

American Indian Higher Education Consortium, 121 Oronoco Street, Alexandria, VA 22314

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### **American Indian Higher Education Consortium**

**Contact:** Erica Newland

**Phone:** (703) 838-0400 ext 106

**E-Mail:** [enewland@aihec.org](mailto:enewland@aihec.org)

### **SIX TRIBAL COLLEGE RECEIVE EPA-AIHEC TRIBAL ECOAMBASSADOR GRANTS**

ALEXANDRIA, VA - This month, six Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) received competitive grants totaling \$160,000 through the American Indian Higher Education Consortium's longstanding Tribal ecoAmbassador partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The Tribal ecoAmbassador program empowers tribal communities to identify and address their own unique environmental needs while building the capacity of Tribal Colleges and Native students by encouraging relationships with federal scientists and offering hands-on field and laboratory experience. The program recognizes and honors an important factor that makes TCU's unique among institutions of higher education: the incorporation of traditional cultural knowledge with the western scientific method.

"We are proud to be partnering with the EPA on this exciting and empowering initiative," said Carrie L. Billy, President & CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), which is the nation's 37 TCUs. "Each ecoAmbassador project is rooted in tribal culture and community need or aspiration, and in addressing that need or working toward that goal, TCU students are empowered to create positive change. They learn new research skills and through use of those skills, they rediscover important lessons from their tribe's history, lands, and ways of knowing. Their own identity is strengthened."

In 2011, EPA first partnered with AIHEC to support the initial Tribal ecoAmbassadors project. In the years since, EPA has recognized the tremendous value of these modestly funded programs, and this year's round of grants marks the fifth year of the project.

Under the initiative, each TCU develops its own project idea, based on its community's needs and the institution's capacity. Past projects have included recycling, traditional gardens, water and air quality research, traditional plant restoration, mercury accumulation in plant and animal tissue, and more. To date, the Tribal ecoAmbassador project has supported 26 projects at 15 TCUs.

When a college receives an award, TCU professors and students are matched with EPA staff with federal scientists who are working in the same field on similar projects and can offer expertise, connections, or training.

Six TCUs received grants this year, including:

Haskell Indian Nations University, Lawrence, KS - \$35,000. The HINU Tribal ecoAmbassador project will focus on food waste reduction in the campus cafeteria, as well as, a campus-wide effort to landscape the campus with a focus on planting traditional polyculture vegetable gardens, native Kansas prairie grasses, wild flowers, shrubs and fruit bearing trees.

Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, Baraga, MI - \$35,000. The KBOCC Tribal ecoAmbassador project will continue and expand water temperature profiling efforts in habitats of local fish management species as part of the implementation of best-management practices for fisheries of the Lake Superior region.

Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT - \$35,000. The SKC Tribal ecoAmbassador project will locate and quantify arsenic concentrations in well water on CSKT land and inform community members if wells are found with elevated arsenic levels and how to access safe drinking water.

Turtle Mountain Community College, Belcourt, ND - \$35,000. The TMCC Tribal ecoAmbassador project will research recreational activities in Tribal lakes to determine if such activities lead to water contamination resulting in a hazardous environment for invertebrate organisms, specifically leech.

Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM - \$10,000. The IAIA Tribal ecoAmbassador project will use art and permaculture to enhance public spaces and to create restoration and passive water harvesting systems and bio-retention rain gardens.

Northwest Indian College, Bellingham, WA - \$10,000. The NWIC Tribal ecoAmbassador project, Rooted Relationships, builds upon previous efforts at Northwest Indian College to expand and enhance facilities, materials and instruction concerning the interrelation of people, plants and wellness.

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*AIHEC is the collective spirit and unifying voice of our nation's 37 TCUs - a unique community of tribally and federally chartered public institutions of higher education working to make a difference in the lives of many thousands of American Indian and Alaska Native students, their families, and their communities.*