

**The Arizona- Sonora Desert Museum, Tucson Arizona USA  
and  
Alice Springs Desert Park, Alice Springs NT Australia**

**I. Purpose of Project**

The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (ASDM) and Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP) propose to create an interactive website for children that will highlight the survival strategies used by native animals, plants and peoples in our two desert regions. The website will showcase the similarities and differences between strategies used by biological organisms of each region in order to survive or adapt to the sometimes-harsh realities of desert life. Focused particularly on children and teens, though of use to adults, this website will lead to an understanding that although our two deserts may be thousands of miles apart there are more similarities than differences. Through our website users will acquire an increased knowledge about and appreciation for the place we call home, and learn about inhabitants from another region who also call the desert their home.

**II. Description of Project**

Over the course of the IPAM granting period the participants will develop and refine specific topic areas that will be included on the website. In order to obtain accurate, useful, and timely information participants will conduct interviews with each institutions botanist, zoologist, researchers, herpetologist, educators, and most importantly children from indigenous and non-indigenous cultures. The information gathered will be synthesized into a child-friendly website with the help of technology experts.

Upon the completion of the website, children from across the world will be able to find information such as: how both the Sonoran Desert's Kangaroo Rat and Australia's Spinifex Hopping-mouse can live their entire lives without ever drinking a drop of water. They will also be able to link to information about animals in the complimentary desert to find out if there are species living there that share this ability. What strategies do plants employ to ensure survival in deserts? How have people survived in deserts for tens of thousands of years? Cultural information past and present obtained directly from Arrernte Aboriginal elders and children can be compared and contrasted with similar information from the Tohono O'odham or Patayan peoples of Arizona. We plan to have children regularly contribute stories and artwork to the site, making it a more meaningful and ongoing connection that will facilitate the development of long distance friendships.

While both ASDP and ASDM currently maintain individual web sites, they are primarily aimed at the adult visitor or tourist. Our goal is to link to a mutual website children can visit, navigate through with ease, find information presented in a child-friendly form, and learn about life in their backyard or in a similar backyard on another continent. We also will provide curriculum links for teachers so the quality learning experiences offered by this website were readily accessible in the classroom.

This project is especially important now as population growth and tourism in both regions is impacting the environment and its indigenous peoples. Through our website we see children becoming aware of the variety of life that can be found in the desert regions and how wonderfully adapted they are to survive in that environment. We will foster an appreciation of and respect for the people who have lived in the deserts for centuries through sharing their stories and cultural history.

### **III. Participants' Qualifications**

Brenda King is an Education Specialist at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson, Arizona. She has worked for the Museum for over 5 years. Her primary responsibility as an Education Specialist is to educate children and adults about the natural history of the Sonoran Desert Region. This is done through the use of artifacts, bio-facts, and live animals either at the Museum or as outreach programs in the community. She also is responsible for coordinating special events such as Saturday Summer Evenings and Public Library Programs. Brenda is currently pursuing her Masters Degree in Conservation Education where she has taken several classes involving web page creations and instructional technology. She has worked in the field of education for over 13 years.

Jodie Clarkson is the Guide Manager at the Alice Springs Desert Park in Alice Springs, Australia. Jodie has been at the Desert Park since 1996. As Guide Manager, Jodie is responsible for managing the cross-cultural guide team. This duty requires her to direct and coordinate the delivery of an international standard of face-to-face interpretive service to Park visitors. She also works closely with the Park's Traditional Owners and other local Aboriginal people for permission, advice and training on cultural interpretation.

Both Brenda and Jodie have similar job duties. Knowledge of interpretive techniques, earth science, life science, and local cultural are integral in their job assignments. Both work with volunteers, museum or park visitors, local and international media, and children of all ages. Both have a passion for their jobs and the environment in which they work. Each enjoys sharing their knowledge to foster a greater appreciation of their respective desert regions.

#### **IV. Plans for Continued Collaboration**

During the grant period we will be collecting information, conducting interviews, taking photographs, and planning the layout of our website. We do not anticipate the actual sites to be up and running until the job exchanges have been completed. Our collaboration will be continued well beyond the granting period due to the wealth of information we want to incorporate on the pages. We also plan on keeping the sites updated monthly with new stories from children, special event photos, and additional plant and animal information.

#### **V. Planned Itinerary**

##### **United States to Australia, August-September 2006**

###### **Week ONE:**

Become familiarized with Alice Springs in general and the Desert Park specifically. View the park as a visitor would by observing interpretations, taking tours, viewing exhibits, and shows. Meet with Guiding, Zoology, and Botany staff to discuss the project and receive input. Begin research on animal life and meet with animal keepers.

###### **Week TWO:**

Travel to outlying regions to meet with the Traditional Owners of ASDP. Photographs, videos and cultural research will be collected at this time. Continue animal research. Meet with ASDP's education staff. Meet with other NRETA and Desert Knowledge staff.

###### **Week THREE:**

Meet with local schoolchildren and observe classes. Look for student partners as contributors for the project. Begin plant research, meet with botanist, including those from NT Herbarium, such as Peter Latz. Meet with local community leaders. Conduct library research.

###### **Week FOUR:**

Return to outlying areas for additional meetings with Aboriginal elders and children. Complete initial plant research and photos. Begin compiling information into possible sections of website.

###### **Week FIVE:**

Complete the initial research on plants and animals of the region. Review information with appropriate staff to check for accuracy and acquire additional information. Review cultural information with appropriate elders. Collect stories and drawings from children. Finalize plans for partner's visit to U.S.

## **Australia to United States, February-March 2007**

### **Week ONE:**

Become familiarized with Tucson in general and ASDM specifically. Meet with Museum directors and Education Department staff. Meet with Interpretive Programs Manager and Docents. Take a guided tour of the grounds, observe exhibits, and demonstrations. Attend on site education classes and outreach classes.

### **Week TWO:**

Begin animal research. Spend time with staff from Mammalogy department, conduct interviews and collect photographs. Meet with Herpetology and Invertebrate Zoology staff. Visit local museums and cultural centers. Meet with Sonoran Desert biologist David Yetman and other University of Arizona staff.

### **Week THREE:**

Spend significant time this week meeting with local tribal elders. Meet with the cultural representative from Tohono O'odham school district. Observe classes taught on the reservation. Meet with representative's form the Altar Valley Conservation Alliance. Look for student partners for project contributions.

### **Week FOUR:**

Finish animal research and observations. Begin plant research. Meet with Botany staff for interviews and collect photos. Meet with researchers to discuss their projects. Meet with Information Technology staff. Visit local public libraries and University libraries for additional information.

### **Week FIVE:**

Conclude research and check with appropriate staff for accuracy. Meet with schoolchildren to collect stories and drawings. Hold final meetings with tribal elders and cultural representatives. Finalize website layout and ideas. Meet with Education staff and select Museum staff to develop plan for continuing collaboration. Review IPAM report.