



**NAVAJO NATION
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2012

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Housing and Urban Development funds improving the lives of Navajo families



Electrical power line extensions are a major consideration for annual project funding from the Indian Community Development Block Grant funds. The Community Development Block Grant program works with tribal, federal and private entities for the completion of these power line projects. (Photo by Roger Morgan)

WINDOW ROCK-In the vast 27,425 square mile expanse of the Navajo Nation, infrastructure development is perhaps the greatest challenge families face when it comes to improving their quality of life. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) has utilized funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to address these needs head-on with the development of electrical power lines and waterlines to serve the basic needs of families.

Arbin Mitchell, director for the Navajo Nation Division of Community Development said infrastructure development has dramatically improved the lives of Navajo families that were the beneficiaries of waterline and electrical power line services. "We continue to promote viable communities through Navajo values," Mitchell said.

Funding from HUD's Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) has been intrinsic to addressing these needs and each year, the Navajo Nation works in tandem with federal, tribal and private agencies to secure the requirements of Navajo families. HUD's mission of creating strong, sustainable, inclusive communities and quality affordable homes for all has aided the Navajo Nation with enhancing the lives of many residents. Since 1976 the development of infrastructure needs has improved the quality of life for Navajo families, in line with HUD's mission. Moreover, the funding has improved the health conditions of the communities being served, especially with regard to waterline development.

James Adakai, program and projects specialist for CDBG said there are many families living in very remote areas of the Navajo Nation that wouldn't have waterline or power line services if it

wasn't for the ICDBG funds. "This is the only program that I'm aware which provides funding for families residing outside growth centers, subdivisions, or communities," Adakai said.

For most people living in urban centers and even in the rural areas of America, infrastructure needs are usually taken for granted because of the given availability and stability. The country buzzes with opinion and concern when the occasional blackouts occur and cities grind to a halt. The lack of these basic necessities is reality for most Native American families, with particular regard to the rugged terrain of the Navajo Nation, where survival has been ingrained into the generations. Finding students doing homework under the dim light of the kerosene lantern isn't a tough endeavor, nor is finding a family that must haul water to subsist.

Adakai estimated the infrastructure needs of the Navajo Nation with some modest cost projections - \$600 million for waterline development and \$250 million for power line development - reflecting higher costs for waterline projects because of the extensive planning process. Waterlines typically involve a longer timeframe than power lines because of the pre-engineering services, archaeology and water studies required.

In the past year, the CDBG has made significant strides toward addressing the existing disparities in nine communities on the Navajo Nation. Working in collaboration with the Capital Improvement Office (CIO), Indian Health Services (IHS) and Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA), CDBG saw the completion of eight power line projects and one waterline project. The total cost of these projects absorbed the maximum ceiling award to the Navajo Nation from ICDBG: \$5.5 million.

The communities of Chinle, Cornfields, Dennehotso, Inscription House, Kaibeto, Kinlichee, Shonto and Tonalea all received power line extensions that brought electrical services to 192 families. The total mileage of electrical line spanned 110.77 miles. CDBG funded \$4,515,899 for the projects, CIO chipped in \$177,803 for the developments, the chapters contributed \$512,545 toward the projects and NTUA contributed \$539,574 for a total power line cost of \$5,745,821.

The community of Ramah received a waterline extension that brought potable water and sewer services to 126 Navajo families. The total mileage of waterline stretched 20.8 miles. For the waterline development, CDBG contributed funding in the amount of \$1,484,500 and IHS contributed \$1,484,500 for a total project cost of \$2,969,000.

The grand total for both electrical power line and waterline developments was \$8,714,821 and clearly demonstrates that providing the basic necessities to Navajo families is a costly and time consuming endeavor.

Working for the CDBG program for 20 years, Adakai has seen the expansion of Navajo communities from ICDBG funding that increased from the \$2.3 million grant he was hired to apply for in 1992 to the \$5.5 million funding ceiling the Navajo Nation was fortunate to receive within the last few funding cycles. However, funding is quite competitive with 171 other tribes in the southwest region applying for ICDBG funding. The threshold requirements

and rating factors require due diligence and persistence to meet the needs of families in dire need of quality of life improvements.

The Navajo Nation is appreciative of the ICDBG funding from HUD and Navajo families have benefited immensely from the simple pleasures of having indoor plumbing and electrical services to power refrigerators, heating systems and light to illuminate what was once veiled in dim obscurity. For these families with infrastructure development, their lives were improved tenfold.

The eight staff members of the CDBG program are assigned specific tasks in the application and implementation process. They are constantly reminded that the reward for a job well done is from knowing that families have enough water to meet their day-to-day needs or electricity to power their residential needs.



The Navajo Tribal Utility Authority works closely with the Community Development Block Grant program for the completion of electrical power line projects on the Navajo Nation. Workers pictured here are preparing to unspool electrical line for the power line project. (Photo by Roger Morgan)



The development of waterline projects is perhaps the biggest financial undertaking for Community Development Block Grant program, which works closely with Indian Health Services to bring these projects to completion. (Photo by Roger Morgan)