



THE HARVARD PROJECT ON AMERICAN INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

John F. Kennedy School of Government • Harvard University

HONORING NATIONS: 2000 HONOREE

Poeh Cultural Center Pueblo of Pojoaque

Contact:

Route 11, Box 71

78 Cities of Gold Road

Santa Fe, NM 87501

Tel. (505) 455-3334 Fax. (505) 455-0174

Website: www.poehcenter.com

The Pueblo of Pojoaque created the for-profit Pojoaque Pueblo Construction Services Corporation in 1993 specifically to generate revenues for and to oversee the construction and maintenance of the Pueblo's non-profit Poeh Cultural Center and Museum. By blending cultural revitalization and economic development into a unique partnership, the Pueblo is creating new revenues and employment opportunities through its construction company, and is regaining control over its cultural future through the promise of a sustained funding stream for cultural and artistic activities.

Located in northern New Mexico, at the confluence of three rivers, the Pueblo of Pojoaque is known in the native Tewa language as Po-suwae-geh, or "water-drinking place." Historically, the Pueblo was a place for travelers to stop and drink water, and a cultural hub for the Tewa people. It is also a place widely known for its rich artistic tradition. Pojoaque artists have long been recognized as producers of exquisite baskets, stone carvings and polychrome pottery. Indeed, artistic expression is of central importance to Pueblo history, and Pojoaque citizens have traditionally relied on art both as a means of employment and as a cultural staple.

Pojoaque's cultural and traditional legacies have faced serious challenges throughout history. The combined consequences of small pox, Spanish conquest, lack of water and a diminished land base reduced Pojoaque's population to a mere 20 citizens by the end of the nineteenth century. As Pueblo citizens fled their homelands, its feasts and dances went into hibernation, and its unique art techniques were threatened by extinction. A turnaround began in the 1930s, however, when several families returned to Pojoaque, and the Pueblo received permanent federal recognition as part of the Indian Reorganization Act. This sparked a political, economic and cultural resurgence, which gained momentum in subsequent decades. The Pueblo's revival accelerated further in 1973 with the reintroduction of its ceremonial dance after over 100 years of dormancy. Its leaders vowed to return economic prosperity and cultural health back to the people.

By the 1980s, art and culture had become important vehicles for the advancement of Pojoaque's self-determination, and as a part of this effort, the Poeh Cultural Center was established in 1988. With nearly 900 artists and artisans living among the eight northern Pueblos, the Center provided a space where artists could display and sell their work. In 1990, Pojoaque established an educational division, Poeh Arts, to teach traditional Pueblo art forms and to provide artists with the necessary marketing skills to achieve greater economic self-

sufficiency for themselves and their families. Soon, the non-profit Poeh Center became the focal point for cultural preservation and revitalization within the Tewa and Tiwa-speaking communities. Encouraged by the Center's early success and the community's support, Pojoaque's leadership embraced the vision of constructing an educational complex and major museum based upon Pueblo beliefs and perspectives, and designed and operated by Pueblo people.

As a first step, the Poeh Center opened a temporary museum in a 1,200 square foot storefront. The Center then began seeking ways to build and fund a permanent venue which could house all of the Center's programming, including a state-of-the-art museum, archives, classrooms and studio space. But making this dream a reality would not be easy. The Center encountered a challenge familiar to art and cultural institutions everywhere – obtaining the necessary funds for facilities construction and operation. The majority of federal, state and private funding sources that support the arts and humanities tend to offer funding for programs, rather than for construction and maintenance of arts facilities.

Consequently, the Pueblo considered ways to combine cultural preservation and economic development into a mutually beneficial relationship. Pojoaque's solution exemplifies creative and pragmatic vision.

In 1993, the Tribal Council created and incorporated the Pojoaque Pueblo Construction Services Corporation (PPCSC), using a two-year grant from the Administration for Native Americans for start-up costs. The tribally owned construction company was directed to work on a variety of commercial construction projects throughout New Mexico, and to use the profits for the construction and on-going maintenance of the Poeh Center's facilities. Specifically, the tribal resolution that chartered the corporation states that PPCSC's purposes are to "garner revenues and allocate thirty-five percent of the total net profits from such revenues to cultural activities including, but not limited to, the Pojoaque Pueblo Cultural Center and Museum and development of a traditional Tewa cultural center."

This unique cross-sector collaboration has been successful on many fronts. First, consistent with its original goal, the fiscal partnership provides the Poeh Center with a sustainable revenue stream. At present, the Poeh Center receives about \$85,000 per year from PPCSC, funds it is using to build a new museum, which is set to open in 2002. PPCSC has also given the Center \$30,000 to start an endowment. These monies – combined with the subsequently obtained matching funds, private funding and direct tribal investment – have placed the Poeh Center in good financial health. With PPCSC's growing number of contracts, the Center stands to receive substantial on-going support. Equally important, as a construction company that specializes in adobe structures, the PPCSC is building and expanding the Center and Museum, which it does without charging administrative fees or taking a profit. Since 1993, PPCSC has contributed over \$300,000 in construction services, virtually eliminating the need for outside construction support. The synergistic relationship between the Poeh Center and PPCSC does not end there, however, as the Corporation's leadership believes that working on the Center has led to increased demand for PPCSC's services elsewhere.

Second, PPCSC is itself impressive. The Pueblo-owned corporation was built debt-free, is Native operated and governed, and is incorporated by the Pueblo as a New Mexico corporation under foreign corporation status. While the company was created specifically to support the Poeh Center and other cultural activities, it has accomplished this goal and much more. In its early years, PPCSC obtained contracts to construct public facilities and roads at Pojoaque; eventually it began serving all eight northern Pueblos. As the second tribal corporation in New Mexico to receive its 8(a) certification from the Small Business

Administration, PPCSC bids on construction projects throughout the state. As of January 2001, PPCSC has completed 26 construction projects and had contracts for seven new contracts with a total value of \$3.3 million. The company employs one tribal member full time, possesses a 13-member base crew and maintains up to a 63-member crew (predominantly Native) for construction projects. Additionally, PPCSC has taught 24 residents how to build their own adobe homes and has recently been granted funding to teach seven young apprentices. Clearly, PPCSC seeks much more than profit generation and is constantly looking for ways to improve the livelihood of residents of the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

Third, from an educational and cultural preservation standpoint, the win-win relationship between the Poeh Center and PPCSC has produced remarkable results. The 26,500 square foot Poeh Center is traditionally constructed, yet possesses the latest in technology, from T1 computer lines to state-of-the-art ventilation systems and art repositories. The Center's classrooms attract hundreds of students, many of whom receive academic credit for their work through a partnership that the Center formed with Northern New Mexico Community College. The Center's instructors provide tutelage in ancient and modern techniques, as well as computer skills, and they even offer their students marketing advice. The Center also brings in children from local schools and the Pueblo's Boys and Girls Club to learn about and create art.

Finally, the Pueblo of Pojoaque's business and cultural investments are transforming the community. Not only does the Poeh Center serve as the eight Northern Pueblos' repository for repatriated sacred objects, but it is also gives community members a venue through which they can express their culture, gain additional training and even launch careers. Indeed, community members share great pride in Pojoaque's commitment to the arts. And the Poeh Center is educating the wider community about Pueblo culture. Its new museum has an anticipated annual audience of 45,000 visitors, plus an unlimited worldwide virtual audience through its on-line exhibits and collections.

In short, the Poeh Cultural Center and Museum have become what countless Pueblo citizens could only once dream of – a veritable showcase of Tewa culture and history, blending past and present in a facility that again makes Pojoaque the cultural hub of the eight Northern Pueblos. This dream became a reality because of the Pueblo of Pojoaque's strategic establishment of PPCSC, a corporation that meets the construction needs of the community and the State, serves as an important source of employment and profit, and embraces a socially responsible mission that benefits Pojoaque, other Pueblos and their non-Indian visitors.

For other American Indian nations, the Poeh Center's partnership with PPCSC serves as an inspiring example. Rather than giving up on their vision, or continue fighting an uphill battle to find private or public funds to undertake museum construction and maintenance, the Pueblo looked within itself for an innovative solution. In addition, the partnership provides a new model of how economic development and cultural revitalization can work together. Throughout Indian Country, the 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a swell in the number of tribally chartered corporations; likewise, a growing number of tribes are actively pursuing the creation or expansion of nonprofit cultural centers and museums. Few tribes, however, have integrated economic development and cultural revitalization as explicitly – or as successfully – as the Pueblo of Pojoaque.

Importantly, the experience of Pojoaque also demonstrates how the arts can serve as the vehicle for advancing self-determination. The Pueblo is cultivating new generations of artists skilled in ancient techniques and trained in modern technologies. These artists are

showcasing their culture in ways that the community finds appropriate, and they are building greater knowledge and appreciation of the important contributions Pueblo people have made throughout history. Through these efforts, Pojoaque has seized control of its cultural future. The importance of such self-determination is particularly pronounced given the federal government's historical policies of assimilation and acculturation, which resulted in the loss of Native languages, traditional practices and indigenous knowledge. In stark contrast, the Poeh Center is a focal point of cultural revitalization and plays a central role in building a positive social, economic and cultural environment of which its citizens and the surrounding communities can be proud.

Lessons:

- Cross-sector collaboration is at the cutting edge of governing, and tribal governments should seek win-win partnerships with the private and nonprofit sectors. Such partnerships can be especially fruitful for tribal art and cultural institutions.
- Economic development and cultural revitalization can complement each other. Tribal governments have the ability to charter corporations that have both a profit motive and a social responsibility.
- Cultural preservation and revitalization are important expressions of self-determination. Tribally owned and operated museums, cultural centers and art institutions maximize a tribe's ability to present its culture in ways it finds most appropriate.

79 John F. Kennedy Street • Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138
telephone: (617) 495-1480 • facsimile: (617) 496-3900
website: www.hks.harvard.edu/hpaied