Awards assist tribal communities in creating jobs, expanding economies

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WASHINGTON – Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs Lawrence S. Roberts announced today that the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development (IEED) has awarded business development grants totaling $947,406 to 20 federally recognized tribes and one Alaska Native corporation. The awards from IEED's Native American Business Development Institute (NABDI) Feasibility Study Program will enable tribal leaders to better evaluate and identify viable economic opportunities for their communities.

"The grants empower American Indian and Alaska Native tribal communities with the ability to make informed decisions about business opportunities they are considering, assess complex economic options they may be facing, and strengthen their self-governance," Acting Assistant Secretary Roberts said. "This year's grants will fund studies for diverse projects ranging from farming operations, restaurants, retail facilities, a shopping center and grocery stores to an airpark, a wood pellet manufacturing plant, and an RV park. Funds will also support one tribe's exploration of commercial uses for lands it received through the Cobell Land Buy-Back Program."

Grants are awarded on the basis of a proposal's potential to create jobs for tribal members and stimulate economies in Native American communities. During this year's NABDI funding cycle, IEED received 66 proposal requests from all 12 Bureau of Indian Affairs regions totaling $4,365,567.

NABDI awards fund feasibility studies that weigh the viability and risks of an economic development project, opportunity, enterprise, or business or the practicality of a technology a tribe may choose to pursue. The studies may be used to determine the likelihood of success for businesses in specific American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

When performed by a reputable third party, an economic development feasibility study also can be used to help persuade lenders and investors to provide financial backing. A study that concludes a project is worthwhile and financially sustainable can often fulfill many of the lender's or investor's due diligence requirements by answering questions about a project's chances of success, resulting in a more rapid loan approval or better loan terms. Feasibility studies can also be used to examine the credibility of a project promoter and claims made regarding a specific project.

One historic example of the impact NABDI funds have had on economic development in tribal communities is a grant made in FY 2008 to the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in Oklahoma to retain a consultant from Harvard University to study the feasibility of building an industrial park and restoring a 66-mile rail line that connects the greater Oklahoma City area with the state's rural southeastern quarter.

The resulting study was used to obtain $3.5 million in financing to develop a railhead 400-acre industrial park near the town of Shawnee and $1 million for the repair of a railroad bridge. When the project is completed, the tribe will operate four miles of railroad track within the industrial park. The tribal portion of the rail line will be called “Iron Horse.” The park will include an onsite trans-load facility permitting transfer of shipments from train to trucks and direct access to the Union Pacific Line. This will open an east-west connection to four major north-south corridors for regional commerce. Four countries have so far inquired about having foreign companies become tenants of the industrial park. The grant recipients and awards announced today are:

- **Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation**, Mont.: $70,000 to study the feasibility of installing a Sprole Irrigation System.
- **Bay Mills Indian Community**, Mich.: $64,000 to study the feasibility of forming the Great Lakes Composites Institute.
- **Bishop Paiute Tribe**, Calif.: $18,000 to study the feasibility of developing a fast food restaurant.
- **Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon**: $35,000 to study the feasibility of developing a grocery store.
- **Forest County Potawatomi Community,Wisc**.: $30,000 to study the feasibility of building healthy communities through tribal food systems.
- **Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribes of the Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation, Nev. and Ore**.: $36,000 to study the feasibility of developing a trading post and variety retail store at the Red Mountain Travel Plaza, off of Highway 95, three miles south of the Nevada town of McDermitt.
- **Haida Corporation**, Alaska: $22,129 to study the feasibility of a rental cabins project.
- **Navajo Nation**, Ariz., N.M. and Utah: $20,000 to study potential commercial development.
- **Nez Perce Tribe**, Idaho: $59,250 to study the feasibility of operating a tribal farming business.
- **Nulato Village**, Alaska: $55,000 to study the feasibility of operating a lumber mill and timber management program.
- **Osage Nation**, Okla.: $55,000 to study the feasibility of operating an Osage Tulsa Airpark.
- **Pauma Band of Luiseno Mission Indians of the Pauma & Yuima Reservation, Calif**.: $62,226 to study the feasibility of operating Pauma Farms.
- **Poarch Band of Creek Indians**, Ala.: $30,000 to study the feasibility of operating a community garden and agricultural expansion program.
- **Pueblo of Jemez**, N.M.: $75,000 to study the feasibility of developing a wood pellet manufacturing business.
- **Pueblo of Laguna**, N.M.: $22,000 to study the feasibility of constructing an intermodal facility on tribal land.
- **Reno-Sparks Indian Colony**, Nev.: $56,517 to study the feasibility of developing a shopping center.
- **Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community of the Salt River Reservation, Ariz**.: $60,000 to study the potential commercial uses of 58 acres acquired under the Cobell Land Buy-Back Program for Tribal Nations.
- **Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation**, Idaho: $67,862 to study the feasibility of operating a fresh pack plant.
- **Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada (Elko Band)**: $39,960 to study the feasibility of operating a full-service, family style restaurant and tourist center.
- **Tonkawa Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma**: $38,861 to study the feasibility of developing a recreational vehicle park.

- **Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska**: $30,000 to study the feasibility of constructing homes insulated with straw bales.

The Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs oversees the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development, which implements the Indian Energy Resource Development Program under Title V of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. IEED's mission is to foster stronger American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities by helping federally recognized tribes develop their renewable and nonrenewable energy and mineral resources; increasing access to capital for tribal and individual American Indian- and Alaska Native-owned businesses; assisting tribes in building the legal infrastructure necessary for their economic progress; and enabling tribally and individual AI/AN-owned businesses to take advantage of government and private sector procurement opportunities.

For more information about IEED programs and services, visit the Indian Affairs website at http://www.indianaffairs.gov/WhoWeAre/AS-IA/IEED/index.htm.
