



NATIVE AMERICAN LIBRARY SERVICES ENHANCEMENT GRANTS

Sample Application NAE-260915-OLS-26

Ponca Tribe of Nebraska

Amount awarded by IMLS: \$142,494

The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska's Culture Department and Language Program aims to revitalize and preserve the Ponca language and culture, building on the tribe's efforts to address the 2018 State of Emergency for the Ponca language. There are currently 5,975 enrolled Ponca members, 3,782 of which reside outside of the Service Delivery Area, making it difficult for all Tribal citizens to access programming. The project will expand access by supporting the design and production of beginner-level Ponca language learning materials including printed activity books, along with a digital version, and worksheets. A series of short-form language learning videos and tutorials related to traditional skills such as beading and regalia-making will be developed in collaboration with community members. Through these activities, the project will strengthen Tribal members' cultural connections.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Tribal profile
- Proposal narrative
- Schedule of completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Tribal Governance

In 1881, the Ponca Tribe was officially dissolved and legally reconstituted as two separate entities: the Northern Ponca Tribe, residing on a portion of the old Ponca Reservation in northeastern Nebraska, and the Southern Ponca Tribe, with a reservation in north-central Oklahoma. The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska was later terminated by the U.S. government in 1962; at that time, only 442 Northern Ponca were listed on the tribal roll, and only 847 of its original 27,000 acres remained. Over the next 25 years, the Ponca people would suffer the effects of termination, with the loss of land, cultural connections like the language, and programs that provided welfare and kept them together as a community. While tribal status was legally restored by Congress in 1990, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska (PTN) was denied the opportunity to reestablish its reservation and instead established the Service Delivery Area (SDA).

The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska now delivers direct services to tribal members residing in the SDA and other services to those living outside the service delivery area. Tribal enrollment exceeds 5,700 members as of March 2025. The Tribe also provides some services to anyone that is a member of a federally recognized Tribe living in the PTN SDA.

The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska has been operating its tribal government since recognition, humbly beginning with three employees, a folding table, and a coffee pot to now having over 300 employees, five office locations and three medical clinics, and provides a variety of services to both Ponca members and anyone of a federally recognized Tribe. One of the core departments is the Culture Department, which operates the Language Program. This program was established in 2022 to address the 2018 State of Emergency for the Ponca language as there are no fluent Ponca speakers in the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. The Language Program staff will be primarily responsible for carrying out this project.

Geographic Location

Instead of a traditional reservation, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska (PTN) has a Service Delivery Area (SDA) which consists of 15 counties: 12 in Nebraska, two in Iowa, and one in South Dakota. Many other members are located outside of the Service Delivery area across the United States (*see Figure 1*). Within the SDA there are a total of five office locations in: Sioux City, Iowa and Lincoln, Omaha, Norfolk, and Niobrara, Nebraska. The tribe has the capacity to provide direct member services to those living in the SDA counties, and limited services are offered to those living outside, or OSDA.

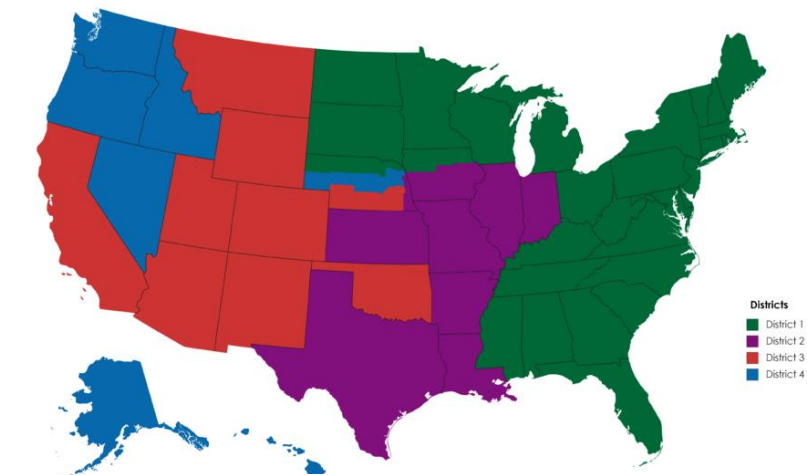


Figure 1: Map of Ponca Tribe of Nebraska Tribal Districts in United States

Project Justification

The preservation and, more importantly, revitalization of the Ponca language and culture are essential to developing identity, strengthening community, and supporting the next seven generations. The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska (Tribe) has ongoing efforts to revive the Ponca language and cultural practices. These efforts have identified a strong interest in cultural education from community members but have also led to the realization of the barriers that prevent a majority of members from obtaining culturally relevant learning materials.

Current obstacles that tribal members face are related to geography, availability of resources, and limited learning opportunities. There are currently 5,975 enrolled Ponca members and a total of 3,782 members reside outside of the Service Delivery Area (SDA). With a majority of members living outside the service delivery areas, these barriers are especially challenging for community members that do not have access to the same programs as those that reside in the service delivery area.

This project addresses these hurdles by establishing a comprehensive library of culturally rooted educational materials that is accessible to all Ponca members regardless of their residence. These resources will include print materials, educational videos, filmed tutorials, and downloadable content. These materials will support language learning as well as culture practice.

The primary audience for this project is Ponca members of any age beginning to and interested in learning the Ponca language. This project will draw in beginner Ponca language learners, members that are looking to reconnect with cultural practices, and families that desire to integrate Ponca ways into their daily lives. Secondary audience members include language and

culture educators, knowledge keepers, and other community leaders that support the revitalization efforts.

Evidence of community need is demonstrated through participation in other cultural programming and expressed interest. In November of 2025 the Tribe conducted a survey to receive feedback on the current language program. Amongst those respondents, 90% said that it is important to continue working on and investing in the Ponca language. While there is interest from 81% of respondents many of them relayed that the lack of virtual learning options holds them back from participation. The Tribe, from an organizational standpoint, has identified language and cultural preservation to be a priority. A state of emergency was declared on March 23, 2018, for the status of the Ponca Language. With few Ponca speakers remaining the Tribe has implemented a language program within the Culture Department. Tribal Council also passed a resolution in 2025 that supports all Ponca Tribe staff making efforts to learn and utilize the Ponca language.

Language and culture are the most vital parts of a tribe. With culture rooted at the core, this project would allow for the expansion of availability and accessibility to important resources. Project outcomes support revitalization, not just preservation. Having access to culturally relevant resources will help the next seven generations continue to learn, grow, and develop a strong sense of identity.

Project work plan

Language Learning Material Development

This project will begin with the design and production of beginner-level Ponca language learning materials. These materials will include a set of five printed activity books, worksheets,

and other guided learning activities. In addition to printed material, a digital version will also be created for download. These tools will introduce foundational vocabulary, pronunciation, and basic grammar. This project will be designed for independent learners or group settings and will be beneficial to a range of ages and learning styles.

The project team will lean on the Tribe's Communications Department for guidance when it comes to design and formatting documents. Content development will be created by the four Ponca Language Instructors with the Culture Director's input to ensure consistency of materials and accuracy of information.

Digital and Video Content Creation

To complement written materials, this project will produce a series of short-form language learning videos. These videos will help audio and visual learners as well as reinforce proper pronunciation of the language. There will also be informational videos about cultural practices that integrate the language within. Many members have indicated that they are eager to learn the language as it relates to practicing culture. Combining language with cultural context makes the information more meaningful and engaging to certain groups in the community.

All video content and language lessons will be developed in collaboration with the Culture Director, Language Instructors, and knowledgeable community members to maintain accuracy, respect, and cultural integrity.

Cultural education resource development

In addition to language-focused materials, this project will create learning materials that demonstrate culturally relevant skills. These resources will include instructional guides and tutorials related to traditional skills such as sewing, beading, regalia-making, and

other culturally significant hand-made items. Each source will be formatted to include step-by-step guidance and incorporate the Ponca language when appropriate. These videos will serve as not just educational tools but also aid in cultural preservation. Important knowledge will be documented and shared for future generations.

Project Implementation and Staffing

The project will be housed with the Culture Department and will be carried out with the assistance of the Tribe's Communication team and IT department. Additional support will be provided by community knowledge keepers and other stakeholders that are willing and able to contribute to the project with their expertise and guidance.

Community involvement is a central component of this project. Ponca members will be engaged in a variety of ways throughout the development process as contributors, advisors, and participants. Keeping the project rooted within the community ensures that these learning resources are culturally accurate and relevant.

Distribution and Access

All learning content developed through this project will be made accessible through multiple channels. This includes digital platforms such as the Tribe's website and SharePoint. Most materials will be password protected to increase cultural safety and ensure that only Ponca members are accessing the information. Some content may be shared via the Tribe's social media platforms so long as it is appropriate. The resulting products will also be available in our Tribe's libraries throughout the SDA as well as other community spaces (waiting rooms, lobbies, etc.). Some printed materials will reach membership through direct distribution via mail or at Tribal events.

Project results

The anticipated results of this project focus on increasing access, improving engagement, and strengthening cultural connection.

Short-Term Outcomes

- Increased availability of Ponca language learning materials
- Expanded access to culturally grounded educational resources
- Increased participation in language and cultural learning activities

Intermediate Outcomes

- Improved confidence among participants in using Ponca language
- Greater integration of language and culture into daily life
- Increased engagement with cultural practices

Long-Term Outcomes

- Strengthened revitalization efforts
- Improved and more frequent intergenerational knowledge transfers to ensure long-term continuity
- Increased sense of identity and belonging among tribal members

Evaluation of Successfulness

Evaluation will be conducted using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Success will be measured based on the evaluation of three areas: effectiveness, quality, and timeliness.

Effectiveness will be measured by tracking the reach and usage of the project materials. Data points will include number of materials developed, number of downloads, views or

distributed copies, and participation levels in related programs. This information will be collected through internal tracking systems, website usage data, and program records.

Quality will be assessed through user feedback and other internal review processes. Quality indicators include participant satisfaction, perceived usefulness and accessibility, and cultural accuracy. This project will result in the development of feedback forms to allow for structured input from community members. Internal evaluations will occur at the midpoint and the conclusion of the project. Ongoing informal feedback will also be incorporated throughout.

Timeliness will be evaluated by comparing project progress against the established project timeline. The information evaluated will include completion of project milestones and delivery of planned deliverables. Project completion will be monitored monthly with a project tracking system and regular internal meetings. Adjustments will be made as needed to achieve the proposed schedule of completion.

Successfully completed outputs will be shared with community members in a variety of ways. This includes digital platforms, community events, and internal reporting. The learning tools created because of this project will remain accessible after the grant period concludes to maintain sustainability.

Sustainability is a key factor to this project. By developing reusable and accessible resources, the project ensures that materials can continue to be utilized by the community and materials can be updated and expanded over time. The Tribe will also be able to utilize these resources to aid in culture integration for ongoing programming. This project lays the foundation for continued growth in language and cultural programming. It supports the long-term and crucial revitalization efforts and will foster increased community engagement that will benefit the Tribe for generations.

Year 1

[illegible]

Year 2

[illegible]