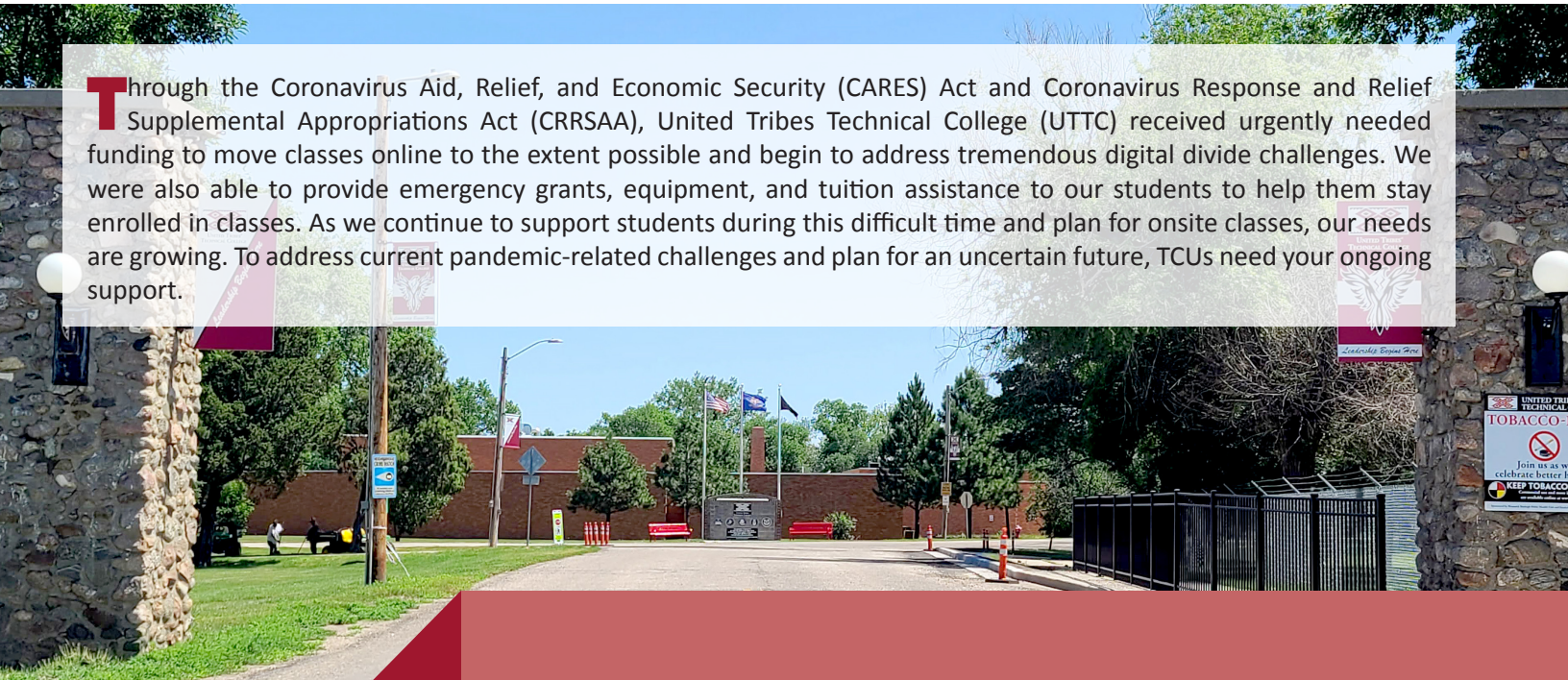# UNITED TRIBES TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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), United Tribes Technical College (UTTC) 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 United Tribes Technical College

- IT Infrastructure Upgrades
- Student Aid
- Ongoing student support.
- Professional Development for distance learning
- Safety/Sanitation
- Classroom changes/physically distant

CARES AND CRRSAA funds were used for IT upgrades focused on replacement of Core Network Switching and upgraded staff/lab computers that resulted in increased internet speed from 100Mbs to 10Gig. These upgrades supported distance learning platforms, classroom/labs modifications, and expansion of WiFi access points across campus.

- Student Aid was in the form of emergency financial aid as well as expenses for food, housing, course materials, technology, healthcare and childcare.
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the form of surgical masks, gloves, gowns, N95 respirators, goggles, and face shields were provided to employees and students.
- Student Health provided services to support the campus community through COVID19 testing kits, COVID19 vaccinations, contact tracing, quarantine guidance, supplies/mail, and medication/prescriptions.

Ongoing Challenges at United Tribes Technical College

- Personal Protective Equipment
- COVID-19 testing kits and vaccination
- Emotional, Mental and Behavior Health Resources
- The short grant period should be extended to the minimum of another year.
- Authorized uses for CARES/CRRSAA should be expanded for rehabilitation and new construction to enhance safety and social distancing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an ongoing need in regard to supplies to keep students, employees, and their families safe. We see morale being impacted negatively for both the student body, faculty, and staff; thus, the need for emotional, mental, and spiritual resources would be helpful. Students are stressed in completing their own studies while ensuring their children are attending their virtual classes at the same time.

- Emotional and mental wellbeing services focused on telehealth counseling sessions, mental wellbeing presentations, open discussion forums, online Yoga, Zumba, and Core Fitness sessions, professional referrals, anxiety lamps/ workbooks/diffusers.
- The food pantry provided groceries, meal deliveries, hygienic supplies, household goods, and meal/gas cards.
- Programmatic licensure and grant requirements required mid-year/final reports, income limits, restricted funds, documentation, and meetings/reviews.

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.

United Tribes Technical College: Broadband and IT Challenges

- IT infrastructure is essential to the provision of education for UTTC college students and their children who attend the Theodore Jamerson Elementary School located on the UTTC campus

- Bandwidth enhancement is necessary as technology advancements and education continues to transition to a digital and virtual classroom environment.

- IT equipment replacement is necessary every 3-5 years as updates to software continue to push the limits of dated equipment and capacity

- Software costs continue to rise as TCUs become more dependent on educational software to ensure consistent enrollment, financial aid, and enrollment services

- Reliable broadband and Wi-Fi are essential to student education, research, and faculty professional development.

- The UTTC Library has a computer lab that serves as an educational resource to college and elementary students' academic success.

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 maintsenance 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.

United Tribes Technical College: Facilities Needs – Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

UTTC is located on the original homelands of the Nueta, Hidatsa, and Sahnish people. The campus was originally built as a military post in 1903 and served in that capacity for the first half of the 20th Century. These buildings are still being used for both student residences and program office space. UTTC went to online learning for Spring 2020 and virtual synchronous learning for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 due to the inability to safety distance people within the smaller classrooms and labs. Current funding has resulted in the ability to maintain and do patchwork to remedy ongoing issues, but not the ability to update or rehabilitate to create a safe energy efficient learning and work environment for students and employees. Construction challenges such as the following could be remedied with additional funds focused on these important updates:

- Update obsolete heating, venting, and cooling (HVAC) systems
- Replace outdated electrical wiring – conduit outside the walls
- Replacement of the original windows and doors
- Installation of insulation
- Outdated plumbing systems – plumbing infrastructure outside the walls
- Add hardwired technology into facilities infrastructure