



Title VI Native American Family Committee
2024-25 school year
6-7 p.m., Feb. 11, 2025, on Zoom

Voting Members in Attendance: Michelle De Asis, Jana Finkbonner, Lyvalene Gellys, Bernard Holden, Yana Mansfield, Dr. Sybil McLean, Sharece Steinkamp

Co-chairs: Dr. Kristen French, Isabel Meaker, Dr. Janis Velasquez Farmer

Introduction

Kristen French opened the meeting with a warm, lighthearted welcome. She acknowledged the recent snow day challenges and expressed gratitude for everyone's flexibility in meeting via Zoom. Kristen noted that the next meeting will be held in person at the district office to facilitate more direct connections.

- Attendees introduced themselves, sharing their names and Tribal affiliations.
- Kristen reviewed calendar updates, highlighting that this was the second meeting since November and drawing on the positive energy from the first session.
- Kristen outlined the focus areas:
 - Development of initial agreements for collaboration, especially regarding the Title VI Grant.
 - Emphasis on creating an ethical space for engagement. Agreements from this meeting will serve as guiding principles, not final bylaws. Once the Title VI Grant is secured, formal bylaws will be developed for ongoing governance.

Breakout rooms, round 1:

- Participants were divided into breakout rooms to provide feedback on 506 Forms Messaging (a critical message needing prompt distribution) and refine the Needs Assessment Survey.
 - **Key takeaways:**

- Members shared highlights and positive experiences.
- A committee member emphasized the importance of deeper connection to strengthen collective work.
- Reviewed Title VI Grant requirements and steps to secure funding for the Bellingham School District.
- Discussed committee goals, including building relationships with local Native nations and scheduling a public hearing to share progress.
- Recognized the central role of local Native voices in shaping the Title VI Grant process.

Discussion on forming agreements for an ethical space

- Personal Needs: Everyone requires feeling heard and valued.
- Collective Needs: How the group can honor all voices while working collaboratively on the grant.
- Kristen explained that, per Title VI requirements, the committee will use a consensus decision-making process (as outlined by the Bellingham School District) until new bylaws are established after grant approval.
- Janis introduced the Padlet platform, sharing a link for members to add their thoughts.
- A committee member stressed the importance of fostering an unconditionally positive, safe, respectful space where all backgrounds are accepted.
- Concerns were raised about the political climate affecting Native families, particularly regarding tribal ID cards and the resulting insecurity.
- The discussion highlighted opportunities to support children by identifying trusted advocates and resources within the community.

Discussion on the grant's purpose and community involvement

- The Title VI Grant aims to support the cultural and educational needs of Native American and Alaska Native students.
- The current needs assessment will guide the optimal use of funds by incorporating local tribal knowledge and cultural elements into school curriculum.
- Concerns were raised about the underrepresentation of local tribes in school curriculum.
- The grant will involve both local tribes (e.g., Nooksack, Swinomish) and non-local Native families.

- Discussion on leveraging existing initiatives such as storytelling programs, Treaty Day activities, and student art projects.
- Janis explained that the district has not previously run a Title VI program. This committee's role is to guide resource allocation and prioritize initiatives.
- The district is simultaneously managing two initiatives, the Title VI Grant and the Office of Native Education STI Grant, which together will support a comprehensive needs assessment.

Breakout rooms, round 2:

- Participants were put into breakout rooms to discuss ways of enhancing 506 form engagement.
 - **Key takeaways:**
 - Need to educate families on the importance of 506 forms.
 - Community events and personal outreach (e.g., phone calls) are more effective than paper alone.
 - Proposals included organizing community events with food. This has been a proven motivator, and personal phone calls can be used to boost participation.
 - The 506 form is specifically for grant allocation and is different from tribal affiliation forms used during student enrollment.
 - Although some forms have been collected at events such as Indigenous Peoples Day, there is still substantial work ahead.
- Tailor communications to Native families, explaining the direct impact on funding for educational programs.
- Engage children in the process through cultural and artistic activities as a long-term strategy.

Grant application & 506 forms timeline

- 506 forms must be collected by February 26 to meet the March 1 grant application deadline. Currently, Bellingham Public Schools has approximately 400 eligible Native American students. Each child requires one form.
- The group discussed potential event ideas, leveraging past successes like Since Time in Memorial Family Night to encourage form completion and submission.

Cultural and educational benefits

- Emphasized the need for events like cultural performances or dances to bring youth together and strengthen their connection to their heritage.
- Highlighted the importance of school and cultural education to help students embrace their identity and stay engaged in learning.
- Focus on school events and community gatherings with food and prizes to increase participation.
- Talent shows or cultural showcases could serve as engaging methods to involve youth and celebrate Native heritage.
- One member stressed the importance of educating young people about their Native heritage to foster pride and cultural identity.
- Focus on high-impact schools with several Native American students.

Discussion of funding sources: Title VI vs. Johnson O'Malley

- Johnson O'Malley (JOM) - A program under the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Education, serving tribal or BIE-funded schools.
- Title VI: A U.S. Department of Education program available to school districts with at least 10 Native students.
- Funds are allocated based on the number of submitted 506 forms and are supplemental to existing resources.

Call to action

- Reinforced the committee's vital role in shaping the Native American family program and the future of Title VI work.
- Acknowledged time constraints and invited further ideas after the meeting.

Final discussion points and closing remarks

- Isabel noted that the district lost its Native Education Coordinator position in 2008 when Johnson O'Malley funds stopped.
- There was a small discussion on the potential use of Title III funds to support Native students, given historical challenges like language loss and trauma.
- Yana suggested including a question on the need for a Native Education Coordinator in the needs assessment.
- Emphasis was placed on enhancing the appeal of the 506 forms (e.g., personalized letters, decorative envelopes, and possible incentives) to boost participation.

Recommended follow-up actions

- Committee members are encouraged to continue discussions via Padlet and email. Future meetings are anticipated to focus on progress updates and refining strategies for community engagement.
- Organize additional gatherings or events to improve the completion of 506 forms and collection.
- Review and update the needs assessment with community feedback.

Next meeting:

6-7 p.m., Tuesday, March 18, 2025 at the District Office