



## Native Language Revitalization Initiative: A Grotto Foundation Plan for Giving

“Without the Ojibwe language, the culture is lost and Ojibwe people become mere descendants of Indians, with little to differentiate themselves from non-Indians. Language and tradition combine to make culture. Indian people need both to survive.”

—Anton Treuer, *Ojibwe language instructor*  
*Bemidji State University*

### I. Introduction

Since its inception in 1964, the Grotto Foundation has directed approximately 37 percent of its grant support to Native-American endeavors, including community and cultural revitalization. Through recent research related to these endeavors, it was discovered that children who learn their heritage language achieve better academically. While a myriad of needs exist, nurturing the root of Native culture and belief systems through language restoration, is the call to which Grotto has responded.

The Grotto Foundation serves as a catalyst in the work of Native language revitalization. It recognizes that the renewal of indigenous languages lies within the community itself. Ultimately, indigenous communities will preserve and restore their heritage language for future generations.

### II. Commitment to Vision

The Grotto Foundation supports the restoration of Minnesota’s indigenous languages within Native families and communities, including those of the Ojibwe and Dakota. In 2001, \$5.6 million was committed in support of this fifteen-year initiative. Approximately \$300,000 is available for grantmaking annually.

The vision of this initiative is intergenerational Native language fluency. Native languages will be heard and spoken throughout Minnesota’s indigenous communities; the language lives through song, conversation, storytelling, prayer, oral and written teachings, and history.

The mission of Grotto’s funding initiative is to restore Minnesota’s indigenous languages as living languages within Native families and communities.

### III. Supporting Community Language Initiatives

Every tribal community has vastly different dialects, language resources, commitment and interest levels, and family, social, and political structures. Therefore, the means by which they elect to revive their heritage language may look very different, and yet prove most viable for their community. Native Language Revitalization grantmaking resources will be used to seed and nurture viable community programs and initiatives that 1) show promise in producing new Native language speakers, 2) have potential for long-lasting family and community impact, and 3) demonstrate the capacity to sustain language revitalization efforts beyond initial Grotto Foundation support.

Successful grantees will promote family, community, and understanding; will exhibit dynamic leadership, innovative thinking, community building, and cross-cultural understanding; and will seek to work collaboratively with other organizations, as the work required to revive endangered languages requires broad community participation.

The Grotto Foundation serves as both catalyst and broker within the Native language revitalization arena. As such, Grotto has adopted three grantmaking strategies:

1. Explore best practices in the teaching and revitalization of Minnesota’s indigenous languages
2. Monitor changes in Native language status
3. Periodically report on the insights and learnings of Native language revitalization efforts, for both the Foundation and the broader community

## IV. Grant Priority Areas

### PRIORITY 1

#### Promising indigenous language revitalization models

Several “best practices” emerged during the study of worldwide efforts to restore endangered languages. Grotto encourages proposals from organizations that utilize these practices. New and creative ways by which to promote language learning will also be examined.

**FOCUS**—Effective teaching models that transmit language proficiency and comprehension to learners of all ages have been documented. Promising language acquisition models include:

- **Master-apprentice programs**—Mentored learning for adults. Adult learners team with a fluent speaker, spending at least twenty hours per week speaking only their heritage language.
- **Immersion schools**—Kindergarten through twelfth-grade immersion schools, where students are fully immersed in their heritage language.
- **Language nests**—Fluent speakers participate in a day-care setting, typically geared for pre-school children, where they speak to young children in their heritage language throughout the day.
- **Community language societies or language support organizations**—Both rural and urban communities have language support organizations or societies in which groups of adults and youth converse in their heritage language on a regular basis. Language camps and retreats are sometimes sponsored.
- **Teacher training programs**—Programs that build both Native language competency and teaching competencies for a new generation of language learners.
- **Innovative new approaches**—Approaches that show promise in the development of new Native speakers, or a hybrid of other promising approaches may be considered.

### PRIORITY 2

#### Community planning and capacity-building initiatives

The key to successful language revival is the creation of an environment that encourages the use of the language. It is an environment where elders feel it is safe and dignified to use Dakota iapi or Ojibwemowin, in which adults feel it important and honorable to use their heritage language, and in which young people know it is special and admirable to speak their Native tongue.

**FOCUS**—Community planning initiatives, including research projects that prepare a Native community to produce new and younger Native language speakers, will be considered. Communities, schools, and programs that will transmit Native language to younger generations may want to examine the role of technology in language acquisition, its organizational effectiveness, as well as receive technical support or expertise, or organize partnerships. Planning and research that examine internalized oppression and historical trauma—and their effects on language revitalization efforts—will add to the field of learning, as will the coordination of community-wide resources, initiating policy level changes or systems change that will foster language recovery and revitalization. Community planning and capacity-building efforts that focus on sustainable language acquisition efforts within a Native community will be prioritized.

### **PRIORITY 3**

#### **Curriculum development projects and improving the quality of instructional material**

Curriculum is needed in all areas of Native language instruction. Grotto will consider curriculum projects that are creative, user-friendly, and multifaceted.

**FOCUS**—Broadening the field of learning by developing relevant tools and materials for learning for all ages will be considered. Curriculum projects must demonstrate the ability to undertake costly endeavors, such as the distribution of material, efficiently and cost-effectively, to formulate a clearinghouse of relevant materials, and to develop media products and marketing.

### **PRIORITY 4**

#### **Technical assistance and resource sharing**

The Grotto Foundation may periodically engage in supportive activities that are deemed beneficial to its language initiative.

**FOCUS**—Grantmaking resources may be directed to the following activities:

- Collaborative efforts and information sharing among Native communities, such as periodic symposiums and conferences.
- Producing reports and white papers; collecting and presenting Native language research, data, and resources.
- Participation in Native language initiatives on a national scale. Sharing information and resources with national and regional initiatives.
- Periodically convening a Native Language Revitalization Advisory Panel. Such a panel would advise the Grotto Foundation on its 15-Year Native Language Revitalization commitment and giving strategy.

## **V. Grantmaking Evaluation**

The following evaluation outlines the means by which Grotto can assess progress towards the vision over the course of fifteen years.

### **OUTCOME 1**

Intergenerational Native language fluency within Native families and communities

**Evaluation:** Grantees will be asked to submit information on language status:

- Language/dialect
- Number of fluent speakers
- Distribution of first- and second-language speakers
- Mean age of fluent speakers
- Gender distribution
- Degree of speaking competence among targeted learners, i.e., passive, symbolic, functional, fluent, and creative

## OUTCOME 2

Positive Native language environments:  
communities, resources, programs, policies and practices  
which support and nurture  
Native language revitalization and usage

**Evaluation:** Grantees will be asked to submit information on:

- Inventory of community language resources, programs, materials, or partnerships (increase or decrease)
- Policy or practice changes
- Integration of Native language into daily life and functions of the family and community, noted changes in hearing language, oral or written language expression.

**Process Evaluation**—Native communities and programs seeking support from the Grotto Foundation will be asked to describe: their language revitalization methods; how activities were carried out and by whom; how language proficiency is assessed; and participant feedback on selected language methods or approach.

**Related Data Collection**—In order to examine the benefits of Native language mastery among Native students, the Grotto Foundation will collect data that are academic in nature. Given the challenges of Indian education on a state and national level, it is ambitious to expect that this initiative will have overwhelming impact on the academic achievement of Native students. However, it is conceivable that positive correlations may occur. The Foundation welcomes any such data from its grantees.

## VI. Conclusion

The Grotto Foundation recognizes that very little exists in evidence-based programs to revitalize indigenous languages of our region. We rely, then, on the practice wisdom of the community, and the promising approaches that have been documented thus far. It is by assessing progress of Grotto-supported programs and change in language status that we will learn of our impact.

The Grotto Foundation seeks to reverse the trends that have lent themselves to indigenous language shift and decline. The industry of assimilation that resulted in full-scale language decline is being offset slightly by this monetary commitment. However, it is offset more so by the hearts and souls of the Native and non-Native allies who have pledged themselves to language revitalization. Academia, historians, educators, linguists, and language activists can now become allies in this revitalization movement. The Grotto Foundation recognizes the importance of the Native and collective human cultural legacy that its language initiative seeks to preserve and restore. Therefore, it is also a cultural and spiritual endeavor.

According to Leann Hinton, creator of the Master-Apprentice model of language acquisition, languages that are no longer spoken are not dead, just sleeping. We, like our languages, are being awakened.

*Dakota iapi teunhidapi,  
Dakota wicohan teunhidapi.*

*As we cherish the Dakota language,  
we cherish the Dakota way of life.*

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<[www.grottofoundation.org](http://www.grottofoundation.org)> for downloadable grant applications and Native language literature.*

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