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Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Receives \$150k Grant to Support Entrepreneurship

Press Release Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
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Partners with Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures to Enhance Economic Resiliency

The Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe has been awarded a \$150,000 grant from the Minnesota Disaster Recovery Fund for Coronavirus (MDRF) to study entrepreneurship in the Mille Lacs Tribal Economy and the feasibility of a business incubator program. The MDRF is a private fund administered through the Minnesota Council on Foundations, which was designed to support the recovery and resilience of Minnesota's nonprofit sector, including tribal nations.

The Band has come to recognize that the Mille Lacs Tribal Economy is too reliant on specific industries that were unevenly disrupted by the pandemic. The Mille Lacs Band has long worked to build a secure economic future for its Band Members, and this grant provides an opportunity to study new ways to do so.

“Through diversification of our businesses and tribal economy, the Mille Lacs Band has made great progress toward achieving economic self-sufficiency through Band-owned businesses, but we also have to support Band Member entrepreneurs,” said Mille Lacs Band Chief Executive Melanie Benjamin. “We have so many talented Band Members who have an entrepreneurial spirit who just need additional support and training so that they can realize their dreams of running their own businesses. This is a great step in that direction.”



A business incubator is designed to help create, foster, and grow young businesses by providing them with affordable shared space, resources, and technical assistance during their startup years. The goal of the business incubator would be to rebuild the tribal economy stronger through jumpstarting entrepreneurship; thereby offering all community members living in the tribal economy an additional tool to build wealth and community resiliency.

As a part of this grant award, the Mille Lacs Band will be engaging Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures (MLCV) as its Agent to study the feasibility of a business incubator. During the study MLCV will engage numerous stakeholders, including community members from underrepresented groups, key public leaders, business professionals, nonprofit leaders, emerging entrepreneurs, and small business owners.

“The ideals of self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship are closely related – they go hand in hand,” said Joe Nayquonabe, Jr., CEO of Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures. “Our hope is to be able to launch a business incubator as a tool to help tribal economy citizens, with a focus on American Indians, to pursue economic self-sufficiency in ways that are rewarding to them, as individuals, while strengthening the collective economic vitality of the region.”