



WHITE EARTH TRIBAL & COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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White Earth Tribal and Community College (WETCC) 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), **White Earth Tribal and Community College (WETCC)** 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 WETCC

- Student emergency aid
- PPE, sanitizers, and social distancing equipment
- IT upgrades - Meeting OWL, portable instruction carts
- Classroom changes - HyFlex and online learning
- Ongoing student support - Chromebooks, Wi-Fi hot spots, and data cards
- Zoom educational account
- Professional development for faculty to teach online

Not being an online institution, WETCC had to transition every classroom to ensure students could continue their academic journey. WETCC purchased equipment to create four mobile TV stations (70" TV, micro-PC, webcam), enabling classrooms to become distance learning spaces. We replaced instructor PCs and purchased Meeting OWL Pro Cameras for the classroom to provide distance learners with 360° video and audio inside that automatically focuses on and follows who is speaking for active student/instructor engagement, and we purchased a Zoom education account in order to continue our classes in a HyFlex and online modality.



Ongoing Challenges at WETCC

- Ongoing student support seeds - Wi-Fi hot spots, data cards, food and housing insecurity
- Student mental health and well-being
- Short reporting grant period – TCUs are functioning in a pandemic and need more time to handle grants and reporting.
- Authorized uses expanded to include construction, infrastructure, and other operational needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused incredible challenges for WETCC students. Students had to transition to online learning without adequate time while caring for their children and transitioning them to online as well. WETCC student services department

contacted students daily to provide mental health support and offer financial support to ensure student success. One student shared her experience on Facebook: "WETCC brought me a little something today for my yard 🥰👍🥰 Miigwech!!! I literally couldn't have done it without the AMAZING STAFF of WETCC right there beside me pushing me to the finish line calling me and encouraging me and supporting me in this roller coaster of a journey to move forward and finish MY DEGREE!! YAY ME!!!! 🥰🥰 I DID IT!! A tremendous amount of gratitude for the dedication to students at WETCC!! What an amazing college! Blessed to have attended 🍀👍🍀👍"

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.



WETCC: Broadband and IT Challenges

Reliable broadband is essential for our rural area where we struggle with:

- A significant percentage of our students (as well as our community at large) do not have access to high-speed internet at home.
- Students live in rural areas and experience poor cell phone service, which renders students’ mobile hotspots ineffective.
- Faculty, staff, and students all need to rely on technology which is either not available or too expensive.

With so many new online learners and staff teleworking, cybersecurity is a concern.



Overcrowded Classroom
Limit class sizes even more now

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.

WETCC: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation

WETCC experienced an increase in student numbers at the same time that the pandemic began. This has left us in dire need of funding to increase our classroom space to accommodate safe places to learn. Currently, WETCC uses all classrooms to their maximum potential and often we have to shuffle classes to accommodate for classroom needs. Infrastructure needs include:

- Construct more classrooms to provide flexible scheduling and accommodate safe distancing space for learners.
- Renovate our arts and science labs/classrooms to provide a learning environment that promotes student engagement.
- Create additional office space for our faculty who now use classrooms as their office space for teaching, advising, counseling, and tutoring.
- Rehabilitate the library to accommodate student-centered space, including a writing center and tutoring and advising spaces.
- WETCC is growing and ready to face the workforce demands of our region, however, adequate space is a barrier.
- Our campus plan includes the next construction phase that we would be ready and able to pursue if funding was available.