

Executive Summary

Evaluation of the National Breath of Life Archival Institute (BoL 1.0)

The Discovery Center for Evaluation, Research, and Professional Learning has contracted with the *National Breath of Life Archival Institute* (BoL) project to provide annual feedback and a summative assessment of the project's ability to meet its stated objectives. Three areas of assessment included *program assessment*, *Linguistic Partner interviews*, and a *broader impact* assessment in order to respond to research questions:

- *To what degree can community researchers search the online catalogues of the NAA, NMAI, and LOC to find materials of interest?*
- *To what degree can community researchers obtain copies of the materials found on the online catalogues of the NAA, NMAI, and LOC?*
- *To what degree are community researchers able to evaluate the relevance of archival materials?*
- *To what extent does the community researcher understand the relevance of expert linguistic analysis for the interpretation of the content of archival materials?*
- *To what degree can community researchers apply the analysis of archival data towards revitalization goals?*
- *Does the community researcher gain a more refined vision of the next steps necessary to continue their revitalization efforts?*
- *To what degree does the community researcher develop a sense of belonging within the larger group of language revitalization practitioners and derive support for their language revitalization research project?*

Participant pre- and post-questionnaires, a Linguistic Partner interview protocol, and broader impact questionnaire and interview protocol were developed, tested, and utilized by the evaluation team to collect data from BoL participants. The following findings are from these three assessment activities.

Program Assessment

Assessment of the 2017 *Breath of Life Institute* showed that after participating in the program Community Researchers had gained confidence for obtaining archival materials, in recognizing items of relevance for their revitalization efforts, and increased their knowledge of linguistics analysis. Pre-post questionnaire data indicated that BoL staff prepared participants sufficiently for working in the archival collections and also indicated an increase in participant understanding of archival processes and in knowledge of searching and accessing items of relevance for their revitalization research. Participants reported having found significant amounts of material associated with vocabulary, grammatical data, and information about ancestral environmental knowledge. Participants felt confident that they were returning home with resources that would move their revitalization efforts forward and with knowledge of the next steps necessary to complete their research goals. Participants were able to articulate the steps necessary to continue their revitalization efforts and identified people and resources necessary for those efforts to succeed.

Linguistic Partner Interviews

Linguistic Partner interview data indicated that, although their Community Research team members started the *Breath of Life Institute* at varying levels of comfort with linguistics, those levels increased by the end of the experience. Community Researchers and Linguistic Partners both reported that communication and collaboration continue within the *Breath of Life* participant community and in the larger language revitalization community.

Broader Impacts Study

Data collected from participants 1 -7 years post-participation revealed that Community Researchers' confidence in utilizing archives and archival materials, recognizing items of relevance for their revitalization efforts, and knowledge about the use of linguistic analysis all remained unchanged following their institute participation. That is, Community Researchers reported that they had not forgotten the content they had learned during their program participation. Participants indicated that they were continuing to use archives to add new materials to

their efforts, and although they recognized their linguistic knowledge skills needed continued improvement, many participants continued to work with linguists but relied on them less over time. Participants reported that while they were at the BoL Institute they were not only able to access a large amount of materials relevant to their community needs, but were overwhelmed by the amount of materials available. Many indicated a need to return to the archives for more time dedicated to utilizing materials of relevance. Participants indicated that they were moving their revitalization efforts forward through continued research, continued language learning, creating materials and resources, sharing their knowledge, and collaborating and planning within their communities and in the language revitalization community at large. Community Researchers indicated that the *Breath of Life* project motivated them to continue to pursue their language revitalization goals and provided emotional and physical support through connections with Project Team members, other *Breath of Life* participants, as well as the larger language revitalization community. Collaboration and communication were cited extensively as important outcomes as well as important goals of the respondents. Researchers felt that their efforts contributed to larger community goals.

Moving Forward

As the *Breath of Life* Project Team transitions to *Breath of Life 2.0*, findings from this report can inform plans to continue to improve project activities and develop new activities. The Project Team should consider:

- Significant findings regarding the ways Community Researchers have used their new knowledge and skills from their *Breath of Life* participation should be used to further develop activities planned for BoL 2.0. Findings suggest that BoL participants fell into three groups: 1) those who participated in *Breath of Life* in order to speak their languages in familiar settings and connect to their cultures in general; 2) those who participated in *Breath of Life* as a means to continue language revitalization research for language groups, Tribal councils, or personal research efforts; and 3) a majority of participants who were interested in both. Therefore, *Breath of Life 2.0* should provide both research-focused activities, as well as activities that are accessible to those with less-developed linguistic analysis skills who would like to speak more and hear more of their language spoken around them.
- The most common post-*Breath of Life* activities cited by participants were the development of a language database and the development of teaching materials. If a database had not yet been developed for the communities, participants indicated that they would like to learn more about creating databases. Teaching materials seemed to be limited to what the researcher had been able to uncover about their language. Participants would benefit from further training and development opportunities in creating and sharing databases. As databases grow and are disseminated more widely, availability of resources for creating teaching materials could increase. A next step for *Breath of Life* participant training would be mutually beneficial if specific skills for building and developing databases that could be used for both the research enthusiast and the curriculum developer were included.
- Obstacles and needs cited by BoL participants included being separated from other language enthusiasts, linguists, and archives; lack of funding; and lack of time. Participants were very enthusiastic about spending time with other language researchers as a means of support and to sustain motivation to continue their work. In the absence of this opportunity, participants could benefit from developing skills to work more effectively, remotely. In addition, guiding participants to available funding opportunities and through the process of writing effective grant proposals might support the community to overcome obstacles associated with time and money.
- While the *Breath of Life Institute* provided knowledge and skills that initiated, motivated, and continue to sustain researchers' language revitalization efforts, perhaps more importantly, BoL connected Community Researchers to repositories that hold materials that are critical for their communities. Although providing access to materials of relevance to revive their language from distance would be welcomed, findings suggest that many participants would miss the opportunity to gather and to be close to these items of cultural significance. It would be of interest to explore for any differences in impact associated with community and cultural connections of a program that increases the availability of working with other researchers and cultural items from distance.