Executive Summary: The Critical Need for a Stable and Supported Program on Endangered Language Documentation at the National Science Foundation

Submitted by the DLI-DEL Scholar and Community Member Collective

The Documenting Endangered Languages (DEL) Program, now NSF Dynamic Language Infrastructure-NEH Documenting Endangered Languages (DLI-DEL), has played a crucial role in the realization of United States federal policy to preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of communities to practice and develop Native languages. For over fifteen years, DLI-DEL has supported projects to advance research and education across many fields of inquiry, providing resources for projects that have strong intellectual merit and broader impacts. However, the recent repositioning of programs within the Directorate of Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences at the NSF has resulted in the merger of DLI-DEL with Linguistics and the loss of a dedicated program officer, a move which is counter to the NSF's own strategic plan. This has the potential to exacerbate an already serious threat to information and insight on our collective human cognitive capacity, and to our cultural and historical traditions. This document outlines recommendations for the continuation and growth of DLI-DEL.

1. DLI-DEL must remain a separate program, with a full-time, dedicated Program Officer. In addition to standard duties, the PO would promote innovations in funding initiatives and opportunities, providing education and guidance to prospective PI's, and collaborating with invested individuals and organizations.
2. DLI-DEL must increase collaboration and outreach to Tribal Colleges and Universities and also to the relevant tribal and indigenous administrative units associated with hundreds of federally recognized tribes in the U.S. DLI-DEL must be able to support data collection and scientific theory, and also awareness, community-building, and research and education infrastructure in the U.S. in order to elicit strong proposals.
3. DLI-DEL must sustain its support of international documentation projects, more specifically, to increase U.S. researcher capacity to work in regions with under-described languages to facilitate language training programs to community members.
4. DLI-DEL must establish a category of staged proposal review, including a pilot award for bringing communities, stakeholders, and researchers together in order to carry out larger documentation projects.
5. DLI-DEL must have two deadlines per year to accommodate U.S. academic field workers' schedules.

Despite the achievements and scientific advancements made via DLI-DEL-funded research, both within established fields and as part of the emerging field of documentation research, the reality is that the endangered languages crisis in the twenty-first century is continuing to accelerate. Now more than ever, there is the need to continue with a dedicated program that serves to fund and facilitate documentation research *by, with,* and *for* vulnerable language communities. The human heritage embodied by endangered languages constitutes scientific data that cannot be allowed to disappear. A Native language marks the political and social identity of its speakers, who are often those who have been economically, educationally, and politically disadvantaged. We strongly urge The U.S. Congress and the National Science Foundation to preserve and protect DLI-DEL by following the recommendations in this Summary and elaborated on in the Position Paper.