



Navajo Thaw Project Wins Federal Grant to Support Navajo Entrepreneurs

[Tuba City] The three year economic development planning and implementation project known as the Navajo Thaw has won a federal grant of \$150,000 to provide business planning and entrepreneurship training for Navajo entrepreneurs impacted by the Bennett Freeze and the Forced Relocation eras of Navajo history. The grant is intended to support Navajo entrepreneurs and existing businesses as they look to start and expand businesses based upon the economic activity anticipated throughout the 10-Chapter region.

The grant is being awarded by USDA Rural Development through their Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program. The program is intended to foster job creation and business growth in rural communities throughout the United States. The grant was funded through the Native American Set-aside Funding. This is the third grant approved in support of efforts associated with the Navajo Thaw.

The grant award is being made to the Northern Arizona Technology and Business Incubator (known today as "NACET"), based in Flagstaff. NACET has a long-standing successful history of providing business development support throughout the region.

"We are so pleased to be a part of the Navajo Thaw effort to bring business planning and entrepreneurial services to our neighbors, the Navajo people," said Scott Hathcock, President and CEO of NACET. "The Navajo Nation has great potential, and helping to equip the people an opportunity for new jobs and better wages."

**Details forthcoming on
how Navajo
Entrepreneurs can sign up
for Business Planning
Workshops**

The Navajo Thaw is supported by Native Builders LLC, a Priority 1 Navajo company as well as Building Communities, a national economic development strategic planning company. Building Communities will coordinate with NACET to offer the business planning and entrepreneurship courses.

The regional planning effort known as the Navajo Thaw got underway in September 2019 with economic development strategic planning sessions benefitting all participating Chapters. Each of the Chapters selected "Entrepreneurial Development" as one of their focus areas for the future. Based upon the desire of the Chapters, the Navajo Thaw Support Team approached NACET to sponsor the grant.

The Navajo office leading the Navajo Thaw project is the Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office (NHLCO). "We, the Nez/Lizer Administration, have always intended the Navajo Thaw to be about plan implementation, not just planning," said Robert K. Black, Jr., Executive Director for the NHLCO. "This is one of the first implementation steps for the plan as envisioned by President Nez."

Navajo entrepreneurs participating in the program will benefit with the identification of business development opportunities, conducting research for business startups, understanding the market for businesses, understanding their business niche, developing financial spreadsheets, analyzing financial projections, gathering information and business development resources and, if desired, beginning business operations.

Building Communities has expertise in providing such business assistance in Indian Country. Building Communities utilizes the Indianpreneurship curriculum offered by ONABEN. The provision of such business counseling services is already underway at one Navajo Chapter, Nahata Dziil.

“This is a great way to transition the planning effort into implementation,” said Brian Cole, President of Building Communities. “These are challenging times to start and operate businesses. Yet we believe that there will be new opportunities for Navajo business interests given the infrastructure and public facilities funding we expect to receive through the Navajo Thaw effort.

The business planning and entrepreneurship project is expected to begin in October 2020 and last 12 months. Information about the project can be found at www.navajothaw.com and at www.moonshotaz.com.

About the Navajo Thaw

The Navajo Thaw is a project of the Navajo Hopi Land Commission Office (NHLCO) to address the needs of Navajo people impacted by the Bennett Freeze and Forced Relocation. Ten Navajo Chapters are participating in the three-year project which has developed Chapter-based economic development strategic plans and the Navajo Thaw Regional Recovery Plan. Entrepreneurial development was identified by all Chapters in the region as critical to the recovery of this region impacted by federal policy.

About Moonshot at NACET

The Northern Arizona Technology and Business Incubator was established in May 2001 to provide support to business entrepreneurs in the region. In 2006, plans began for a Business Incubator on McMillan Mesa. NACET established Moonshot, an intensive education format helping entrepreneurs to create businesses. Today, Moonshot at NACET looks to extend services including this effort with Navajo entrepreneurs.