

TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

PHASE 4 RELIEF PACKAGE: URGENT COVID-19 RELATED INFRASTRUCTURE & SUPPORT NEEDS

Updated: July 8, 2020

Outlined below are data informed cost estimates to address urgent COVID-19 related needs of Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). Although it is difficult to predict how deeply TCUs, their students, and their communities will suffer due to the COVID-19 pandemic, experts predict that the pandemic will peak in the western U.S., where most TCUs are located, much later than other parts of the country. As TCUs begin to plan for an uncertain future (2020-2021 academic year), we turned to data on past economic, academic, and community patterns to help inform our decision making.

1. **\$65 million in the Interior-Bureau of Indian Education account to help Tribal College and Universities address projected AY-2020-21 losses: Tribal support & tuition cuts; increased tuition write-offs.**

Most TCUs start their fiscal year on July 1. As TCUs plan for FY2021 (Academic Year 2020-21), they face:

- A **significant drop in support from chartering Tribal governments** due to the ongoing and staggering loss of casino revenue, tribal enterprise revenue losses, and the need for tribes to divert scarce resources to address COVID-19 emergency public health issues, community safety net expenses, and enterprise losses. Tribal TCU Payments: 2018-19: \$33,331,078; 2017-18: \$31,049,542 (AIHEC AIMS).
- Projected **declines in enrollment** as students drop out or fail to return because they lack Internet connectivity and cannot participate in online classes or because they need to increase work hours (if jobs are available) to help support families in economic crisis. Total TCU Tuition Received: 2018-19: \$23,188,584 (AIHEC AIMS); 2017-18: \$25,503,359 (IPEDS).
- Inability of most TCUs to conduct **summer classes**, due to the need for intensive faculty development in online learning, advising, and assessment to maintain regional accreditation and the need to complete extensive course and management redesign for the fall semester because of increased online teaching. Summer Tuition and Fees: 2018-19: \$1,692,995 (AIHEC AIMS)
- Growing financial challenges facing students who persist and try to complete their degree programs, resulting in TCUs having to **write off more tuition payments** than in previous years. Annual TCU Tuition Write-off: 2018-19: \$4,000,595; 2017-18: \$2,906,650 (AIHEC AIMS).
- **American Council on Education (ACE) “Survey of COVID-19 Costs of Reopening for Institutions of Higher Education”**: In June 2020, ACE conducted a national survey on the costs of reopening campuses and/or delivering classes online in academic year 2020-21. (This survey was like one conducted by AIHEC early in the pandemic.) ACE surveyed IHEs in eight areas: PPE; disinfectant level cleaning, including supplies; testing; new housing; lost revenue and increased revenue costs: housing, staffing, IT; isolation/quarantine; social distancing (retrofitting classrooms and other campus spaces); and other. U.S. Department of Education IPEDS data was to calculate a per student cost. Using only institutions that could estimate costs by category (4-year, larger institutions), ACE averaged the costs and then divided by total IPEDS student enrollment of the surveyed IHEs. **The cost per student is \$2,400.**

For TCUs, this figure is **higher** because: (a) IPEDS does not accurately reflect enrollment at TCUs using FTE, because of the high number of part-time students at TCUs; (b) historic inequities in funding and geographic location (e.g. lower IT access, capacity, and equipment; cost of providing services in rural areas the size of some states versus in compact urban areas); (c) student demographics (TCUs serve students at higher risk than mainstream institutions – **84 percent receive Pell benefits**, as opposed to 31 percent nationally); and (d) the ACE survey did not include mental/behavioral health counseling; faculty professional development/training (for online instruction); and certain sunk costs that are incurred regardless of size with

a lower student numbers to spread costs across. To account for these factors, increasing the cost by one quarter for 22,000 TCU students, the **overall TCU need is estimated at \$66,000,000.**

2. **\$24 million in existing USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program funds for a permanent Rural TCU-IT Fund.**

Justification: To address a key part of the digital divide/homework gap and long term IT capacity building in Indian Country, Congress should establish a permanent **TCU Fund** under the USDA-Rural Utilities Service. Over the past several years, funding has gone unused in the program. A \$24 million set-aside for TCUs, which are the 1994 Land-grant institutions, could be established using existing funds and therefore would be at no additional cost. (Note: for the TCU program, matching requirements should be waived.)

If TCUs had adequate funding currently for IT infrastructure support, they would have put in place many of the community-based mobile hot spots needed to address the “homework gap” on many reservations. *It is important to note that any program to provide tax credits to existing Internet Service Providers for providing free internet access to students provides little or no help in Indian Country because the IT infrastructure does not exist: 68 percent of those on rural Tribal lands lack access to fixed broadband, according to a 2016 FCC Broadband Progress Report.* And for TCUs that do have broadband access, Internet capacity is inadequate. **Nearly one-third of all TCUs (ten) have Internet speeds at 100 Mbps or less – five are below 50 Mbps.** This compares to national averages of 513 Mbps for 2-year institutions and 3.5 Gbps for 4-year institutions.

Establishing specific funds for Land-grant institutions is not unusual. In the last reauthorization of the Farm Bill, for example, Congress established a permanent \$40 million scholarship fund for 1890 Land-grant institutions (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and Congress has established and annually funds a modest TCU communities facilities construction set-aside program within the USDA-Rural Development Community Facilities program.

3. **\$500 million in the Interior-BIE account for a TCU Deferred Maintenance & Rehabilitation Fund, as authorized under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act.**

Justification: AIHEC recently conducted a survey of 22 TCUs, which revealed a list of chronic facilities-related needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The 22 TCUs have an estimated total need of \$332.5 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need \$558 million to fully implement existing master plans. Extrapolating this to all 37 TCUs, the total *current* need is: **Deferred Maintenance/Rehabilitation: \$500 million; Completion of Master Plans: \$837 million.**

Background: Since mid-March 2020, the nation’s 35 accredited TCUs have incurred significant costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including closing and securing campuses; relocating students off campus and providing shelter in place housing for students who had no home to go to; beginning the first phase of online courses; purchasing equipment for students and providing emergency aid; and paying salaries/administrative leave for staff who would otherwise be unemployed. Virtually all TCUs have moved to online instruction and have closed most of their physical campuses. TCUs also face challenges in addressing: (a) Career and technical courses, which often cannot be converted to online courses; (b) professional development and course redesign for faculty; (c) equipment and infrastructure for online delivery of courses; and (d) lack of Internet access in students’ homes. The \$22.9M provided in the CARES Act will help TCUs address *some* of these critical issues, but as challenges continue to mount, more funding is needed.

Special Note:

To ensure that all TCUs are included in new federal programs and opportunities, the term “tribal colleges and universities”, defined in section 316(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c), should be used:

TRIBAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY.—The term “Tribal College or University” means an institution that—
(A) qualifies for funding under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978 (25 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.) or the Navajo Community College Act (25 U.S.C. 640a note); or (B) is cited in section 532 of the Equity in Educational Land-Grant Status Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 301 note). (20 U.S.C. 1059c)

There are five different types of TCUs:

- Tribally chartered colleges funded under Titles I and II of the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act (TCU Act) (29 TCUs);
- Tribally controlled career and technical colleges funded under the Carl Perkins Act and more recently, Title V of the TCU Act (2 TCUs);
- BIE-operated colleges (2 TCUs);
- Congressionally-chartered AI/AN college (1 TCU – IAIA); and
- State/Tribal hybrid college chartered by the state of Minnesota and one Indian tribe (1 TCU – Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College).