

2000 Annual Report Executive Summary

Oglala Sioux-Pine Ridge Empowerment Zone

As the Oglala Oyate Woitanacan 2008/Oglala Sioux Tribe Empowerment Zone entered Year 2000 (second year of the project) it soon became clear that many great challenges needed to be addressed in the development of a solid program foundation.

The work performed by Oglala Oyate Woitanacan (OOW) over the past year has focused on administrative system development while providing initial funding of Family, Housing and Education benchmark related projects. All funded projects are listed in the text of this report.

In accomplishing the many tasks associated with the structuring of the program administrative operations it is important to recognize the many obstacles had to be overcome by the OOW Board, staff and community partners. During the first year of the Oglala Sioux Empowerment Zone and up to June 2000 no permanent office space was provided to locate the project staff. To overcome this barrier, tribal member consultants were retained and worked from homes utilizing personal computer equipment and supplies in performance of work tasks.

In spite of these logistical obstacles measurable progress has been made in 2000. Perhaps the most significant step has been the granting of a Charter to OOW by the Oglala Sioux Tribe. OOW, with leveraged support from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, developed the Charter and adopted a certified Accounting system in February 2000. As a result, the newly chartered OOW Empowerment Zone received first time draw down funds in April 2000 which then enabled the hiring of a full time Executive Director and full time administrative support staff by June 2000. Additional office equipment, computers, accounting software and office furniture was ordered and installed during the same period.

The second primary work effort performed by OOW staff and Board beginning in April 2000 has entailed the partial accomplishment of Benchmark targets outlined in the original proposal and strategic plan. In doing so, benchmark training needs have been identified by staff and community participants involved in the EZ process. Questions related to the benchmarking system, the specific purposes for which EZ funds are to be used and accessing funds will require additional training support. A streamlined communication process must be developed to achieve clarity and continuity.

It must be recognized that in achieving an understanding of the EZ process a tremendous technical and communication gap existed, and still does, among OOW and USDA representatives. In part, this obstacle can be attributed to language and cultural barriers, as many community members are unfamiliar with the inner workings of USDA. Attaining program operational consensus has been further complicated by conflicting economic values. However, this immediate obstacle provides a unique opportunity for all partners involved in the OOW Empowerment Zone effort. This can be evidenced by a demonstrated willingness among partners to continue to work together in order to derive maximum benefits for Oglala Sioux tribal members.

Community interest and participation levels in OOW EZ available opportunities have been marked by a notable increase during 2000 and can be attributed to administrative capacity building, community outreach, and staff interaction with the public. It is further projected that program participation will increase as evidenced by the nineteen (19) community projects and business plan submissions under review by OOW staff at 2000 year end. Correspondence and inquiries regarding the project are also on

the upswing as communications and information dissemination methods improve.

New mediums are being developed to improve communications, streamline the funding process and clarify roles among the OOW Empowerment Zone partners in 2001. Economic development initiatives will be strengthened and enhanced through achievement of a truly collaborative partnership. The incorporation of efficient delivery systems in the communities will ultimately improve the development of economic opportunity on Pine Ridge thereby empowering Oglala Lakota people.