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Shapiro Administration Announces “Indigenous Peoples Cultural and Heritage Initiative”

Pennsylvania Tourism Office awarded Appalachian Regional Commission Area Planning Grant to develop promotion of the Commonwealth’s Indigenous Heritage

Partnership with Lehigh University and federally recognized Tribes will highlight the history and culture of Indigenous Nations which originally dwelled in Pennsylvania

Harrisburg, PA – Today, the Shapiro Administration announced the Pennsylvania Tourism Office has been awarded an [Appalachian Regional Commission](#) (ARC) Area planning grant to develop experiences based on Indigenous heritage across the Commonwealth. Through a partnership with the [Lehigh University Institute for Indigenous Studies](#) and members of federally recognized tribal nations, the Tourism Office will utilize the grant to develop, and promote experiences that share the stories, history, and culture of the Indigenous peoples originally from Pennsylvania.

“Pennsylvania is steeped in Indigenous history and we look forward to bringing, experiences to Pennsylvania for people to engage with and learn about this history,” said **Carrie Fischer Lepore, Deputy Secretary of Tourism at the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development**. “We are incredibly proud to be launching this project, which is the start of a long journey to uplift the stories and culture of the Indigenous Nations that resided in Pennsylvania. This project will have so many benefits, from educating visitors from near and far about our Indigenous history to strengthening the economies of ARC counties. Most importantly, this project is designed to allow citizens of the federally recognized Indian nations which originated here to be the storytellers and ensure we are presenting their history and culture in an authentic and appropriate way.”

The ARC Area Grant provides critical funding for the Tourism Office to convene with American Indian Studies scholars and tribal representatives chosen by the federally recognized Indigenous nations originally from Pennsylvania. Collaboratively, they will discuss and develop a comprehensive plan highlighting locations, narratives, and resources of interest to uplift culture

and history. This project will allow tribal nations the opportunity to direct how they would like their stories to be told. The final plan would then be executed into experiences for visitor engagement during additional phases of this project.

“This new initiative will not only boost the region’s economy, but also will help showcase Appalachia’s rich cultural heritage,” **said ARC Federal Co-Chair Gayle Manchin**. “I applaud the Pennsylvania Tourism Office for amplifying the stories of the Indigenous Nations which originally settled our region’s lands.”

The Pennsylvania Tourism Office selected the Lehigh University Institute for Indigenous Studies as its partner for this initiative due to its relationships with federally recognized tribal nations, particularly with those who are citizens of the tribal nations pushed from Pennsylvania. The Delaware Nation of Oklahoma operates their extension [Tribal Historic Preservation Office](#) on Lehigh University’s campus in Bethlehem, part of their Lenape homelands, and has already committed to consulting on this project. The Institute for Indigenous Studies is also in communication with several other federally recognized tribal nations who may potentially be interested in this project.

“Much of what we are taught about Native peoples, and what we know, or more precisely what we think we know, about Native peoples is inaccurate. Unfortunately, even Native peoples themselves have been misled due to colonialistic US Federal Indian policies, such as residential boarding schools, the Court of Indian Offenses, and other assimilationist practices. It is time to correct the mistakes, the misinformation, and the misrepresentations that we have all been taught. It is time to include Native peoples in the storytelling process – to allow them to tell the stories which they have been a part of, and continue to be a part of, from their perspectives. Both of these are long overdue. While this project will not correct 500 plus years of problems, it is a start and a move in the right direction,” **says Sean M. Daley, Director of the Institute for Indigenous Studies**.

The [Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission](#) (PHMC), which has gathered extensive information about the indigenous peoples of Pennsylvania, will provide research support to the Institute of Indigenous Studies. This support will be especially critical to ensuring Indigenous nations that are now considered extinct, including the Susquehannock, are appropriately represented.

“As the custodian of Pennsylvania’s rich heritage, the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission is enthusiastic about the potential impact and significance of this project which provides an opportunity for Native American tribes who call Pennsylvania their homeland to share their history and experiences with today’s Pennsylvanians,” **said PHMC Executive Director Andrea Lowery**. “We keenly support the engagement of tribal representatives and officials of federally recognized Indigenous nations ensuring that they have a voice and that their stories and experiences are portrayed in a respectful and accurate manner.

Along with the \$100,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission the Pennsylvania Tourism Office will provide \$100,000 in matching funds, as well as funding for work conducted outside of Pennsylvania's 52 ARC-designated counties.

"This project is not just critical to our mission of building economic development in Pennsylvania through a robust travel economy, it is also essential to our office's values of diversity, representation, and inclusion in the stories we tell and the places we visit," said Deputy Secretary Lepore.

"We are excited to support this project because it celebrates Pennsylvania's Indigenous Nations and recognizes their profound impact on our Commonwealth," **said Cassandra Coleman, Executive Director of America250PA.** "America250PA has been working to ensure we educate all Pennsylvanians about how Indigenous Nations helped shape our communities in advance of the 250th anniversary of the founding of our nation in 2026. Our nation began here, and Pennsylvania continues to play an integral role in our future."

The Shapiro Administration is committed to positioning Pennsylvania as a national leader in economic development and investment in the tourism industry is part of that effort. The World Travel & Tourism Council currently reports that 80 percent of businesses operating in the tourism sector are small businesses. The Governor knows small businesses are the backbone of our economy and that investing in our robust and diverse tourism industry will improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians by strengthening our communities and their economies.

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