



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF TRIBAL HISTORIC
PRESERVATION OFFICERS**

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Anthony Morgan Rodman
Executive Director
White House Council on Native American Affairs
1849 C Street NW, MS – 4146 – MIB
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Mr. Rodman,

The National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (NATHPO) members were pleased to read that the White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNA) is developing a 10-year National Plan on Native Language Revitalization. Native languages are central to Tribal Nations' cultures and the revitalization of those languages is a key component of efforts to preserve and protect Tribal Nations' cultural resources and sacred places.

NATHPO is the only national organization devoted to supporting Tribal historic preservation programs. Founded in 1998, NATHPO is a 501(c)(3) non-profit membership association of Tribal government officials who implement federal and Tribal preservation laws. NATHPO empowers Tribal preservation leaders protecting culturally important places that perpetuate Native identity, resilience, and cultural endurance. Connections to cultural heritage sustain the health and vitality of Native peoples.

Because language is an intrinsic part of the culture and history of Tribal Nations, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPOs) are often leaders in efforts to preserve and revitalize Native languages. This is not one of THPOs' official responsibilities as laid out in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), so THPOs are not permitted to use money they receive from the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) to pay for language revitalization work. NATHPO members strongly urge the Biden Administration to find a way to financially support THPOs for the work they do on language revitalization.

NATHPO would highly recommend that funding for language revitalization for THPOs or other Tribal entities be distributed via non-competitive grants. The existing grants that the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Native Americans offers are valuable, but it is problematic to force Tribal Nations to compete against each other for this funding. The federal government led the effort to force Tribal members to assimilate and to erase Tribal languages. To now force Tribal Nations to compete against each other for a limited amount of money for language revitalization from that same federal government is retraumatizing and counterproductive. The act of revitalizing Tribal languages is part of the larger process of helping Tribal communities overcome the trauma of assimilation and erasure of their languages. The federal government needs to support language revitalization in a way that does not inflict further trauma on Tribal communities.

NATHPO would also recommend a high degree of flexibility in both the types of Native language revitalization programs and the manner in which they are offered. They should be available at all levels of the educational system and students should receive course credit for the classes they take to learn Native languages. We also encourage the creation of youth councils so that youth have a dedicated role in innovation and decision making. Furthermore, with many Tribal adults and children not living on Tribal lands, there should also be classes and other language revitalization resources available via the

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Internet. (We would be remiss here if we did not note the importance of strengthening Tribal Nations' access – on and off Tribal lands – to high quality broadband.) Flexibility is particularly important because it recognizes that Tribal Nations are not a monolith. The language program that works for the Ho-Chunk Nation is not the same program that works for the Yakama Nation.

Whatever programs the federal government supports should be run exclusively through Tribal Nation organizations. Unfortunately, there is a strong tendency among non-Tribal Nation members to appropriate and profit off Tribal Nations' cultures. The federal government should put safeguards in place to ensure that non-Tribal individuals do not take advantage of language revitalization programs.

Overall, it is important that language revitalization programs are part of a larger holistic effort to heal the trauma that Tribal Nations have experienced. Tribal languages cannot be separated from Tribal Nations' cultures, and the revitalization and protection of both are essential for healthy Tribal communities and individuals. For Tribal Nations, language and culture are not relics from the past but rather vital tools for strengthening their communities now and in the future.

The Biden Administration's focus on language revitalization is part of a larger reckoning with the historic role that the federal government has played in trying to eliminate Tribal Nations. As with Indian Boarding Schools, it is incumbent upon the Biden Administration to discuss that history clearly and unequivocally. NATHPO members look forward to working with the Administration as it seeks to honestly address our nation's history and, as much as possible, right the wrongs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valerie J. Grussing". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Valerie J. Grussing, PhD
Executive Director