Salish Kootenai College: *TCU Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic*
117th Congress – February 2021

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), **Salish Kootenai 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 Salish Kootenai College

- 50% reduction in tuition for all students during the 2020-2021 academic year
- Implemented Google Meet and Zoom virtual meeting platforms
- Increased Wi-Fi access sites on campus
- Paid professional development for faculty members through Quality Matters to earn an online teaching credential
- Emergency aid for students experiencing financial difficulty, and weekly food box distribution
- Example: Ongoing student support.
- Home delivery for students in isolation/quarantine of food and other necessities

Salish Kootenai College implemented numerous supports for students, faculty, and staff to meet the changed learning environment due to COVID-19. The COVID-19 response team was established to coordinate services and messaging to the campus community. Classes were offered using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online platforms, in-person classes were offered for lab and technical education courses. Electronic processes were put in place to manage many processes that were previously done in person. A laptop check-out system for students was implemented. Additional technology to improve course delivery was purchased. Classrooms were evaluated for reduced capacity to allow for social distancing. Rotation of staff in buildings to keep employee density at a minimum was done. An e-mail address (askskc@skc.edu) was created to enable students to a get rapid response to questions or concerns without having to search for a specific person or department. The college implemented an online daily health assessment for faculty and staff to monitor and manage employee health. Administrative leave was provided for faculty and staff who were required to isolate/quarantine.

Ongoing Challenges at Salish Kootenai College

- Emotional and mental health supports are ongoing challenges. SKC tripled the amount of counseling support but the need is greater than the service providers can accommodate. Sustaining this support is a big challenge
- SKC facilities remodeling and construction for interior and exterior space
- Students needs will continue for childcare, technology support, and academic supports
- Funding for maintenance of facilities

Funding to maintain buildings; replace appliances, vans, safety lighting, and parking lot, and build infrastructure is a constant challenge. Construction resources are very limited making facilities needs difficult to address in a timely manner. The cost and availability of mental and behavioral health professionals are an ongoing challenge. Access to affordable internet service became a glaring issue as the broadband access in our rural community could not meet the needs of the college, K-12 schools, and local businesses. Families were required to prepare more food at home for themselves and their families, putting stress on appliances, utility costs, and the need for childcare. These needs will continue post-pandemic.
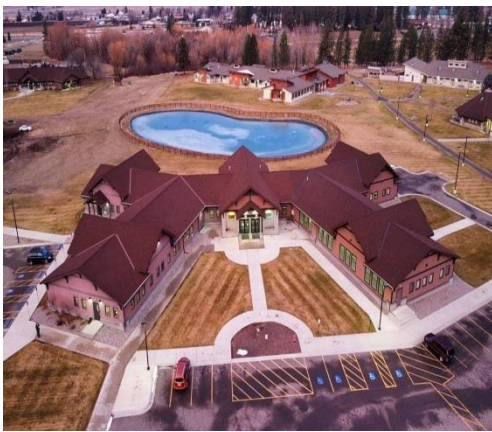
REQUEST: $24 TCU IT Service Fund: USDA – Rural Utility Service

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.

Salish Kootenai College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- 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 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: $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.

Salish Kootenai College: Facilities Needs -- 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 6-15 students. Our campus needs to reconfigure many of our academic spaces to allow for safe use. We do not have any outdoor, covered 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 non-existent 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 housing units. We also need additional dormitory style housing. We consistently have 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 two people to meet given the requirements for social distancing.
- Construction of outdoor learning spaces are needed.