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**PARTNERSHIP YIELDS CULTURALLY-RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL
MATERIALS**

**NASA, ArtReach Studios and Navajo Nation collaborate to present material
aimed at encouraging children to study science**

After more than two years of dedicated work, educational material designed to encourage Navajos to study science in a culturally relevant way was presented to a group of educators, scientists and leaders who worked to make the project a reality.

Through a partnership with the Navajo Nation, ArtReach Studios and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, an activity book and DVD that integrates both Navajo and Western teachings on astronomy were developed. The material presents Navajo stories about the stars, as well as Western scientific knowledge. The material – including an activity book and a DVD called “Sa’ ba hane’: Story of the Stars” – is designed for community activity nights for hands-on and interactive learning. For example, elders are encouraged to share their own personal knowledge of the Navajo stories about stars during activities with students.

Angela Barney-Nez, staff assistant at the Speaker’s office, said that after some

final revisions, the educational materials will soon be made available for use by Chapters and schools throughout the Navajo Nation.

The material evolved from the findings of a focus group that began meeting in 2004. The focus group was proposed to NASA Explorer Institute by ArtReach Studio in partnership with the Office of the Speaker of the Navajo Nation Council. ArtReach Studio and the Speaker's office had previously collaborated on the production of the documentary, "Sani Dez-bah: Navajo Women Warriors."

In the project description, project leaders Daniella Scalice from the NASA Astrobiology Institute and Alice Carron from ArtReach Studios state: "The focus group's findings outlined a need for products and programs that include families in the learning experience, tie together NASA content and Navajo knowledge, incorporate the Navajo language and promote sustainable partnerships.

"With that in mind, the NASA and the Navajo Nation project collaborators set out to develop K-12 informal educational materials which weave together NASA astrobiology science and Navajo cultural teachings relating to astronomy and the stars."

NASA scientists and Navajo educators, including staff from Division of Diné Education, Chinle Unified School District, Diné College and many other entities, provided input in the development of the educational materials, which meet educational guidelines established by the states of Arizona and New Mexico. The resulting "Community Night Setting" was field-tested in four locations throughout the Navajo Nation.

Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) became involved in the project because the Diné Fundamental Law, which was passed by the Navajo Nation Council in 2002, gives the leaders of the Navajo Nation responsibility in ensuring that the fundamental laws continue to be taught to the Navajo people.

In the introduction to the DVD, Speaker Morgan says, "The natural order is maintained through our knowledge of the stars. We need our children to know this knowledge.

"The Natural Law is the first component of Diné Fundamental Law... To the Diné people, the Natural Law is an immutable law, because it is set for us by the Holy

People – meaning that the Natural Law cannot be changed by any human. It is established by our Holy People and sets forth the Diné lifeway standards. The Holy People enact these principles of life for us as Earth people.”
