Parts of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the narrative portion 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 applicants are urged to prepare a proposal that reflects their unique project and aspirations.

Prospective applicants should consult the application guidelines at https://www.neh.gov/program/dli-del-fellowships for instructions.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Research Division staff well before a grant deadline.

This attachment only contains the narrative, 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 might have been changed since this application was submitted. You must follow the guidelines in the currently posted Notice of Funding Opportunity (see above link).

> **Project Title:** *Turning Phrases: Exploring Expressive Potential in Morpheme Combinations of Nuwä Abigip*
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> **Institution:**
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> **Project Director:** Laura Grant
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> **Grant Program:** Dynamic Language Infrastructure - Documenting Endangered Languages (DLI-DEL) Fellowship

"Turning Phrases: Exploring Expressive Potential in Morpheme Combinations of Nuwä Abigip"
A proposal from Laura Grant

Narrative

Significance, impact and endangerment. The *nuwüm*, known in English as the Kawaiisu, are one of several distinct groups of Indigenous peoples living in their traditional territories in Kern County in southern California. The Kawaiisu are not federally recognized. They live among the general population in their homeland at the southern tip of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, from east of Bakersfield to the western edge of the Mojave Desert. Their language, *nuwä abigip*, (also known in English as Kawaiisu (ISO 639-3: xaw)) is a Southern Numic language of the Northern branch of the Uto-Aztecan family. The extensive Uto-Aztecan language family consists of over 30 languages found from the Great Basin of the Western United States and through western, central and southern Mexico. Lucille Girado-Hicks (born (b) (6)) is the only remaining first-language speaker of *nuwä abigip*. In 2003 she was the first to teach her language in public classes in the town of Tehachapi. She, her sister Betty Hernandez (deceased 2014) and her brother Luther Girado (deceased 2021) have been central to the revitalization and documentation of her community's history and conversational practices. By the UNESCO scale (Mosely, 2002) *nuwä abigip* is critically endangered; the community rejects this deficit-based term and has rather framed their measures of language vitality in the rising number of speakers of all levels. Among Lucille's students, five adult second-language learners (of which I am one) can converse and have become teachers of *nuwä abigip*. By tallying the role sheets of language learning opportunities offered between 2008 and 2018 by the tribally-controlled nonprofit organization, the Kawaiisu Language and Cultural Center (KLCC), 130 learners between the ages of 2 and 90 could be counted as having varying abilities to use it.

Like other Uto-Aztecan languages, *nuwä abigip* is polysynthetic. Its words can be built of many morphemes (pieces that have independent meaning but may or may not be able to stand alone, 'free' and 'bound' morphemes). When building a word– (inflection) –the word could be modified by adding pieces to express, for example, aspect (how an action extends over time) or mood (a speaker's attitude about a topic). Like many Indigenous languages of the Americas, *nuwä abigip* is highly inflected; a sentence can be made up of one verb with many affixes and express what a more isolating language like English does with separate words and fewer bound morphemes.

> *Panhuuzgwevaanüm*.
> panhuuz   -gwe-   -vaa-   -n-   -üm
> swim   progressive   future   n.verb.suffix   1st.person.plural.exclusive
> 'We [the speakers, not the hearer(s)] are going to go swimming.'

Nuwä abigip is also described as an agglutinative language, meaning its morphemes, both stems and affixes, tend to remain unchanged after being combined and that they largely have a single, specific meaning ad/or grammatical role to play. Previous studies of *nuwä abigip* have necessarily focused on defining these individual morphemes so that their distinctions could be recognized and understood (e.g., Booth, 1979). Scholars from outside of the speaker community published a reference grammar of Kawaiisu using elicited language samples largely translated from English (Zigmond, Booth & Munro, 1991) Linguist Sheldon Klein (2002) reflected on this paradigm:

> I had asked [American linguist] Mary Haas if using English to elicit sentences from informants might run the risk of getting responses biased by English grammatical structure. She replied by saying that such queries were only a starting point, and that one need to collect and study long unprompted texts to find constructions that might never be elicited just in response to "How do you say.[…]?" question in English." (p. 97).

In the proposed study, in close collaboration with Lucille Hicks, I intend to document constructions of multiple bound morphemes present in recordings of sustained natural language use among up to three first-language speakers of *nuwä abigip*. In this new opportunity to explore *nuwä abigip*'s inventive inflectional forms, we seek to discover what we can learn about its morphology that will expand models of the expressive capacity of this Numic language, and related Numic languages, and also provide supports for language revitalization through the use of these models. The study will complement and

expand on research by earlier outside academics and more recently by *nuwä* community researchers. This study has special significance to the speaker community; their oral language provides a bridge to deep knowledge about their worldview as conveyed through generations of previous speakers. Lucille is the last person who can interpret these recordings as a first-language speaker raised among a community of speakers. Recordings that will provide this study's source of natural language contain local history and stories of family relations that can help reconnect coming generations to the traditional *nuwä* community in Kern County; it is in a mode of resurgence after suffering the diasporic effects of settler colonialism.

Organization, concepts, and methods. To maintain an ethical relationship with the nuwä community, I will follow an Indigenist approach to research that foregrounds the contributions of the Indigenous community researchers and requires that the end result brings benefits to them (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2007, 2008). Beginning in 2009, community researchers (myself included) organized by the KLCC began their own analysis of *nuwä abigip* under the direction of the Girado siblings and with the mentorship of two professional linguists (Spence, Grant & Ahlers, 2013). This led to two sequential Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) projects (NSF Awards: BCS-1160669 and 1561925) to videotape, in an immersion environment, narratives and conversations that focused on topics relevant to the first language speakers and then to transcribe these recordings (Grant, 2019, Grant & Ahlers, 2021). In order to study long unprompted texts, I will draw on primary sources from these previous DEL projects, 60 hours of previously videotaped conversations and narratives of three contemporary *nuwä abigip* speakers, the Girado siblings, and on audio recordings of the Girados' older relatives by linguist Sheldon Klein from the 1950s and 1980s (Peebles & Klein). Using ELAN software (Brugman & Russel, 2004), 20 hours of these recordings have already been largely transcribed and analyzed to the morpheme level, and glossed and translated to English by community researchers who are second language learners, with validation by first-language speakers. These transcriptions, and others that I will create from other recordings to widen domains of use, will facilitate bilingual access to many natural language samples. The KLCC research team mentioned above began an ever-expanding guide of bound morphemes. To add to this guide, I will analyze how first-language speakers use morphemes in a range of combinations, to gain a better understanding of the scope of these morphemes, especially in terms of their semantics (rather than their grammatical scope).

In 2021 I completed a retrospective study of *nuwä abigip* language acquisition in adult learners that showed their developmental sequences manifesting in regular patterns (Grant, 2021). Learners remembered that the use of particular bound morphemes opened up whole domains of use in their agglutinative language. For example, the mastery of the verbal suffix *-vaa* allowed them to begin talking about actions they intended to do in the future. Mapping the order in which language learners acquired specific types of grammatical functions showed that there were many commonalities in the order of acquisition. Language acquisition was constrained by the few opportunities to hear and interact in the language but it was accelerated by learners' transcription to the morpheme level of videotaped conversations. Just as earlier experiences enabled the recognition and acquisition of individual bound morphemes, project results may enable learners to recognize and test more complex expressive forms and contribute to their language development.

Linguistic features to explore during this project. Every verb (with rare exceptions such as some imperative forms) must be marked with one of two verbal suffixes: *-n* or *-d.* Previous studies resulted in a partial understanding of these centrally important morphemes as in this statement: "Although -dï/rï [-rï is an alternate pronunciation of -dï] verbs appear to have been originally imperfective (and subject related; §4.2.1), it is clear that they can now express perfective (or a least past) notions, and that -na verbs, though they more commonly refer to the past, can refer to present and other imperfective events […] (Zigmond, Booth & Munro, 1991, p. 88). Zigmond, Booth, and Munro also suggest that *-dï/rï* function as nominalizers (p.85). An integrated understanding of their range of functions is unclear and largely unexplored, especially in the context of natural conversational speech. My earlier work suggests that the use of these verbal endings is highly context-dependent, and is related to narrative structure. (See

sample.pdf) In beginning this research I hypothesize that verbs can take either the *-n* or *-d* suffix depending on both the context within a conversation or story and a speaker's choice to place themselves within the action that is being described, or to step back and describe it from outside the action. Such work is done using tense markers in English, but is easily done with aspectual marking instead. Disentangling this in *nüwa abigip* adds to our understanding of the tools that languages offer their speakers in narrative construction. In view that almost every sentence requires the use of *-n* or *-d*, a clearer understanding of how these two morphemes are used by native speakers in managing narratives and multi-party conversations is critical in interpreting existing documentation, in teaching *nuwä abigip* and in acquiring the spoken language.

The meanings of many *nüwa abigip* morphemes undergo semantic extension, including metaphorical extension (e.g., using distal or past constructions to refer to people who have passed away). Such semantic extensions may not depend on the morphemes themselves in isolation (as they are typically described), but rather in combination with one another, or as they are placed into broader narrative or conversational contexts. In order to explore this, I will compare the existing guide of bound morphemes to instances of their use in morpheme combinations, and within the broader narrative and conversational structures available in the recordings of multi-party conversations. Having analytic support of a first-language speaker is key to my process as is my ability to understand the language without translation first to English. I have been privileged to videotape Lucille's traditional stories, an array of teaching media, conversations with her siblings and her autobiography as told entirely in her language. We have a long-standing, trusting relationship on which to build this new study. From our homes we will use FaceTime and Zoom on phones and iPads to confer regularly. I will meet with Lucille face-to-face at her home in **(b) (6)**, for intensive work weeks and to record new samples of narratives expressing morpheme combinations highlighted by this study.

Competencies, skills, and access. I participated in linguistic field training in Tehachapi from 2009 to 2011 along with the Girado siblings and my Indigenous peers under the mentorship of two professional linguists. Based on our findings we created immersion curriculum that featured the use of bound morphemes. I continued with the same co-researchers in two consecutive DEL projects, first as a Co-Principal Investigator in 2012 and as the Principal Investigator between 2016 and 2020. Along with *nuwä* co-researchers, I was responsible for digital recording, the design and implementation of the ELAN template and annotation standards, and the training of 11 community researchers in translation and transcription. I am a proficient speaker of *nuwä abigip* and literate in the language. I have copies of the Kawaiisu materials I propose to use, the audio and video recordings and completed ELAN projects of the two KLCC DEL projects and the availability of Lucille for her invaluable interpretative asssistance.

Final product and dissemination. The final products will include a monograph which describes *nuwä abigip*'s bound morphemes and morpheme constructions, presented to the reader through unprompted texts of natural language use by the Girado siblings. Stories of community history that will be relevant to the contemporary *nuwä* community, accompanied by photos of the speakers conversing, will be featured. Morphological data will be organized in roughly the same order in which adult learners, through their developmental sequences, demonstrated their acquisition of certain *nuwä abigip* grammatical functions (Grant, 2021); the analysis may inform the study of linguistics and second language acquisition and be useful to the community of emerging *nuwä abigip* speakers. The monograph will include a key to the orthography and abbreviations and terms for morphemes. I intend that the monograph will be peer reviewed and disseminated though it will be published formally only after the span of the Fellowship program. I anticipate that I will transcribe at least six hours of digital recordings to add to the existing collection (Girado, Hernandez, Hicks, Grant & Turner). All project results will be shared with the KLCC. I will also archive all project results and products in the Survey of California and Other Indigenous Languages (SCOIL) at the University of California, Berkeley. The archive's staff will upload digital project results to SCOIL's complementary online public access site, the California Language Archives (CLA). (See archives.pdf)