

## Northwest Indian College: TCU Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic

117<sup>th</sup> Congress – February 2021

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), **Northwest Indian College** received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address tremendous digital divide challenges. We were also able to provide emergency grants, equipment, and tuition assistance to our students to help them stay enrolled in classes. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and plan for onsite classes, our needs are growing. To address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future, TCUs need your ongoing support.

### CARES and CRRSAA Funds at Northwest Indian College

- Student Aid
- Safety/Sanitation
- IT Upgrades
- Classroom changes/physically distant
- Professional Development for distance learning
- Ongoing student support.
- Note: spent approximately \$3M in grant expenditures (as of Feb. 2021); every dollar used for institutional priorities, one; student recruitment/retention; two, teaching and learning/instruction; three, health and safety.



*Changes include: Offered tuition discounts, classes converted to virtual/distance learning format to meet social distancing and safety guidelines, PPE for essential staff/ all campus facilities, and flexibility for faculty and staff to work remotely. Pivoted in-person classes to online remote learning by: accelerating attainment of distance learning accreditation, subsidizing internet connection costs, providing new laptops for students and faculty, and expanding the various technologies we use to teach and support our staff and student users remotely.*



### Ongoing Challenges at Northwest Indian College

- Limitations from lack of quality internet access
- Emotional, Mental and Behavioral Health Concerns for students and staff
- Short grant period – too short for TCUs and Students
- Authorized uses to be expanded to include new construction
- Ongoing student support needs
- Example: temporarily reassigning staff impacted by department/program closures or cancellations to support institutional priorities such as student outreach and connection and Continuing Education (CEU)

*Our biggest challenges include but are not limited: establishing and maintaining relationships and connections with students remotely; making sure that students, faculty, and staff can access needed software with technology and internet access; restrictions in authorized uses of emergency funds that prohibit TCU's from addressing short and long-term needs like construction; supporting wellness activities to promote positive emotional, behavioral, and mental health of students, faculty, and staff; ongoing recruitment and retention efforts; and meeting unique student needs (i.e. ADA accessibility).*

We appreciate your commitment and support!

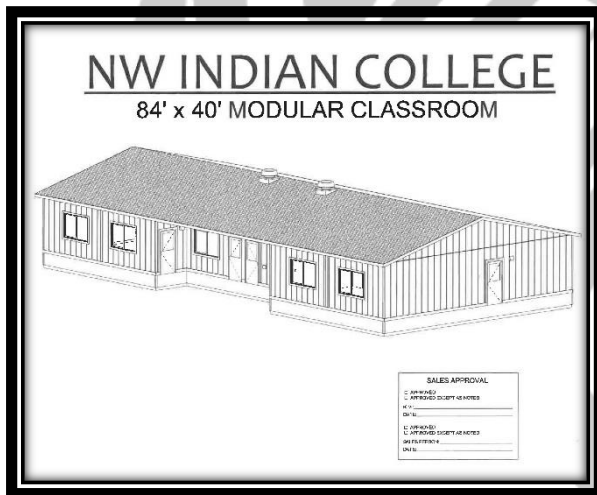
### **REQUEST: \$24 TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service**

The ongoing pandemic has exacerbated the digital divide and homework gap and underscored the lack of broadband access across Indian Country. To address these deficiencies, Congress should establish a *permanent TCU IT Service Fund* within the existing (and previously under-used) **USDA-Rural Utilities Service Program**. An annual \$24 million set-aside for TCUs, which are the 1994 Land-grant institutions, is needed to cover ongoing equipment costs, maintenance and upkeep, infrastructure expansion, and IT staffing. If TCUs had adequate funding for IT service and infrastructure support, they would have already put in place many of the community-based mobile hot spots needed to address the “homework gap” on many reservations.



### **Northwest Indian College: Broadband and IT Challenges**

- Internet service and connection has been and remains a challenge for instructors and students. Note: NWIC is still recovering from cybersecurity attack in summer 2019.
- ADA accessibility: Assistive technology for students with vision impairments, students with hearing impairments (screen readers, transcription services, etc.)
- Inequitable Internet service across site campuses. The main campus is set up with a 1gbps connection. The extended sites are all currently at 100mbps, or roughly 1/10 of the speed of main campus.
  - Remote learning has shed light on this disparity as several staff and student users were either severely limited by choice of ISP or, in some cases, even unable to be connected to the Internet entirely.



### **REQUEST: \$500 million TCU Construction Fund: DOI – Bureau of Indian Education**

A recent AIHEC survey of TCUs revealed a list of chronic facilities-related maintenance and rehabilitation needs, including student and faculty housing, classrooms, libraries, and laboratories. The TCUs have an estimated total need of \$489.75 million in deferred maintenance and rehabilitation and need \$837 million to fully implement existing master plans.

A dedicated TCU deferred construction and maintenance/rehabilitation fund through the DOI-BIE would help meet the 21st century needs of *all* TCUs, including technology-enabled facilities; campus renovations; IT infrastructure; and facilities necessary for career, technical, and pipeline programs.

### **Northwest Indian College: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation**

In general, the facilities on our campus have been focusing on ways to create appropriate distancing, improved indoor air quality and comprehensive sanitation of all facilities.

- Create additional spaces for Instruction and Administration,
  - Purchasing a new Pre-Fabricated/Modular Classroom.
  - Planning for a new Office building to replace a small, obsolete, congested modular building.
  - Converting under-utilized buildings/rooms to hold more in-person classes that allow for proper distancing.
  - Installing PPE items such as plexi-glass barriers between office staff and students.
- Older buildings need upgrades on their Heating Venting and Air Conditioning (HVAC) units.
  - Venting and air filtration units to be installed in buildings without adequate HVAC systems.
  - Create additional outdoor classrooms and modify existing classrooms for more open air instruction.
- Additional custodial staff to allow for deep cleaning before and after classes. Regular cleaning of restrooms, meeting rooms, and staff rooms, lobbies and offices.

We appreciate your commitment and support!