

Purpose, Significance, and Vision

The Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs (NCIA), on behalf of the Omaha Tribe and a coalition of public-private partners, requests a 12-month “Business Opportunity” Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG). The ***purpose*** of this planning grant request is to enable a strategic planning process and generate a roadmap of the steps necessary to repurpose the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital in Walthill, Nebraska, in a way that creates a catalyst for rural small business development while securing its place as a cultural treasure. The ***significance*** of this project emanates from the “firsts” by which it is motivated. Built using funds raised by Dr. Picotte – the *first* Native American doctor, a noteworthy accomplishment for a young woman of her time – the hospital bearing her name was the *first* constructed for an Indian reservation that was not funded by the government. Opened in 1913, the hospital was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1993. The goal of “honoring the past and building for the future” motivates a dichotomous ***vision*** for the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital: rehabilitation of this culturally and historically significant structure will provide dedicated space for practical skill acquisition and entrepreneurial activity to enable Native people to engage in small business development efforts and generate new revenue streams and lasting tribute to an inspirational Native figure. The specifics of the small business development activities will emerge during the planning grant project period but may include business plan development for income-generating activities like a museum honoring Dr. Picotte’s legacy and an associated gift shop; a Native arts and crafts studio and gallery, brick and mortar boutique, and/or e-shop; maker, co-working, or business incubator spaces; a legal aid service provider; a Native health clinic; and/or a Native farmer’s market.

Activities and Expected Outcomes

To fulfill the purpose of this request and take a critical first step toward the vision outlined above, NCIA and its constellation of project partners will undertake ***three primary activities*** during the planning grant:

Conduct a Community Needs Assessment. A consultant (Milan Wall, Co-Director of the Heartland Center for Leadership Development) will seek deep understanding of the business and community needs in Walthill so renovation of the hospital can meet those needs and create economic opportunity for the community. To do so, Mr. Wall will cast a wide net across the region and ask targeted questions about regional and community needs related to the economic development and priorities of small and emerging businesses across Walthill and the Omaha Reservation. Extant secondary economic development and market data also will be analyzed. This assessment, which will inform the development of a strategic plan in Activity 2, will focus on the needs of *end users* – local community and business members – of the repurposed facility. The primary *deliverable* will be a community needs assessment report that will feed into a strategic plan to guide the implementation of specific business development and entrepreneurial activities in the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital.

Complete a Strategic Plan. Mr. Wall will extend the work performed in Activity 1 into a strategic planning process. Through a series of project meetings, he will provide guidance and expertise in the overall design of process methodologies used to gather qualitative and quantitative information through focus groups, one-on-one interviews with community members and potential donors, and other surveys and questionnaires. The primary *deliverable* in Activity 2 will be a strategic planning document describing: 1) critical project components like vision and mission statements, 2) high-level project goals and objectives, 3) a fundraising goal and capital campaign plan and process, and 4) fundraising and construction budgets and timelines – as well as tactics to meet the same.

Prepare an Architectural/Engineering (A/E) Restoration Master Plan. While the community assessment is being conducted and the strategic plan is being developed, Dan Worth and Gary Bowen of BVH Architecture – a Nebraska-based architectural firm – will prepare a restoration master plan that will assess the current structural state of the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital and its renovation costs and, as needed, address any legal matters associated with the restoration (e.g., issues related to federal 501[c]3 designation and National Historic Landmark status). The strategic plan and needs assessment report will inform the A/E restoration master plan and give the architects insight into how the building may best be configured to serve contemporary small business-related uses. The primary *deliverable* from Activity 3 will be an A/E restoration master plan that, together with the strategic plan, will inform the project fundraising goals, timeline, and budget and will include a set of talking points and design images for strategic use during the capital campaign phase.

These three activities/deliverables will result in the main **outcome** of the planning grant: a comprehensive, detailed, and coordinated framework to guide the next phase of the project. This framework will ensure that the renovation of the Dr. Susan La Flesche Picotte Memorial Hospital will lead to a repurposed space that serves as a hub of business innovation for the community while also honoring the unique cultural heritage of the hospital.