

Little Priest Tribal 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), Little Priest Tribal 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 Little Priest Tribal College

- Classroom modifications to deliver HyFlex modality
- Safety/Sanitation – signage, touchless dispensers, sneeze guards
- Laptops available for Title IV students so they could complete online classes
- Assist students with all bills, specifically internet, food, and utilities
- Student aid paid directly to Title IV eligible students
- New IT building due to the demands for their support due to COVID
- Professional development – All faculty attended ACUE training for online teaching.



Initially for the spring 2020 semester the college decided to have all classes move to online for the safety of the students, faculty, and staff. During the initial transition, we had to assist students with technology and purchased laptops and assisted students who did not have access to the internet. Some students lived remotely where they did not have the option to have internet installed. Little Priest Tribal College continues to provide laptops and Chromebooks to students. Little Priest Tribal College returned to campus and therefore implemented the capabilities to deliver the HyFlex model to students. This enabled students to socially distance when necessary but still remain active in their classes. It will also be helpful to continue the Cares and CRRSAA Funds for Institutional Aid at Tribal Colleges.



Ongoing Challenges at Little Priest Tribal College

- Emotional, mental, and behavioral health concerns
- Lack of tutoring services and tutoring center.
- New dorms on campus to help the ease of students and who may not have the resources to travel across town
- Lack of buildings to expand services with classrooms, labs, student support services, and office spaces
- The Cares Act money is restrictive, as it only allows modular buildings.

At Little Priest Tribal College, a majority of the students received support with the Cares Act Money in the form of student aid. Students reached out and shared their hardships due to the loss of employment and the struggles with paying bills. Students' emotional, mental, and behavioral health concerns were barriers to their education prior to the pandemic and increased during the pandemic. Several students discussed the transition for their own children from attending school to being at home and the stress families endured. Families were trying to survive during the pandemic, and their own education suffered as a result. This impacted their financial aid status. Students at Little Priest Tribal College are resilient but will need the additional support as the country continues to make progress and heal from this 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.



Little Priest Tribal College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- Little Priest Tribal College is on about a 3-5-year workstation upgrade plan.
- The plan for servers, switches, and other networking items are on an 8-10-year cycle.
- Increase our internet bandwidth from 200 MB to 500 MB, with an increase to 1 GB soon.
- Add new 10 GB network switches with fiber as the backbone of the campus to handle increase of projected load capacity.
- Provide internet services and IT support to the library which serve as a dual college and public library.
- Work with the tribal government on a wireless internet project to provide 4G and soon 5G internet service to tribal lands.
- Provided laptops to student, staff, and faculty for remote connectivity, e.g. distant learning, telecommuting, and after-hours support.



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.

Little Priest Tribal College: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

At Little Priest Tribal College classrooms and laboratories remain an issue. The classrooms are too small for social distancing, and there are too few classrooms to accommodate the planned program growth. The current laboratories are poorly designed and are unsuitable for chemistry, particularly organic chemistry. The current student services center is too small for social distancing. This specifically impacts the computer lab, tutoring center, and commons area. The college is unable to accommodate large events such as graduation. Students also discuss the lack of day care as an issue. Currently there is no day care center on campus. The college conducted student surveys which showed the lack of daycare to be a significant deterrent to enrollment. The existing dormitories are located a great distance from campus and there is no transportation available for students. The largest dormitory is an old building, requiring constant maintenance to HVAC, plumbing, etc. The existing dorm space will allow for little growth beyond our immediate service environment. Apartment-type family student housing is needed to support enrollment. The current administrative building is 70 years old and requires constant maintenance. The building cannot accommodate all administrative offices in a central location. Facilities and maintenance needs a larger shed for equipment and vehicle storage. The parking lot poses a hazardous risk for employees and students year-round due to large cracks and winter ice. The college will be leasing from the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska an additional 10-acres adjacent to the existing main campus. Since it is currently used for farmland, the annex will require infrastructure to be delivered to the area. The college will need to develop a master plan for the annex with architectural consultants. Additional parking will be needed to for this area.