

# **Indigenous Program for Interpretation and Tourism**

## **A Proposal for Collaborative Programming: Giving Voice to our First Nations**

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*Seek the teachings of history; listen quietly and patiently to stories from the West, the North, the East and the South. Speak gently as you feel the essence of the meanings to all people. Don't change or soften the spirit of what happened, but learn from what you can for our future. Respect others, their history and the knowledge gained through time.*

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**Overview:** The hope for the future and the stories of the past lie in the young people of today. This program invests in the American Indian youth across the nation. It looks to these young people to keep the indigenous culture alive and sacred and sovereign – to learn of their culture, their land and their spiritual connection to both – the way the stories and traditions have been carried on for thousands of years. It teaches them how to share their stories beyond the reservations through the art and science of communication and interpretation by facilitating connections and inspiring understanding and respect of the natural and cultural world – giving new perspectives to our nation – giving voice to those who have been silenced for so long. It also gives skills to these students in the area of tourism. It will teach them how to build a tourism program that allows for others to experience the culture of their people and learn in a good way the richness of their culture and the sacredness their land. It builds an Associate's program and a Bachelor's program within the tribal college system in the fields of interpretation and tourism giving opportunity for students to move into these professions.

### **Program:**

**Coursework Development** - The basic premise is that the National Park Service (NPS) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) along with a variety of strategic federal and educational partners come together to build a course of study leading to a degree in the fields of interpretation and tourism.

The NPS in collaboration with other partner organizations will take the lead in the curriculum design of the courses in interpretation and tourism. These courses when combined with the required core coursework determined by the TCUs will lead to a degree in these critical fields of study. The curriculum will be designed by a team of partners including indigenous professors, curriculum design specialists and professional interpreters. It is imperative that the new coursework reflect the curriculum development principles for indigenous learning and native ways of knowing. The methodology classes in interpretation and tourism must be designed to reflect current and contemporary professional standards. The courses must also give the students permission to withhold information based on their cultural protocols

The TCUs will examine existing coursework and package appropriate required courses that will support a course of study related to natural and cultural history, writing, communication, marketing and design. These classes will form the foundational content for such degrees. Courses of study developed at two year colleges will earn the student an Associate's degree (or certificate) in interpretation and tourism, the credits for which will be transferable to four year institutions. The four year colleges and universities will create a Bachelor's program in much the same way. The content and combination of courses will be defined by the TCUs through their degree formulation process and their individual accreditation procedures.

**Train Professors (Educators)** – The NPS and other agencies and professional organizations coordinate to build a summer institute for tribal teachers and professors. The institute provides the teachers/professors with an opportunity to come together in a residential setting to review and learn

the content of the new courses in interpretation and tourism. This gives the professors a chance to share ideas with each other and interface with representatives from land management agencies and tourism organizations. It is proposed that the NPS host a one to two week training session to give the professors a better understanding of the curricula in order to be more effective in the classroom and in guiding the students to careers in these fields. The professors in turn will be invited to assist the NPS and other agencies in their interpretive training programs and tourism plans- giving insights and guidance to the professions – how to integrate indigenous ways of learning into interpretive techniques and sharing the techniques and best practices of interpreting indigenous content and stories.

**Develop Interpretive and Tourism Based Opportunities** –This component of the program is to bring various partners and programs together to work with the tribes to build capacity for tourism on the reservations. This is critical to the economic development of the Tribes, to the success of graduating students who choose not to leave their home and to preserving the culture intact on the reservation. This component creates jobs and allows the tribes to build a tourism program around their own needs, to tell their own stories to visitors and to create an authentic experience for visitors from around the world. The goal is to establish tourism programs that the tribe believes to be in harmony with their culture and their sacred teachings.

**Career Opportunities** – Another important effort in this program is to build career paths for students and graduates in the federal government. This essential piece invites indigenous individuals to seek a career that gives them the opportunity to share their voice and that of their people. A new perspective so rarely heard in national parks. The visiting public can come and hear the history of a place and a people through the eyes and experiences of those who have lived there for time immemorial. The stories go deep into the public lands of America, deep into the hearts of our first nations, deep into the meanings of the places we all call home. Students will have opportunities to work in the profession of interpretation during the summer months of their college years, gaining experience, and putting into practice what they have learned in the classroom. The indigenous interpreter will be valued for their knowledge, their perspective and their ability to communicate effectively with the visiting public. Through this program the NPS and other agencies would have a greater pool of potential candidates for critical positions where indigenous people are needed to weave a complete basket of perspectives - one that holds the truths of our nation for all people to explore. Indigenous stories are being told every day in national parks – it is a purpose of this program to give voice to those in whose homeland we reside.

As an added benefit to the graduates of this program, the NPS and partner organizations should explore ways to provide lifelong career development and participation in professional training courses. Every graduate of this program should have access to interpretive and tourism training courses that are offered by the partners of this project.

#### **Next Steps:**

- Continue to build a collaborative team of people, organizations and agencies with a common goal making this proposal a reality.
- Increase the dialogue with the TCUs and engage professors, students, tourism directors and other key Tribal offices in this effort.
- Host a workshop with TCU/NPS pilot partners and other organizations to begin to discuss the next steps and DESIGN toward fulfilling this vision.
- Build a framework to serve as a model for adoption by TCUs and other National Park Units
- Engage Federal Partners and other National Park Units in the process for fulfilling the requirements of this type of program.
- Seek funding to support this effort.