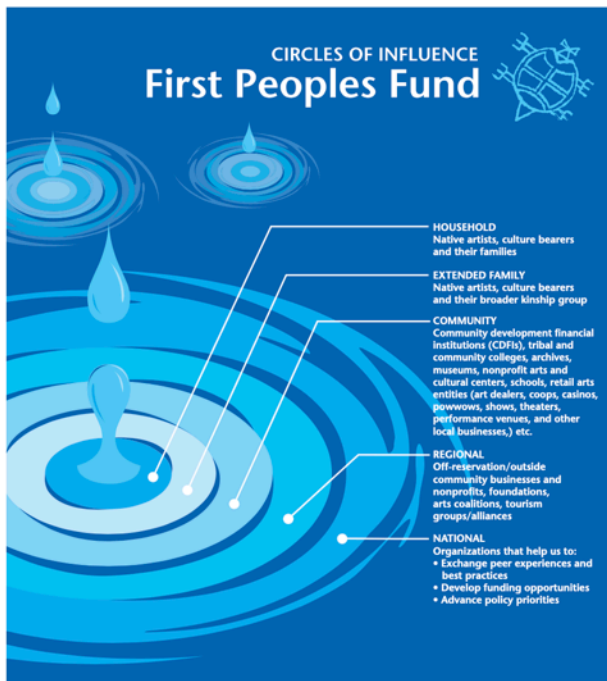


How a Rotary Global Grant Changed Economics for Native American Artists

Alcohol has destroyed many Native American lives, especially on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. For too many years, four liquor establishments in Whiteclay, Nebraska, 2 miles from the dry reservation, sold over 4 million cans of beer yearly, to local citizens. Whiteclay had a population of about 12, while Pine Ridge area is estimated to be about 3,300. In 2017, after pressure from many communities, Nebraska State Liquor Control Commission denied liquor licenses to all the stores, shutting down the sales of alcohol. Thus began a slow but positive rebuilding of the community with various initiatives to turn a terrible environment into one of hope and rebirth.



First Peoples Fund provided the following research: First Peoples Fund published its 2013 report, *Establishing a Creative Economy: Art as an Economic Engine in Native Communities*. The report laid the foundation for the concept of creative economies and provided evidence that culture bearers like Lani, when well supported, could play a viable role in restoring strong and resilient Native economies. The study focused on the Pine Ridge and Cheyenne River Indian reservations in South Dakota, both struggling with the impacts of very high poverty and generational trauma. The report identified six key



resources that artists need in order to be successful as entrepreneurs and community leaders: credit and capital, networks, markets, creative space, business training, and supplies. The study found that as artists gain sustainable and consistent access to these resources, they are better equipped to develop and grow their arts business, placing them on a path out of poverty. The Indigenous Arts Ecology model recognizes the network that is necessary to provide these resources and support the artists and culture bearers who are at the center of thriving Native communities.

From *Establishing a Creative Economy: Art as an Economic Engine in Native Communities*, July 2013 Lakota people draw strength from their “tiospaye,” a rich heritage that honors their ancestors and the next generations, an inherent respect for all living things, and “mitakuye oyasin” (the Lakota belief that we are all related). Understanding and respecting these cultural assets is critical to any economic development approach, but most especially efforts designed to build the capacity of Native artists.

Cultural Assets as a Path Out of Poverty

When targeted support is provided to Native artists, increased economic success follows. For support to be effective, it must be:

1. Culturally Appropriate

Art is embedded in Lakota society. When asked whether or not there is an art community on Pine Ridge, several artists suggest a deep connection between art and Lakota culture. According to a respondent from the Pine Ridge Reservation in Kyle, SD, “The entire reservation is an art community. It is informal – meeting with each other. There are no set dates or times. We exchange ideas, barter. It spreads through word of mouth.” To these artists, creating art is a natural extension of being Lakota. As such, creating art affords great opportunity to grasp a unique and culturally appropriate asset and turn it into a meaningful way to grow the reservation economy. It is a homegrown solution.

2. Reflective of How Households Allocate Time

Home-based business is a significant component of the Native economy on reservations, and art is the primary home-based business. Art is not merely an activity, but a job for Native artists – those who are struggling and those who have found success. Both groups spend a significant amount of time engaged in art activities: creating, marketing, traveling and selling. Despite the fact that selling art on the reservation is highly seasonal, 74 percent of emerging artists and 90 percent of FPF artists sell their work year-round. Art is a significant means of earning a living, and artists are committed to selling their work.

3. Mindful of Lakota Family Structure

Creating art is a family enterprise. Among all emerging artists surveyed, 26 percent report four or five family members involved in art. One quilter from the Pine Ridge Reservation in Porcupine, S.D., says selling from home is comfortable because “all my supplies and materials are there, as well as my family. We all work together.” Forty-five percent of emerging artists sell from their homes, with individuals contacting them directly to buy their art. Sometimes artist families divide tasks; women create the artwork and men sell it. When asked if they are likely to travel farther (more than 100 miles) to sell their work, men are slightly more inclined to do so than women (35 percent versus 25 percent).

Native arts are an untapped and undervalued resource that can be used to serve as an economic engine within a community’s broader efforts of poverty alleviation among reservation economies.

Excerpted from reports by First Peoples Fund, PO Box 2977, Rapid City, SD 57709 firstpeoplesfund.org

What Happened after 2017

In 2018, a Nebraska non-profit, Whiteclay Makerspace, Inc. purchased a former liquor store and trading post, and set to work remodeling and restoring the building to house an artists’ makerspace. Jonathan Ruybalid is the principal owner and contributes his time and energies to developing the site. The non-profit obtained USDA grants to fund the property purchase and remodeling effort. Rotarian Ina Winter, incoming District Governor for 5610 in 2019, Hot Springs, SD learned of the project, contacted Jon and offered to obtain a Rotary grant to help fund the equipment and supplies to furnish the new space. From this initial contact, Ina proceeded to develop a concept paper to the District 5610 Rotarians, to describe the project, and lay out the process that would guide the grant proposal. Looking at her incoming Rotary duties, she recruited Linda Peterson, PDG 2014-15, Rapid City Rushmore Rotarian to contribute financial guidance, computer skills, and product knowledge. In addition they were encouraged by Tom Katus, Rapid City Rushmore Rotarian and past Peace Corps volunteer. He contributed in-depth knowledge of the people and places on the reservation, having served these communities for many years.

You may ask, what did Rotarians in the District at this time, think of the proposed grant? Well, first of all, not many understood the makerspace concept. Next, leadership in D5610 questioned every aspect of the project, asking who would own the building, how would we maintain control of the equipment, who was running the website, and - most importantly - WHY did we think we needed to do this project with tightly controlled District Designated Funds? Our District had been holding back funds for loosely formatted grant proposals for years, hoping and thinking someday, one or more would develop into a real grant. Then of course, the Rotary Foundation had been revising the grant process, and many proposals simply went away, as Rotarians lacked the computer skills and initiative to make the process happen. Also, reluctance to put grant dollars into Native American communities was mostly unspoken but a real opinion among many local people. Our social services had been doing that for so long and still had very little progress to improve the lives of Native people. After all, even First Peoples Fund had been working for almost 30 years, developing research and pointing out the failures of previous societal efforts. What could our small community of Rotarians do?

Ina Winter recalls: “After a rough start getting buy-in from Rotary International District 5610 leadership, I am immensely pleased that the project has been successful and we are starting to see the enterprise starting to stand up and stand tall with outreach to local artists and craftspersons with technique classes. The positive response from Rotary Clubs in the United States and internationally is greatly appreciated and we are extremely grateful for the outpouring of goodwill and assistance from the local business community. I look forward to seeing Whiteclay Makerspace grow and develop in the coming years.”

Would a Rotary Global Grant Help Economic Development?

Yes of course! The three grant committee principals decided to build the proposal on economic development to support the artists and craftspeople who will be making use of the new makerspace. First Peoples Fund research provided solid background information to support the proposal. The project committee members worked for over a year in 2019-2020 on the community assessment, interviewing artists, gathering equipment costs, supplies list, and securing the training element. They wrote the global grant application, secured international Rotary partners with India, Australia, Greece and Mexico, and US Rotary Districts in Vermont and Texas, to provide funding in addition to District 5610 DDF. The grant was approved in August 2020, for \$57,575. The committee planned how to oversee the implementation of the grant, measure outcomes, evaluate the effectiveness of the project, and report on grant activities to TRF.

Elements of the proposed grant project included:

Equip the Artists and Craftspeople to directly impact the beneficiaries by supplying them with the needed tools and equipment to produce their art. Five centers situated at the site include: Quilting & Beading, Painting & Drawing, Photography, Woodworking, and Community rooms. A gallery of art will be in the front and supply shop areas.

Stand up a Supply Shop to provide an initial stock of the type of supplies used by local artists and craftspeople. Prices of items will be set to help replenish supplies.

Provide Training to succeed in developing their small businesses of art production, the beneficiaries have noted that training is needed in business practices, financial matters, entrepreneurship, marketing, online marketing, computer skills, and professional development.

Art Zeitler, Regional Rotary Foundation Coordinator states “This is an outstanding project for an underserved population, and I am delighted to see the support, not only from my fellow Texas Rotarians, but also Mexico, India and elsewhere in the Rotary network. This is a great opportunity for use of a Rotary Foundation Matching Grant.”

Martin Cohn, past president, Brattleboro, and Tristram Johnson, Brattleboro Sunrise, Vermont, concur: “The Rotary Clubs of Brattleboro first became aware of Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in October of 2011, making it the focus of their international work. We are proud to join with other Rotary Clubs in supporting the Whiteclay Makerspace in providing jobs and resources to artists on the reservation. We remain committed to its success.”

How was the Global Grant planned?

The *beneficiaries* of the project are the resident Lakota artists and craftspeople in need of space and other assistance to produce and sell works that will enable them to raise their level of income. A core group of quilters became regular members, working in the space and setting up sales at the site.

District 5610 project committee are the *grant administrators* serving these beneficiaries. The team worked closely with the manager and supervisor, asking for exact equipment and supply specifications to best suit their needs. The committee met regularly over Zoom to discuss activities and planning next steps. They spoke to a number of Rotary clubs, District and Zone meetings on Zoom calls, providing information about the project. Newsletters were posted online at the District website to educate and inform the District Rotarians.

Whiteclay Makerspace is the *cooperating organization* assisting District 5610 in delivering the project. Jon Ruybalid, President, has Tewa heritage, as well as Spanish going back to his ancestor who was the officer in charge of the Spanish conquistadors in Santa Fe in the early 1600s. His Spanish ancestor married a Tewa Woman and the family migrated to Colorado territory. He understands and appreciates the Native culture, encouraging and supporting with his talent, personality and resources.

At the Grand Opening on October 17, 2021, Jon Ruybalid was awarded a Paul Harris Fellow by Ina Winter, to honor his dedication to the project. Over 50 people attended the event, following the District’s Conference in Deadwood. We awarded artist toolboxes to new members, who had gathered to sell crafts under the new canopy. Food and refreshments were served all day, and tours of the site generated a lot of enthusiasm.

In 2023, Native trainers lead business classes, a high priority in the grant. Additional skills classes have continued, including beginning sewing, quilting, beading, moccasin making, hide painting, and parfleche making. Classes are scheduled throughout fall and winter months, when artists are home, making goods for the summer powwow tours. Expenses of the trainer, teachers, class supplies and refreshments were paid by the grant.

Rotarians Went to Work

Donations of cash and in-kind items were welcomed through encouraging newsletters posted to all District Rotarians and interested community members. A large donation of sewing machines, material and notions filled the rack of shelving. Linda coordinated a group of seven women to sort, cut and package the fabric for easy use by quilters. Norm Peterson worked with down-sizing hobbyists to gather donated power equipment and hand tools to furnish the woodworking shop. Ina found a retail rock and bead shop that was discontinuing beads sales, so we negotiated a price for the entire inventory for less than wholesale cost. The owner then donated cabinets, a leather sewing machine and volunteered time to setup the beads display and re-assemble the industrial leather sewing machine. She is now an enthusiastic supporter of the project. A local sewing store provided excellent pricing, training, and service on installing two large format quilting

machines. Another local building supply store custom built a work table cabinet for the sewing room at a huge discount.

Kibbe Brown, Oglala Sioux Tribe member lead the organization of the Omniciye Multicultural Rotary, satellite club to Rapid City Rushmore, 75% of whose members were predominantly Native American. Ina presented the White Clay Makerspace concept, and the members of the satellite club voted unanimously to support the project, before disbanding in 2019. Kibbe's career took her to Colorado, where she joined a Rotary club and secured a District grant to purchase equipment for the Makerspace. She is now back in Rapid City, and a member of Rapid City Rushmore club.

Tom Katus states: "As a Rotarian who was born and raised on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation and having served as a consultant to a great variety of programs on Pine Ridge over the past 50 years, I have seen many failures of external groups attempting to assist tribal people. I have also participated in some great successes; including the launching of Oglala Lakota College and the 37 colleges of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, KILI Community radio station and the development of the Rotary-sponsored Directory of Pine Ridge Area Service Projects, published by Raising Healthy Families Together, a network of more than 60 tribal, federal, state and private nonprofit service organizations serving the Pine Ridge Reservation."

Tom added, "I am perhaps appropriately nick-named as 'a doubting Thomas.' When I first met Jon Ruybalid, who purchased the previous liquor store to be converted into an arts makerspace for local Oglala people, I expressed my skepticism and teased that perhaps his philosophy of development is, 'if you build it they will come.' But because of Jon's idealism and the initial commitment of tribal craftswomen, I became a somewhat reluctant supporter of the Whiteclay Arts Makerspace and joined the Rotary District 5610 committee supporting it. Thanks to the dynamic leadership of PDGs' Ina Winter and Linda Peterson and her husband Norm, more than 20 Rotary volunteer work weekends renovating the Makerspace have occurred even in the midst of Covid impact. Now the Craftswomen are coming and I am increasingly convinced that this project is succeeding and will continue to grow to support scores of local Oglala Lakota craftspeople."

Work days for volunteers to install equipment and prepare the space were scheduled from fall of 2020, throughout 2020-2021-2022. Whiteclay is 100 miles from Rapid City, the largest city in western South Dakota, where most of the volunteer Rotarians live. Over 20 trips were made by volunteers even during the Covid pandemic, cleaning, painting, assembling equipment, stocking shelves, and working closely with the manager and supervisor to fulfill needs. The volunteers were restricted to through roads only, via checkpoints by Tribal police, which we willingly abided by, to keep the residents safe. We wore masks, gloves and brought our own snacks and drinks. Some trips were only 2-4 Rotarians, other times up to 10 people arrived to make quick work of the day's assignments.

Linda noted: "This project came about at an opportune time for Norm and I. I had just wrapped up a Rotary assignment of Zone Public Image Coordinator, and was hoping to find another way to continue contributing our talents to Rotary projects. This really fit my computer skills, and knowledge of Rotary processes and online tools. Then, when Covid hit, we had a perfect activity that was certainly social distanced, that kept us very occupied."

Norm added "Through friends and acquaintances, we found most of the power equipment to furnish the woodworking shop. The outpouring of goods from people in the community was amazing. I was happy to save the costs of this equipment from coming out of the grant funds."

The first supervisor, Candi Red Cloud, worked side by side with us, and even spent time with Linda, training on the computer software, and taking photos of artwork for the website catalog. She was diagnosed with brain tumors and subsequent surgery has sadly reduced her abilities. Another artist, Nadine Morrison, stepped up to take over the onsite supervision, and recruited more artists. She setup regular hours from 11 to 4, Wednesday thru Friday, for artists to work onsite. About 8-10 women were coming in on a regular basis.

In 2023, Holly Albers joined the staff, first as marketing, then took over supervising the Makerspace. As a business-woman and enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, she has scaled up the community connections, marketing, and recruiting more artists. She has scheduled skills classes, added Food Fridays, and many other community events.

Holly is especially proud of opening the store with plentiful supplies of fabric, notions, and beads. “The store has given local artists access to supplies, without having to drive many miles away. That saves them time and cost.” she gladly states.

One of the quilting artists gave us her story: She was a working nurse in the community, and the hours took her away from her young family. Once she had access to the sewing and quilting equipment, she has made quilting her full-time work. She says, “My mom taught me how to sew satin star quilts. Now I can make a living and be at home with my family.” Her quilts are exquisite and she spends many hours, almost every day at the Makerspace.

The grant has purchased a Direct-to-Film Printer and a supply of t-shirts and goods to imprint with art. This final equipment and supplies purchase in spring 2024, expended the grant fully. Everyone is looking forward to seeing native art and artists succeed!

The Makerspace is located off Highway 18 to SD Highway 407/Nebraska Highway 87. In 2023, Jon Ruybalid signed up the Makerspace for Nebraska Passport, a tourism connection. Dozens of people stopped by to see what they are selling/doing, and word spread in the surrounding communities, through multiple media stories.



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Whiteclay Arts Makerspace Project

Rotary District 5610 Global Grant #2010044 in Whiteclay, Nebraska USA



Community Economic Development benefiting the Lakota Native Artists and Crafts People on Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Grant funds were used to purchase equipment, supplies and store goods from 2019-2024.

Education classes for skills and financials were funded. Donations of equipment and materials were also delivered.

Supported Internationally by Rotarians in India, Australia, Greece and Mexico.

Supported in the United States by Rotarians in South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Vermont and Texas.

*Thank you for your generous donations to the project.
You help make the Arts Makerspace a success!*

This project was made possible by

**Whiteclay Arts Makerspace
& many other community supporters**

www.whiteclayredo.com www.rotary5610.org

**Rotary Project Committee: Ina Winter, Linda Peterson, Tom Katus
Makerspace President: Jon Ruybalid**

Signage at the Whiteclay Makerspace noting Rotary's Contributions.