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NAVAJO TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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Navajo Technical University: *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), Navajo Technical University 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 Navajo Technical University

- CARES student relief checks
- 50% tuition assistance
- Computing device/MiFi device check-out
- PPE and sanitizing supplies
- Sneeze guards and temperature devices
- Homework Express transportation services
- IT upgrades to support distance learning
- Expanded broadband infrastructure
- Chapter House and homes broadband resources



When COVID disrupted learning at NTU, efforts were made to accommodate students experiencing hardship while transitioning to hybrid learning platforms. Safety was the top priority of the transition. Funds were used to purchase personal protective equipment; accommodations were made to classrooms and labs to include sneeze guards and social distance spacing; and information technology upgrades were made to transition learning and support services online. For students experiencing difficulty continuing their education because of financial constraints, NTU offered student relief checks for Pell-eligible students and 50% tuition assistance for all students. Processes were put in place for laptop and MiFi devices, gas card and emergency aid relief, and a homework delivery system.



Ongoing Challenges at NTU

- Mental health and suicide prevention
- Grants/scholarships for non-Pell-eligible students
- Equitable distribution of the Title V formula
- Approve TCUs to receive E-rate authority
- Equity in Land-Grant formula funding
- Eliminate partnership requirement for Land-Grant research

While NTU made strides in addressing the short-term needs of COVID, more effort has to be made to address ongoing challenges that NTU faced pre-pandemic.

More work needs to be done to provide emotional, behavioral, and mental health support to students, faculty, and staff. Funding must be made available to non-Pell-eligible students, as a large percentage of NTU's students have had an educational journey that has exhausted financial resources. As a TCU, NTU also must have its financial streams expanded in order to meet the growing needs of students. This includes approving TCUs to receive E-rate authority and equitable distribution of Title V formula.

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.



Navajo Technical University: Broadband and IT Challenges

- Permanent authorization to the 2.5 GHz spectrum is needed to provide Internet services at low cost to our communities.
- Federal right-of-way is needed to provide long-haul and middle-mile fiber to resolve tribal connectivity issues.
- Need assistance to resource the last mile of connectivity services to off-set the expense of broadband construction, and more importantly, the reoccurring monthly costs that allow telework and learning.
- Funding would assist in 5 Gbps upgrade to NTU’s Chinle instructional site’s Internet connection and a 5 Gbps layer two fiber optic interconnections between NTU Crownpoint and NTU Chinle (Aos: Chinle - 10 GB, Crownpoint – 100 GB)
- Broadband is not affordable on Navajo:
 - Chapter Houses pay \$40/Mb, today (after CARES Act funding).
 - Universities and colleges pay \$23/Mb, today (after CARES Act funding).
 - Navajo home broadband costs up to \$100/month for 10 Mbps.
- Many students drive two hours to participate in distance learning.
- Many Navajos are not able to work from home (or at a Chapter House).
- Navajo K-12 started E-rate projects – two to three years away.
- Navajo is pursuing novel and innovative broadband discussions (Sceye, Starlink, Verizon).



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.

Navajo Technical University: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

The pandemic illuminated NTU’s need for expanded infrastructure to accommodate physical distancing. Classrooms were too small to accommodate proper distancing; faculty offices were limited for counseling; and NTU’s existing buildings needed rehabilitation and retrofitting to address ventilation standards. Additional infrastructure needs include:

- Residential and faculty housing
- Center for nursing and health programs
- Construction of an academic building
- Construction of Navajo Center for the Environment