

Program Began accepting applications Sept. 7

Staff Reports

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer announced that the newly-created Navajo Nation Business and Artisans Economic Relief Grant Program began accepting applications on Sept. 7 to help Navajo businesses, entrepreneurs, and Navajo artisans facing financial hardship and/or business interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The \$60 million that will be used for the program was part of the \$475 million CARES Act funding package in Resolution CJY-67-20, which was approved by the 24th Navajo Nation Council Aug. 6 and signed into law Aug. 16 by Nez and Lizer.

“We’ve had business owners and Navajo artists ask about COVID-19 economic relief efforts. We know that many businesses and artisans have dealt with the economic downturn due to the pandemic and it is not just here on the Navajo Nation, it is across the country,” Nez said “Under the leadership of Division of Economic Development Executive Director JT Willie, his team put together the \$60 million proposal and now they have implemented the Business and Artisans Economic Relief Grant Program. We encourage all business owners and artisans to take the initiative to apply for the funds,” he continued.

Navajo artisans who meet the eligibility requirements can receive up to \$5K for “dire financial emergencies” defined as the lack or imminent endangerment of essentials such as housing, medicine, childcare, and food. Eligible businesses can receive as much as \$10K to \$60K depending on the demonstrated need.

“Many artisans depend on other businesses to showcase and sell their artwork and we know that many businesses had to close for periods of time due to the ongoing pandemic. With these funds, we want businesses to keep their employees on the payroll, cover some operating expenses, and hopefully create some long-term stability,” Lizer said. “As a business owner, I understand the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on operations while we try to

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maintain our employees as well. I encourage all businesses out there to at least submit an application.”

Willie said the application website will include two separate applications – one for businesses and one for Navajo artisans. There is a two-step process, part one is the Navajo Business Certification Application and step two is the relief grant application. Applicants are required to complete their source list number in part one in order to apply for part two. All information is located at navajoeconomy.org. Additional information is available on the Division of Economic Development’s Facebook page, along with live webinars regarding the application process.

The following general eligibility requirements apply to all businesses applying for financial assistance under this Navajo Business Economic Relief Grant:

Business is facing a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Business is organized for profit and at least 51% owned by an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation.

Business was in operation prior to Jan. 1, 2020.

Business has fewer than 300 employees as of March 1, 2020 (for the purpose of this requirement, each individual employee, regardless of typical number of hours worked, and each owner, is considered one employee).

Business is certified or to be certified or re-certified under the Navajo Nation. Business Source List as published by the Navajo Business Regulatory Department. Website: navajoeconomy.org

The following general eligibility requirements apply to all artists and artisans applying for financial assistance under this Navajo Artisan Relief Grant:

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Business is certified or to be certified or re-certified under the Navajo Nation. Business Source List as published by the Navajo Business Regulatory Department. Website: navajoeconomy.org

Organized as an artist in a medium or discipline in art or performance.

Artist or artisan is at least 18 years of age.

Artist or artisan must be an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation.

Artist or artisan must be able to demonstrate a sustained commitment to their work, career, and public audience for their work.

Artist or artisan is facing a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Independently owned and operated with annual gross sales revenue of \$100K or less (artists or artisans who typically earn over this amount each year should look into the Navajo Business Economic Relief Grant).

“As a business owner and most importantly as an artist, I know the challenges that one’s business can go through. It is also extremely difficult when you have no avenue to sell your work or are instructed to close due to a public health emergency,” Division of Economic Development Executive Director JT Willie stated. “Therefore, when we began developing this program in May, we took into account all possible situations our business owners and artisans are facing.

“A lot of hours of preparation, evaluation, and determination made this possible. My team deserves all the recognition in making this possible. We are looking forward to a positive outcome for everyone,” Willie said.

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Overall, the Navajo Nation received over \$714 million in CARES Act funds: \$600 million on May 6, \$86 million on June 16, and \$27 million on June 18. Approximately \$537 million in CARES Act funds has been approved and signed into law, leaving a remaining amount of \$176 million, which the Nez-Lizer Administration is proposing to use to directly help Navajo students, elders, families, and others impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic through Legislation No. 0209-20.

For more information regarding the Navajo Nation Business and Artisans Economic Relief Grant Program, please contact the Division of Economic Development at (928) 871-6544 or send an email to navajoeconomy@navajo-nsn.gov.