

**THE AMERICAN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONSORTIUM**  
**SUBMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE - COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY – NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION**

March 10, 2016

**I. REQUEST SUMMARY**

On behalf of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) that collectively are the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), thank you for this opportunity to present the TCUs' Fiscal Year 2017 (FY 2017) appropriations request with regard to the Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Minority Serving Institutions Partnership Program (MSIPP). New funds were added to the program in last year's budget, but because the intent for the use of those funds to launch a TCU Initiative within the NNSA-MSIPP was not clearly enough articulated, the funds were absorbed into the existing NNSA-MSIPP program. In the end, a modest amount of funding was identified to implement the initial phase of an important TCU Initiative, engaging 5 TCUs in the project. We ask that report language be included in the FY 2017 Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies, Appropriations bill designating \$5 million of the funds appropriated for the Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Minority Serving Institutions Partnership Program (MSIPP), specifically for the Tribal Colleges and Universities Initiative.

This initiative is designed to support a primary focus of the MSIPP, which includes advancing the TCUs' capacity for engaging in collaborative research projects throughout the NNSA complex, and helping to meet the nation's STEM workforce needs.

**II. NNSA-MSIPP TRIBAL COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVE**

As noted above, new funds included in last year's budget were intended to support a Tribal Colleges and Universities initiative designed to educate, train, and develop Native researchers, engineers, and technicians to expand and diversify the nation's STEM workforce in important technology growth areas. The fully-implemented project will focus on capacity building at TCUs in these growth areas and on facilitating research partnerships with NNSA's National Laboratories and their industry partners. In addition to furthering the science mission of the U.S. Department of Energy, activities supported through this program will encourage Native students to pursue science and technology careers resulting in a sustainable career pipeline for American Indian and Alaska Native students in science and technology fields that are emerging as key drivers of the U.S. and global economies.

**III. BACKGROUND: TCU SHOESTRING BUDGETS- "DOING SO MUCH WITH SO LITTLE"**

Tribal Colleges and Universities are an essential component of American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) education. Currently, 37 TCUs operate more than 75 campuses and sites in 16 states, within whose geographic boundaries 80 percent of all American Indian reservations and federal Indian trust land lie. They serve students from well over 250 federally recognized tribes, more than 70 percent of whom receive federal financial aid. In total, the TCUs annually serve over 100,000 AI/ANs through a wide variety of academic and community-based programs. TCUs are public institutions accredited by independent, regional accreditation agencies and like all U.S. institutions of higher education must periodically undergo stringent performance reviews to retain their accreditation status. Each TCU is committed to improving the lives of its students through higher education and to moving AI/ANs toward self-sufficiency. To do this, TCUs must fulfill additional roles within their respective reservation communities, functioning as community

centers, libraries, tribal archives, career and business centers, economic development centers, public meeting places, and child and elder care centers.

The federal government, despite its direct trust responsibility and binding treaty obligations, has never fully funded the TCUs' institutional operating budgets, authorized under the Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities Assistance Act of 1978. In fact, after over 35 years, the TCU operating support remains well below the level authorized for their day-to-day institutional operations. TCU budgets are at a further disadvantage because these colleges receive operations funding based on only a percentage of their enrolled students. Almost every other U.S. institution of higher education receives institutional operations funding based on its entire student body. However, approximately 15 percent of the TCUs' collective enrollments are non-Indian students living in the local community. TCUs receive federal funding based only on Indian students, defined in statute as members of a federally recognized tribe or the biological children of an enrolled tribal member. While many TCUs do seek funding from their respective state legislatures for their non-Indian, state-resident students (oftentimes referred to as "non-beneficiary" students) successes have been inconsistent at best. Yet, if a TCU's non-beneficiary students attended any other public institution in the state, the state would provide the college with ongoing funding toward its day-to-day operations. Given their locations, often hundreds of miles from another postsecondary institution, TCUs are open to all students, Indian and non-Indian, believing that education in general, and postsecondary education in particular is a catalyst to a better economic future for their local and regional communities.

#### IV. FURTHER JUSTIFICATIONS

Since 1973, the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) has been the collective spirit and voice of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), advocating on behalf of tribally or federally chartered institutions of higher education. AIHEC's mission is to nurture, advocate, and protect American Indian history, culture, art and language, and the legal and human rights of American Indian people to their own sense of identity and heritage. Our vision statement - *Strengthening sovereign nations through excellence in Tribal higher education* - illustrates our strong focus on Tribal Nation building.

To achieve this vision, AIHEC is continually seeking new avenues of support to grow the country's Native workforce and to create jobs in Indian Country. TCUs are the leaders in preparing American Indian/Alaska Native nurses, hundreds of teachers, and other professionals in high-demand fields, including agriculture and natural resources management, human services, IT technicians, and build tradesmen. However, training workers where opportunities for employment are extremely limited cannot address the entrenched poverty that plagues Indian communities.

Using the TCUs as the foundation, AIHEC is implementing a long-term systemic plan for transitioning Native communities' economies from one that perpetuates the cycle of unemployment, dependency, and poverty to economically self-sufficient communities. Working with new and emerging manufacturing technologies and methods, and with seed funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), we have established an Advanced Manufacturing program involving a pilot cohort of five TCUs. Each college has established a basic advanced manufacturing facility, is involved in developing a joint training and education program, and identified research and development projects involving energy system and related technologies which they are pursuing with private sector and federal agency partners. This program will prepare a well-trained Native workforce in advanced manufacturing and create economic and employment opportunities within Tribal communities through design and manufacture

of products that are responsive to needs and opportunities within these targeted technology areas. The project envisions bringing the “maker movement” to Indian Country by providing American Indian/Alaska Native young people with technical skills, as well as the opportunity to use those skills to respond to emerging opportunities in key technology areas. We envision Tribes, Tribal Colleges, and investment partners working together to establish a manufacturing hub in Indian Country for products and technologies that are designed, developed, and made by Native people. While the \$5 million requested from the DOE will focus on DOE STEM strategic goals more broadly, it will be critical to this initiative, ensuring that the participating Tribal Colleges have the facilities, dedicated personnel, and National Laboratory partners necessary for meeting both their training and education and research and development goals. Most important, these funds will help ensure that the TCUs develop the capacity to generate business activity that creates revenue necessary to grow and expand the program, and create jobs.

The new TCU Initiative is helping to advance some very promising and exciting projects in the area of advanced manufacturing. Two TCUs are providing models for the other colleges now participating and those eager to be included as the initiative expands. Bay Mills Community College (BMCC) in Brimley, MI operates the Great Lakes Composite Institute, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the college that functions as a Tier II/Tier III manufacturing supplier. It has established a technical leadership position as a supplier of composite materials and products focusing on thermoplastic fiber reinforced polymeric innovations and next generation thermoplastic fiber reinforced products. Industry partners include the Department of Defense military tank command (TARDEC), Ford Motor Company, and the Chrysler Corporation. The Center for Digital Technology at Navajo Technical University (NTU) in Crownpoint, NM has established a program that involves three dimensional modeling and manufacturing. They are currently focusing on additive metal manufacturing, “lightweighting”, and metrology with partners from Sandia and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories, NASA, and regional New Mexico and Arizona companies. Both BMCC and NTU are providing leadership and models for how TCUs can successfully participate in an advanced technology-supported economic growth area while providing students hands-on training and career opportunities.

The TCUs are a very sound investment of federal funds. A recent independent, economic impact study *revealed that TCUs create lasting value from multiple perspectives: students, society, and taxpayers.* TCUs elevate their students’ lifetime incomes, and this in turn benefits society as a whole, by increasing the region’s economy and generating a wide array of savings through improved lifestyles. The increased employment benefits taxpayers through increased tax receipts and a reduction in the need for welfare and unemployment benefits. In fact for every dollar spent, the life time income of students more than quadruples; society gains over five times the investment, in added income and social savings; and the taxpayers see a return of almost two and a half times the investment.

#### V. APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE REQUEST FOR FY 2017

We ask that the Subcommittee include report language designating that of the funds appropriated for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)-Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) Program, \$5 million be designated for the Tribal College Initiative, so that we might begin to truly benefit from the intended program that could set TCUs on a path to further the opportunities they can offer their students and reservation communities.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Struggling economies are endemic in Indian Country. We ask that Congress join us in bringing Tribal nations into the evolving global manufacturing community, transforming Tribal economies while addressing

national energy technology challenges. AIHEC Member institutions/Tribal Colleges and Universities provide quality higher education opportunities to many thousands of American Indians and Alaska Natives and other reservation residents, as well as essential community programs and services to those who might otherwise not have access to such possibilities. As noted earlier, the modest federal investment that has been made in TCUs has paid great dividends in terms of employment, education, and economic development. Continuation of this investment and expanding it through Department of Energy/NNSA partnerships makes sound fiscal, as well as moral sense.

We greatly appreciate your past and continued support of the nation's Tribal Colleges and Universities and your thoughtful consideration of our FY 2017 appropriations requests.