

E-Rate Eligibility is Needed for Tribal Colleges and Universities Now!

March 2020

FEDERAL E-RATE PROGRAM SHOULD INCLUDE TCUS (COMMUNICATIONS ACT OF 1934)

The federal E-Rate program, known as the School and Library Program of the Universal Services Fund and authorized by the Telecommunications Act of 1996, provides discounts to help schools and libraries secure affordable telecommunications and internet access. The program is particularly important for rural America. In 2016, the E-Rate program helped connect 53.6 million students to the internet and provided discounts for Wi-Fi connections and high-speed data lines to 120,000 school buildings and more than 4,000 library systems nationwide. TCUs, as rural, community-based, and under-resourced institutions, should be designated eligible to participate in the E-Rate program. **The cost is estimated at less than \$8 million per year.**



Why do TCUs need E-Rate?

- 32 TCUs are in rural areas, and for these TCUs, few choices of internet service providers exist, resulting in higher priced and lower quality service than is available in many urban areas.
- 68 percent of Americans living on rural Tribal lands lack access to fixed broadband according to a 2016 FCC Broadband Process Report.
- On average, TCUs have more expensive and much slower internet connectivity than other U.S. institutions of higher education. The average connectivity speed at TCUs is 336 mbps, compared to 513 mbps at other 2 year institutions and 3.5 gbps at other 4 year institutions. The average connectivity costs at TCUs range from \$40,000 to \$250,000 per year. **Iḷisaġvik College, a TCU, has both the *most expensive* and *slowest* Internet connectivity in the entire U.S. higher education system.**
- Industry standard for IT equipment replacement is 3-5 years. At TCUs, the average IT equipment replacement timeline is 8.29 years.
- 31 TCUs provide public library services to their communities.
- Rural and remote TCUs have difficulty recruiting and retaining the professional staff necessary to operate and maintain IT systems.
- 21 TCUs provide dual credit programs that help high school students transition to college.
- TCUs provide continuing education programs to more than 165,000 American Indian/Alaska Natives and other rural community members.
- Bandwidth is critical to the success of hardware initiatives providing ubiquitous access to learning, such Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) and 1:1 laptop and tablet programs.
- Bandwidth availability and capacity guide student learning, providing faculty a range of options—online, blended, and face-to-face instruction—creating more TCU student-centered and tailored instruction.

