

A Proposal for a Pilot Planning Process for Western Navajo Agency

Capitalizing on the Decentralization Process to Mobilize Navajo Nation

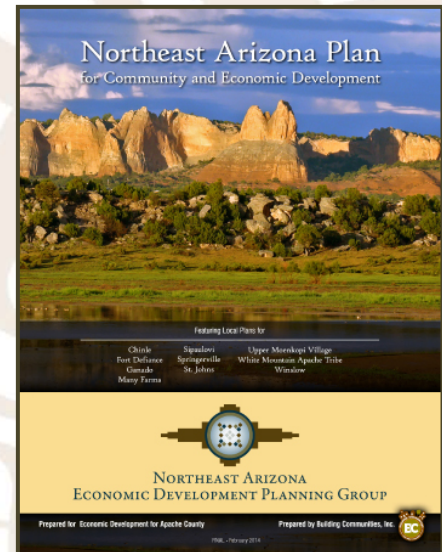
Background and General Recommendations

Since January 2011, Building Communities has been working in and around Navajo Nation to assist Chapters and communities to envision and enact their future. Specifically, this work has yielded Chapter-based community and economic development strategic plans for Bodaway Gap, Chinle, Ft.



Defiance, Ganado and Many Farms.

Building Communities also facilitated and reported-out the results of the August 2012 Navajo Nation Building Summit in Tsaile, Arizona. Finally, Building Communities produced the HUD-funded **Northeast Arizona Plan for Community and Economic Development** which benefited Navajo Nation.



Through this work, Building Communities has developed many positive working relationships with Navajo leaders at the National, Agency and Chapter levels.

Building Communities believes that the recent effort toward decentralization, if properly executed, could yield substantial community and economic development benefits for people throughout Navajo Nation.

Building Communities also believes that for Navajo Nation and its people to be successful, seven conditions must be in place:

1. **Competent Local Governance and Capacity**
2. **Effective National Economic Development Programming**
3. **Effective National/Agency/Chapter Communications and Processes**
4. **Strategic Local Decision Making**
5. **Transparent National Decision Making**
6. **Sound Project Execution**
7. **Routine Reporting**

Note: Building Communities is not necessarily asserting that these conditions are not currently in place for Navajo Nation. Rather, Building Communities asserts that these conditions are critical for all nations, states and communities that desire effective economic development advancement.

Seven Conditions for Successful Community Advancement

1. Competent Local Governance and Capacity. Navajo Nation Chapters have varying levels of local governing capacity. Chapters that have attained certain governing capacity thresholds have become certified by Navajo Nation. Continuing efforts by Navajo Nation to provide training and materials to increase capacity is much needed and warranted. Building Communities has been privileged to be a part of such capacity building work.

2. Effective National Economic Development Programming. Community and economic development programming should be tailored to inspire strategic project advancement throughout Navajo Nation. Chapters should be encouraged to collaborate within their respective Agencies, perhaps developing multi-Chapter regions within Agencies to conduct strategic planning and to advance projects. Building Communities outlined a methodology for such programming in its January 2013 *Proposal to Advance Navajo Nation*.

3. Effective National/Agency/Chapter Communications and Processes. All Chapters should have an equal chance to understand and compete for community and economic development resources offered by Navajo Nation. Sound existing communication channels, largely through Agencies, should be utilized for such communication. Program eligibility, deadlines and other requirements should be clearly articulated well in advance of program application deadlines.

4. Strategic Local Decision Making. Chapters—and better yet, multi-Chapter regions—should conduct an appropriate strategic planning process that yields prioritized strategies and projects for community and economic development. Eligibility for Navajo Nation community and economic development funding should only be made available after such strategic planning has been completed and well documented.

5. Transparent National Decision Making. Navajo Nation should establish a comprehensive, transparent economic development program and funding process that gives Chapters throughout the Nation an equal chance to compete for program funding. Decision makers allocating such funding should be broadly represented geographically throughout Navajo Nation.

6. Sound Project Execution. Chapters or Chapter-regions that have received community and economic development funding should be responsible for the proper execution of projects, including procurement processes, funds management and other necessary activities. Expertise at the National and Agency levels should be made available to Chapters and Chapter-regions to assist in project execution.

7. Routine Reporting. Chapters and Chapter-regions should be responsible for accurate and timely reporting of project advancement and results.

A Specific and Timely Recommendation for Western Navajo Agency

The recent work of Building Communities has been primarily with the Western Agency (and the Bodaway-Gap Chapter). Lessons learned from this activity include:

- Western Navajo Agency has very competent, professional staffing to assist Chapters with advancing community and economic development priorities.
- Navajo Nation has proven very responsive to local planning and project priorities, especially as exemplified with the Bodaway-Gap Chapter grant application to the Arizona Commerce Authority for Rural Economic Development Grant program funding.
- Efforts to convene and work with multiple Chapters in the Western Agency December 10-11, 2013 were well received, with Chapters expecting to continue to collaborate for community and economic development benefit.
- Various Navajo Nation-led initiatives are underway that could continue to bolster strategic planning efforts.
- Funding for the Former Bennett Freeze area, unique to Western Navajo Agency, can usher in a new era of successful project development, especially for housing.
- Building Communities has the relationships and capacity needed to become the catalyst to leverage all of these circumstances into meaningful strategic project advancement throughout Western Navajo Agency.

An Immediate Opportunity to Leverage Federal Funding. The US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families recently announced the availability of funding from the Social and Economic Development Strategies (SEDS) program. The application deadline is April 15, 2014.

The purpose of the SEDS program is to promote economic and social self-sufficiency for American Indians. The Administration for Native Americans (ANA) is interested in supporting community-driven projects designed to grow local economies, increase the capacity of tribal governments, strengthen families, preserve Native cultures and increase self-sufficiency and community well-being.

The ANA is expected to make 22 awards averaging \$225,000 for this purpose. According to the ANA website, not one grant award from the SEDS program has been made in Northern Arizona for at least five years. This represents a significant opportunity for a well-crafted grant application in the current funding cycle.

Building Communities proposes to extend the work of the Steering Committee that was formed from the December 10-11, 2013 ***Capacity and Community Building: Envisioning and Implementing the Future for the Western Navajo Agency Chapters*** event. This would be done by assisting the Western Navajo Agency, through Navajo Nation, to prepare and submit a SEDS grant application.

Anticipated Outcomes and Benefits from Pilot Planning Effort

Overarching outcomes of the SEDS-funded initiative would be to:

1. Reinforce the existing collaboration already established
2. Strengthen and broaden the existing Steering Committee, ensuring that all Chapters are effectively represented
3. Conduct community and economic development strategic planning activity in other (non-Bodaway-Gap) Chapters to ensure uniform strategic planning throughout the region
4. Build trust and increase dialogue that leverages additional technical and financial resources such as future rounds of the Rural Economic Development Grant (ACA REDG) program, the Navajo Economic Development Fund and the Navajo Nation Business Industry Development Fund
5. Provide a template for similar governance, community and economic development improvements throughout Navajo Nation