

# **DRAFT FOR REVIEW**

(September 18, 2002)

## ***Ga-du-gi: A Vision for Working Together To Preserve the Cherokee Language***

### **Report of a Needs Assessment Survey and a 10-Year Language Revitalization Plan**

**Conducted by the Cherokee Nation  
in fulfillment of  
FY 2001 DHS ANA Grant #90-NL-0189**

To quantify the current status of the Cherokee language among CN citizens who live in the jurisdictional service area and to develop a 10-year plan to increase the use of the language in the home, community and CN work setting.

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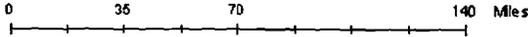


# Cherokee Nation 14 County Jurisdictional Area



**Legend**

- 14 County Jurisdiction
- Oklahoma Counties



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## Executive Summary

In the late 1960's the Cherokee Nation (CN) began the noble effort of instruction in the Cherokee language. However 42 years later, the demise of the Cherokee language has reached a critical stage and the language may be only one or two generations from extinction. In response, the CN has engaged in a bold new language revitalization initiative to challenge Cherokees of all ages to not just speak the language in its rudimentary form but to be proficient in the more complex and beautiful aspects of the literate language.

Funds provided by the US Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Native Americans in 2002 allowed the CN to quantify the language fluency rate of persons living within the CN jurisdictional service area and develop a long-range language preservation plan. The principle way that information was gathered was a convenience sample (n=300) survey, which generated quantitative data. The second method was a key informant process that collected qualitative information from individuals knowledgeable about the Cherokee language. Three major findings generated are a call to action for the Cherokee Nation to preserve the language.

- The Cherokee language should be the predominant language used in homes and communities.
- Cherokee members should strive to be fluent and the language should be spoken well enough to pass on to future generations.
- The Cherokee Nation should establish more community classes including instruction in intermediate and advanced levels, use of the language in the workplace, develop better instructional materials, and develop language immersions programs to bring the language back to homes and communities.

Other major findings derived from the sample population are noted below.

- No one under the age of 40 years of age is conversational in the language.
- Only 52 of 300 Cherokee language speakers use the language in their homes.
- Most former speakers stopped using the language either before they started to school or while in elementary school.
- Most children of fluent or conversational speakers do not speak the language.
- Most respondents report they would like to learn to speak the language or learn to speak better.
- Almost all respondents said that preservation of the Cherokee language is very important for future generations.

Findings from this survey were used to inform the development of a ten-year language preservation plan beginning in fiscal year 2003 and continuing through fiscal year 2012. Twelve strategies and 46 action steps are recommended to revitalize the Cherokee language for the people. The program development strategies include the following:

- Create informal learning opportunities in the home and communities,

- develop language immersion preschool through grade 6 classrooms,
- increase the quantity and quality of language classes in local school districts,
- expand language instruction for intermediate and advanced levels,
- create master-apprentice opportunities for adult learners,
- define language degree requirements and certification standards,
- collaborate with higher education institutions to increase the number of academically trained language teachers,
- evaluate academic instruction and modify to meet changing need,
- document and archive the written and spoken forms of the language,
- establish an archival system to preserve the language,
- assess the instructional needs and develop curriculum, and
- create teaching materials and evaluate.

Implementation of the plan requires substantially increased financial resources for program development, capital and equipment costs. Additional appropriation of tribal funding is a first step but other sources of funding from government and private philanthropy are critical to success. Creation of a fund raising plan is a high priority and should begin immediately.

Successful implementation of the long-range plan also depends largely on the extent to which the tribal government is able to formulate policy that promotes new services for intended beneficiaries. As with other tribal codes, language policy should be developed at the beginning of the planning process and refined as need arises.

While the results of this survey present a grim portrait of the Cherokee language, a strong group of committed individuals are already hard at work to reverse Cherokee language shift---and there is a glimmer of hope. The first full immersion Cherokee preschool classroom was successful and the children learned to converse and comprehend Cherokee from their teachers. Being witness to the progress of these little ones will encourage parents and their families to learn the language themselves. And, eventually with this small step, Cherokee people can enjoy the same success as the native Hawaiian and Maori people, who have revitalized their languages.

Following the Principal Chief's call to action to "follow the guiding principles of tribal strength by integrating Cherokee language into all aspects of everyday activities, history, custom, wisdom, art, music and traditional values" will allow Cherokee people in future generations the pleasure of enjoying the beautiful language given by the Creator.

## Cherokee Language Preservation Plan

Survey findings show that new and different kinds of language programs are needed for Cherokee people of all ages --- preschool to adult learners. Further concerns expressed by several individuals at different planning events indicate that a common theme is the desire for the Cherokee language to become part of the everyday life of a bilingual Nation. A substantial proportion of the survey respondents consider it the responsibility of the Cherokee Nation to operate programs at many different locations to benefit as many people as possible. Additionally other respondents believe that the most crucial site for language acquisition is in the home setting with the family charged with responsibly for keeping the language alive.

In large measure, the future of the survival of the Cherokee language and the Tribe's role in promoting equitable opportunities for its members depends largely on the elected officials of the Tribe. How they choose to assert their legislative authority by appropriating the resources necessary to support a language revitalization initiative is the first and most critical step.

Three major goals and 12 strategies are presented for the purpose of showing what would be required if the Cherokee Nation elects to move ahead with the development of a comprehensive language revitalization program. These goals and strategies are well matched with key findings expressed by the 300 people who participated in this language survey, approximately 100 key informants, and 20 advisors such as staff, Language Advisory Council, and the Research Advisory Committee.

The overall direction for achieving language revitalization in the next 10 years is centered on the following major goals.

- Create language revitalization programs that ensure survival of the Cherokee language throughout the tribal communities.
- Educate and certify language teachers to assure a qualified and knowledgeable workforce for program implementation.
- Document the language and develop language instructional materials and curriculum.

The three goals provide the overall direction for the Tribe's language revitalization initiative. Each goal has several strategies that provide a focus and direction. A fuller description in the action steps describes the activities necessary for program implementation. Although this long range plans offers a focused direction for the tribe, separate strategic plans with specific outcome indicators and measures should be created for each strategy during the planning and development phase.

Implementation of the long-range plan requires substantially increased financial resources for program development, operations, capital, and equipment costs. Additional appropriation of tribal funding is a first step, but because this plan proposes an ambitious approach to language preservation, other sources of funding from government (such as grants and congressional appropriation) and private philanthropy are critical for successful outcome. Thus, one of the first considerations for the Cherokee Nation is to create a fundraising plan to describe the way resources can be generated to support implementation and long-term program maintenance costs. The fund raising effort should begin immediately in fiscal year 2003 and continue throughout the ten-year process.

Successful implementation of the long-range plan also depends largely on the extent to which the governing body is able to formulate policy that promotes new services for its intended beneficiaries.

Language policy consists of a set of statements and mandates about language based on philosophy and ideology of the Cherokee Nation and its language communities. As with other tribal codes, language policy should be developed at the beginning of the planning process, but may be rewritten and refined for years as changing needs arise regarding Cherokee language preservation. Following are types of policy recommended for consideration:

- general mission statement about language or language-related issues.
- statement about the philosophy and value of the Cherokee language.
- statement declaring the official language(s) of the Cherokee Nation.
- information on the role and authority of various bodies, including local governing or policy-setting bodies, community members, and committee.
- list of the prioritized language planning goals.
- statement on policies about orthography and literacy; such as accepting an official writing system or rejection of a writing system.
- statement about intellectual property rights copyrights archival rights, etc.
- statement about social, cultural, religious, situational and political constraints that may affect language programs.

The purpose of policy development is to sanction the language revitalization initiative and validate formal agreements (such as creating new tribal codes, tribal council resolutions, agreements with affiliate entities, local school districts, and colleges and universities) so the initiative will proceed in a timely manner as mandated by individual policy statements.

The timeline shown for initiating each strategy, or phasing in various program components is hypothetical, because the Cherokee Nation must first decide which programs will be developed, secure the appropriate resources, and decide the sequence of implementation. However, the priority ranking of the following strategies is recommended by the advisory (Tribal Council Language and Culture Committee and the two project advisory committees) in the order shown on the following pages.

The 12 strategies and 46 action steps are recommended to commence in fiscal year 2003 and continue through fiscal year 2012. The anticipated development and implementation years are estimated and reported below each action step.

## Language Preservation Strategies

### Goal A - Create language revitalization programs

- A-1 Create learning opportunities for the language to be reinforced in the home, in informal community social settings, and in the conduct of Cherokee Nation business activities.
- A-2 Develop and maintain demonstration immersion classrooms beginning with preschool and continuing through grade 6.
- A-3 Coordinate with the local school districts to increase the quantity and quality of Cherokee language classes for students of all grades.
- A-4 Expand the Cherokee language programs for intermediate and advanced instruction in speaking, reading and writing in the Cherokee syllabary.
- A-5 Create Master-Apprentice learning opportunities for adult learners in different Cherokee communities.

### Goal B - Educate and certify language teachers

- B-1 Define college degree requirements and certification standards for Cherokee language instructors.
- B-2 Coordinate with higher education institutions (and/or the Cherokee Nation Tribal College) to offer the necessary course of instructions for Teacher Aides, Teachers, and Linguists.
- B-3 Evaluate the course content, instructional methods and modify to meet the changing needs of future certified language instructors.

### Goal C – Document the language and develop curriculum

- C-1 Research and document older forms and the current form of the Cherokee language.
- C-2 Establish an archival system to preserve the different forms of the language for future generations.
- C-3 Assess the language instructional needs of the programs to be implemented in Goal A and develop age-appropriate and competency-based language curriculum.
- C-4 Create language teaching materials, activities, methods of instruction, and implement an evaluation plan.