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 (CRRSA) and American Rescue Plan (ARP), Salish Kootenai 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.

Salish Kootenai College: Rising to The Challenge

- Emergency Student Aid Disbursed: $601,775
- IT Upgrades have included technology purchases for course delivery, additional Wi-Fi hotspots, electronic business procedures implemented.
- Safety/Sanitation efforts included daily health surveys for faculty and staff, weekly COVID calls to provide safety information, mask mandate, vaccine incentives, paid administrative leave for employees who have COVID or are in isolation or quarantine. Meals, personal hygiene items and medications delivered free of charge to students, faculty and staff during quarantine or isolation. Free mental health counseling has been available for all students, staff and faculty.
- Campus Modifications have included reduced public access, reduced classroom sizes and modifications to food events.
- Professional Development opportunities have been made available to faculty to improve and implement high quality online instruction.
- Housing costs continue to be a significant challenge. The inventory of available housing is not adequate to meet the needs of the community which is impacting the ability of students to find housing while attending college.
Salish Kootenai College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- Skills and training for cybersecurity personnel is very expensive and there is a shortage of skilled professionals.
- Electronic Document costs, Student Information System costs, rising costs of software, in some cases as much as 50% or more, and additional personnel needs are a few of the challenges that are being faced.
- Students residing outside of the several towns on the Flathead Indian Reservation have limited options for Internet access. In many cases, it is poor quality DSL. In some cases, they have no access at all to broadband Internet and have to rely on LTE service which can be spotty as well. About 12% of our students last spring had no Internet access at their homes.
- SKC has some legacy fiber-optic lines buried on campus. This fiber was buried in the early 1990s. It does not support the high-speed networking that is now required in today's world. This fiber needs to be replaced along with equipment upgrades to accommodate the new fiber.
- SKC's current Internet connection is a 1GB connection through the University of Montana. This connection is frequently saturated because of the demand for Internet access to and from our campus network. The connection does have the capability to increase that to a 10GB connection, but equipment for each end would need to be purchased along with some work on the actual fiber path.

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.

Salish Kootenai College: Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

Salish Kootenai College classrooms were constructed to hold a class of between 10-25 students pre-COVID 19. In order to meet social distancing protocols, our classroom currently hold between 6-15 students. Our campus needs to reconfigure many of our academic spaces to allow for safe use. We do not have any covered outdoor learning space. The need for student housing construction is critical for our students. The rent and available units in our community are expensive and the inventory is virtually nonexistent due to an influx of people moving into the area to avoid more densely populated areas in our country. SKC needs to build additional 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom family units. We also need additional dormitory style housing. We consistently have between 150-300 students per academic year who are unable to attend SKC due to lack of housing. SKC needs to remodel its classroom and lab space for social distancing. Office space is not adequate for 2 people to meet given the requirements for social distancing. Construction of outdoor learning spaces is also need.

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.