

Mr. Lyle Rustad
The Diversity Foundation, Inc.
2127 Killeen Court
St. Cloud, MN 56302

Dear Mr. Rustad:

In my role as the Director of the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, we provide education and training to non-Native individuals and organizations regarding cultural diversity. I would venture to guess that half of my time is spent on dispelling myths about Indians - "we get checks every month for being Indian, the federal government 'takes care of us,' or more recently, we have all become millionaires from gaming revenue." After spending nearly three years in Washington, D.C. as a political appointee, it was disheartening to come home to North Dakota and realize that there is much to do to promote better understanding about the history of Native people and the context of how and why we live the way we do today.

I offer my fullest support for the endeavors of the Diversity Foundation and am willing to serve as an advocote and/or advisor. It is imperative to utilize the educational technologies available to promote better understanding between Indians and non-Indians. Multi-media tools such as film and video are wonderful mechanisms to teach and will generate more participation and better understanding. The stories and truth from Native perspective are powerful and must be told.

In my work on the logo/mascot with the University of North Dakota, professors provided anecdotal information that when non-Indian

students take Indian studies courses, they are profoundly shocked to learn the Indian side of history - i.e. most do not know about the famous 'Trail of Tears' wherein the Cherokee people were removed from their traditional homeland and relocated to Oklahoma. There are many such stories including that of chief Wapasha and the Dakota warriors hanged in Minnesota. Indian history is a compelling story that has national appeal

It is important to tell these stories so that a better understanding can be promulgated between Indians and non-Indians. Not knowing the context of the historical relationship perpetuates the fears that evoke racism and stereotyping. I must also emphasize that this is a two-way process - Indians must learn as well as the non-Indians. We must learn so that history can be acknowledged, so that we can find it in our heart to forgive, and subsequently so that we may reconcile and live in the 'traditional' ways of our ancestors, but in today's world.

There are many resources in North Dakota such as the State archives that could be used for your film and video project. In addition, there is the North Dakota Humanities Council and several local and corporate foundations. I will be glad to be your contact for those organizations.

The Diversity Foundation's initiative to produce a series of documentaries on the history of the Dakota people is timely and will be a very useful tool to promote better understanding of Indian/U.S. relations. Through these endeavors we can grow together for a better future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cynthia Mala'.

Cynthia Linquist Mala
Executive Director

North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission

Member, Spirit Lake Nation, Ft. Totten, North Dakota