



BIE - Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI) TCU Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic 117th Congress – February 2021

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), **Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute (SIPI)** received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address tremendous digital divide challenges. We were also able to provide emergency grants, equipment, and tuition assistance to our students to help them stay enrolled in classes. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and plan for onsite classes, our needs are growing. To address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future, TCUs need your ongoing support.

SOUTHWESTERN INDIAN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE CARES and CRRSAA Funds

- Student aid
- Safety/Sanitation
- Transition to distance learning
- IT equipment
- Professional development for faculty
- Student support



SIPI used CARES funding to:

- Ensure student access by transitioning and/or continuing to deliver 409 classes online since March 2020 through February 2021.
- Enhance academic quality through professional development for online teaching and learning to approximately 60 faculty members; 21 completed an advanced certificate for Brightspace through Central New Mexico Community College Ingenuity, and 24 faculty and staff completed Brightspace training through WeTeach at Winona State University.
- Contract administration services, from Desire2Learn, to assist with the administration of Brightspace.
- Provide IT equipment and internet access to over 60 faculty and staff.
- Purchase e-textbooks for all classes and hands-on science lab kits at no cost to students.
- Upgrade SIPI's library digital resources to include video streaming and databases accessibility via the web.
- Purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) (face coverings, gloves, hand sanitizers, disinfectant spray, wipes, face shields) and signage for the entire campus. Sneeze guards were placed in the computer labs at the residential halls.
- Purchase additional supplies including air purifiers, sanitization caddies for common areas, and plexiglass for the labs and classrooms. SIPI will also purchase ultraviolet lighting and Dutch doors for offices.
- Purchase additional services including a nursing contract, the purchase of Healthy Roster, an app that allows staff and students to self-check their symptoms before coming onto campus; and the purchase of Safe College, a CDC COVID online training that all faculty, staff, and students must complete before returning to campus.
- **CARES TITLE III MSI funds:** Students were provided \$43,800 to assist with food, housing, daycare, and technology needs during the fall 2021 trimester, and \$135,494 was used to purchase hot spots and refill cards for students who required internet access for online courses/distance learning.
- For the spring and summer 2020 trimesters, the college distributed HEERF funds to 301 students who qualified per the guidelines set forth, and used institutional unrestricted resources to assist 209 students who did not qualify per the HEERF guidelines. SIPI plans to use institutional CARES and CRRSA funds to assist students for the spring 2021 trimester.



SOUTHWESTERN INDIAN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE Major Ongoing Challenges

- Internet and bandwidth access for student in remote areas
- Student onboarding, placement testing, and registration
- Student IT support needs
- Supporting students with disabilities remotely
- Non-web-based student information system and its learning management system
- Lack of instructional designers for online curriculum development



The college continues to experience the following challenges:

- The lack of interoperability between SIPI's non-web-based student information system and its learning management system, impeding the exchange and use of basic information such as course enrollment, grading, etc.
- The lack of instructional designers to assist faculty in developing and delivering high-quality online curriculum.
- The lack of staff to address the needs confronting students today (e.g., HyFlex course design, short-courses, prior learning assessment, shared resources, etc.)
- Adequate internet and broad bandwidth for students who reside in remote areas. Internet access is either too slow, limited, or completely absent. At times, students resort to cell phone data use for online coursework completion.
- Difficulty with online placement testing, onboarding, and registration. Placement testing requires good internet access. Due to limited and/or slow access the average test took 3-7 hours a day to complete, causing frustration and loss of concentration affecting placement scores. Registration continues to be difficult, as SIPI lacks an online registration system; therefore, all work is manually completed.
- Students need consistent and ongoing assistance to navigate the use of IT equipment and programs, e.g. Brightspace, Cengage, and eBooks.
- Working remotely with students with disabilities has proven difficult. After a student self-identifies his/her needs there is a lapse in communication between the school, student, and instructor, which causes a delay in service.
- Mental health counseling is needed for students experiencing grief, loss, and emotional issues from the effects of the pandemic. There is a need for virtual telehealth for our students.
- In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, SIPI greatly expanded virtual learning throughout the campus. This will remain a key component for academic delivery. As such, long-term funding support will be needed to continue quality delivery of virtual courses and support services.

SOUTHWESTERN INDIAN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE Broadband and IT Challenges

The college's telecommunications and computer technology needs upgrades and modifications to meet the ever-increasing needs of academic programs and student support services. Improvements for telecommunications and computer technology need to be addressed soon to ensure the ability to support online learning, the greater use of laptops, tablets, and other smart devices that are now commonplace in higher education facilities.

- The existing bandwidth needs upgrading, and recent assessments have called for the development of parallel academic network while also increasing bandwidth 5 to 10 times the current capacity.
- Web-based support applications for all areas of the campus are greatly needed.
- In-building cabling is inadequate and inferior to peer facilities and post-secondary best practices.
- Wi-Fi reception is spotty and needs campus-wide expansion and upgrades.
- The college needs permanent IT support staff. Many IT staff are temporary employees tied to various grant funds. There must be adequate funding to ensure permanent IT support services throughout campus.
- There is no dedicated funding for equipment life cycle maintenance.



REQUEST: \$24M TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and homework gap and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies, Congress should establish a *permanent TCU IT Service Fund* within the existing (and previously under-used) **USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program**. An annual \$24 million set-aside for TCUs, which are the 1994 Land-grant institutions, is needed to cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and upkeep, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing. If TCUs had adequate funding for IT service and infrastructure support, they would have already put in place many of the community-based mobile hot spots needed to address the “homework gap” on many reservations.

**SOUTHWESTERN INDIAN POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE
Facility Needs - Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation**

SUPI encompasses 165 acres in Albuquerque, NM, with 22 buildings on the campus. The majority of the buildings on campus were originally built in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Science & Technology, Cultural Center (Hogan), and Early Childhood Learning Center are the only new buildings. The campus is plagued with continuous issues and problems due to aging infrastructure. Sewer line backups, water line breaks, and limited electrical capacity are ongoing issues for the college. The biggest challenge is how best to use the existing buildings while ensuring living and working conditions are safe and healthy and providing a state-of-the-art learning environment.

- The hot and cold domestic waterlines are galvanized piping (not copper). The lines are old and corroded, creating pinhole leaks and water line breaks throughout campus.
- The campus has marginal water pressure, and there is no secondary water source for SIPI.
- The HVAC systems in the older buildings are connected to a centralized heating and cooling loop. Currently there is not a back-up cooling system.
- The HVAC systems use open plenum return air that contributes to the spread of aerosols from room to room.
- There are currently three unique HVAC control systems on campus that do not communicate with one another. This is challenging for maintenance to monitor and requires daily adjustments.
- The existing campus power distribution is provided by Power New Mexico (PNM) which has three primary meters for the entire campus. To adequately provide power to existing and future buildings, the existing campus 12.47 KV power distribution system must be expanded and modified. The dormitories and culinary arts kitchen have reached maximum capacity where new equipment cannot be added. Upgrades in science labs and computer labs are limited by this lack of electrical capacity in the older buildings and campus wide.



**REQUEST: \$500 million TCU Construction Fund:
DOI – Bureau of Indian Education**

A recent AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed a list of chronic facilities-related maintenance and rehabilitation needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The TCUs have an estimated total need of \$489.75 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need \$837 million to fully implement existing master plans. A dedicated TCU deferred construction and maintenance/rehabilitation fund through the DOI-BIE would help meet the 21st century needs of *all* TCUs, including technology-enabled facilities; campus renovations; IT infrastructure; and facilities necessary for career, technical, and pipeline programs.