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Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College Awarded \$9.2 Million Bush Foundation Community Innovation Grant to Catalyze Ojibwe Language Revitalization

May 20th, 2026

[CLOQUET, MINN.] — Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College (FDLTCC) has been awarded a \$9.2 million Community Innovation Grant from the Bush Foundation to support a bold, eight-year initiative focused on advancing Ojibwe language revitalization across the region and beyond.

This transformative investment will strengthen FDLTCC’s role as one of the many institutions and communities working to advance Ojibwe language revitalization by expanding pathways for adult learners, preserving the voices of first-language speakers, and increasing access to immersive and community-based language learning opportunities.

“Through our Community Innovation program, we look for ideas to develop, test, and spread, and the work of Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College is a great example,” said Mattie Harper DeCarlo, grantmaking officer at the Bush Foundation. “This work will help develop infrastructure that supports adult learners and strengthens the language pipeline that the Ojibwe language movement is building,” DeCarlo added.

The initiative reflects a long-term commitment to sustaining and growing Ojibwe language through culturally grounded education, intergenerational learning, language documentation, and community partnership. Over the next eight years, the project will focus on developing new pathways and support systems for adult learners, strengthening relationships with first-language speakers, expanding immersion opportunities, and building long-term language infrastructure.

Dr. Robert Sonny Peacock, Fond du Lac Elder and Tribal College Director, reflected on the importance of language growth and continuity:

“I was told by several elder fluent speakers that learning Ojibwe is a life-long learning. One never learns all of it and as we move into the 21st Century the need to keep our language relative and relatable to change is as important as learning about the old meanings. We live in a new, ever-changing world and if our language doesn’t grow with it, learning Ojibwe will not be relevant. What a challenge for our language learners, to be on the edge of new words that fill the void with new sounds and meaning, creating a thesaurus for tomorrow’s children.”

The initiative comes at a pivotal moment for language revitalization efforts, as communities continue working to preserve and strengthen Ojibwe language for future generations. By investing in adult learners and expanding opportunities for immersion and mentorship, FDLTCC aims to support learners at every stage of their language journey while helping create sustainable systems for long-term growth and proficiency.

A major component of the initiative includes the creation of an Ojibwe Language Documentation and Preservation Research Center dedicated to recording and preserving the sound of the Ojibwe language. The center will focus on documenting first-language speakers and creating an accessible archive for students, educators, and communities. Building on the college’s two-year Ojibwe Language degree, FDLTCC also plans to explore a bachelor’s degree program in Ojibwemowin. This degree will help prepare the next generation of language speakers, educators, and leaders in revitalization efforts.

“This award addresses the funding needs that have existed for so very long. This long-term commitment is exactly the type of support needed to make FDLTCC a regional hub for language learning and revitalization,” said Biidaasige Tom Howes, FDLTCC Cultural Oversight Board Chair. “We have had dreams like this and to see this come true means so very much, perhaps more than we can truly measure. The impact of this may truly be generational in nature.”

The grant will also expand the long-standing Ojibwemotaadidaa Omaa Gidakiiminaang (OOG) immersion camps, which have been active for more than 15 years and have played a meaningful role in strengthening Ojibwe language revitalization efforts across communities. Through these camps, many participants have gone on to contribute their language knowledge and teaching skills to other programs, helping extend the impact of immersion learning for the benefit of the language and future generations. The initiative will further increase opportunities for learners to engage directly with first-language speakers

through culturally immersive and community-centered experiences grounded in Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being.

“This opportunity reflects a deep commitment to the future of our language and our people,” said Gaagigegiizhigookwe Nicole Kneeland, Dean of Indigenous and Academic Affairs at FDLTCC. “Through this work, we will honor our first speakers, uplift and support our learners, and ensure the Ojibwe language continues to live, grow, and thrive for generations to come. We are deeply grateful to the Bush Foundation for investing in a vision that will strengthen our college, empower our communities, and create lasting pathways for language revitalization grounded in culture, relationship, and intergenerational knowledge.”

The initiative is grounded in the understanding that Ojibwe is a living language that must continue to evolve alongside contemporary life while remaining rooted in ancestral knowledge.

For press inquiries or more information regarding FDLTCC and language revitalization please contact Rebecca Baker, Director of Marketing and Communications, at rebecca.baker@fdltcc.edu or 218-879-0820