LEECH LAKE TRIBAL 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), Leech Lake Tribal 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.

LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

• Emergency Student Aid (March 2020-April 2022)
  • Cost of living/inflation assistance: $500,000
  • Tuition assistance: $260,000

• IT Upgrades: Upgraded Network infrastructure to include more virtual machines and storage with increased resources (RAM, CPU).
  • LLTC has upgraded outdated classroom equipment to allow virtual and HyFlex course delivery. This allowed students and faculty to be flexible in how courses are taught and attended and the college to be more flexible in responding to changes in the Covid-19 infection rates.
  • COVID funds allowed the purchase of remote software licenses, equipment, and Zoom/Webex accounts.
  • COVID funds allowed purchase of laptops & hotspots for students

• Campus Safety/Sanitation: COVID funds allowed us to
  • upgrade air filtration system
  • pave a dirt parking lot to minimize dust and load on the air system
  • upgrade 80% of doors to keyless entry
  • hire more sanitation staff and a deep cleaning service
  • purchase rapid tests & KN-95 masks for students, staff, and faculty

• Campus Modifications: a new building was possible to create a safe socially distancing capable learning space for building trades students with an AICF grant. However, COVID funding made finishing the space possible, otherwise we would not be able to use it.

• Professional Development: All faculty distance teaching trained through the OLC and Quality Matters (COVID funds made it possible)

Since March 2020 and the abrupt shut down of our campuses and the forced transition to online learning, the COVID funds that our college received have been instrumental in helping us maintain operations, avoid lay off and furloughs, keep our students enrolled and persisting and maintain a healthy and safe campus facility. Perhaps the most salient form of assistance to the Leech Lake Tribal College was that of being able to assist our students with basic needs, such as emergency aid for food, rent, transportation, and childcare. Many of our students lost jobs as local businesses shut down and needed food pantry items and basics, such as laundry detergent and childcare items. Once the campus reopened, we were able to use our COVID funding to assist students with the rising cost of living due to inflation and tuition assistance. Likewise, to better prepare faculty to transition to online teaching, we were able to purchase online training.
There were several new student programs developed during and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Bridge Program for New Students**
In the Summer of 2021, using COVID funding, LLTC began a new intensive orientation program for new incoming freshmen. The funding has allowed us to route more resources towards supplying students with technology, inviting guest speakers, and having a longer orientation.

**Carpentry Trades in the COVID Pandemic**
A grant from the AICF allowed us to purchase a new modular building to help create an appropriate space for social distancing and teach students about new health-conscious practices in the trades. Because the grant was not sufficient to finish the space, we were able to use COVID funds to make the space ready for students with socially distanced workstations and other safety measures in place. We now have a carpentry program curriculum that prepares our students to be trade workers and leaders during and after the pandemic.

**Inflation Support to Students**
With the rising cost of living and supply chain issues, our students, especially those attending full-time cannot support their families. LLTC is using COVID funds to issue student support stipends based on enrollment (number of credits taken). This has helped to bolster attendance and persistence.

**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.

**Leech Lake Tribal College: Broadband and IT Challenges**
- Fiber to home in the Leech Lake area is limited
- Many communities in Leech Lake either do not have Internet access or have unreliable access
- LLTC has checked out laptops and Verizon hotspots to any students who need for online courses
- Cybersecurity equipment and methods have been introduced during this pandemic to balance the increase in cyberattacks and ransomware attacks
  - Service cost for this equipment and maintenance is considerable
- IT training cost is substantial to keeping up with cybersecurity and other changes that are occurring frequently
- Cost to train faculty and staff to use technology is also considerable

LEECH LAKE TRIBAL COLLEGE MARCH 2022
Leech Lake Tribal College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

Currently, the Leech Lake Tribal College does not have housing or dormitory facilities for our students. Some of the communities in the Leech Lake area that we serve are located over an hour away (by car) from the college campus and some do not have sufficient Internet or broadband access for our students to connect to courses remotely. Moreover, there isn’t sufficient space for faculty offices (most faculty do not have an office), classrooms, or extension/community education facilities. It has long been a dream of ours and a part of our strategic plan to have a cultural space on the LLTC campus, such as a roundhouse, a sweat lodge, and an archive facility for housing sacred ancestral items.

Having sufficient funding for infrastructure development can allow us to:

- Have housing for students and families who attend the college
- Have a cultural space that allows the college community and the community at large to participate in spiritual and cultural ceremonies that promote healing and wellness
- Have sufficient space for faculty to meet with students in private
- Have sufficient classroom and updated lab space for our Indigenous Science, Forestry, Ecology, and IT courses
- Have a facility where we offer cultural education and cultural practice preservation (Extension and community education)
- Have a wellness center where we can offer mental health, resource management, and nutrition support to students and faculty

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.