneca Nation of Indians is a federally recognized Indian tribe (Federal Register, January 8, 2024). Enrolled membership of the Seneca Nation stands at 8,540 members. Among the Seneca Nation territories, 4,325 enrolled members and their families live on territorial lands, with a substantial portion of the remaining membership and their families living in proximity to the territories in Western New York (*Seneca Nation Enrollment, March 2024*).

Today, the people of the Seneca Nation live and work on the same lands that Seneca people have inhabited for over 1,000 years. The Nation holds title to five non-contiguous territories in Western New York State. The territories are adjacent to portions of five counties: Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, and Niagara Counties.

The Seneca Nation's largest population concentrations are located on the Allegany Territory and Cattaraugus Territory. These territories are primarily residential; each is also home to Seneca Nation governmental departments and offices.

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The Seneca Nation's Buffalo Creek Territory, Niagara Falls Territory, and Oil Spring territory are non-residential: each is home to a Seneca gaming enterprise.

Seneca Nation Library: The Seneca Nation has a branch library at both of its residential territories: Allegany and Cattaraugus. Library programs provide informational, cultural, and recreational services for Seneca members. The libraries also work to educate non-Seneca communities about the importance of Seneca culture and heritage in order to promote a closer relationship with, and understanding of, the Seneca people.

Project Justification

The Seneca Nation proposes the Kids' Reading Project, to be funded with 2024 Enhancement Grant funds. This project will take place at the libraries at both Seneca Nation residential territories: Allegany and Cattaraugus. Project Director is Krista Jacobs, Director of the Seneca Nation Library.

The Kids' Reading Project will bring together Seneca Nation youngsters, ages 6 – 11 years to take part in scheduled monthly reading activities at the libraries. The books to be read as part of this project will consist of physical audio books for children, as well as virtual reality books for children. These sessions will bring together Seneca children to participate in group activities, such as listening to audiobooks and virtual reality books being read aloud, as well as follow-up activities, including art activities (drawing, painting, sculpting, etc.) that follow the theme of the book being read, and, where appropriate, due to the age of the participants, writing activities that also follow the theme of the book being read (including but not limited to "What happens next?" writing assignments).

The Kids' Reading Project aligns with IMLS Goal 3: Enhance the preservation and revitalization of Native America cultures and languages, Objective 3.3: Support the sharing of content within and/or beyond Native communities. This will take place as Seneca Nation youngsters come together at either library branch to hear audio books being read and to take part in related, follow-up activities. Because of the age of the participants, the children are likely to be brought to the library by one or both parents, who will be invited to stay for the presentation and work with the child on the follow-up activities. Thus, it is hoped that the project will enable families to spend quality time together engaged in listening to, talking about, and completing follow-up activities.

The importance of audiobooks on the literacy horizon has increased significantly in recent years. In *Audiobooks and Literacy: A Rapid Review of the Literature*, Emily Best states: "...there is strong evidence to suggest that engagement with audiobooks can impact positively on reading skills and enjoyment" (A National Literacy Trust Research Report, February 2020).

Together with Ms. Jacobs, Seneca Library staff will select audiobooks and virtual reality books that will be utilized in the project's activities.

In addition to purchasing audiobooks and virtual reality books, the project budget includes the purchase of easily tables and chairs for each branch library. The tables and chairs will be used

for each session of the Kids' Reading Project and can then easily be stored until either the next project session or another youth or adult activity at the library (e.g., a craft activity).

The need for the project is significant. It has been consistently demonstrated that Native children do not do as well in school as their non-Native counterparts. In *Striving to Achieve: Helping Native American Students to Succeed*, the National Conference of State Legislatures has stated:

The state of education in our nation's K-12 schools for Native students is distressing. Native students perform two to three grade levels below their white peers in reading and mathematics. They are 237 percent more likely to drop out of school and 207 percent more likely to be expelled than white students...One contributing factor to this achievement gap is that most American Indian/Alaska Native students are not prepared to learn when they walk through the doors of their school...Low-income homes, lack of adequate health care, and other factor create challenges that add to the achievement gap.

Implementing a project that can help to instill a love of reading in young children can prove to be a significant step forward in preparing them for the challenges of school.

Project Work Plan

The activities that will comprise the Kids' Reading Project will consist of:

- Activity One: Selecting and purchasing the audiobooks and virtual reality books
- Activity Two: Selecting and purchasing portable tables and chairs for the library area where the project will take place
- Activity Three: Scheduling the project sessions
- Activity Four: Advertising the project
- Activity Five: Implementing the sessions
- Activity Six: Collecting surveys (anecdotal for the children, written for participating adults) regarding the project

– Activity Seven: Analyzing the surveys collected (monthly and at end of period of performance)

Risks to the project will hopefully be minimal. Should there be a resurgence of COVID, or some other significant health-related occurrence, sessions at the library would likely be canceled. In such a case, presenting the sessions remotely would be an option.

The project will be planned and managed by Krista Jacobs, Director of the Seneca Nation Library. Implementation of the project will be carried out by existing library staff. Time for the sessions will be on a monthly basis, for about one hour allotted per session. If the sessions go well and the participating youngsters are engaged, extra time (perhaps an extra half-hour per session) could be incorporated. Funds to purchase the reading materials, tables, and chairs, along with \$3,000.00 required travel amount per year, will comprise the budget.

Resources within the Seneca Nation will be utilized to help advertise the project. The Official Seneca Nation Newsletter, which goes to all enrolled members every two weeks, will provide updates on the project's planning stages. The Seneca Nation Media and Communications Center will be invited to film and/or record project sessions. These recording will be housed at both the Media Centers at Allegany and Cattaraugus, as well as at the libraries.

The results of the analysis of the surveys to be requested will be shared with Library staff and will be available for Seneca Nation Council Members and Executives to study.

Project Results

The project's intended results are:

- 1) At least ten (10) child participants per scheduled session
- 2) At least four (4) parents or guardians attending each session along with their child
- 3) A positive view of the project, from the perspective of both the library staff and parents
- 4) Anecdotal information from parents/guardians that children who participated in the project have shown an increased interest in reading (i.e., asking for books at home, asking parents to read aloud at home, asking to go to the library)

The Seneca Nation places a high value on the education of its young people. A project such as the Kids' Reading Project aligns with the Nation's goal that its youth have positive school experiences and go on to graduate, perhaps opting for further education or training to prepare for

a career. Right now, a career might seem a long way off from the lives of the Nation's youngest members, but every step along the way can rightfully be viewed as a milestone that leads, ultimately, to success and fulfillment later in life.

It is likely that one product will result from the project: a recording of the sessions made by the Seneca Nation Media and Communications Center.

The success of the Kids' Reading Project is likely to create a positive view of future projects for youngsters at the Seneca Nation. Such future projects may take place at the Seneca Nation Library, or within another Nation department: Education, Conservation, etc. It is also likely that, given the anticipated success of the Kids' Reading Project, that permission to apply for future grant funding for other projects will be forthcoming.

