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MSU RURAL READINESS TRIBAL FELLOWSHIP PLANNING

In early January of this year, the Michigan State University (MSU) Center for Community & Economic Development (CCED) was awarded a *Rural Readiness* grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development to promote community-specific solutions that build planning and capacity in rural communities and regions across Michigan. Supporting cross-sector collaboration, development readiness, partnership and planning as well as rural capacity building and collective impact, the Center proposed utilizing this 18-month planning award to craft an economic resiliency Native American Tribal Fellowship pilot model.



In partnership with the MSU Native American Institute (NAI) and with support from MSU Extension, the Center will facilitate this project through June of 2025 serving the five sovereign nations of: the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians (Gun Lake Tribe), Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, and Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi.

To begin this grant period, planning will focus on refining and prioritizing tribally identified resiliency needs to help lay a framework for more equitable development and long-term investment. The pilot project has grown as a direct response to tribal focus group activities conducted by MSU Extension in June of 2023 through “*Building Strong Sovereign Nations, Anishinabek Leadership for Seven Generations*” programming with support from the CCED and NAI. After experiencing disruption and loss of income due to the pandemic, the following areas were identified by tribal economic developers and other leadership as areas of resiliency need including climate resiliency support, food sovereignty, infrastructure, and renewable energy upgrades, contracting capacity development, government and business structuring, public health, entrepreneurial advocacy and more.



Over the course of the next year and a half, partners will work to craft a professional development and 12-month work experience for competitively selected tribal community members residing in their nations who also demonstrate a commitment to living there and applying their skill building long-term. Assisting to help develop local leadership to buffer against future shock and crises is critical. Therefore, throughout this spring the CCED and Extension partners will meet with each of the five fellowship pilot model tribes and conduct additional asset mapping and resiliency prioritization activities. Fellow workplans will be developed accordingly and by spring of 2025 the initial candidate recruitment and interviews will be underway for Cohort I.

In addition to conducting economic resiliency needs assessments, building out partnership frameworks and leadership development, the anticipated impacts include identifying funding streams, developing stipend incentives and identifying, recruiting, and training talent. Long-term investment opportunity will also be cultivated. Lastly, working together with tribal nations and harnessing institutional support, CCED hopes to leverage other university and community college opportunities for fellow immersion experience, co-creation of talent pipelines and leveraging of problem-solving networks to aid resiliency efforts. A joint sense of social responsibility and spirit of community engagement may assist to help connect tribal communities, rural areas and urban through shared resources. Please contact Mary ZumBrunnen at zumbrun1@msu.edu for details.



The Center would also like to thank nonprofit partner, Michigan Center for Employee Ownership (MCEO), for offering their services pro-bono to participating tribes on this project. The MCEO will: 1) work with tribal communities to start, retain, and grow businesses in their rural communities, 2) offer valuation assessments, company development, exit planning and employee ownership services, and 3) develop and deliver appropriate fellow training programs valued at approximately \$1,000. For more information about the MCEO please contact Executive Director, Roy J. Messing, at rmessing@eoxnetwork.org.

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