



**CITIZEN-CENTRIC REPORT
FY2023**

MISSION:

Practice, Promote, Preserve, and Perpetuate the Chamorro Language & Culture

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The CNMI Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) was established in June 1985 through the 2nd Constitutional Convention. Article III Section 23 of the CNMI Constitution tasked the Resident Executive with the responsibility to:



- coordinate the development, distribution, adoption, and translation of a comprehensive history of the Marianas.
- ensure local participation in executive managerial decision-making in the government and private sector.
- assist and promote local entrepreneurial development.
- establish a community foundation for the advancement of the indigenous people.
- coordinate the translation and distribution of such official documents as the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and the Covenant and the analyses thereof.
- plan for the establishment of the Indigenous Cultural Center and the Indigenous Hall of Fame.
- coordinate an annual cultural festival.
- develop and implement a long-range plan to assist and promote the entry of the indigenous people into professional and technical institutions of higher education.

- serve as an advocate of positions taken by indigenous people on issues brought before them.

Key Initiatives:

- ✓ Successfully acquire grant funding to provide *instruction* in the following:
 - Traditional fishing practices (i.e. Talaya, Achuman, Gigao, etc.)
 - Customary cooking of native food (potu, bibinka, tamales gisu, etc.)
 - Authentic coconut and pandanus leaf weaving techniques.
 - Botanical medicine making
 - Chamorro blacksmithing methods
- ✓ Effectively upgrade and maintain culturally venerated historical sites by acquiring outside funding sources.
- ✓ Fruitfully submit position statements on current land leases and their potential uses.

ACTIVITIES PERFORMED

Infrastructure Development:

- ✓ **Economic Development Administration Grant - 500 Sails Boat Yard:**
 - The Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) is a co-recipient of funding meant to expand Maritime education in the CNMI. IAO through its continued partnership with 500 Sails, a non-profit organization with federally recognized 501 (3) (c) status has been awarded \$1.3 million to renovate the old CNMI Procurement Office and retrofit it with classrooms catering to the various maritime courses needed for students seeking careers in the maritime field, Aside from the theoretical aspects being taught in such classrooms, the site also boasts a fully functional boat shop fully equipped and capable of making replicas of traditional Chamorro and Carolinian canoes so that students are actively engaged in the hands-on aspects of their prospective career endeavor.

The project is currently at the Architectural & Engineering (A&E) phase and is being closely monitored by the CNMI Office of Planning and

Development to ensure that project timelines are being closely adhered to at this point as this project hit snags early on with high A&E bids coming from early bidders. After multiple attempts at finding a compromise with vendors emphasizing that this project does not require a full tear down, a vendor was finally realized thus setting us back on track towards meeting our infrastructure goals.

✓ **Economic Development Administration Grant- Cultural Events Center:**

- The CNMI Indigenous Affairs Office (IAO) with this proposal submission will create a Cultural Events center focused on centralizing many of the outdoor activities consistently held like the Flame Tree Arts Festival, Taste of the Marianas, Chamorro, and Carolinian Heritage Month, the Sabalu Market, etc. This project mimics the Chamorro Village in Agana, Guam widely known for its “Wednesday Night Market” which offers visitors a glimpse into Chamorro culture by hosting an array of local foods, various cultural dance performances, and artwork specific to Guam. The infrastructure project herein focuses on Guam’s successes over the years in which cultural practitioners have become actively engaged in tourism activities by showcasing our local goods and services and serving as a focal point for future commerce related to our distinct culture.

The project is currently awaiting Legislative approval as it requires a match. The CNMI Governor is currently negotiating terms for \$15 million for all the CNMI’s \$90 million worth of EDA projects to begin the necessary phases of construction.

Maintenance of Sites



Kagman Latte Site ----- has been reopened and maintained by coordinating with the Department of Corrections (DOC) for biweekly maintenance.

Chamorro Village (Civic Center) ----- The office has issued several permits to various groups (*Religious and family functions*) wishing to use the facilities. in the subsequent month.

500 Sails Boat Yard-----The old procurement building in Lower Base designated to IAO continues to be used by our local NGO partners. We are pleased to report that the space being occupied by the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) has been vacated and renovations can begin as part of the \$1.3 million project approved by the Economic Development Administration.

Outreach Activities



Mt. Tapochao Easter Pilgrimage -----Joined by members of the Executive branch, staff promoted goodwill by offering food and drinks to those participating in the annual Lent pilgrimage.



"Saturday Sails" by 500 Sails ----- A local NGO that we partner with continues to hold up to their promise of providing outreach activities by means of offering free sailing activities to the public every Saturday.



PSS Cultural Day -----Participated in Marianas High School's Cultural Day Celebration. The office will be continuing in its efforts towards greater visibility at the various public and private schools.



Liberation Day- -----Along with our friends from Carolinian Affairs Office, Women's Affairs Office, and the Youth Affairs Office, we portrayed a unified stance as "two cultures making up one native people."

Taste of the Marianas----Our office along with key volunteers from the Women's Affairs Office took part in preparing local dishes for tourists and locals to try as part of our focus on getting greater engagement from stakeholders.



Advocating for less federal expansion in our ocean---Although culturally we are not known to be confrontational as a people. We are seeing the increased expansion of federal jurisdiction using the Endangered Species Act. Our office stands at the forefront

in any proposed federal expansion and stands ready to work on the outreach necessary to combat such efforts.



Chamorro - Carolinian Cultural Heritage Month---Throughout the month of September and with funding support from the Saipan & Northern Islands Legislative Delegation our office took a major part in the furtherance of cultural preservation as we were able to put cultural practitioners three (3) times a week in the various public schools teaching topics like weaving, storytelling, and the art of making local foods. Every Saturday, IAO staff set up at the "Sabalu Market" a heavily visited area putting up food displays for the general public to try and if interested be taught how to make such delicacies. Every Sunday for the entire month, our office helped put together cultural dancers for the viewing public to visit as a form of family entertainment at the heart of Garapan.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART:

