



Navajo Nation Council receives updates on CARES business and artisan hardship program, \$4.6 million granted through online portal

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council were briefed on the progress of the Navajo Nation CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Business and Artisan Grant Program established through Navajo Nation Council Resolution No. CJY-67-20 and implemented under the Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development (DED).

The Navajo Nation Council established the relief program in July to provide relief for artisans and business registered through the DED that have experienced hardship due to the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. The DED has implemented the relief program mainly through an online application portal developed specifically for administering the CARES funds.

The DED reported a total 1,532 applications have been received as of Oct.5, of which 607 have been funded or have been extended offers totaling \$4,638,467.29. This is further broken down into the following:

- Navajo artisans: 468 applications funded/extended offer in the amount of \$2,274,245;
- Navajo businesses: 139 applications funded/extended offer in the amount of \$2,364,222.29.
- 925 applications are pending review.

“With this support for Navajo businesses and artisans from the CARES Act available right now, the Council continues to urge small businesses and artists to apply for relief grants through the Division of Economic Development,” said Council Delegate Wilson Stewart, Jr. (Fort Defiance, Crystal, Red Lake, Sawmill).

Navajo businesses and artisans can access the application online at: navajoeconomy.org. For assistance, call (928) 871-6544 or email navajoeconomy@navajo-nsn.gov. Assistance for submitting an application to the CARES Business and Artisan Grant program is available through the DED administration in Saint Michaels and will be available soon through Regional Business Development Office (RBDO) locations.

Applicants are also required to register through the Navajo Nation Business Regulatory Source Listing as part of the grant application process.

DED shared Tuesday, in coordination with the Navajo Nation Office of the Controller (OOC), the audit firm Baker Tilly was hired to assist in management of the CARES Funds received by the Navajo Nation. DED Executive Director J.T. Willie also shared that the internal procurement process for the applications averages five days, with processing times for business source listing applications averaging 2 hours.

The more than \$714 million in federal CARES Act funds, which includes the Navajo artisan and business relief grants, are restricted to expenditures that:

1. Are necessary expenditures incurred due to the public health emergency with respect to the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19);
2. Were not accounted for in the budget most recently approved as of Mar. 27 (the date of enactment of the federal CARES Act) for the state or government; and
3. Were incurred during the period that began Mar. 1 and ends Dec. 30.

This distribution of CARES Funds is being monitored by the OOC to determine compliance with the CARES Act. The OOC is also utilizing the CARES Business and Artisan Grant program online portal as a model for potential widescale hardship and chapter-based distribution proposals.

Two legislation approved by Council may potentially utilize the underlying online portal currently in use by DED, the Controller said earlier in a report to the Naabik'iyáti' Committee.

Resolution No. CS-73-20 would authorize expenditures up to \$90 million by Navajo Nation chapters that are administered through an online portal and monitored by the OOC and Division of Community Development. The portal would eliminate the need for funds to be deposited into individual chapter accounts and would be paid out from a single payment system controlled by the central government.

Resolution No. CS-74-20 would allocate \$49,454,416 to the CARES Hardship Assistance Expenditure Plan to provide emergency financial assistance to enrolled Navajo tribal members.

Both legislation are currently awaiting action by President Jonathan Nez, who may issue a regular veto, line item veto or enact either legislation into law.

“The Navajo Nation Council is moving quickly to get CARES Funds expended before the Dec. 30 deadline to spend these dollars,” stated Speaker Seth Damon (Baahaali, Chilchiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh). “We appreciate the initiative demonstrated by Director JT Willie and the staff at the Division of Economic Development for getting this program up and running. If you’re a Navajo business or artisan that has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, we encourage you to get in touch with DED to see how they can assist you.”

The Navajo Nation CARES Fund Division of Economic Development Relief Funds and Projects Expenditure Plan approved by the Navajo Nation Council through Resolution No. CJY-67-20 includes \$36,450,000 for Navajo business economic relief grants, \$18,050,000 for the Navajo artisans economic relief grant program and \$5,500,000 for Covid-19 projects administered by the DED.

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