

## Catalyst Grant Final Project Report

### Project Title

Heritage Seeds for Sustainable Lifeways

### Project team

*Internal to UM; \* = Heritage Seeds On-Site Meeting Co-Chair*

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Dr. James Penner-Hahn, co-P.I., (formerly serving as) Interim Director, UMMAA  
Dr. Phil Deloria, co-P.I., American Culture and History  
Dr. Lisa Young, Department of Anthropology  
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Jessica Litman, School of Law (see Project Team at end)  
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*External to UM; \* = Heritage Seeds Co-Chair*

\*Shannon Martin, Director, Ziibiwing Center of Anishinaabe Culture & Lifeways  
\*Kevin Finney, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians  
Sydney Martin, Elder, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians  
Dan Cornelius, Intertribal Agricultural Council – Great Lakes Region  
Dr. Scott Herron, Ferris State University  
Dr. Christina Walters, US Department of Agriculture  
Citralina Haruo, student, College of the Menominee Nation and  
UM Doris Duke Conservation Scholar (see Project Team at end)

### Summary

The actionable question addresses ways to encourage collaboration of First Nation's agencies and their specialists with UM faculty, staff, and resources affiliated with the UM's ethnobotanical resources: "*what museological, cultural, scientific and legal protocols are needed to restore culturally significant plants and associated historical information currently curated by UM units to their Anishinaabe communities of origin to help in their efforts to revitalize sustainable lifeways, including their traditional knowledge of plants?*" To address the question, a two-day meeting of the potential collaborators was arranged at the UM Research Museums Complex.

In advance of the meeting, significant work had been accomplished to pull from multiple sources and digitally share the curated information about the collections that would be present for review. In addition, all the plant materials originally collected from the represented communities were arranged by the location where they were collected on tables in the UM Museum of Anthropological Archaeology open lab at the Research Museum Center. At the meeting held May 3-5, 2017, 11 representatives from Tribes/First Nations in Michigan and Ontario were able to attend: Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, Bkejwanong Walpole Island First Nation, and Pokagnek Bodewadmik Pokagon Band of the Potawatomie. Representatives from other regional First Nations (FN), specifically the Aamjiwnaang First Nation (Chippewas of Sarnia) and Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi, were invited but unable to attend. In addition, three plant specialists (two are FN) were invited from Ferris State University, Intertribal Agricultural Council – Great Lakes Region, and the United States Department of Agriculture.

At the meeting we agreed to pilot project that was metaphorically described as the "return of one seed to one Nation". By focusing on a cultigen that was collected from a specific community of origin, we will implement the collaborative framework. One seed lot of mandaamin / corn / *Zea mays* collected in the Bkejwanong Walpole Island First Nation by Dr. Scott Herron (one of the Project team members) in the summer of 2000 was selected for be the pilot. Subsequent to the meeting a specific site at the UM Matthaei Botanical Gardens for this pilot project was proposed.

In addition, the UMMAA Ethnobotanical Collection stewards a broad range of plant materials and information in the museum records that were also of interest. This meeting familiarizes all parties with the kinds of information that were available on the ethnobotanical collections. First Nation/Tribal members

were also interested in exploring ways of further sharing information about the collections, especially in digital formats.

It was agreed that the representatives from each First Nation/Tribe will need to identify their appropriate representatives to help guide continued collaborations. Progress in building relationships for projects involving these plant collections can move forward concurrently with the pilot project proposed with Bkejwanong.

To guide the discussion, a draft MOU has been created and now needs review by all parties. Critical to the MOU is the development of respectful and culturally-appropriate collaboration. Developing and implementing the framework and protocols for collaboration will advance not only the project but the evolving standards of professional museum practice. The next step is to continue discussions with specific representatives of Bkejwanong, UMMAA, and the UMMBGA with the goal of developing a project specific MOU.

### **Project background and approach**

An over-arching theme of the Heritage Seed project was the importance of framing respectful collaborations between First Nations/Tribes, UM, and other specialists that will be of mutual interest and related to the botanical collections curated at the UM. Defining such projects requires mutual understanding of the kinds and extent of the relevant collections and resources at the UM, the contexts within which all parties operate, and the meanings of respect where, as here, there is a difficult history beyond any one unit or topic. Tribal Nations are sovereign entities which define their norms and standards of traditional knowledge and relationships. The initial question at the meeting – of referring to the seeds here in Ann Arbor as community members rather than “objects” is indicative of the profound respect inherent in the ways forward. By focusing on: a) a specific set of seeds with one community, and; b) curated information related to other ethnobotanicals and their community’s specialists, we can collaborate on priority projects, build mutual respect, focus on each case, and address issues one-by-one as they arise and thereby articulate and disseminate the evolving museum practice.

University team members at the May meeting have appointments in the UM Department of Anthropology (Young) and the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum (Michener). The external partners have roles in their home communities and agencies at: Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, Bkejwanong Walpole Island First Nation, and Pokagnek Bodewadmik Pokagon Band of the Potawatomie. Drs. Scott Herron (professor and ethnobotanist at Ferris State University) and Christina Walters (senior research scientist at USDA) as well as Dan Cornelius (Intertribal Agriculture) each brought needed specialist knowledge.

The day before the meeting, the UM community was invited to an Open House to see the ethnobotanical collections that would be under discussion, since the meetings themselves were not open to the public. The first meeting day focused on exploring and discussing the collections that had been pulled for examination, along with their curated information. The second day focused on identifying goals for future collaborations focused on the ethnobotanical collections and the planning process to develop and implement the “one seed for one nation” pilot project. The second day of the meeting was led by Shannon Martin (Ziibiwing Center) using an Anishinaabe planning process.

The key finding is that all parties wish to engage on priority projects of mutual interest. Each community expressed their desire to discuss the collections and the potential for collaborations within their communities, to identify appropriate persons within each community for continued engagement, and to explore options for subsequent meetings to discuss the collections and issues raised in regards to intellectual property. There was interest among all parties in developing a pilot project involving seed from Bkejwanong.

### **Outputs**

The project set to establish a ‘Collaborative Framework’ to guide both a pilot project and ways forward for other areas of mutual interest. As the project evolved, the ‘Collaborative Framework’ evolved from the

concept of a single document to a set of documents and resources (some digital) with a shared understanding of pending outcomes.

Output 1. An extensive set of digital documents about the collections were developed and shared among participants via Google drive.

Output 2. A statement about the benefits of collaboration was written by Elspeth Geiger, a doctoral student in UM Anthropology, as part of her deeper and required UM Museum Studies field practicum based on the *Heritage Seeds* project.

Output 3. A draft MOU specific to the proposed pilot Bkejwanong mandaamin / corn and the UM Matthaei Botanical Garden and UMMAA was developed by Citralina Haruo while she was in residence at UM as a Doris Duke Conservation Scholar. She was a student at the College of the Menominee Nation and is now an employee of the US Forest Service in Wisconsin.

### **Outcomes**

Outcome 1. One of the critical issues to resolve is the viability of the mandaamin / corn. Contemporary hybrid corn in US agriculture has a storage life (seed viability) of only a few years when at room conditions (as formerly at the museum). However, mandaamin is historically stored for years in domestic/storage conditions before being planted: long-term viability is essential. To resolve which viability model the pilot and subsequent mandaamin may follow, the pilot project is anticipated as a culturally-appropriate, experimental planting based on a small sample from a 17-year old seed lot. If the modern-corn model is operating, germination should be trivial or nil. If the mandaamin model is operating, the % viability will be significantly above trivial. At the May meeting, seed-coat protein racemization %, as taken by non-invasive methods, was discussed as a possible predictive tool to assess seed viability. However, any such protocols must be agreed in advance by the community of origin, and that decision respected (including other First Nations).

Outcome 2. At the May meeting it was decided the issues of intellectual property were too complex and nuanced to address in addition to all the issues already under discussion. A follow-up meeting on this theme has been proposed, organized and hosted by a specific Tribal Agency. This meeting is anticipated to need two days and UM participation is expected.

Outcome 3. At the May meeting, the possibility of digitally sharing information was discussed. At present the information about the collection that has been shared digitally (i.e., spreadsheet) with meeting participants is basic descriptive information from the UMMAA catalog. Issues that were identified for future discussions included: identifying culturally-sensitive information, intellectual property issues, and culturally appropriate curation.

Outcome 4. In discussing the development of “culturally appropriate means of curation” the broad consensus is that we should build this portfolio of practice – including professional publications – through specific, documented case studies. We need to be conscious that we are developing new standards and protocols. What is important is “to do, not just discuss”.

### **Other information (optional)**

The level of public interest, as indicated from media tracking reported to us, was not anticipated by all parties.