



**OFFICE OF INDIAN COUNTRY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, BUSINESS MT DIVISION  
State Tribal Economic Development Commission**

Heritage Inn, Great Falls, MT

AUGUST 24, 2022

**MEETING MINUTES**

*Note: Due to the poor internet connection, the zoom recording of this meeting experienced significant packet loss, some comments were frozen or unintelligible. These minutes are intended to be summarizations and best representations of what was expressed or stated by meeting attendees.*

**Commissioners Present:** Gerald Gray (Chairperson), Richard Sangrey (Vice-Chair), Jennifer Finley, and Delina Cuts The Rope

**Commissioners Remote Attendance:** Cheryl Reevis, Liane Taylor with Department of Commerce (proxy for Director Scott Osterman)

**Staff Present:** Jason Small, Luke Robinson, and Rachelle Brown

**WELCOME/PURPOSE OF GATHERING**

Roll call and quorum established. Meeting was called at 9:19 AM with opening statement read aloud by Rachelle Brown about meeting being recorded by Zoom. Technological issues with internet connectivity made the remote option very challenging.

**ROLL CALL**

Conducted by Rachelle Brown, and a quorum was confirmed.

**NON-AGENDA ITEMS OR PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no non-agenda items or public comments.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** STEDC MEETING 5/18/22 MINUTES NOT AVAILABLE

The STEDC Manager position at Commerce has been vacant since May 20, 2022, and the minutes from the May 18, 2022 were not located, are missing, or were unavailable, and therefore, approval of the previous meeting minutes had to be tabled to the next meeting. Chair Gray expressed surprise at the minutes not being located and asked if anyone had contacted the former STEDC Manager Billie LeDeau to inquire about them. Ms. Brown answered no one had called Billie to ask for them. Ms. Brown said she would continue to research if previous minutes could be located ahead of the next STEDC meeting in November

2022. Ms. Brown is helping to assist the vacant STEDC position. Chairman Gray agreed the item could be tabled until the November meeting.

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

Ms. Brown introduced Jason Small, the OICED interim Program Manager to the Commissioners.

## **OICED PROGRAM REPORTS AND TRIBAL BUSINESS PLANNING GRANT (TBPG) DISCUSSION**

OICED PROGRAM UPDATE: Mr. Small shared a program overview with a power point presentation. The Indian Equity Fund (IEF) small business grant cycle opened and accepting applications July 15 - August 31, 2022, Native American Collateral Support (NACS) program has no new information at this time. Native American Made in Montana program continues, and he reviewed resources for STEDC, Native American Business Advisors (NABAs), Tribal Tourism Grants (TTG/TTEG), and the State Tribal Agreement Database (STAD) is up to date. Liane Taylor added there was \$420,000 available in the NACS program, and the Tribal SSBCI program (Loan participation program--50% private matched with 50% non-private institutions with a low interest rate) has launched with an upcoming training offered in early September hosted by Carolyn Jones Department of Commerce Loan Officer for those who are interested.

Chairman Gray asked about the Tourism Grant program, if the cycle had started, and Ms. Brown clarified the Tribal Tourism Grant cycle opens October 1, 2022. The statewide Tourism Grant cycle is open now until September 15, 2022 with a budget of \$1 million available to Tribal Governments to apply. Mr. Small continued to share impressions and takeaways from his site visits to IEF program recipients over the summer, and some program changes he has implemented, including adjustments to IEF and the Tribal Business Planning Grant (TBPG). He also announced the open Tribal Economic Development Specialist position at OICED will be reposted soon.

Mr. Small opened the discussion about the TBPG status to discuss among the Commissioners, noting that less than 34% of awards (planning or feasibility studies) get actualized. Chairman Gray noted it is undetermined the shelf life of those past plans. He also recapped Commissioner Reevis' concern about the TBPG lack of communication and surprise with it being put on hold. Liane stated the Director wanted to ensure the funds are being put to best use which is the motivation behind program changes and acknowledged the lack of communication on the part of OICED was an oversight. Ms. Taylor noted that halfway through the grant, some Tribes request to switch to a different focus of the grant. Ms. Taylor suggested possibly to move toward more of a down payment assistance program to help some of the programs get underway.

Commissioner Reevis recapped her annual grant writing cycles as the Planner for Blackfeet, and her surprise to discover TBPG was not available a few weeks ago. She was confused about a

lack of communication from OICED about the change, and she recommended a period of consultation with Tribes for any program changes are very important for respect and strengthen relations. She also provided some history from 2011 in Blackfeet planning for campgrounds, and the infrastructure needed to build these locations out. She felt included by previous OICED Program Manager about the needs for the planning to develop projects, and with TBPG, TIP Grant, and other funding sources they were able to hire people, there has been accountability, job performance measurements, and that they got it done and had some successes. She provided an overview of her views of what programs work, which are lacking, what are wanted and needed, and recommended we look at other ways for Tribal input to develop programs or program changes to get the most out of the funding. Loans are a strain at times and her examples over the past ten years she agrees that TBPG funds are not always easy to utilize, or monies do go to non-native engineers and leave the reservation.

Chairman Gray asked what is happening with the money from TBPG and how much there is. Mr. Small stated \$300,000 is available for a revolving loan program idea, to also compliment the IEF program, where a small business owner could leverage one funding source to secure a loan up to \$100,000. However, the idea is running into “un-bankable” stigma roadblocks from lenders he has approached.

Vice Chairman Sangrey added some historical perspectives on the OICED programs. He stated that previous award amounts could be used as matching funds to leverage other funding sources, and there are benefits of the IEF, and how they have been utilized at Rocky Boy’s (Chippewa Cree). The NABA was a bigger challenge for them.

Chairman Gray talked about the original \$70,000 amount was more beneficial leveraging for more funds for Little Shell to purchase equipment, but the reduction to \$30,000 for planning was limiting and he agreed the TBPG should be reassessed. Commissioner Cuts The Rope expressed the work one must do to utilize the TBPG funds to maximize them towards a feasible or realistic project. It is a lot of work for little money, so she tries at Fort Belknap to identify the ‘low hanging fruit’—selecting a project for Tribal Business Planning Grant (TBPG) that is attainable. Business incubators and flexibility that is reflective of the differences across tribal regions, these may be new, best uses of these formally TBPG funds, and suggested that better funding could see better results.

Vice Chairman Sangrey asked Mr. Small if the funds could be used by Tribal Governments, but Mr. Small said they are focused on small business owners, and to compliment the IEF recipients to maximize their banking opportunities. But the program is still being evaluated, explored, and discussed. Chairman Gray provided a comment about questioning how an Indian Equity Fund (IEF) used the funds to build a bathroom—did that really grow their business? He was just unsure if so, and how. He wanted to understand what criteria was used to approve applicant projects to ensure the accomplish the desired effects. Mr. Small agreed that the Legislature

wants to be assured the funding is going to benefit businesses on the reservations, and program changes have been made to target that issue.

Ms. Taylor and Commissioner Reevis both expressed difficulty hearing everyone's comments, and that a microphone might need be used. Chairman Gray said this discussion has been great, this topic can be concluded at this time and called for a recess at 10:25 a.m. to allow Ms. Brown to work on improving the meeting audio.

Meeting was called back to order 10:45 am with improved audio.

IEF & NABA: Luke Robinson provided an update on FY 2023 Indian Equity Fund (IEF) application cycle which opened July 15 - August 31, 2022. He shared some program changing, including a reduction in the program budget to \$260,000, a requirement of applicants to reside on Tribal lands, and to have a bank account as additions to eligibility requirements. He also shared a brief update on the NABA submissions and reported no final decisions have been made. Chairman Gray asked what the history of funding fluctuations with IEF was, FY21 \$300,000 to FY22 \$320,000 to FY23 \$260,000. Mr. Robinson was able to explain how those numbers were determined between Ms. Valandra's time managing the OICED program to the current time under Jason Small's management.

Additional details were shared about program applicants, quarterly calls with NABAs, site visits, activities in economic development and partners with Department of Labor, NADC, Plenty Doors, Export MT, and others.

Site visit trip is planned for August 25-26, 2022, to CSKT and Browning businesses with Mr. Small. Commissioner Finley announced the passing of a CSKT Councilwoman, and that their offices will be closed for the remainder of the week.

TRIBAL TOURISM: Rachelle Brown presented a power point presentation with an overview of the program's activities since May 2022. She discussed the pilot IC Summer Events 2022 marketing campaign, total budget of \$160,000 (\$80,000 each from Business and Brand MT divisions), \$20,000 for each of the eight Tribal events promoted. She gave background on Hoffman York the ad agency on record with Commerce, how their creative content decisions were made, radio ad scripting and recordings with Montana Native American talent, billboard placements and challenges, social media ads on Facebook and Instagram. Ms. Brown shared the mid-campaign social media metrics as well as the [www.VisitMT.com](http://www.VisitMT.com) Indian Country page metrics. She said she would email the graphs, trackers, and charts to all after the meeting, as there was too much to pour over in this meeting, and the data could be useful for take-away lessons for future marketing campaigns and decision making. Vice Chairman Sangrey suggested to not promote competing events (same dates, but two events in same area).

Chairman Gray commented there were issues he noticed with the Little Shell billboard

placement. He stated it was hard to read, and located 10 miles outside of Great Falls, in the southbound direction of I-15 leaving Great Falls. It was a smaller board and was set off the highway further back than some others, making it harder to read. Ms. Brown went through the campaign in greater detail.

Vice Chairman Sangrey wanted to share that there are a number of radio stations on Tribal lands that could be used for future radio ads recording and placements. Ms. Brown shared some challenges with limited internet access in rural areas essential to successful recording and thanked those who shared feedback that can be converted into improved decision-making next time. There have been over 9 million social media impressions, over 40,000 clicks on those ads. At VisitMT.com Indian Pages there were over 2 million page visits, over 48,000 events page visits, and over 4000 requests for guidebooks, 11,000+ guidebooks have been mailed out in the first 45 days of the campaign. Prolonged page visits were also very insightful.

Chairman Gray thanked the Director for the funding for this campaign. Commissioner Reevis asked if 107.5 FM radio spot in Browning had been used for the recording and wanted to know if there was a board for Blackfeet on I-90 outside of Missoula, and she wanted to understand the decision to place it there. Ms. Brown responded about strategy, timing, placements, and challenges. Commissioner Reevis wondered if it included any references to Glacier, and she emphasized what an important reference Glacier is in marketing her region. She also asked what radio stations aired the event ads, where the Blackfeet billboard was positioned, when and for how long. Chairman Gray commented that a billboard is most effective if it has no more than seven words on it. Commissioner Reevis pointed out that by not including Glacier in the radio advertising was a missed opportunity and should be always connected. She emphasized consultation with the tribes was important for strategy.

Ms. Brown responded to some of these questions and comments. She explained ad placements were intended to attract non-resident visitors from outside of the Tribal regions, or resident visitors from other areas of the State. She shared a tracking chart that outlined all the ad placement details as to what, when, where, how and how much each element cost, to specifically answer these questions. She said attachments in emails would be sent out to all following the meeting. Ms. Brown also expressed agreement that some ad choices were not optimal. That the Commissioners' opinions and feedback would be learned from and implemented into future campaigns, should bed tax collections from 2022 be strong enough to support more funding for 2023. Chairman Gray emphasized the importance of including tribal consultation and involvement for future marketing campaigns from the beginning. All Commissioners agreed and Ms. Brown said with more time, a more inclusive planning and placement strategy can be employed.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

This section was tabled. No reports to be presented.

### TTG/TTEG Award Updates on Projects

- Chairman Gray reported the Little Shell's grant award for the Hell Creek Recreation Area investments in equipment and Army Corps contract negotiation is on-going.
- Vice Chairman Sangrey reported Rocky Boy's venue improvement needs at the Rodeo Grounds, which are in a different location than the Pow Wow Grounds, so he talked about upgrades that could be included in a future application FY23 TTG cycle.
- Delina reported Fort Belknap's Mission Canyon needs more signage inside the canyon. The Tribe has worked with federal agencies for trails added some mapping. Invested in equipment for the fairgrounds but still needs updates for visitors.
- Commissioner Reevis reported the Blackfoot Tribe has purchased tipis and buffalo robe and the visitor's center is under construction.
- Commissioner Finley reported CSKT needs increased signage on the bison range on the Flathead Reservation. The signage is in the process of being updated. They are trying to increase awareness that the Bison Range is managed by the Flathead Reservation.

Jason Legislative Update - The Montana legislative session starts in January 2023. Indian Country is funded on a one time only basis. Adding to the bill. Mr. Small gave a legislative update. (Inaudible)

### TAC & STEDC NEW MOU DISCUSSION

Nathan St. Goddard is the Tribal Business Representative Tourism Advisory Council (TAC) Lane Spotted Elk has not been able to attend any meetings. In the TAC MOU agreement from Rachel Gray, Executive Chair of TAC reviewed the MOU, their committee wants to deepen the relationship between TAC and STEDC. One suggestion is to make a commitment once a year to attend a meeting. Another idea is to have two alternates for each of the two Tribal Representative to TAC. Commissioner Reevis asked if the TAC member had to be a Tribal Representative, an employee, or an entrepreneur. Two Tribal Representatives to the TAC are appointed by the Governor. One must be a Tribal Council Member the other has to be a Tribal entrepreneur.

Ms. Brown sent the information on the MOU from 2017 and the proposal of section 3, number 1, how to better define deepening the relationship between TAC and STEDC. What they want to see or modify to what they would like to see happen with TAC. Commissioner Cuts The Rope suggested having a representative from Eastern Montana. Commissioner Reevis wondered how the Governor gets the names from Tribal Leadership or from submitted recommendations. Commissioner Cuts The Rope recommended have all Tribal Leaders look at the candidates so they are not only reporting to their Tribes, but to the other Tribes as well. Mr. Small summarized the STEDC's recommendation that there is an eastern and western representative; add an alternate to ensure participation; and have a group like the (inaudible) to help us out.

Ms. Brown also asked consideration of a commitment for one STEDC attend at least one TAC meeting per year and the same with a TAC member. The STEDC Commissioners agreed.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS FOR 2023** – Chairman Gray moved to nominate Vice Chairman Gray to be Vice Chairman. Seconded by Commissioner Cuts the Rope. Motion passed.

Vice Chairman Sangrey nominated Chairman Gray to be the Chairman for the next fiscal year. Seconded by Commissioner Reevis. Motion passed.

There was a request to renew the membership of Mission Met to host our Strategic Plan. Vice Chairman Sangrey moved to approve. Commissioner Cuts the Rope seconded the motion. The Commissioners discussed the Strategic Plan and Mission Met. Motion passed.

Chairman Gray motioned to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Vice Chairman Sangrey. Motion passed.