



25TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL

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Resources and Development Committee supports growth and sustainability plans for Navajo Arts and Crafts Enterprise



Resources and Development Committee Chair Brenda Jesus recommended proactive steps to improve transparency, service, and overall satisfaction.

PIÑON, Ariz. – The Resources and Development Committee (RDC) received the Navajo Arts and Crafts Enterprise (NACE) 2024 Fourth Quarter Report this week, highlighting achievements and strategic growth as the enterprise works to strengthen its role in the Navajo Nation’s artisan economy.

Members of the Resources and Development Committee commended NACE’s progress while urging the enterprise to address key challenges and refine its approach.

“We hear the feedback from our community and artisans,” said RDC Chair Brenda Jesus. “Whether it’s about credit card fees or inventory availability, we are recommending proactive steps to improve transparency, service, and overall satisfaction.”

Delegate Danny Simpson acknowledged NACE’s achievements in a challenging economic environment but stressed the need for customer engagement.

“Rebuilding after COVID isn’t easy, and NACE has made strides despite setbacks,” Simpson said. “The focus now should be on innovation and finding ways to bring customers back to reservation stores.”

NACE’s 2024 revenue projections reached \$5.5 million, with the flagship Window Rock store contributing 80% of sales. Willie highlighted the completion of audits for 2021 and 2022, with audits for 2023 and

2024 expected by March 2025. Despite a challenging retail environment, the enterprise implemented a sustainable management plan to reduce costs and optimize operations.

NACE CEO JT Willie said the Enterprise's mission is to uphold the artistry and craftsmanship that define our identity as Diné.

"We are moving into a period of regrowth," Wille said. "Our goal is not only to sustain but to thrive, ensuring that Navajo arts and crafts remain a vibrant and essential part of our culture and economy."

Chair Brenda Jesus noted NACE's dedication to supporting artisans but raised concerns about customer-facing fees and financial transparency. She emphasized how families rely on payroll deductions to shop for their children during the holidays and encouraged NACE to continue building sustainable practices that benefit the community.

Vice-Chair of Health, Education, and Human Services Committee (HEHSC), Germaine Simonson joined RDC in recommending the need for education and innovation.

"NACE needs to educate our people about business practices, especially around pricing and markups," Simonson said. "It's also essential to explore online sales to expand beyond the reservation and tap into global markets. COVID was a missed opportunity to grow digital sales, but it's not too late to adapt."

NACE plans to focus on regrowth and innovation by upgrading infrastructure, including point-of-sale systems to enhance efficiency, and strengthening workforce development through high school apprenticeship programs in silversmithing and weaving. The enterprise also aims to establish local silver milling and wool processing facilities to support artisans and reduce material costs, while launching co-op stores and artist-in-residence programs to increase visibility and revenue for Navajo artists.

Delegate Otto Tso encouraged NACE to think about new economic opportunities with initiatives that could boost local economies while preserving Diné culture.

"We need to think bigger—whether it's acquiring facilities like Shiprock Plaza or creating manufacturing hubs for wool and silver," Tso said.

Delegate Shawna Claw emphasized the importance of strengthening NACE's internal leadership and operational processes.

"NACE is critical to preserving and showcasing Navajo artistry, but there is room to improve," Claw said. "Recruiting a permanent CFO, developing sustainable inventory strategies, and engaging with the community will be essential moving forward."

The RDC unanimously voted three in favor and none opposed to accept the report and scheduled a follow-up meeting for April 2025. The committee requested a detailed breakdown of financial data, including revenue contributions by store and product category.

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