Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and American Rescue Plan (ARP), White Earth Tribal and Community 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.

Not being an online institution, WETCC had to transition every classroom to ensure students could continue their academic journey. WETCC purchased equipment to create four mobile TV stations (70” TV, micro-PC, webcam), enabling classrooms to become distance learning spaces. We replaced instructor PCs and purchased Meeting OWL Pro Cameras for the classroom to provide distance learners with 360° video and audio inside that automatically focuses on and follows who is speaking for active student/ instructor engagement, and we purchased a Zoom education account in order to continue our classes in a HyFlex and online modality.

White Earth Tribal and Community College: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

- Emergency Student Aid Total: $334,971 (March 2020-April 2022/anticipated)
- IT Upgrades: OWLs, portable instruction carts, Zoom educational account, and updated computer lab
- PPE, sanitizers, foggers, and social distancing equipment
- Classroom changes: HyFlex and online learning
- Ongoing student support - Chromebooks, Wi-Fi hot spots, and data cards
- Professional development for faculty to teach online courses

White Earth Tribal and Community College TCU Highlight: Dayna Thompson

It's time to proudly spotlight Dayna Thompson, a current TCU student who persisted during the pandemic and succeeded in sticking to her studies.

My educational goals are to graduate from White Earth Tribal and Community College with an Associate of Arts degree. I have hopes to transfer to Bemidji State University after graduating and pursue a major in Psychology or Indigenous Studies. I have been learning more about my culture and language and I hope to be able to continue my education so that I am able to pass my knowledge onto future generations.

Completing my education will impact my community in a positive way. I plan to give back to my community and make it a better place for future generations and elders. Growing up, I always heard people saying that they wanted to leave the reservation because it was no longer a good place, or they were embarrassed of it. The reservation is my home, and it is where I plan to plant my roots for my children and grandchildren. Where do we start for a better and positive change for the reservation? Well, it simply starts with yourself wanting a change. To some people it might not seem like much, but one person can make a huge difference.
**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.

**White Earth Tribal and Community College: Broadband and IT Challenges**

Reliable broadband is essential for our rural area where we struggle with:
- Having access to high-speed internet at home, phone service, and hotspots.
- Faculty, staff, and students all need to rely on virtual support from IT.
- Cybersecurity is a concern.

**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.

**White Earth Tribal and Community College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation**

During the pandemic, we need additional space on our campus to accommodate safe distancing between our learners. We need funding to increase our classroom space to meet this need. Currently, WETCC uses all classrooms to their maximum potential and often we must shuffle classes to accommodate classroom needs. Infrastructure needs include:
- Construct more classrooms to provide flexible scheduling and spacing.
- Renovate and update our arts and science labs/classrooms.
- Create additional office space for our faculty who now use classrooms as their office space for teaching, advising, counseling, and tutoring.
- Rehabilitate the library to accommodate student-centered space, including a writing center and tutoring and advising spaces.
- Our campus plan includes the next construction phase that we would be ready and able to pursue if funding was available.