STONE CHILD COLLEGE
"MAKING OUR DREAMS HAPPEN WITH ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, CULTURE AND COMMITMENT"

STONE CHILD 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), Stone Child 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 Stone Child College

- Laptops, iPads for staff, faculty, and students
- Safety/sanitation for campus and students
- IT infrastructure upgrades on campus and in the classrooms; Internet for students at home
- Classroom changes/physically distant
- Professional development for distance learning
- Emergency aid for students
- Ongoing student support

Narrative: IT upgraded to support distance learning platforms, classrooms, and labs; made changes for physically distant instruction; and purchased laptops for staff, faculty, and students to be able to telework and take online courses from home. SCC also helps pay for Internet for students' use at home, as there are students who do not have Internet access available at home. Student support services provided to our students: financial aid, funds towards tuition and fees, childcare, laptops, internet, online tutoring services, stipends for food during community lockdown, food baskets, purchase of other items needed for online classes, and emergency funds to keep students in school. We provide COVID testing and worked with our local healthcare to provide COVID vaccinations. We are also transitioning our student management system to move towards online admissions, access to records for students, and more reliable reporting for our institution.

Ongoing Challenges at Stone Child College

Narrative: The major ongoing challenge on our campus is our small library. Our library uses rotating shelves that hold our books and resources; this was done for spacing when the building was built over 18 years ago. This current system only allows one student to be in that area at a time due to social distancing.

The forced migration to online course delivery has a negative impact on our aging faculty to the point where several faculty members have given notice that they will not be renewing their contracts. The technology that we used for course delivery is not

well-received by some of our older faculty; the learning curve with the course delivery programs are the pain points. Recruiting and retaining quality staff and faculty is a major concern that needs to be addressed.

SCC students are already at a disadvantage looking through the equity lens. The pandemic magnified the challenges of our students completing courses. However, SCC had a 15% increase in enrollment for the fall 2020 semester. Recent reports on TCUs conducted with the support of the American Indian College Fund have supported the fact that financial incentives or assistance to TCU students show a much greater semester completion rates than those who do not receive financial assistance. Grant programs serving TCUs need to allow for stipends and cover the cost of attendance for TCU students in order to help bridge our communities out of poverty.

Ongoing Challenges at Stone Child College

- Emotional, Mental and Behavior Health Concerns
- Short grant period – too short for TCUs and Students
- Authorized uses needs to be expanded to include construction
- Ongoing student support needs, trying to continue to keep students engaged online
- Our Library does not allow for social distancing, the area is too small; only one student can look for books due to our small Library area

Airian Russette is a current student at Stone Child College. She is in the liberal arts and Native American studies programs and expects to graduate in May 2021. She is also the mother of two young children. When asked how Stone Child College has been able to support her needs as a student during the pandemic she said "From Stone Child College, I have received COVID funds, and it has helped provide gas for my van to get to and from classes. The funds have also helped with my monthly electric, phone, and propane expenses. Another thing SCC has helped my family and I with are food and cleaning supplies baskets. The food and supply baskets were filled with noodles, bread, water, toilet paper, dish soap, bar soap, paper towels, canned food, boxes of pasta, hand sanitizer, cleaning spray, pasta sauces. With the funds SCC has also provided IGA food gift cards. Stone Child College provided me a laptop so I could do my classes virtually when the campus closed. Providing me with a device also helped with typing my papers and completing other work when I was unable to access the library. The help from SCC during the pandemic has helped me become a successful student. The services and resources I have received, created less stresses at home and helped me to be able to focus on my education.

On campus, I feel completely safe. I can relax and do my work in a comfortable environment. The staff have taken extra precautions to make sure the campus is clean and safe. Everyone that enters the building is required to use the temperature checker and wear a mask. The campus can only be used by staff, faculty, and students to limit traffic. There is also hand sanitizer, masks, and disinfecting wipes provided to everyone for sanitation. I really love being a student at Stone Child College, because you are treated good and feel welcomed. There are so many opportunities like scholarships, tutoring, counseling, work study, and stipend programs. The staff and faculty are helpful. They are always available to talk with you, help you when needed, and will get you to the right person if it is something they are not aware of. Stone Child College is a great Tribal College, and I am proud to be a student." (Airian Russette, 2021)

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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.

Stone Child College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- Microsoft Teams is the primary course delivery platform for online learning at SCC, but our older faculty are turned off by the transition and tools required for remote learning and are not renewing their teaching contracts.
- The cost of Internet access is greater than urban areas and speeds are much slower at SCC.
- Reliable broadband is essential to making the most of online resources and opportunities for faculty professional development.

- Local Internet provider has a monopoly on the service; IT staff are looking for redundancy for Internet providers in the event of price hiking or break in service lines.
- Line-of-sight Wi-Fi to outlying buildings is currently done due to the high cost of installing fiber optics.
- 31 of 35 accredited TCUs serve as community libraries.
- Industry standard for IT equipment replacement is 3-5 years. At TCUs, the average IT equipment replacement timeline is 8.29 years.
- Bandwidth is critical to the success of hardware initiatives providing ubiquitous access to learning, such as bring-your-own-device (BYOD) and 1:1 laptop and tablet programs.

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.

Stone Child College: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation
Narrative: Our library is too small, and a lot of federal funds disallow construction. The pandemic has resulted in extreme uncertainty in predicting our Indian student count (ISC) numbers. The ISC is used to determine our funding levels in future years. One of the ways we are accommodating the ISC uncertainty is by enacting measures to reduce operating costs such as energy efficiency and sourcing our energy from cheaper, more self-reliant and sustainable sources. We are in the process of securing the campus and increasing social distancing capacity.

- We are currently conducting a feasibility study to determine if combined heat and power will meet our current and short-term energy needs.
- A renewable energy feasibility study will also be conducted, after the CHP study, to develop and implement a 50 kW renewable energy portfolio.
- We are conducting a commercial energy audit to identify and enact facility improvement measures.
- We are conducting a preliminary architecture report for a library that can accommodate social distancing.
- A chain-link fence will be installed to secure the campus perimeter and maintain more secure points of entry.
- To accommodate social distancing, the Extension department and the Institutional Research & Development department are procuring modular buildings with at least five offices each and space for hands-on cooking and research laboratory spaces.