

## Wyoming's First SAGE Class Graduates Eight

The Wind River Development Fund graduated its first class of Starting and Growing Entrepreneurs (SAGE) participants in August. Eight individuals completed all the requirements of the eight-week business planning curriculum, including writing a business plan. The SAGE Course was designed by the Wind River Development Fund (WRDF) with input from the [Wyoming Women's Business Center](#) and the [U.S. Small Business Administration](#) specifically to help new and existing businesses on or near the Wind River Indian Reservation.

"This is the first of its kind for this community," said Lisa Wagner, WRDF Executive Director. "We have taken the first step to provide assistance and funding to businesses that will contribute to economic sovereignty for the reservation. Small business is the backbone of any healthy economy," added Wagner, "and we are excited to be able to provide these much needed services."

The WRDF is a private, non-profit corporation chartered under tribal law. It was formed by New`e Development Corporation to provide loans and assistance to small businesses on or near the reservation. They received initial loan capitalization funding of \$750,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture this summer. Last year WRDF also picked up a \$15,000 operating grant from First Nations Development Institute of Fredericksburg, Virginia, and a \$65,000 technical assistance grant from the Department of Treasury.

WRDF seeks to develop the reservation's economy by making loans to new and existing businesses on or near the reservation. Loans will range anywhere from \$1,000 to \$80,000. "Our maximum loan amount will increase as our capital base increases," commented Wagner.

Education and training in business management are key components of the loan program. Applicants starting new businesses are required to attend the eight-week SAGE Course prior to applying for a loan. Loan recipients will also receive on-going assistance with their business from WRDF.

Amy Lea of the [Wyoming Women's Business Center](#) and Molly Holt were instructors for the first SAGE Course. [Deb Farris](#) of the [Small Business Administration](#) provided help in reviewing the final business plans. "The students' commitment and dedication to the class was amazing," said Holt. "These folks are true business pioneers." Businesses ideas from the class included a restaurant, a clothing store, construction contractors, a custom saddle shop, a daycare facility, a C-store, and a non-profit organization.

The next SAGE Course is scheduled to run from September 15 - November 6 in Fort Washakie. For more information call (307) 335-7330 or E-mail: [info@wrdf.org](mailto:info@wrdf.org). For more information on small business and educational classes check out SBA's website at [www.sba.gov/wy](http://www.sba.gov/wy), call the Wyoming SBA Office at (307) 261-6500; e-mail [sbawyo@sba.gov](mailto:sbawyo@sba.gov).

