ILISAĞVIK COLLEGE: RESPONDING AND ADAPTING TO COVID-19
117th Congress – 2nd Session (March 2022)

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and American Rescue Plan (ARP), Ilisaġvik College received urgently needed funding to immediately transition to online learning platforms, modify campuses for health and safety concerns, and address the digital divide challenges in Indian Country. Our students received emergency grants, laptops, tuition assistance, and internet stipends to help them stay enrolled in courses. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and develop a plan to “return to normal,” TCUs need your continued support to address ongoing and increasing needs.

ILISAĞVIK COLLEGE: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

- Emergency Student Aid: $450,000 (March 2020-April 2022 Anticipated)
- IT Upgrades: Hardware; Software; Cybersecurity Improvements; Increased Bandwidth
- Safety/Sanitation: COVID-19 testing; vaccination policy; air purifiers; Plexiglas barriers; at-home antigen tests, masks, sanitization stations
- Campus Modifications: Air purifiers; Plexiglas barriers, staff/student spaces
- Professional Development: Tech Training: Neat Bars, Zoom, DocuSign; Internal and external trainings on augmenting ADA accessibility, Wellness supports
- Inflation: Price increases on food and foodservice; internet service; computer hardware (laptops, etc., due to chip shortage)

Ilisaġvik immediately prioritized distance education improvements as we transitioned to virtual learning during the pandemic. Concomitant with those improvements were technology improvements—both are ongoing endeavors. Ilisaġvik increased its internet bandwidth, purchased new computer hardware, software, and apps to help our virtual learners access their coursework more easily. This endeavor has resulted in us supplying webcams, laptops, printers, software, and more to our students. We also prioritized direct and indirect student aid including relief payments to students, internet stipends, and debt dischargement to students’ accounts. Ilisaġvik has also prioritized augmented campus cleaning, securing a separate quarantine house for faculty and staff use, retrofitting the campus to make it safer, and securing PPE.

Removing Barriers during COVID

During the pandemic, Ilisaġvik prioritized removing barriers to student success in two ways: providing mental and behavioral health support and providing financial relief in several forms.

- $385,368 in student debt discharged to support retention and encourage students to re-enroll
  - Average Discharge: $537
- $325,130 in direct payments to students (through December 2021)
  - Average Relief Payment: $1,095
- Laptop Loaner Program for Students: 54 Recipients

- Hired one (1) Wellness Coordinator
- 28 Wellness Engagement Activities offered in 2021
- 208 Student Support Services offered in 2021
- Service Types: Counseling Services, Case Management, Health Referrals, Behavioral Health Training
- Classroom accomodations due to illness/childcare
REQUEST: $40 million TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies that could leave Indian Country – and AI/AN students – behind the rest of the U.S. for generations, Congress must act to establish a permanent TCU IT Service Fund within the USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program. An annual $40 million set-aside for TCUs, which are 1994 land-grant institutions served by USDA, would help cover rapidly increasing network, connectivity, and equipment costs, maintenance, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing.

Congress recognized this need in the pandemic and attempted to provide support to TCUs by including them in the new NTIA Tribal Connectivity Broadband program. Unfortunately, due to NTIA’s design of the program, to date, not even one TCU has been awarded direct grants.

REQUEST: $3.2 billion TCU Construction Fund: DOI - Bureau of Indian Education

A July 2021 AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed many chronic unmet facilities and infrastructure needs, including lack of student and faculty housing, inadequate classroom space, insufficient libraries, and outdated laboratories.

- TCU deferred maintenance/rehabilitation: $400 million (total)
- TCU completion of master plans: $2.7 billion (total)
- TCU operation and maintenance: $20 million (annual, recurring need)

AIHEC strongly urges Congress to fund dedicated TCU facilities programs through DOI-BIE to modernize current facilities and build safer 21st century campuses.

Ilisaġvik College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- According to a 2015 survey shared by AIHEC, Ilisaġvik College has the least amount of bandwidth of any tribal or community college in the nation, while paying the highest for bandwidth.
- The pandemic has heightened the bandwidth challenges we face in rural Alaska. Our villages have varying levels of connectivity, however, all our communities struggle with low bandwidth availability and extreme high internet costs.
- Ilisaġvik College is using CARES Act funding to increase our bandwidth during the pandemic, however, funding for future bandwidth needs has not been identified.
- Ilisaġvik College depends heavily on a donation of bandwidth (in addition to the bandwidth we pay for) from Quintillion for the College’s day-to-day operations.

Pre-pandemic Monthly Internet Costs (2019) and Speeds: $47,500 for 50 mbps
Post-pandemic Monthly Internet Costs (2022) and Speeds: $95,000 for 100 mbps

Ilisaġvik College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

Ilisaġvik College resides on the North Slope of Alaska and leases a total of 13 buildings, varying in size, age and physical condition from our local native corporation. A majority of our facilities were constructed in the 1940s for use by the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (NARL). Because our facilities are aging and becoming more expensive to maintain and lease, Ilisaġvik has been working towards a new college campus.

- Main campus was constructed in 1968. We experience frequent plumbing, sewage, and electrical issues which are expensive.
- Road access to our main campus experiences severe erosion and at times, the campus is inaccessible during extreme weather events.
- Since we lease, we are unable to secure various funds. and are in dire need of a new campus to own.
- We have Quonset huts on our main campus that we utilize for our skilled trades programs, such as carpentry, welding, plumbing and electrical. These are our oldest facilities, and being safety compliant has been challenging. A new college campus will alleviate these issues.