



## NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

### **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs Notice of Funding Opportunity at the appropriate resource page ([Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), [Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

**The application format may have been changed since this application was submitted.** You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above links).

Project Title: A Study of Diné (Navajo) Traditional Sheep Butchering

Institution: Dine College

Project Director: Christine M. Ami

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities

*Diiǰi nida'iil'ah (Today, we butcher): Diné Lessons from sheep on life, death, and re-mem-bering*  
Narrative

**Award Overview:** This proposal requests twelve months of funding to support the completion of my first book *Diiǰi nida'iil'ah (Today, we butcher): Diné Lessons from sheep on life, death, and re-mem-bering*, which is based on my 2016 dissertation. This project the significance of sheep in Diné history and culture from Diné perspectives and will be of interest to scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences in fields including Native American Studies (NAS), History, Animal Studies, Anthropology, and Literature and researchers and students committed to methodological frameworks of storytelling, decolonization and Indigenous research. This award period will be spent (1) preparing and submitting a book proposal to a top tier academic press, (2) completing the first full draft of the manuscript, and (3) developing two new course syllabi derived from the book project, which will contribute to the growth of the growing NAS program at Diné College in general and food sovereignty initiatives of the Navajo Nation more specifically.

**Significance and Contribution:** As a Diné scholar engaging the interdisciplinary academic field of NAS, this manuscript will highlight Indigenous realities of the Americas and in particular, Diné people and their intertwined life and death relationship with *dibé* (sheep). Grounded within the Diné practice and philosophy of *Dibé éí Diné be' iiná át'é* (Sheep Is Life), this project explores the nuances of sheep butchering techniques, stories, and philosophies in order to understand how *dibé* actively co-construct Diné identities, histories, and ways of sensing the world even during the dismembering process of traditional butchering. This project reveals: (1) an undervalued connection between Mountain Sheep (wild game native to the Americas) and Churro Sheep (domesticated livestock stolen from the Basque people by the Spanish and transplanted in the Americas); (2) the unexplored links and distinctions between the mountain sheep hunt and butchering of domesticated sheep; (3) the process of traditional sheep butchering, including variations throughout the Navajo Nation; (4) the gender protocols, age norms, and extra-intellectual ways of knowing ingrained in traditional sheep butchering, which commonly are excused as taboos; (5) the impact of traditional sheep butchering on Diné butchers who work in slaughterhouses; (6) the role of the sheep butchering event in the Miss Navajo Nation pageant; (7) the exploration of the rejection of sheep, sheep butchering, and consumption of sheep meat by contemporary Diné people; and (8) and the re-mem-bering process of traditional sheep butchering that allows for not only the re-purposing of sheep parts for food, clothes, and ceremony but which also brings forth a re-mem-bering of people and animals who have passed on.

The understanding of *dibé* as viewed through *Dibé éí Diné iiná át'é* presents sheep as conscious beings who are actively involved in the relationship building process with Diné people and Diné ways of knowing. Effectively, *dibé* are not simply consumed (culturally, economically, linguistically, or digestively) by Diné people. Rather, as this work reveals, *dibé* are sentient beings. This active agency of *dibé* highlights their role in Diné intellectual and social life, even in death. Ultimately, this project also stresses that Diné people must confront the challenges of colonization and internal colonization to revitalize the belief and practices of the Sheep is Life philosophy, rebuilding the human/non-human animal relationships and thereby perpetuating Diné extra-intellectual ways of knowing.

Native American and Indigenous Studies approaches to research offer critical interventions to knowledge production in the Humanities. My book project engages global dialogues that address histories of colonialism in academia and call for an acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples's intellectual sovereignty and self-determination. By demonstrating the historic relevance of mountain sheep (*dibé tsetah*) to Diné people prior to the Spanish arrival and the contemporary significance of Diné relationships to domesticated sheep (*dibé*), this project offers important correctives to Humanistic studies that incorrectly position: (1) sheep as mere economic/ecological subjects (Boyce 1974), (2) Diné pastoralism as an acculturated practice of domination (Hill, 1936), (3) sheep as a mere foreign objects introduced alongside Spanish colonialism (Weisiger, 2009) and (4) sheep as a transitory Diné commodity into capitalistic society (Weiss, 1984).

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**Organization, Concepts and Methods:**

**Manuscript Completion:** There are four core manuscript completion activities.

(1) **Updating Literature Review:** Noteworthy research recently published dialogues with my project. While none of the literature speaks to the implication of butchering for Diné people, works addressing Indigenous food sovereignty movements (Frisbie, 2018), Indigenous research (McGregor, 2018), and Indigenous animal studies (Sakakibara, 2020) connect this project to national and global discussions.

(2) **Conducting New Data Collection:** I plan to conduct open-ended conversations with 3 Diné butchers who work in slaughterhouses to explain how their traditional teachings and learning of sheep butchering impact their work in slaughterhouses. I also plan to host a community talking circle to discuss the role of traditional sheep butchering during the mandated COVID-19 quarantine and curfew orders, as well as the stories associated with last meal request of mutton stew from those who passed on during COVID-19. Lastly, I will continue butchering sheep regularly throughout this award, not only for mere ethnographic purposes, but as praxis of the Indigenous methodologies placed at the forefront of this project.

(3) **Revising Dissertation Chapters:** I will revise eight dissertation chapters to align with updated literature and new data:

Chapter 1 "Navajo Sheep Butchering Re-Search" This introductory chapter identifies how Indigenous research (Smith [1999], Wilson [2008], and Kovach [2009]) and the Diné Educational Paradigm of *Sá'áh Nagháii Bik'éh Hozhóón* influence this project. Edits will include strengthening the re-searching and re-mem-bering frameworks brought forth through extra intellectual ways of knowing.

Chapter 2 "Protocols of Respect: *Diné dóó Dine*" Dialoguing with Inge Bolin's (1998) rituals of respect and Paul Nadasy's (2007) assessment that there exist reciprocal, sentient, and intellectual relationships between humans and non-humans, edits to this chapter will reinforce the linguistic, philosophical, and historical Diné perspectives of the relationships between humans (*Diné*) and nonhuman animal (*dine'*) through recent ethnographic findings (i.e., my position as a herd guardian).

Chapter 3 "*Dibé éi diné be' iiná át'e*: Sheep Is Life (beyond Death)" Originally one chapter, I will divide this chapter into two - chapter 3 and chapter 6. Chapter 3 reviews an arch of sheep deaths since time immemorial (ceremonial hunts, puberty ceremony hunts, home butchering, reduction era live burns, slaughterhouse kills) through Kim Tallbear's (2011) lens of "who lives and dies in this world, and how." Edits to this chapter will elaborate on the concept of reciprocal trust associated in human/non-human animal relationships, which Tim Ingold (1994) claims to exist primarily in hunting societies.

Chapter 4 "*T'áá hwó ájít'éego*: Traditional butchering in our Own Hands" This chapter analyzes print sources of the process of Diné sheep butchering in terms of a physical, intellectual, and communal practice. Through David Howes (2003) and Constance Classen's (1993) works, edits to this chapter will identify language, child rearing, and alternative sensory modes as Diné ways of learning.

Chapter 5 "Re-mem-bering Diné People through Sheep Butchering" Dialoguing Barbara Myerhoff's (1982) "re-mem-bering" metaphor and Michael White's (1997) use of remembering as psycho-therapy, this chapter explores the dismembering/re-mem-bering processes associated with butchering. Ties between the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual dismembering of sheep serve as a therapeutic process for Diné people to culturally mourn and to dismantle historical trauma.

Chapter 7 "*Naabeehó Bich'eeki*': Dismembering Miss Navajo" Utilizing Deloria's "Playing Indian", this chapter highlights the Indian Princess/Squaw stereotypes of Native Women, which often overshadow the Miss Navajo Butchering event's association with *Dibé éi Diné be' iiná' át'é*. Updated ethnographic data will provide further elaboration on the event's effectiveness of gauging competitors' knowledge of traditional butchering philosophies, revealing the pageant as a decolonial project.

Chapter 8 "Re-mem-bering the Repertoire" I analyze the documentary *Miss Navajo* (2007) through Diana Taylor lenses in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003). Focusing on the butchering event as performed at the 2015 Miss Navajo Pageant, edits will strengthen the conclusions of the contestants as archivists of traditional philosophies and the event as living embodiment of knowledge.

Chapter 10 "*Dibé lizhiin*: Butchering the Black Sheep": Building from Donna Haraway's work (2003), edits to this chapter posit that the manners in which we treat sheep are more than a reflection of how we

## NEH Awards for TCU Faculty

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treat ourselves, it is how we value ourselves and our future as a tribal nation. In doing so, where sheep and Diné people co-constitute each other, sheep and Diné peoples also de-construct each other.

**(4) Drafting New Chapters:** I will complete two new chapters based on new research and additional kinesthetic, linguistic, and philosophical understandings gained since the dissertation completion.

Chapter 6 "From Backyard Butcherings to Slaughterhouse and Back" Introduced in chapter 3, this new chapter will explore the seemingly contradictory setting of a Diné person in a Western institution through Philip Deloria's "Indians in Unexpected Places" framework and conversations with 3 Diné butchers who work at Sunny Side Farms (USDA Slaughterhouse).

Chapter 9 "Dissertation Defense: Running the Miss Navajo Butchering Event" This chapter explores my experience as the 2018 Miss Navajo Nation Butchering Event Coordinator and address the challenges and successes of the event in adherence to *Dibé éí Diné be' iiná' át'é* and Indigenous research.

**Course Creations:** An unintended consequence of COVID-19 reveals an increase of Indigenous food sovereignty practices within the Native Nation. Coffee Pot Farms and Navajo Agricultural Cooperative are local examples; however, neither of these organizations address Diné animal care. The following two new courses will address this gap in transmission of Indigenous ways of knowing and contribute to the emerging NAS curriculum at Diné College. Classes will address intersections with Animal Studies (animals in Indigenous epistemologies), Global Indigenous Politics (questions of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty), and Colonial/ Decolonial studies (possibilities of Indigenous healing through academia). Currently there are no Indigenous animal studies classes at Diné College. This classes will not only continue to build the NAS Minor but they will also be available as electives in other degree programs such as: Agriculture BS; Diné Studies BA, Environmental Science BA, and Psychology BA.

**(1) NAS 301 Indigenous Perspectives of Human/Non-Human Animal Relations:** This animal studies class will intersect with Indigenous perspectives and practices of human and non-human animal relationships. The class will culminate in Diné specific praxis to reestablish that relationship. Student final projects will engage Indigenous research by oral history and conversation data collection processes.

**(2) NAS 401 Indigenous Butchering Practices of the Americas:** This class addresses the link with Animal Science and Animal Studies, exploring how, where, and why non-human animals die. This class bridges the humanities and the biological sciences and culminates in technical workshops guided by cultural teachings of traditional sheep butchering. Student final projects will engage Indigenous research.

**Competencies, Skills, and Access:** I am an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, and after completing my Ph.D. course work, I returned to work in my community by teaching Indigenous Research and Decolonization and Indigenous Resilience classes at Diné College, managing grants for the Navajo Cultural Arts Program, and **(b) (6)**. These responsibilities, coupled with my positions as the 2018 Miss Navajo Butchering Event Coordinator, guardian of our family's herd, and butcher during COVID-19 have deepened my kinesthetic, linguistic, and philosophical understandings of the significance of Diné relationships with sheep. These experiences not embodied in my dissertation will (1) contribute to the 44 Diné voices collected from 2012-2016 as part of the dissertation project, (2) demonstrate Indigenous reciprocal relationship explication and (3) encapsulate *dibé* as an axis of community unity, cultural preservation, and perpetuation of Diné ways of knowing as of yet unexplored by the humanities or social sciences nor taught directly at Diné College.

**Final Product and Dissemination:** A book proposal will be submitted to publishers early in the award period (i.e., University of Arizona Press, University of Minnesota Press, and University of New Mexico Press) and the complete first draft of the book manuscript will result from the totality of this award. This award period will also include findings presentations to chapter houses involved in the original and new data collection periods, to Diné College, IRB and to the Navajo Nation IRB. Lastly, syllabi and New Course Petitions will be submitted to Diné College's Curriculum Committee to add NAS301 and NAS401 to the 2023-24 Academic Year Course Offerings.

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