



TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Based on the Federal Communications Commission's broadband speed benchmark, 63 percent of tribal lands across the country lack access to the high-speed broadband services needed to support economic development, tribal governance, healthcare, education, and public safety. While USDA Rural Utilities Service programs provide vital capital resources for broadband projects, certain regulatory mechanisms have hindered the deployment, maintenance, and affordability of broadband and radio services throughout Indian Country. Policies and investments focused on the deployment and adoption of these new technologies will provide renewed opportunities for tribes to exercise self-determination, nation building and economic development. Funding for federal commitments to consult with tribal nations, and access to public media systems continue to be essential functions for bridging the Digital Divide in Indian Country.

Key Recommendations

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC)

Financial Services Appropriations Bill

Office of Native Affairs and Policy

- *Provide a permanent fixed annual budget of \$500,000 to fund the Office of Native Affairs and Policy.*

The 1934 Communications Act, and subsequent amendments in the 1996 Telecommunications Act, failed to recognize the regulatory challenges of deploying telecommunications infrastructure on tribal lands and the critical role of tribal governments in facilitating such projects. Since 2000, tribal matters have steadily gained recognition at the FCC and in 2010 the FCC established its Office of Native Affairs and Policy (FCC-ONAP). Since then, FCC-ONAP has engaged tribal governments through consultations and trainings, and provided vital technical assistance throughout Indian Country that has resulted in tribal inclusion in FCC regulatory matters at unprecedented levels. Through this tribal engagement the FCC has revamped regulations to assist in bridging the Digital Divide on tribal lands. However, the ONAP office was created without dedicated funding and it was not until passage of the FY 2014 Omnibus that the office received \$300,000 dedicated to supporting its tribal consultation and training directives.

FCC-ONAP must continue to receive ongoing and increased funding to support the staffing levels necessary to consistently continue its consultation, training, technical assistance, and workshops throughout Indian Country. These interactions are vital in obtaining critical information regarding telecommunications issues affecting tribal lands and residents. A dedicated annual budget of \$500,000 for FCC-ONAP is vital to facilitate meaningful and productive consultations with tribal governments and to support the office in hiring additional staff to assist tribes in navigating the complex structures and regulatory functions at the FCC.

FY 2019 FORWARD APPROPRIATION (CPB/OMB REQUEST)

CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING (CPB)

Labor, HHS, Education Appropriations Bill

Grant Programs

- *Appropriate at least \$5 million to fund American Indian and Alaska Native radio stations.*
- *Appropriate at least \$1 million to Native Public Media and Koahnic Broadcast Corporation.*

Native radio stations are critical to the communities they serve since they are often the first source of emergency reporting and information for tribal citizens. Public broadcasters use datacast technology for public alert and warning systems, homeland security, and other public safety purposes. In addition to providing emergency information, tribal radio stations provide vital access to healthcare information and other services specific to the tribal communities they serve. For instance, in Arizona, KUYI Hopi radio provides “House Calls,” a health call-in show that connects listeners with a local doctor to field questions related to health issues. And in Alaska, KNBA covers news from Alaska Native villages about climate change refugees, language revitalization, and other hyper-local stories important and relevant to Alaska Native communities. Often, the only place where Native stories and issues are heard, are on Native radio stations.

NCAI supported the Administration’s request for a \$445 million advance appropriation for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) in FY 2018. Since 1976, CPB’s two-year advance appropriation has served as a Congressional strategy to protect public media from any immediate political pressure. Community Service Grants (CSGs) account for approximately 70 percent of CPB’s appropriation, which directly funds 1,300 local public television and radio stations including 30 Native radio stations.

CPB also funds the essential system-wide station support services provided by Native Public Media, Inc. and content production and satellite programming distribution by Koahnic Broadcast Corporation. Access to these funds allow organizations like Native Public Media, Inc. to ensure that Native radio stations stay on-air by maintaining compliance with FCC and other federal rules and regulations, and by providing the training and support Native broadcasters need.

NCAI supports an FY2020 advance appropriation of \$5 million in CPB funding for the 30 CPB-qualified Native radio stations serving federally-recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages; and an FY2020 advance appropriation of \$1 million for Native Public Media and Koahnic Broadcast Corporation for technical support services to Native radio stations.