



Telecommunications

The ability to communicate keeps communities safe and promotes trade and commerce. Tribal access to modern communications networks supports economic development, tribal governance, healthcare, education, and public safety in tribal and surrounding communities. Consultation in federal decision-making that impacts tribal nations, greater representation in telecommunications infrastructure and media, and increased access for tribal citizens to mobile and fixed broadband internet will result in economic and community development that can increase the efficiency of certain federal programs by delivering more cost effective or proactive services that result in better program delivery. Unfortunately, many tribal communities continue to disproportionately lack broadband access, which directly inhibits the progress for tribal nations and citizens.

According to a September 2018 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on broadband internet access on tribal lands, the Federal Communications Commission methodology for measuring and reporting broadband access resulted in overstatements in broadband access that leave some tribal lands and communities underserved or unserved. A key finding of the GAO report is that the Federal Communication Commission's report that 63 percent of tribal lands across the country lack access to high-speed broadband services is understated, and that the digital divide between Indian Country and the rest of the United States is even greater than previously reported. Policies and investments focused on the deployment of broadband and the adoption of new technologies will provide increased opportunities for tribal nations to build thriving economies, inclusive public safety networks, strong public media systems, and other necessary infrastructure.

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 challenges of deploying telecommunications infrastructure on tribal lands and the critical role tribal governments can assume 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 held consultations, 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 to support its tribal consultation and training directives.

FCC-ONAP must continue to receive ongoing and increased funding to support the staffing levels necessary to close the digital divide in Indian Country. FCC-ONAP's consultation, training, technical assistance, and workshops are vital to supporting rural Indian Country's broadband needs. A dedicated annual budget of \$500,000 for FCC-ONAP is a necessary investment in the digital future of all tribal nations.

FY 2020 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 \$500,000 for Native Public Media and \$500,000 for 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. In Alaska, KNBA covers news from Alaska Native villages about 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 supports the \$445 million advance FY 2022 appropriation for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). As such, NCAI opposes any reduction in appropriations that affect funding for native public media organizations. 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 36 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. Funding for Native Public Media, Inc. and Koahnic ensures that Native radio stations stay on-air by maintaining compliance with FCC and other federal rules and regulations; providing the training and support Native broadcasters need; and sustaining the satellite delivery necessary for providing broadcast services to some of the most rural and remote locations across Indian Country.

NCAI supports an FY 2021 advance appropriation of \$5 million in CPB funding for the 36 CPB-qualified Native radio stations serving federally-recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages; and an FY 2021 advance appropriation of \$500,000 for Native Public Media and \$500,000 for Koahnic Broadcast Corporation for technical support services to Native radio stations.