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## **National Indian Organizations Release Proposed Recommendations for Small Business Administration Improvements on 8(a) Government Contracting**

DENVER—November 15, 2007—The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Native American Contractors Association (NACA), and the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development (NCAIED) have submitted key oversight and regulatory solutions to the Small Business Administration (SBA) that would revamp and improve the 8(a) Business Development Program for all program participants in response to SBA's request during tribal consultations. The three organizations have been working on the recommendations for two years, garnering tribal and village support.

"These recommendations focus on improving SBA oversight, improving the Mentor-Protégé program for protégé firms and SBA's monitoring, and expanding all small business and 8(a) contracting opportunities through a creative and inclusive subcontracting plan," said NCAI Executive Director Jackie Johnson. "The recommendations are key to maintaining and expanding economic opportunities for tribal communities. If implemented by the SBA, they will lead to better lives for Native people."

"These recommendations improve transparency and accountability. Our proposals will enhance SBA oversight by requiring more effective reporting on compliance with 8(a) regulations," said NACA Executive Director Karen Atkinson.

Native American participation in the 8(a) program is unique because, for example, a tribal-owned 8(a) firm generates revenues and benefits for its entire tribal community, not just a few individuals.

"We strongly recommend supporting the Office of Native American Affairs at the SBA to advocate agency-wide for the thousands of tribal citizens and Alaska Natives who look to the program as one of the best opportunities for growing and diversifying their local Native economies," said Ken Robbins, President, NCAIED.

During formal consultations with the SBA, participants from Alaska Native villages and Indian tribes across the nation had the opportunity to tell their stories about the positive impact that the 8(a) program has had in remote and geographically isolated Indian communities. They also had the chance to express their hope that the program will continue for the long term to address and help reverse the legacy of poverty in Indian country and stimulate economic growth and job opportunities in Native communities throughout the country.

Key recommendations include:

- Creating a web-based system that would foster greater efficiency and visibility to enable the SBA to exert greater oversight and gather accurate data. These improvements would go a long way to help assess Native participation in small business programs and better target SBA resources.
- Creating milestones for the mentor-protégé program. Although only a dozen tribal and Alaska Native mentor-protégé agreements exist, all see the benefit of setting milestones for mentors in assisting their protégés in building their business capacity through the relationship. Performance and progress measurements will allow both parties to benefit, clarify expectations, and facilitate oversight by the SBA.
- Establishing milestones and improved reporting for all sole source 8(a) joint venture contract awards to a mentor/protégé joint venture.
- Expanding contracting opportunities for all tribal and Alaska Native contractors and other small and minority contractors, for example by recommending implementation of a subcontracting plan for large contracts awarded to small businesses.

"The Federal contracting agencies have not reached the government-wide contracting goals of awarding 23% of all federal contract dollars to small businesses and 8% of all contract dollars to small disadvantaged businesses. We feel it is incumbent upon these Federal agencies, the SBA and all small businesses to work hard – together – to achieve the important social and economic policy objectives that the Congress intended to be met by requiring such levels of federal expenditures through our nation's small and small disadvantaged businesses," said Greg Dumontier, NACA, Chairman. He added, "We are looking forward to doing our part to help the 8(a) program reach its full potential by continuing to refine these recommendations and provide further input as the SBA's consultations and 8(a) rulemaking progress."

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*Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country. NCAI advocates on behalf of tribal governments, promoting strong tribal-federal government-to-government policies, and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights.*

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