

College of Menominee Nation: 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), the **College of Menominee Nation** (Keshena, WA) received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address the 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 modified for public health restrictions, our needs are growing. To address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future, TCUs need ongoing support.

CARES and CRRSAA Funds at COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION

- Classroom equipment for hybrid learning
- Software for online learning
- Laptops for students, staff, and faculty
- Faculty training
- Counseling services for students, staff, and their families



The College of Menominee Nation upgraded classroom equipment and software to meet the new needs of moving into the hybrid and online learning environment. These included WebEx and SMARTnet agreements for classroom equipment. The classrooms are equipped with plexiglass to create safe environments between the instructor and students. The purchase of laptops for students, staff, and faculty allows for working/studying from home. Faculty training was a priority for full-time and adjunct for online instruction and the new learning management system. CMN also offered counseling services for students, staff, faculty, and their families.

The College of Menominee Nation struggles to create a socially distanced learning environment for courses that require lab work or general education courses that fill to capacity. Allowing TCUs to use some of these funds for construction would allow



Ongoing Challenges at College of Menominee Nation

- Struggle to create spaces that follow social distance
- Short grant period
- Ongoing student support needs

expansion of labs and building of outside learning environments. The short grant period does not allow TCUs to continue counseling services beyond the length of the grant. The long-term effects of COVID-19 are not known and continued counseling services would benefit students, staff, faculty, and their families.

COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION: Broadband and IT Challenges

Rural communities face many challenges in accessing the digital world, from internet access, reliable internet access, and the cost of internet access. CMN's library serves as both an academic and community resource. Before the pandemic, the library offered in-person community programs that were popular with our community members. The library staff has revised their programs for the online environment but struggles to find participants who can participate due to their lack of internet access.

- Previously, there were zero laptops available to be loaned out to students. Thanks to the CARES funding, we have been able to purchase over 100 new laptops for check-out and use at student homes.
- We had a single campus-to-campus remote classroom set up and now have over 10 WebEx classrooms setup for connecting students across campuses and at home.
- Financial internet assistance for students to pay a portion of their monthly internet bill to connect remotely and complete assignments and online work.
- Transitioned from basic Google Classroom use to a complete learning management system for online course delivery.
- Upgraded Wi-Fi availability on campus to make the internet more accessible for students by extending coverage to parking lots and outdoor areas.
- Provided laptops and webcams to faculty and staff to enable videoconferencing.



COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

The College of Menominee Nation has experienced difficulties in planning for the reopening of our campuses due to current facilities' inadequate capacity to address health and safety issues due to the pandemic. Areas most impacted are within our student resource areas, planning and meeting spaces, office spaces that directly support students, and the creation of creative spaces that allow for use of our outdoor areas. Redesigning and creating spaces will allow us to better serve our students while maintaining safe environments for our students, staff, and faculty.

- Technical Trades Building – increasing classroom space to allow for social distancing.
- Shirley Daly Hall (classroom building) – build-out of the lower level to allow for a safety exit, which provides more meeting space, potential classroom space, and office space for student support services.
- Commons Building (currently held by Retention Department) –, redesign this space to allow for a larger area for meetings, student and youth activities.
- Outdoor classrooms – construction of outdoor classroom spaces that creatively use our green spaces in fully open-air environments.

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.

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.