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# MINNESOTA INDIAN AFFAIRS COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE REPORT

2019-20



MINNESOTA

INDIAN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

# THE MINNESOTA INDIAN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Established in 1963 as the first council of its type in the U.S., the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council (MIAC) is the official liaison between Tribal Nations in Minnesota and the state of Minnesota. MIAC is mandated to make recommendations on legislation that is important to tribal governments and American Indian people and improve services between the state and American Indian communities. MIAC provides a forum for and advises state government on issues of concern to American Indian tribes and communities, develops and advocates for state legislation, and administers cultural resource preservation programs and the Dakota and Ojibwe Language Revitalization Grant program.

## MIAC'S MISSION

To protect the sovereignty of the 11 Minnesota tribes and ensure the well-being of all American Indian citizens throughout the state of Minnesota.

## MIAC'S VISION

To strive for social, economic, and political justice for all American Indian people living in Minnesota, while embracing our traditional cultural and spiritual values.

## Tribal Nations

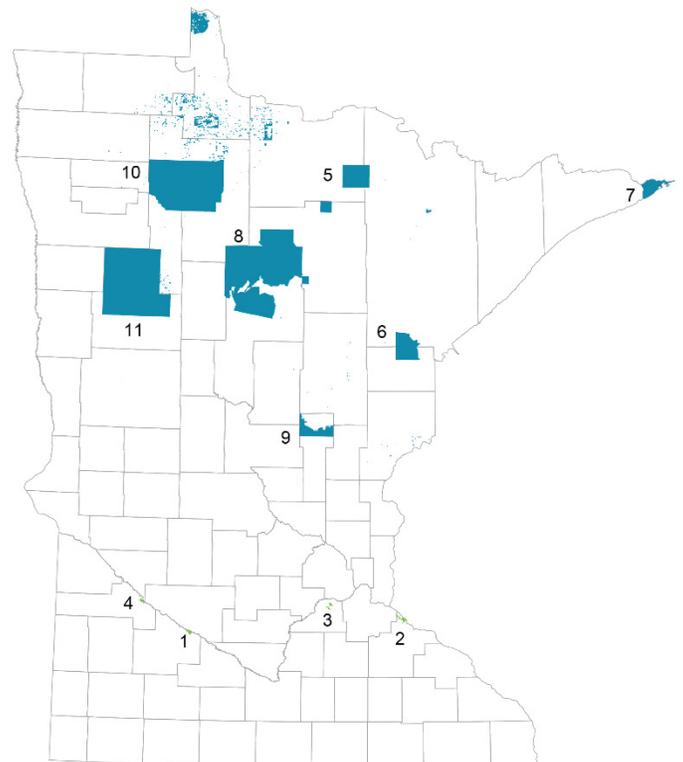
There are 11 Tribal Nations that share geography with the state of Minnesota:

Dakota nations:

1. Lower Sioux Community
2. Prairie Island Indian Community
3. Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
4. Upper Sioux Community

Ojibwe nations:

5. Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
6. Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
7. Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe
8. Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
9. Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
10. Red Lake Nation
11. White Earth Nation



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Executive Board (Voting Members)

- Board Chair: President Robert Larsen, Lower Sioux Community
- Board Vice-Chair: Shelley Buck, Prairie Island Indian Community
- Chairwoman Cathy Chavers, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Chairman Kevin Dupuis, Sr., Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Chairman Robert “Bobby” Deschampe, Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe
- Chairman Faron Jackson, Sr., Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
- Chief Executive Melanie Benjamin, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- Secretary Samuel Strong, Red Lake Nation
- Secretary/Treasurer Rebecca Crooks-Stratton, Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
- Chairman Michael Fairbanks, White Earth Nation

## Non-Voting Board Members

- Alice Roberts-Davis, Commissioner of Administration
- Paul Schnell, Commissioner of Corrections
- Mary Cathryn Ricker, Commissioner of Education
- Jan Malcolm, Commissioner of Health
- Steve Grove, Commissioner of Employment and Economic Development
- Jennifer Leimaile Ho, Commissioner of Minnesota Housing Finance Agency
- Jodi Harpstead, Commissioner of Human Services
- Sarah Strommen, Commissioner of Natural Resources
- Margaret Anderson Kelliher, Commissioner of Transportation
- Rebecca Lucero, Commissioner of Human Rights
- Larry Herke, Commissioner of Veterans Affairs
- Mark Phillips, Commissioner of the Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation
- Representative Mary Kunesh-Podein (41B, DFL)
- Representative Dean Urdahl (18A, R)
- Senator Gary H. Dahms (16, R)
- Senator Patricia Torres Ray (63, DFL)

## Urban Indian Advisory Board

### *Board members:*

- Jason Loons, Duluth representative
- Charleen Ann Day-Castro, Minneapolis representative
- Dr. Kate Beane, Minneapolis representative
- John Day, Saint Paul representative
- Beverly Bushyhead, Chair, Saint Paul representative

*“Something we’ve seen is just being able to listen creates social reform in a way. [For example,] there was an elder group on the agenda, and when the tribes heard the group was coming, it overlapped tribal issues...it pressured some action to address an issue that wasn’t addressed appropriately... it’s that kind of influence. I don’t know if that was intended, but it’s what we’ve noticed.”*

– Urban Indian Advisory Board member

## MIAC Staff

- Shannon Geshick- Executive Director, Grants and Legislative Director
- Melissa Cerda- Cultural Resources Specialist, Senior
- Dylan Goetsch- Cultural Resources Specialist
- Mario Uribe- Cultural Resources Specialist
- Office Manager- Melanie Franks

## About MIAC

MIAC operates on a unique level compared to Minnesota's other boards and councils because Tribal Nations and state government operate on a government-to-government level and MIAC's work is centered on that relationship. MIAC advocates for funding and administers a language preservation and revitalization grant program that was funded at about 3.15 million-dollars in this biennium. Additionally, MIAC responds to, monitors disturbances of American Indian cemeteries, and is the regulatory agency for reburials under the Private Cemeteries Act. These legislative mandates create distinctive and important responsibilities for the MIAC staff to fulfill.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, MIAC had many achievements in the 2019-20 fiscal year. Prior to the start of the pandemic, MIAC worked with the Weisman Art Museum to conduct a full inventory of pottery and objects from the Mimbres collection. MIAC also added information about additional cultural sites to the Office of the State Archeologist website, which will help prevent inadvertent cemetery or other cultural site disturbances. In March 2020, MIAC's response to the pandemic included a significant website upgrade to provide timely information regarding health and safety and public benefit resources for individuals and families.

MIAC also reformatted quarterly meetings to a virtual platform. This successful transition allowed hundreds of participants to still attend the board meetings. The virtual meetings ensured that the board was able to convene and added access for people that may not have had access previously. MIAC also participated in daily calls with the Governor's Office and Tribal Leaders for the first few months of the pandemic and has continued to participate in calls when offered. In addition to the COVID-19 response, MIAC continued to increase communication with the Governor's office and continued work on a large cemetery disturbance.

This report summarizes MIAC's work this fiscal year and highlights key accomplishments.

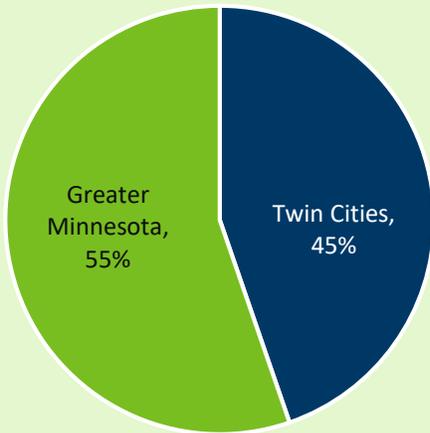
As in previous years, stakeholder input suggests that MIAC needs additional resources to meet the legislative mandates. Cultural preservation staff are stretched thin and are not able to rigorously follow through on all possible cemetery site disturbances, especially when they are in the midst of a large project. This is particularly pressing as cemetery disturbances are increasing. Additionally, the grants coordinator and legislative director is a combined role. However, each area has extensive work and responsibility for MIAC to create roles for a full-time grants coordinator and a full-time legislative director. As MIAC broadens the relationship with the Governor's office and state agency commissioners, more demands will be put on their time. Increased funding would allow MIAC to add staff and better fulfill the responsibilities of each role.

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

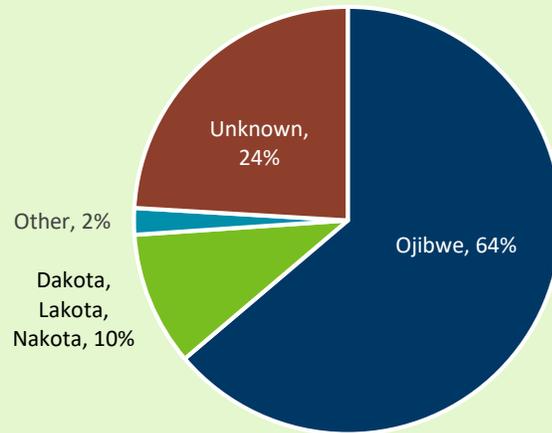
Wilder Research was contracted by MIAC to compile information from staff and interview key stakeholders to summarize MIAC's work and impacts during the previous fiscal year.

# TOTAL POPULATION OF AMERICAN INDIANS IN MINNESOTA: 168,465

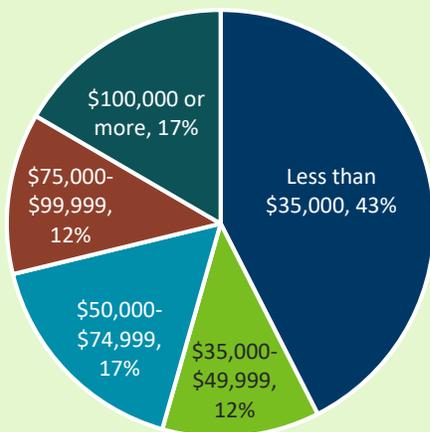
## I. Population by geography<sup>1</sup>



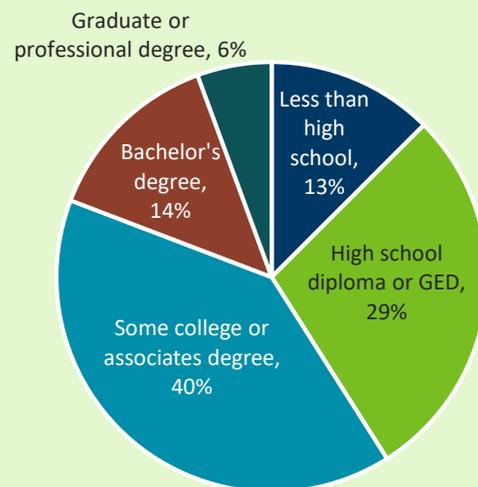
## II. Tribal grouping for individuals who identified their race as American Indian Alone<sup>2</sup>



## III. Household income<sup>1</sup>



## IV. Educational attainment (population age 25 and older)<sup>1</sup>



Source: <sup>1</sup> 2013-2017: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey

<sup>2</sup> 2019: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-Year estimates. Note: The census only records tribal affiliation for those who only report their race/ethnicity as American Indian alone. The census labels tribal grouping as Chippewa (Ojibwe) and Sioux (Dakota, Lakota, Nakota), Wilder has changed the terms in the chart to reflect accepted terms.

# RECENT EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN MIAC'S OPERATIONS

## Improved communication with the Governor's Office

To increase the frequency and consistency of communication from the Governor's office, MIAC staff and the Governor's office participate in bi-weekly meetings. These meetings help keep the Governor's office up to date on tribal concerns and help MIAC stay abreast of important information. This level of communication has been particularly helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic. These regularly scheduled meetings began in March and will continue indefinitely.

## Executive Order 19-24

In April 2019, Governor Walz signed Executive Order 19-24, an update to Governor Dayton's Executive Order 13-10. The updated executive order requires state agencies to recognize the government-to-government relationship between Tribal Nations and the state government by formalizing tribal consultation policies.

This is a step forward for the government-to-government relationship between the state of Minnesota and Tribal Nations as it creates avenues for timely and meaningful communication, coordination, collaboration, and consultation between these governments. Guidelines for the consultation policy require that agencies must meet with each Minnesota Tribal Nation to identify priority issues with the goal of aligning agency efforts with the needs of Tribal Nations. To facilitate this process each agency must create a liaison position who advises each respective agency commissioner on any program, project, or initiative that may affect tribes. The tribal liaison may arrange, participate in, or facilitate government-to-government consultation meetings.



Attendees at the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Dinner. Photo credit Shannon Geshick



2019 Tribal Liaison Panel. Photo credit Holly Rosendahl

## Increased attendance at board meetings by state agency commissioners

During the 2019-20 fiscal year, agency commissioners and their staff prioritized attending MIAC quarterly meetings. Interview respondents reported that the presence of state agency commissioners at board meetings has improved the relationship between tribes and the state. Commissioners are non-voting members of the MIAC board, and because of the government-to-government relationship between the state of Minnesota and the Tribal Nations, they report to the Tribal Leaders at MIAC. By attending the board meetings, the commissioners both hear about issues important to Tribal Nations directly from tribal representatives and are held accountable to make progress on these issues. This also facilitates collaboration by breaking attendees out of their usual spheres of work and provides opportunities to hear about diverse concerns and perspectives.

*“They’ve [MIAC] become a stronger voice...advocating for issues and things that effect all of the tribes... It feels like there is more collaboration across the different tribes especially with the leaders when it comes to certain areas of concern or support. MIAC is building a stronger relationship with the governor and administration.”* – House Representative

*“The commissioners know they are going to have to face the MIAC board and the committee members face to face. [When they come to the meetings], they hear the sound of the voice, the body language, and it’s more impactful to hear it from those individuals directly, rather than reading it in a report, or a phone call, when you hear about it and then it’s gone. [Having them attend meetings] builds and solidifies the voice of our Native people.”* – House Representative

## Website refresh

MIAC partnered with Wilder Research to revamp the MIAC website to become a one-stop shop for the public and Tribal Nations on COVID-19 information and public benefits. MIAC’s website now shares information and programs from several agencies, including Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, Minnesota Department of Health, and federal agencies. This served as a resource to the public and Tribal Nations on topics such as public health updates, emergency funds, and job postings.

## Virtual board meetings

MIAC began hosting its quarterly board meetings in a virtual format. Virtual meetings have allowed for greater participation from the public by eliminating the need to travel. Because the meetings span several days, a virtual format allows participants to come in and out of the meeting according to their schedule, allowing attendees who normally would not have time to travel and attend the whole meeting to participate. MIAC also began posting board meeting minutes and the agenda on the website for public access. This allows for greater transparency to the public about what is discussed at the meetings and decisions made by the board.



# CULTURAL RESOURCE PRESERVATION AND GRAVES PROTECTION

Indian Mounds Regional Park, St Paul, MN, USA. By McGhieever - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15181134>

## Threatened sites

The MIAC Cultural Resources team aims to protect and preserve all American Indian human remains and cemeteries older than 50 years in the state of Minnesota to fulfill the requirements of the Field Archaeology Act (M. S. 138.31-.42), the Private Cemeteries Act (M. S. 307.08), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (Pub. L. No. 101-60, 104 Stat. 3048 [1990]). The MIAC team and osteology lab staff respond to unintentional disturbances of cemeteries to identify, analyze, repatriate, and rebury remains, in collaboration with the Office of the State Archaeologist and Tribal Nations.

The MIAC team advocates for tribal interests and the respectful and culturally responsive treatment of human remains, while mediating between stakeholders to identify mutually beneficial solutions. This includes incorporating American Indian knowledge into the archeological process. This requires proactive relationship building with tribes and state agencies, as well as consulting, monitoring, and reviewing proposed construction projects and projects in process (e.g., conducting cemetery assessments to delineate legal boundaries). Interview respondents noted that even though MIAC staff could not always be on-site at recovery, they were always responsive to questions and concerns from those who were on-site. MIAC staff ensure compliance with state and federal laws and provide culturally responsive preservation and repatriation. MIAC staff also support Tribal Historical Preservation Officers in these efforts.

*“MIAC plays an important role in trying to protect and preserve burials everywhere... Some may look at [American Indian cemetery sites] like older burials, but it’s the same as would you want your relative’s burial to be disturbed? I assume everyone would say no. As progress happens with roads and other mass transit, it can be good for the state... but we have to do our best to preserve and protect our burials and treat all burial lands with as much respect as possible. MIAC is a huge part of that whole process.”*

– Archeological partner

*“MIAC did a presentation [to train field staff] on all this information. I never knew how many sites there were, or that this was even happening outside my own walls. The presentation that they gave was so informative and I was writing the whole time! My mind was blown by it... and it got me interested in doing this type of work.”*

– Archeological partner

*“They [MIAC] are the experts in educating everyone else and giving advice to what we should do. We look to them. There are archeologists and specialists, but as far as cultural resources and being Indigenous, and having a whole other insight of your cultural history, that sensitive information, they look at it differently.”*

– Archeological partner

## EXAMPLES OF MIAC CULTURAL PRESERVATION WORK IN ACTION

### WHITEFISH RECOVERY AND ADJUSTMENTS TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A cemetery disturbance occurred near construction of a Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT)-owned bridge over Whitefish Creek in Mille Lacs County. Starting in fall 2019, MIAC work with Hamline University, four Dakota tribes, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, private contractors, and MnDOT to ensure the recovery process is done quickly and respectfully. Recovery is expected to finish in winter 2021.



Jayson Gill (left) and Josh Gill (right) demonstrating new distancing and PPE procedures for archeological projects. Photo credit Dylan Goetsch

One of the biggest challenges of the project was continuing the recovery process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The March 2020 stay-at-home order stopped work for six weeks. After the order was lifted, crews returned to work with new precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The new precautions include wearing a mask at all times on the site, spacing 10 feet apart, ensuring each crew member has their own equipment, and running air purifiers in the green houses. MIAC worked to design and implement these new precautions with project partners. Additionally, they facilitated discussions between archeological contractors to make sure that everyone was working together to keep staff at the site safe.

In addition to new COVID-19 procedures, MIAC also trained 10 new archeological contractors to conduct cemetery recoveries. Expanding the number of contractors able to work on cemetery recoveries is critical, as the number of American Indian cemetery disturbances has increased over the past few years. In addition to building the capacity of contractors to conduct cemetery recoveries, MIAC provided trainings for tribal members so that they have the skills to conduct or assist with future recovery projects.

### MIMBRES COLLECTION

In fiscal year 2019-20, MIAC's Cultural Resource Preservation team saw the beginning of a resolution to a decade's long effort to get the Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota to return items in their collections that are of cultural significance to Pueblo communities to which they belong. In the 1920-1930s, the University of Minnesota, along with several other institutions, conducted archeological excavations in the Mimbres Valley in New Mexico. From these excavations, the University obtained American Indian human remains, funerary objects, and pottery.

In 1989, under Minnesota Statutes 307.08 (the Private Cemeteries Act), the University of Minnesota transferred all human remains to MIAC. The funerary objects remained in the collection at the Weisman. Starting in 2013, MIAC staff consulted with the Pueblo communities, who trace their ancestry back to those living in the Mimbres Valley, to figure out how to repatriate the human remains and funerary objects. Through these consultations, MIAC staff learned they would need a complete inventory of the funerary objects held at the Weisman. It took MIAC staff many years of consulting with the Weisman, but in 2018-19 the inventory began. MIAC collaborated with staff from the University of Minnesota's Anthropology Department to help create a more detailed inventory database to help with the repatriation effort. The inventory will allow the Pueblo communities to understand what is in the collection. Once the inventory is complete, MIAC staff will proceed with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act process, including more consultation and conversation with the Pueblo communities.

MIAC staff worked as advocates for the Pueblo communities to encourage the Weisman to initiate the inventory and adhere to the Private Cemetery Act and NAGPRA. MIAC staff maintained this effort over decades and collaborated with many stakeholders to move the inventory and repatriation process forward.

## TIME DEVOTED TO RESPONDING TO INQUIRIES

MIAC Cultural Resource Preservation staff often spend time answering inquiries from the public related to cultural site disturbances. These are not formal reviews, but helping private entities understand if there is a protected site on their private property, what to do with inherited remains, and other questions. Responding to these inquiries can take about 20 hours per week. Handling these inquiries is another way MIAC works with external partners to help prevent disturbances and work with protected areas and items in a culturally sensitive way.

## Efforts to strengthen the Cultural Resource Preservation and Graves Protection operations

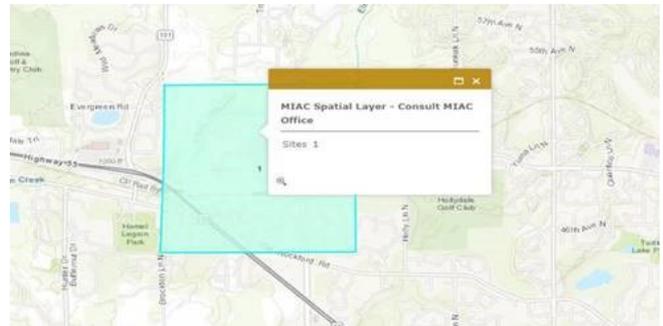
### *Increased communication with MnDOT*

MIAC and MnDOT have increased their communication over the past fiscal year in an effort to be more proactive about preventing disturbances. Preventing cemetery disturbances is important to both American Indian people living in Minnesota and the state as a whole. Because MnDOT is fiscally liable for the recovery process for sites they disturb, working with MIAC to prevent these disturbances will save taxpayer dollars. MIAC hopes to continue to build this working relationship to both address the increasing number of disturbances and prevent future disturbances.

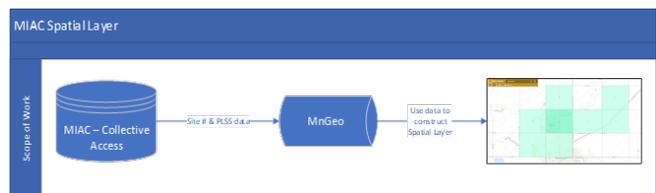
### *Inclusion of additional data on Office of the State Archeologist Portal*

MIAC added a Geographic Information System (GIS) data layer to the Office of the State Archeologist (OSA) portal that provides additional information about potential American Indian cultural sites. This layer adds additional sites from MIAC records to create a more comprehensive map of cultural sites across the state. This layer includes archaeological and cultural site locations of special concern to MIAC. These may be areas in which MIAC has had direct involvement and maintains a set of records or identified Traditional Cultural Properties. The intent of this layer is to encourage agencies and individuals to consult with MIAC and the OSA when a project is in an area that has already been identified as a cultural site. The information directs people to reach out to MIAC with questions or concerns, creating an avenue for proactive care of cultural sites.

Community members have already used this data and reached out to MIAC with questions or requests. MIAC worked closely with the OSA to build this layer, continuing to collaborate with government agencies to prevent cemetery disturbances.



Office of the State Archeologist Portal with MIAC special layer highlighted. Image by Melissa Cerda



The steps taken to create the MIAC layer and integrate it into the Office of the State Archeologist Portal. Image by Credit Melissa Cerda

## 2020-21 MIAC Cultural Resource Preservation Priorities

- Continuing to build a strong working relationship with OSA, specifically regarding responsibilities under state law, data privacy, and data sharing ethics
- Continuing to build better relationships with state agencies, contractors, and the public to proactively prevent cemetery disturbances and effectively respond to the increasing number of disturbances
- Continuing to train tribal members in cemetery recovery work to build capacity among community members to engage in cultural site preservation for their communities
- Working with interested stakeholders to prioritize for legislative initiatives

*“MIAC is willing to push to acknowledge the tribal community and history. Not all history is fancy buildings...there’s an older history there that’s forgotten about...MIAC creates that connection, and helps to speak or represent these communities and their interests.”*

– Archeological partner



# DAKOTA AND OJIBWE LANGUAGE PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION GRANTS PROGRAM

Gordy Adams demonstrates how to clean fish at Spring Camp in Nett Lake. Photo credit Charles Wagner

## MISSION OF MIAC'S LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE

Protect and empower American Indian children, parents, and elders in the continuing development of our language, thus maintaining tribal sovereignty.

Revival of the Dakota and Ojibwe language through immersion and other language acquisition strategies is a critical component of revitalizing and preserving the culture and traditions of the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples as well as an impactful way to exercise tribal sovereignty. It is particularly important and time-sensitive for Dakota Tribal Nations because there are only a few Dakota first language speakers still living in Minnesota. This means the Dakota language is close to becoming an extinct language.<sup>1</sup> In 2019-20, MIAC distributed and oversaw \$3.15 million in funding for language revitalization programs. The funding comes through the Legacy Amendment appropriation in the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, which is funded by Minnesota's state gas tax. There are three funding streams: a competitive grant, a grant for immersion schools, and a grant for Tribal Nations. To apply for the grant, organizations propose a project that has a long-term vision to achieve language proficiency and uses short-term steps to achieve the vision. Organizations also develop an evaluation component so MIAC can learn what is successful and sustainable for Dakota and Ojibwe language revitalization. These programs operate across the state and serve a diverse group of American Indian communities.

Past recipients of the grant say immersion schools in Minnesota are creating young Indigenous language speakers, acting as a model for schools in other states and in Canada, and turning language students into language teachers. As youth participate in immersion schools or language programs, they are able to bring what they have learned into their home and community and preserve Indigenous language for generations to come.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dakhota.org/status-of-dakota-language/>

## Changes due to COVID-19 pandemic

Grantees submitted proposals prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so many had to adjust their spending and programming to accommodate distance learning. This caused a delay in figuring out how to wrap up funding for the grants. However, grantees reported they were able to adjust their lessons to an online format. With the shift to online communication, some grantees were able to work with elders from farther away than they otherwise would have been able to. Connecting with these elders allowed grantees to expand the number of Dakota and Ojibwe speakers they worked with.

## 2019-2020 Language Grant and Appropriations

- American Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center - \$80,248
- Fond du Lac Tribal College - \$149,516
- Dakhóta lápi Okhódakičhiye - \$150,000
- Minneapolis American Indian Center - \$136,663
- Nay Ah Shing/Pine Grove Schools - \$132,393
- St. Paul Public Schools - \$148,753
- Dakota Wicohan - \$150,000
- White Earth Tribal College and Community College - \$107,478

## Immersion Programs

- Bdote Early Learning
- Çañsayapi Waçanyeža Owayawa Oçi, Lower Sioux Early Head Start and Head Start
- Niiganne at Bug O’Nay Geshig School in Leech Lake
- Wasaabiik Immersion at Red Lake

*“The impact of language programs goes beyond those directly learning and ripples out to their family and friends. It helps bring the language back into the community so everyone can pick it up.”*

– Language grantee

*“Something we’ve been talking about when we started the grant is how it’s going to affect children and us. There’s a lot of mental disorders and addiction issues, and children were growing up not knowing who they are and their language. That makes it hard to know where you’re from. Where do I fit in? We want to give our children a strong base. This was something we had to fight for in our adulthood – is something that we had to reclaim. We don’t want our children to fight for that. They won’t have to fight to learn language and know cultural traditions. [That will] lessen the severity of colonization and [its] impacts, not only for our children, but also healing parents, families, and elders.”*

– Language grantee



One of MIAC's 2019 legislative accomplishments was coordinating Sovereignty Day in the House of Representatives. Pictured is the flag procession into the House Chambers. Photo credit Paul Battaglia, House Photography

MIAC staff are a resource for Minnesota legislators to understand tribal concerns and priorities, directly advocate for legislation, and work to support legislative efforts that align with MIAC's mission. MIAC also monitors and communicates pertinent legislation to Tribal Nations and keeps the MIAC executive board informed of legislative happenings that may affect their Nation's communities. Oftentimes MIAC staff work in partnership with the tribes to gather information and ensure effective communications.



Indigenous Language Bill testimony with MAIC legislative board member Rep. Kunesh-Podein, February 2020. Photo credit Shannon Geshick

## Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers Act

In collaboration with the state's ethnic councils, MIAC staff helped draft and advocate for the Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers Act of 2020. The bill included provisions for a variety of initiatives with the goal of increasing the number of American Indian teachers and teachers of color in areas facing teacher shortages, with a focus on expanding pathways to teaching, strengthening teacher retention efforts, and providing incentives to attract more students into the teaching profession through scholarships and grants. The bill has been presented to the legislature for several years in a row, and while it has not yet been passed into law, these efforts have helped build awareness around the shortage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota. Through this long-term effort to pass the bill, the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers, of which MIAC is a part, is building a united effort to address the shortage systematically.

In 2019-20, MIAC staff worked with the Minnesota Department of Education and the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers to: participate in meetings with key legislators and state agencies, help draft the bill, provide joint testimony and joint letters for the bill, and communicate with Tribal Nations to help garner support and increase support.

## Changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Many legislative efforts paused at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 because the Minnesota Legislature had to switch to an online format and had innumerable new issues to address. For example, there were a couple of MIAC bills, such as the Indigenous Heritage Language Bill, that legislature did not hear because COVID-19 mitigation took priority.

*"As a state legislator, I rely on MIAC for information on certain issues I'm not familiar with or if people bring me ideas for legislation. It's a great resources for me to learn more about the issues at hand as well as find out the level of support the different tribes have on specific issues.[MIAC is] a good resource on all things Native in our state."* – House Representative



## EDUCATION

Educational panels from the *Why Treaties Matter* exhibit displayed at White Earth Nation's Tribal Headquarters, photo courtesy of Casey DeMarais, MN Humanities Center

### Why Treaties Matter: Self-Government in the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations exhibit

The *Why Treaties Matter* exhibit details how the treaties tribes made with the federal government affirmed tribal government sovereignty -- tribal governments oversee their own land, resources, economies, and people. A permanent version of the exhibit is installed at the Minnesota State Capitol, and a traveling version is available on request, for example by tribal entities, colleges, or local governments. Local community engagement events are often held in conjunction with the exhibit.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the traveling *Why Treaties Matter* exhibit has not been on display due to safety restrictions. Once the pandemic is over, the exhibit will be available again. MIAC also has plans to purchase Dakota and Ojibwe language panels to compliment the exhibit or as a stand-alone exhibit in the upcoming year.

### Tribal-State Relations Training

Developed in collaboration with the MnDOT and the University of Minnesota - Duluth, the Tribal-State Relations Training prepares state agency employees to work effectively with tribal governments. The training promotes respectful collaboration among tribes and state agencies and provides an overview of American Indian tribal governments, federal Indian policy, and tribal sovereignty. The goals for the training are to create unique, mutually beneficial partnerships, build respectful relationships between the state and Tribal Nations, and create an enduring commitment by the state to learn about tribal governments.



Tribal State Relations Training 2019 Prairie Island Indian Community. Photo credit Holly Rosendahl

Over 3,400 state employees have attended the training to date. Historically, the training was focused on MnDOT employees, but with the signing of Executive Order 19-24, all agencies are required to have certain staff complete the training. These staff include all commissioners, deputy commissioners, assistant commissioners, and any staff member whose work may affect Tribal Nations. While trainings happened during the first part of the fiscal year, most were canceled in early 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. MIAC is planning virtual sessions in 2021.

## Other activities

### *Legislative Coordination Commission*

In July - August 2019, MIAC staff sat in on a series of meetings for the legislative coordination commission, which included an expert panel discussing natural resources. MIAC staff reminded the commission to consult with Tribal Nations about the use of natural resources even if they are not legally mandated to do so.

### *Tribal State Relations Implementation Team*

MIAC's executive director sat on the hiring panel for the Tribal State Relations Implementation team, a two-person department funded through a two-year grant housed in the Governor's office. These two positions work for the Governor's office to design new practices for commissioners, state agencies, and tribal liaisons consulting with Tribal Nations. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, these new staff worked diligently to communicate with the 11 Tribal Nations to ensure everyone was up to date on COVID-19 response during a time of changing conditions. These staff members also made sure that Tribal Nations were aware of available resources, and gave Tribal Leaders a platform to express their concerns and needs. These meetings also included federal partners from Representative Betty McCollum's and Senator Tina Smith's offices.

### *MIAC staff worked with state agency tribal liaisons, tribal leaders, and staff from the Governor's office*

In September 2019, MIAC staff worked with state agency tribal liaisons, tribal leaders, and staff from the Governor's office to review tribal consultation policy for 24 state agencies. These policies varied as some agencies have long-standing consultation policies, while others were submitting newly developed policies. MIAC staff and other review team reviewed, ranked, and provided feedback on policies to ensure ongoing effectiveness. This was a tedious process that will undoubtedly assure strengthened government-to-government relations and a greater reflection of Tribal Nations' needs and priorities reflected in state agency initiatives.

MIAC staff also collaborated with the Governor's office and Minnesota's ethnic councils in various ways, including:

- MIAC staff worked with the Governor's office to help coordinate the 2020 Governor's Tribal Summit
- MIAC participated in calls with Minnesota's ethnic councils to stay informed of the concerns and policies of the groups they represented and coordinate with these groups on policy efforts



Governor's Tribal Summit. Photo credit Shannon Geshick

## **Wilder Research**

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451 Lexington Parkway North  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-280-2700  
[www.wilderresearch.org](http://www.wilderresearch.org)

**About this report:** Wilder Research was contracted to complete this report on behalf of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council. We conducted 10 interviews and reviewed a variety of documentation and notes from MIAC staff about their work over the past year, as well as consulted with MIAC staff about which work and priorities should be emphasized in this legislative cycle.

For more information about this report, contact Nicole MartinRogers at Wilder Research, 651-280-2682.

Authors: Nicole MartinRogers and Alice Lubeck

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