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Building Tribal College & University Capacity:
A Needs Assessment During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic

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Executive Summary

Building Tribal College & University Capacity: A Needs Assessment During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic is a comprehensive needs assessment conducted June-September 2020 and funded by the Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) to explore the needs, opportunities, and barriers that COVID-19 presents to the broader TCU and Universities (TCUs) community. The project team consisted of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) working with TCUs to examine the landscape and capacity of TCUs to play a lead role in adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through literature reviews, focus group discussions, and a large-scale survey with TCU stakeholders, we identified a variety of opportunities and challenges for TCUs to operate in a safe and inclusive manner.

Survey results clearly showed that the needs and support related to broadband access and distance education were foremost among respondents. These needs not only include the access and technologies but also the technical assistance and training need to successfully navigate the digital environment for students, teachers and community members. Additionally, there are other pressing needs in Tribal communities related to public health, child or elder care, food security and other household needs. Potential collaborative opportunities exist with local Tribal departments, public health organizations, K-12 schools and other groups.

The results of the focus group discussions were categorized into themes which identified the TCU needs and opportunities presented by COVID-19. The key themes discovered were as follows:

- Reopening: TCUs are working to make accommodations for students who will need to learn from off-campus locations (or hybrid modes).
- Funding: There are increased opportunities to access funding through grant applications, especially in relation to COVID relief legislation.
- Increased Workload: Participants mentioned an increased workload, citing increased meetings and emails, repeated/rescheduled classes, and moving coursework online as the main culprits. In particular, the increase in online Zoom meetings was mentioned.
- Safety: Participants expressed interest in what other TCUs are doing to facilitate the safe reopening of their college campuses.
- Student Retention: Participants mentioned concern over student retention, citing drops in enrollment numbers for their incoming classes.
- Internet/Broadband Access: The lack of reliable internet access in rural areas makes remote work for faculty and extension educators more difficult.
- Student/Faculty Engagement: Many participants mentioned the lack of engagement they see in working with students through digital platforms. They worry that many students will not be able to learn while learning in a primarily remote environment.

- Mental Health: The COVID pandemic has been devastating for many people, including students, who have concerns within and beyond the classroom, including lost jobs, housing, childcare, and sick family and friends.
- Technology: When classes went fully online, TCUs struggled to get technology (i.e., laptops and/or tablets) to students as quickly as possible. Moreover, the shortage of technology in the marketplace is concerning; schools with funds to pay for laptops cannot get them because they are not available.
- Supporting Staff: The lack of required expertise in moving to an online learning environment is a concern. Some faculty have struggled with teaching through digital platforms.
- Childcare: TCU stakeholders who are also parents are struggling with time management and family connection with their children in the house as they try to work remotely from home.
- Vocational/workforce development: Vocational classes are particularly challenging to teach virtually. There is a looming question as to the feasibility of these classes and how to equitably offer them to outlying communities in a safe way.
- Resource Guides: Many participants expressed interest in the sharing of best practices between TCUs, perhaps facilitated by AIHEC.
- Increased Radius for Teaching: The increased attention to online teaching has expanded the population radius of students/stakeholders TCUs can reach with their programming.

The following three recommendations based on the needs assessment data are as follows:

1. Create an at-distance technical assistance framework (TAF) that can safely provide support and build capacity at TCUs.

TCUs need technical assistance and support to address the COVID-related challenges to their organizations and to the communities they serve. These needs are related to providing distance education to students and community members and involve broadband access, the installation and use of digital technologies, and the skills and training required for digital users. TCU faculty and staff need support in performing their roles in an at-distance environment, as well as help in balancing their increased workload with personal and community obligations. TCU needs also involve supporting public health, child or elder care, food security and other household needs of students, their families, and the Tribal community at-large.

The traditional in-person approach to delivery of technical assistance and educational services, which is high-trust and relationship-orientated, is the most accessible and culturally relevant for TCUs and Tribal communities. Yet, with widespread travel restrictions and social distancing regulations due to COVID, the in-person delivery of support is currently not possible. Therefore, an at-distance technical assistance framework (TAF) is recommended to provide support in a safe and effective manner.

TAFs are commonly used on international development projects to connect individuals, share knowledge, and build capacity. The TAF proposed here will be a tool for cultural localization of best practices and will draw on Moore's 2018 concept of a Critical Friends Group (CFG) (Moore 2018), which include: (a) use of protocols implemented by the facilitator, (b) equity of voice, (c) adherence to time frames, and (d) keeping conversations focused. The TAF should be fully-functional via laptop computer and smartphone, as many TCU stakeholders and community members these as their main technology touchpoints. The platform should be accessible across the technology accessibility spectrum (e.g., hard copies of documents, both audio options for low bandwidth in place of video, and small file sizes). A TAF should survey stakeholder preferences, which may include web pages with plugins to simple cloud-based document/media library (e.g., Google Drive), webinar tools, video, and/or a social media forums.

2. Provide content and support on building capacity in distance education technologies and skills.

While the TAF can provide the delivery mechanism and digital platform, the content and follow-up support are the critical teaching and learning components. Ironically, the use of the TAF as a distance education delivery technology also serves in large part as the learning content that can help TCUs and their communities learn best how to use digital technology to deliver needed services to their students and communities. Modeling the TAF to TCUs will help them use distance education technologies themselves. The TAF can also provide content and support on the various distance education products in the marketplace, and best practices in distance learning pedagogy, student engagement, and remote faculty work. Additional topics of interest, such as "hands-on" vocational or lab course delivery, Federal funding challenges, and mental wellness can be shared among the TCUs.

TCUs will both be contributors of content as well as consumers of content. Providing and curating the content will require dedicated resources to manage and communicate information, as well as to connect TCUs with experts and technical assistance providers when needed. The TAF can also host interest groups based on specific topics, where digital communities can drill down on focus areas or priorities. Opportunities also include extending the TCU's reach to other communities/students via distance education and also building their virtual faculty to grow their faculty body, without losing their high touch, local and cultural identity.

3. Provide content and support on safely providing education and outreach to tribal communities in a COVID environment.

More than ever, Tribal communities need TCU extension and community services to provide trusted, science-based, practical information on how to stay healthy, care for their families and youth, ensure a steady and safe food supply, make wise financial decisions, and support their local businesses and economy. With widespread travel and social distancing restrictions, community-based TCUs are best positioned to offer these critical educational services in

culturally respectful ways with the appropriate technologies. As Indian Country come to grips with the "new normal" of operating in the future, TCUs can lead the way to developing innovative distance education solutions, not only for Native American populations, but for rural communities and other underserved communities. Examples may include: technologies to make remote programs more accessible (mobile hotspots, field-based computers), learning management system subscriptions, or development of hybrid service provisions that allow for services without creating additional health risks (e.g., drive-in demonstrations and presentations).

Tribal communities with limited connectivity and access to technology are at a significant disadvantage in the digital age. Internet access and cell phone service are limited in many tribal communities across the U.S. The onus is now on TCUs to adapt quickly so their community members can continue to receive much-needed services regardless of their access or inclusion in the digital world. A TAF can provide the space for the sharing of content, best practices, and follow-up support to help TCUs succeed in serving their Tribal communities.   As stated above, TCUs will both be contributors of content as well as consumers of content. Further, the TAF can model how a local TCU implementation could serve its community.

Acronyms/Abbreviations

AI/AN	American Indian/Alaskan Native
AIHEC	American Indian Higher Education Consortium
FALCON	First Americans Land Grant Consortium
IHS	Indian Health Service
NIHB	National Indian Health Board
PPE	personal protective equipment
TAF	Technical Assistance Framework
TCU	Tribal College and/or University

Background

American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) populations face many of the same COVID-related challenges as the broader population, including lack of readily available testing and shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE). However, there are a number of factors that increase the vulnerability of AI/AN populations, including limited health services, lack of infrastructure, and above-average rates of immunocompromising disease (Maybank, Warne, & Wescott, 2020). These factors put the United States' indigenous populations at a higher risk of poor outcomes related to COVID-19, including rates of infection, hospitalization, and death (Rubin-Miller, Alban, Artiga, & Sullivan, 2020; Artiga & Orgera, 2020).

The National Indian Health Board (NIHB) conducted a rapid survey in March 2020 with Tribal leaders, healthcare providers, and partners. In this survey, NIHB found that only half of respondents had received information from their state or the federal government, and only 18% had received resources (i.e., funding, technical assistance, or supplies) (NIHB, 2020). Many tribes rely on enterprises in gaming and hospitality, which have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Meister Economic Consulting, casino closures during the pandemic have led to an estimated $4.4 billion loss in economy activity, 296,000 people out of work, and $997 million in lost wages (Meister Economics Consulting, 2020). These troubling statistics surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic point to a need for innovative collaboration to improve health in our AI/AN communities.

This project focused on the needs, barriers, and opportunities for TCUs and Universities (TCUs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Presently there are 35 accredited TCUs in the United States, with two formal candidates for accreditation. Located across the United States, TCUs create an educational environment that incorporates and fosters American Indian culture, language, and traditions. Moreover, these institutions often serve as community resources for crucial social services, such as personal and career counseling, wellness programs, child care, and transportation and housing assistance.

Project Purpose

Building Tribal College & University Capacity: A Needs Assessment During the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic is a needs assessment funded by the Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) to explore the needs, opportunities, and barriers experienced by TCU stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, this assessment was conducted to inform the development of a Technical Assistance Framework (TAF) platform. This TAF platform is meant to provide TCU stakeholders with resources and information that may help them address their needs and gain access to opportunities available to them.

The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) is a nonprofit organization that provides leadership and influences public policy on American Indian and Alaskan Native higher education issues through advocacy, research, and program initiatives. AIHEC began this research project in order to better understand how to help TCUs adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic and build capacity wherever possible. This needs assessment was made possible by NAAF grant funding.

Methods

The broad exploratory scope of this needs assessment required a methodological approach that balanced the need for at-distance data collection to prevent COVID spread, yet maintained the inclusivity of all TCU stakeholders who wanted to participate in the project. A mixed-method approach was employed to gather multiple perspectives with multiple methods in order to better ascertain reliable data. To address these methodological needs, the needs assessment was comprised of two distinct components:

1. **SURVEY**. The survey portion of the project consisted of a large-scale, web-based survey meant to gather a broad-level understanding of the types of needs, barriers, and opportunities related to COVID-19 that TCU stakeholders are experiencing in their communities. Upon review and approval of the AIHEC Research Committee and the Northwest Indian College Institutional Review Board (IRB), the survey was distributed via email to TCU presidents, administrators and land-grant and STEM faculty/staff. Recipients of the survey were then asked to distribute throughout the TCU's staff and faculty members. The survey was administered on SurveyMonkey for a period of three weeks, where stakeholders were encouraged to participate by completing a short (average completion time was 6 minutes) questionnaire about COVID-19 and its impact on TCUs. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix A of this report.

2. **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**. The focus group portion of this project consisted of two, 90-minute focus group discussions. These discussions were conducted over a password-protected Zoom session. Members were admitted into the Zoom discussion one at a time, their display name was anonymized, and then they were placed into a breakout group with the primary facilitator. The recording of the discussions were kept in a private, password-protected folder in order to transcribe and remove identifying information. Once transcription and removal of identifying information was completed, the recordings were destroyed. The focus group protocol, consent form, and transcripts can be found in Appendix B-E.

Survey Analysis

For the survey portion of this project, we used SurveyMonkey to design and collect responses from TCU stakeholders. Participants were invited to participate through a variety of email-based recruitment, including AIHEC and First Americans Land-grant Consortium (FALCON) newsletters and listservs. The surveys were shared with TCU presidents, administrators and faculty/staff with the request to share to all appropriate staff/faculty. The survey took an average of 6 minutes to complete and had a start-to-end completion rate of 80%. There were 153 valid responses. Because of the snowball sample approach of this survey, an estimate of a response rate could not be determined.

Generally, participants felt prepared to perform their primary role in a COVID-19 environment, with the majority stating they felt either somewhat prepared or very well-prepared (Figure 1). A total of 19 participants (13%) stated they felt not prepared at all or somewhat unprepared. Over half of participants stated they have an increased workload as a result of COVID-19. Core services that have been suspended due to the increased safety precautions include laboratory courses, field experience, and face-to-face communication with students. In terms of needs that participants have seen arise in the community, many (87%) stated they need more broadband and/or internet access. Access to technology (i.e., computer/tablet) was a stated need for the majority of participants (86%). Finally, another need that was included by the majority of participants was access to reliable child and/or elder care. More in-depth analysis of the survey results can be found below.
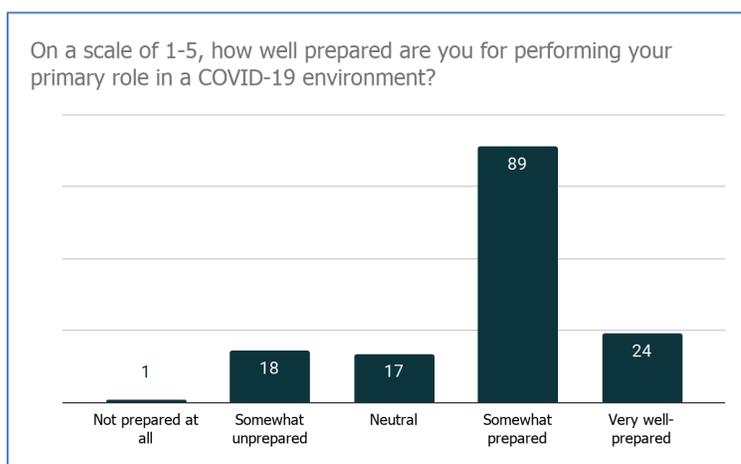
Figure 1. Preparation for COVID-19 Environment.

Next, we wanted to gain a better understanding of how work conditions had changed for TCU stakeholders. The results from participants are found in Table 1 below. Most respondents answered that they are working from home. Many stated they have an increased workload. Text analysis of the "Other" responses show that one participant was laid off, eight participants are working partially remote, four participants are remote, six participants are struggling with remote work, and one participant has suspended activities.

Table 1: **Responses to Q2,** *"How have your work conditions changed as a result of COVID-19? Please check all that apply."*

	# of responses (percentage)
No change	8 (5.2%)
Decreased workload	6 (3.9%)
Increased workload	77 (50.3%)
Furloughed	2 (1.31%)
Work from home	125 (81.70%)
Other (please specify):	21 (13.73%)

We also wanted to learn about opportunities that may have been presented amidst the chaos of dealing with the pandemic. We asked participants to share new ways of connecting with stakeholders that may be on the horizon given the context of COVID-19. Table 2 shows that 93% of participants stated web-based videoconferencing tools were an opportunity to connect with one another despite the challenges of COVID-19, and that 71% of participants stated that tools like Blackboard and Canvas offer a new way of connecting with stakeholders.

Table 2: Responses to Q3, *"Challenging times can help us explore new ways of learning and teaching. What new ways of connecting with your stakeholders do you see on the horizon? Please check all that apply."*

	# of responses (percentage)
Using more video storytelling to teach remotely (e.g., YouTube channels)	71 (56.8%)
Using web-based videoconferencing tools (e.g., Zoom)	116 (92.8%)
Using text message-based instruction	33 (26.4%)
Using drive-in "hotspot" workshops	22 (17.6%)
Using Facebook and other social media platforms	41 (32.8%)
Using drop-off learning kits	46 (36.8%)
Using one-on-one telephone and/or texting	72 (57.6%)
Using outdoor open-air facilities	49 (39.2%)
Using digital learning/virtual platforms (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas)	89 (71.2%)
Other (please specify), *text analysis below*	15 (12.0%)

Text analysis of the "Other" responses show four participants see hybrid-in classes on the horizon, one participant stated social distance field trips, two participants listed video-streaming,

two participants see virtual labs/lab work on the horizon, four participants stated virtual training/conference, and one participant stated none of the above.

Next, we wanted to understand how AIHEC could provide support to TCU stakeholders during this challenging time. Figure 2 shows ranked answers to this question. The two most popular responses were the use of web-based videoconferencing tools (i.e., Zoom) and collaboration platforms (i.e., Google Drive, Microsoft Teams). One-on-one technical assistance by phone/email was third, followed by social media groups.
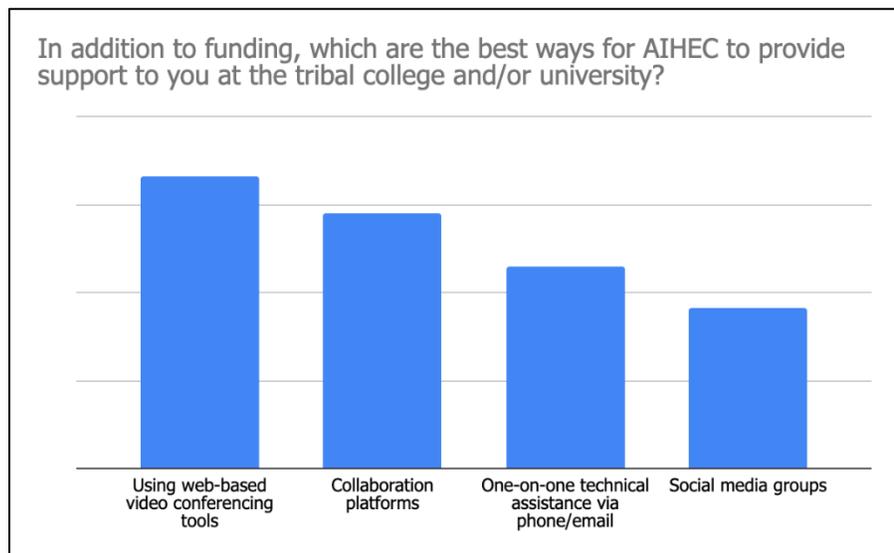

Figure 2. Support to TCUs.

Our next question provided a space for open responses for participants to share what, if any, core services or programs that they typically provide to the community were suspended due to COVID-19. Text analysis of the responses found several key themes, including:

- *Face to face communication:* 29 responses were linked to stakeholder's ability to communicate face-to-face, with students and/or employees.
- *Lab courses:* 18 responses were linked to lab-based coursework that were not easily moved to a virtual platform when in-person classes had to be suspended.
- *Fieldwork:* Four participants were linked to fieldwork that students were unable to participate in due to COVID-19. Another five responses were linked to internships and externships.
- *N/A:* It is notable that this question asked participants to state N/A if they are providing all normal core services and/or programs. 37 participants put "N/A" in the text box for this question.

Other responses that were mentioned include: one participant stated acquisition/delivery, three participants stated childcare, three participants stated advising, two participants stated extension services, six participants stated food/nutrition, one stated housing, one stated physical exams, four stated recreation/workout, five stated technology, three stated workforce/vocational education, and seven stated traditional/cultural programming.

For our next question, we wanted to better understand needs that have come up in the community due to COVID-19. Participants were invited to check all that apply, for their local community. Table 3 shows that 87% of respondents said that the need for more broadband/internet access and more access to technology devices were present in the community. The next highest need stated was more access to child care (79%), followed by more public health information (54%), more nutritional foods (51%), and more access to household goods (43%).

Table 3: Responses to Q6, *"Which needs have you seen arise in the community due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Please identify local needs you've seen emerge with community members, students, and/or families. Check all that apply."*

	# of responses (percentage)
Need more information on public health	67 (53.6%)
Need more broadband/internet access	109 (87.2%)
Need more access to nutritional foods	64 (51.2%)
Need more access to reliable child and/or elder care	99 (79.2%)
Need more access to household goods (such as soap, paper towels, or toilet paper)	54 (43.2%)
Need more access to technology (computer, tablet)	108 (86.40%)
Other (please specify)	19 (15.20%)

Text analysis of the "Other" responses showed four participants stating child/elder care, two participants stated direction/oversight, two stated healthcare, four stated mental health care, one responded housing, four participants stated masks/sanitation, three stated public health education, four stated technology, one said transportation, and one said there were no needs.

Next, we wanted to see if one of the opportunities that could arise from the COVID-19 pandemic was increased collaboration between stakeholder groups. If there was interest, we could use that to make strategic recommendations to TCUs and other leaders in the community. Table 4 shows that health program stakeholders were most often mentioned (67%), followed by Tribal departments (65%) and K-12 schools (65%). Next, social service organizations were mentioned by 56% of respondents, followed by youth organizations (27%).

Table 4: Responses to Q7, "*Which stakeholder groups in the community represent the most important opportunities for collaboration in the COVID-19 era? Please check all that apply.*"

	# of responses (percentage)
Tribal departments	73 (65.2%)
K-12 schools	73 (65.2%)
Youth organizations	32 (28.6%)
Health programs	75 (67.0%)
Social service organizations	63 (56.3%)
Other (please specify):	18 (16.1%)

Text analysis of "Other" showed several of the participants (six) mentioned that local businesses would offer a good opportunity for collaboration, two participants stated 1862 institutions, four participants stated other TCUs/universities, four mentioned universities, five listed government organizations, and one listed corporate partners.

More than just knowing whom our participants wanted to collaborate, we wanted to offer a chance for participants to share what an ideal partnership with the stakeholder group would look like. For these open-ended responses, text analysis was conducted to find general themes, as follows:

- A total of 29 responses shared something along the lines of general collaboration.
- 18 responses stated that resource sharing would be a good form of collaboration with their stakeholder group.
- 11 mentioned communication/messaging support.
- Eight participants would like more direction/oversight with or from their stakeholder group.
- Eight participants would like to collaborate to promote better technology/internet access.
- Seven participants mentioned funding.

There were many more opportunities listed with less responses, including credit flexibility (one), COVID testing (three), field experience (two), intern/externships (two), food/nutrition (three), housing (one), masks/sanitation (three), and outreach (four). One participant stated they already have a partnership with a tribal department that is working very well to meet community needs.

In Table 5, we wanted to know if and how TCUs might be supporting one another during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharing of best practices was mentioned most often (71%), followed by resource sharing (66%), collaborative grants (33%), faculty mentoring (28%) and curriculum development (25%).

Table 5: Responses to Q9, *"What ways have you noticed TCUs and/or universities (TCU) supporting each other within or between TCU communities? Please check all that apply."*

	# of responses (percentage)
Faculty mentoring	33 (27.7%)
Resource sharing	78 (65.6%)
Curriculum development	30 (25.2%)
Sharing of best practices	84 (70.6%)
Collaborative grants	39 (32.8%)
Other (please specify):	19 (16.0%)

Text analysis of "Other" showed that eight participants listed "n/a," one listed moral support, three mentioned webinars/virtual training, one stated resource sharing, one stated policy/procedure development, one mentioned funding, three stated communication/messaging, and one listed collaboration.

Table 6 shows the barriers that respondents mentioned in providing services since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Student confidence in digital learning platforms was mentioned most often (77%), followed by access to technology and/or internet (74%), child or elder care support (70%), student financial assistance (55%), and confidence in teaching with digital platforms (22%).

Table 6: Responses to Q10, *"Which barriers have you experienced in providing services since the COVID-19 pandemic began? Please check all that apply."*

	# of responses (percentage)
I am not confident in teaching with digital learning/virtual platforms.	27 (21.8%)
My school does not have access to digital learning/virtual platforms.	2 (1.6%)
My students and/or stakeholders do not have access to the technology and/or internet they need to access digital learning/virtual platforms.	92 (74.2%)
My students and/or stakeholders do not feel confident learning with digital learning/virtual platforms.	96 (77.4%)
My students and/or stakeholders need financial assistance to participate.	68 (54.8%)
My students and/or stakeholders need child or elder care support	87 (70.2%)
Other (please specify) *text analysis below*	20 (16.1%)

Text analysis of "Other" responses included six participants that mentioned faculty development/training, five stated remote work/teaching struggles, five mentioned student needs, six listed technology, two mentioned administration issues, and two listed "N/A."

It was our goal to get responses from every TCU to participate in the study. Unfortunately, we did not meet that goal. This could be due to reaching out to an already stressed workforce. It also may be due to the fact that the survey was conducted during the summer months, when some staff and faculty go offline. The representation of survey participants is listed below.

- *Colleges/Universities with no participants*: Blackfeet Community College, Diné College, Haskell Indian Nations University, Little Big Horn College, Sisseton Wahpeton College, and Stone Child College.
- *Colleges/Universities with 1-2 participants:* College of Menominee Nation, Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College, Fort Peck Community College, Institute of American Indian Arts, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College, Leech Lake TCU, Little Priest TCU, Navajo Technical University, Nueta Hidatsa Sahnish College, Oglala Lakota College, Red Lake Nation College, Saginaw Chippewa TCU, Sinte Gleska University, Tohono O'odham Community College, Turtle Mountain Community College, and White Earth Tribal & Community College.
- *Colleges with 3-6 participants:* Aaniiih Nakoda College, Cankdeska Cikana Community College, Chief Dull Knife College, College of Muscogee Nation, Iḷisaġvik College, Nebraska Indian Community College, Northwest Indian College, Sitting Bull College, and Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute.
- *Colleges with 7+ participants:* Bay Mills Community College, Keweenaw Bay Ojibwa Community College, Salish Kootenai College[1], and United Tribes Technical College.
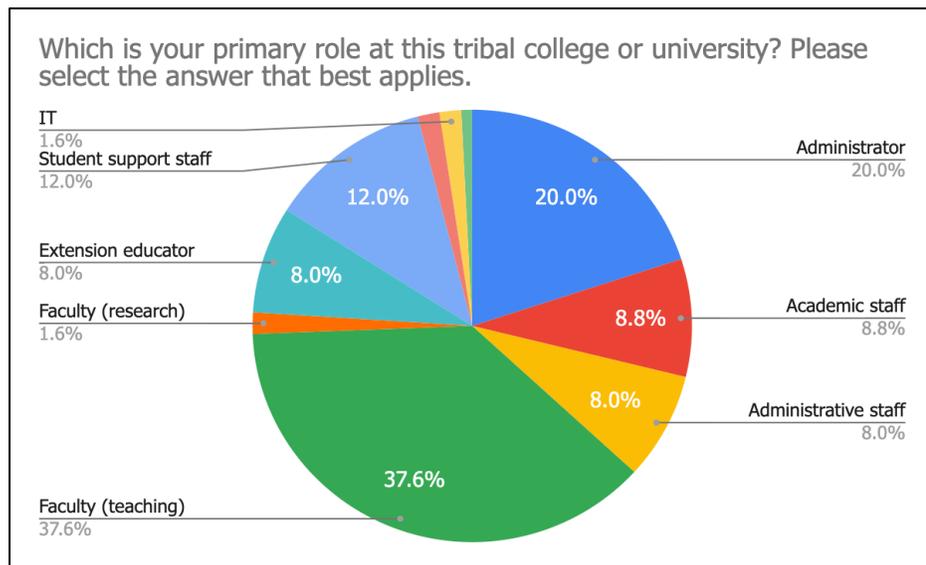

Figure 3. Primary Role at TCU.

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[1] Salish Kootenai College had significant levels of participants in the survey (34.5% of respondents), which may impact the interpretation of results to reflect the opinions of staff/faculty at this college more than others.

Our final question sought to understand the role of our participants at the TCU. Figure 3 demonstrates the distribution of participants. About 38% of respondents were teaching faculty, 20% identified as administrators, followed by 12% student support staff, 9% academic staff, 8% administrative staff, 8% extension educators and 2% IT staff.

Focus Group Qualitative Analysis

This section contains thematic findings from two focus group discussions held in August with TCU stakeholders. In the focus group discussions, participants were asked to take part in a 90-minute discussion on the needs, opportunities, and barriers faced by TCUs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The script for these focus group discussions can be found in Appendix B. Focus group participants were asked to complete the survey portion of this research prior to joining the discussion. Additionally, participants were required to review and sign the consent form for the focus group discussion prior to joining. The consent form for the focus group discussion can be found in Appendix C.

Focus group participants were admitted from the Zoom waiting room one at a time. The display name for each participant was changed to an anonymous identifier; for example, the first participant to enter was named "Participant 1." After they had been welcomed and the display name had been changed, participants were moved into a breakout session to wait until all focus group participants had entered the video conference call.

The themes were extracted from these transcripts using Atlas.ti software. The themes included in this analysis have been numbered; for example, the first theme surrounding the reopening of TCUs is number 1. The quotes in each transcript that correspond to each of these themes have been labeled with a superscript number to allow for easy reference. FGA refers to the first focus group and FGB refers to the second focus group. The number within the parentheses indicates how often that particular theme was mentioned during the focus group discussion. Themes are ordered by those mentioned most often to less often.

THEME 1: REOPENING

FGA: (7) TCUs seem to be struggling to make accommodations for students who will need to learn from off-campus locations for at least the Fall 2020 and possibly the Spring 2021 semesters. There are adjustments being made that may not be sustainable in the long-term. Faculty telework and extended online coursework are two examples that were brought up in the discussion as potentially unsustainable accommodations TCUs are making in the short-term.

FGB: (10) The reopening plans of participants seemed to vary: for example one TCU reopened on Aug. 31, one reopened and then went to hybrid, and another is leaving it up to parents to decide what is best for their students. Participants mentioned the possibility of AIHEC collecting reopening plans as a resource-sharing tool to be used by other TCUs with questions of what to do. One challenge that was mentioned was contact tracing. Another challenge was reaching out and engaging students who had to take an incomplete last semester (Spring 2020) and have not enrolled for the upcoming Fall 2020 semester.

THEME 2: FUNDING

FGA: (6) There are increased opportunities to access funding through grant applications, especially in relation to COVID relief legislation. However, the quick deadlines for applying for and spending this money has been a challenge for TCUs.

> ***Subtheme: Lack of direction - FGA:*** (4) There was a general consensus on the lack of clear direction on funding priorities from Administration personnel. Additionally, the lack of guidance from the Department of Education on CARES Act funding and higher education credit accreditation requirements has made adaptation to the virtual learning environment challenging.

FGB: (8) New funding opportunities were mentioned as an opportunity, but more direction is needed to help TCU stakeholders know for which opportunities they should be applying. Multiple participants mentioned a lack of understanding of what the regulations and limitations of the increased funding dictate. Two participants mentioned that the lack of infrastructure is a concern; the funding is there but it will take time to build the infrastructure even with increased funding. One participant mentioned their numbers were off in the IPEDS, so they were cut off from a source of funding that helped with laptop/technology procurement. One participant mentioned a useful opportunity - leveraging CARES Act funding to hire a COVID coordinator for the TCU, tasked with testing/following up and being a point-of-contact for questions related to their reopening plan.

THEME 3: INCREASED WORKLOAD

FGA: (8) Participants discussed faculty burnout being an issue. Teaching faculty are struggling with the increased workload of moving courses online; one participant estimated their workload has increased by 50%. One extension educator mentioned his staff is inexperienced in remote work and that employee oversight has increased his workload significantly. Participants mentioned being in a reactive mode, moving from one pressing issue to another, and not able to be proactive or strategic in their planning. Additionally faculty and administrators are also managing family obligations such as child care that has been impacted by the pandemic.

FGB: (9) All participants in the focus group discussion mentioned an increased workload, citing increased meetings and emails, repeated/rescheduled classes, and moving coursework online as the main culprits. In particular, the increase in online Zoom meetings was mentioned. One participant mentioned their school is still in non-full-time status, which means uncertainty for staff/faculty on what will be expected of them and how to plan for the future.

THEME 4: SAFETY

FGA: (4) Participants expressed interest in learning more about what other TCUs are doing to facilitate the safe reopening of their college campuses. One participant mentioned the time delay of COVID-19 test results being a barrier to the safe reopening of their TCU. Another participant mentioned the fear that exists as the situation continues to evolve, even despite the already high level of safety procedures they have in place.

FGB: (7) TCUs are making several safety precautions, including (a) taking temperatures upon entry to buildings, (b) sign-in sheets, (c) masks, and (d) flexible leave/remote work options. Another idea being considered is four-day work weeks. Early alert contact tracing and open communication with students was mentioned as another potential challenge, as many students have outdated addresses or phone numbers. If the school loses touch with a student, it is uncertain how the school will make sure the student is ok and has accommodations for their classes.

THEME 5: STUDENT RETENTION

FGA: (3) Several TCUs are expecting or experiencing lower enrollment than previous years, including students from the Spring 2020 semester who have not re-enrolled in classes they couldn't finish in Spring.

FGB: (3) Many participants mentioned concern over student retention, citing drops in enrollment numbers for their incoming classes. There was also concern over students who dropped off in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester and have not re-enrolled in these courses in the Fall 2020 semester.

THEME 6: INTERNET/BROADBAND ACCESS

FGA: (2) The lack of reliable internet access in rural areas makes remote work for faculty and extension educators more difficult. One participant mentioned relying on hotspot connectivity to get online, which is not stable enough for video conference calls. Hotspots rely on good cell signals that are often unreliable in reservations communities.

FGB: (4) One participant from a rural location mentioned the lack of internet access, and even electricity, on the reservation where many of the TCU students will be for the next semester(s). Parking lot hotspots and ultra-flexibility were mentioned as coping mechanisms to deal with the student struggle to get online. Another participant mentioned at least two of the tribes they serve lack access to a reliable broadband connection.

THEME 7: STUDENT/FACULTY ENGAGEMENT

FGA: (5) Several participants mentioned how difficult it was to get students to come to class when classes went online short-notice in the Spring 2020 semester. They worry about how to motivate both faculty in moving to online teaching and students in coming to online classes. One participant mentioned that they have the tools to move to online teaching, but no one wants to get in front of the cameras.

FGB: (3) Many participants mentioned the lack of engagement they see in working with students through digital platforms. They worry that many students will not be able to learn while learning in a primarily remote environment.

THEME 8: MENTAL HEALTH

FGA: (8) Mental health was mentioned by several participants as a need in communities. The move to majority remote work means that employees have less face-to-face time with one another and teachers have less interaction with students. One participant mentioned the invisibility of mental health and how some people in the community may not even recognize they need help. The COVID pandemic has been devastating for many people, including students, who have concerns within and beyond the classroom, including lost jobs, housing, childcare, and sick family and friends.

THEME 9: TECHNOLOGY

FGA: (4) When classes went fully online last semester, TCUs struggled to get technology (i.e., laptops and/or tablets) to students as quickly as possible; however, there has not been a good mechanism to get these back from students and redistribute for the upcoming semester(s). Moreover, the shortage of technology even available for purchase in this market is concerning; schools with funds to pay for laptops cannot get them because they are not available.

FGB: (1) One participant mentioned the TCU use of Moodle as a digital learning platform as a barrier to reopening school online. The outdated platform is not compatible with several online applications that can help make digital learning more comprehensive and engaging for students.

THEME 10: SUPPORTING STAFF

FGA: (6) Several comments in this focus group discussion concerned the lack of required expertise in moving to an online learning environment. Faculty struggled with teaching through digital platforms in Spring 2020, and that concerns them for the upcoming semesters. Several participants mentioned they are worried about students who do not learn well in digital environments. One TCU faculty member mentioned their science-based courses have decreased the lecture time in order to reduce workload, but they are concerned with teaching the same level of material in a shorter amount of time.

FGA: (2) Inexperienced employees, such as part-time staff and students, have not been trained in effective remote work practices. The level of oversight required to keep these employees on the right track has added to already overburdened workloads.

THEME 11: CHILDCARE

FGA: (2) TCU stakeholders who are also parents are struggling with time management and family connection with their children in the house as they try to work remotely from home.

FGB: (1) One participant mentioned the lack of childcare services as a barrier for parents in the TCU community to actively engage in classes.

THEME 12: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

FGA: (1) One participant mentioned their vocational/workforce development classes being particularly challenging to teach virtually; the college's numbers for these classes are really low because they can't travel to communities to offer them.

FGB: (1) One participant mentioned that 50% of TCU's programming is dedicated to vocational education and/or workforce development, which is much harder to successfully teach online. There is a looming question as to the feasibility of these classes and how to equitably offer them to outlying communities in a safe way.

THEME 13: RESOURCE GUIDES

FGB: (7) Many participants expressed interest in the sharing of best practices between TCUs, perhaps facilitated by AIHEC. One resource guide that would be helpful is a list of apps that

could be used to engage students in learning. Others mentioned equipment lists with links on where to purchase and mental health/food resources available to students.

THEME 14: INCREASED RADIUS FOR TEACHING

FGB: (3) The increased attention to online teaching has allowed at least one TCU to expand the population radius of students/stakeholders they can reach with their programming. Other schools mentioned the online registration going fully online as an opportunity that has come about as a result of COVID.

OUTLIERS

FGA - Tourism: One participant mentioned a large influx of tourism to the Montana area from nearby states.
FGA - Outreach: One participant mentioned increased opportunities for extension outreach work.
FGB - Commencement: Commencement was mentioned as a struggle by one TCU stakeholder; whether to go virtual or delay commencement ceremonies seems to be a question.
FGB - Contractors: One participant mentioned a state mandate that has caused friction in their reopening plan: the TCU is required to use contractors to come in to teach specific classes. There is a question of whose responsibility it is to test and oversee the safety precautions for these contractors.
FGB - Social media: One participant mentioned the increase in utilization and oversight of the school's social media presence as an opportunity that has arisen out of the pandemic.

Summary of Findings

Survey results clearly showed that the needs and support related to broadband access and distance education were foremost among respondents. These needs not only include the access and technologies but also the technical assistance and training need to successfully navigate the digital environment for students, teachers and community members. Additionally, there are other pressing needs in Tribal communities related to public health, child or elder care, food security and other household needs. Potential collaborative opportunities exist with local Tribal departments, public health organizations, K-12 schools and other groups.

The results of the focus group discussions were categorized into themes which identified the TCU needs and opportunities presented by COVID-19. The key themes discovered were as follows:

- THEME 1: REOPENING: TCUs are working to make accommodations for students who will need to learn from off-campus locations (or hybrid modes) for at least the Fall 2020 and possibly the Spring 2021 semesters.

- THEME 2: FUNDING: There are increased opportunities to access funding through grant applications, especially in relation to COVID relief legislation. However, the quick deadlines for applying for and spending this money has been a challenge for TCUs.

- THEME 3: INCREASED WORKLOAD: Participants mentioned an increased workload, citing increased meetings and emails, repeated/rescheduled classes, and moving coursework online as the main culprits. In particular, the increase in online Zoom meetings was mentioned.

- THEME 4: SAFETY: Participants expressed interest in learning more about what other TCUs are doing to facilitate the safe reopening of their college campuses.

- THEME 5: STUDENT RETENTION: Many participants mentioned concern over student retention, citing drops in enrollment numbers for their incoming classes. There was also concern over students who dropped off in the middle of the Spring 2020 semester and have not re-enrolled in these courses in the Fall 2020 semester.

- THEME 6: INTERNET/BROADBAND ACCESS: The lack of reliable internet access in rural areas makes remote work for faculty and extension educators more difficult.

- THEME 7: STUDENT/FACULTY ENGAGEMENT: Many participants mentioned the lack of engagement they see in working with students through digital platforms. They worry that many students will not be able to learn while learning in a primarily remote environment.

- THEME 8: MENTAL HEALTH: Mental health was mentioned by several participants as a need in communities. The COVID pandemic has been devastating for many people, including students, who have concerns within and beyond the classroom, including lost jobs, housing, childcare, and sick family and friends.

- THEME 9: TECHNOLOGY: When classes went fully online last semester, TCUs struggled to get technology (i.e., laptops and/or tablets) to students as quickly as possible. Moreover, the shortage of technology even available for purchase in this market is concerning; schools with funds to pay for laptops cannot get them because they are not available.

- THEME 10: SUPPORTING STAFF: Several comments concerned the lack of required expertise in moving to an online learning environment. Faculty struggled with teaching through digital platforms in Spring 2020, and that concerns them for the upcoming semesters. Several participants mentioned they are worried about students who do not learn well in digital environments.

- THEME 11: CHILDCARE: TCU stakeholders who are also parents are struggling with time management and family connection with their children in the house as they try to work remotely from home. One participant mentioned the lack of childcare services as a barrier for parents in the TCU community to actively engage in classes.

- THEME 12: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION/WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: Vocational/workforce development classes are particularly challenging to teach virtually. There is a looming question as to the feasibility of these classes and how to equitably offer them to outlying communities in a safe way.

- THEME 13: RESOURCE GUIDES: Many participants expressed interest in the sharing of best practices between TCUs, perhaps facilitated by AIHEC.

- THEME 14: INCREASED RADIUS FOR TEACHING: The increased attention to online teaching has allowed at least one TCU to expand the population radius of students/stakeholders they can reach with their programming.

Recommendations

The following recommendations based on the needs assessment data should be viewed as suggestions, not prescriptions, for action. Discussions regarding these recommendations should lead to conversations about how TCU capacity can be built and will perhaps generate additional recommendations. Recommendations are primary intended for two audiences: 1) the TCUs and 2) supporting organizations such as AIHEC and FALCON. The three recommendations based on this study are as follows:

1. Create an at-distance technical assistance framework (TAF) that can safely provide support and build capacity at TCUs.

TCUs need technical assistance and support to address the COVID-related challenges to their organizations and to the communities they serve. These needs are related to providing distance education to students and community members and involve broadband access, the installation and use of digital technologies, and the skills and training required for digital users. TCU faculty

and staff need support in performing their roles in an at-distance environment, as well as help in balancing their increased workload with personal and community obligations. TCU needs also involve supporting public health, child or elder care, food security and other household needs of students, their families, and the Tribal community at-large.

The traditional in-person approach to delivery of technical assistance and educational services, which is high-trust and relationship-orientated, is the most accessible and culturally relevant for TCUs and Tribal communities. Yet, with widespread travel restrictions and social distancing regulations due to COVID, the in-person delivery of support is currently not possible. Therefore, an at-distance technical assistance framework (TAF) is recommended to provide support in a safe and effective manner.

TAFs are commonly used on international development projects to connect individuals, share knowledge, and build capacity. The TAF proposed here will be a tool for cultural localization of best practices and will draw on Moore's 2018 concept of a Critical Friends Group (CFG) (Moore 2018), which include: (a) use of protocols implemented by the facilitator, (b) equity of voice, (c) adherence to time frames, and (d) keeping conversations focused. The TAF should be fully-functional via laptop computer and smartphone, as many TCU stakeholders and community members these as their main technology touchpoints. The platform should be accessible across the technology accessibility spectrum (e.g., hard copies of documents, both audio options for low bandwidth in place of video, and small file sizes). A TAF should survey stakeholder preferences, which may include web pages with plugins to simple cloud-based document/media library (e.g., Google Drive), webinar tools, video, and/or a social media forums.

2. Provide content and support on building capacity in distance education technologies and skills.

While the TAF can provide the delivery mechanism and digital platform, the content and follow-up support are the critical teaching and learning components. Ironically, the use of the TAF as a distance education delivery technology also serves in large part as the learning content that can help TCUs and their communities learn best how to use digital technology to deliver needed services to their students and communities. Modeling the TAF to TCUs will help them use distance education technologies themselves. The TAF can also provide content and support on the various distance education products in the marketplace, and best practices in distance learning pedagogy, student engagement, and remote faculty work. Additional topics of interest, such as "hands-on" vocational or lab course delivery, Federal funding challenges, and mental wellness can be shared among the TCUs.

TCUs will both be contributors of content as well as consumers of content. Providing and curating the content will require dedicated resources to manage and communicate information, as well as to connect TCUs with experts and technical assistance providers when needed. The TAF can also host interest groups based on specific topics, where digital communities can drill down

on focus areas or priorities. Opportunities also include extending the TCU's reach to other communities/students via distance education and also building their virtual faculty to grow their faculty body, without losing their high touch, local and cultural identity.

3. Provide content and support on safely providing education and outreach to tribal communities in a COVID environment.

More than ever, Tribal communities need TCU extension and community services to provide trusted, science-based, practical information on how to stay healthy, care for their families and youth, ensure a steady and safe food supply, make wise financial decisions, and support their local businesses and economy. With widespread travel and social distancing restrictions, community-based TCUs are best positioned to offer these critical educational services in culturally respectful ways with the appropriate technologies. As Indian Country come to grips with the "new normal" of operating in the future, TCUs can lead the way to developing innovative distance education solutions, not only for Native American populations, but for rural communities and other underserved communities. Examples may include: technologies to make remote programs more accessible (mobile hotspots, field-based computers), learning management system subscriptions, or development of hybrid service provisions that allow for services without creating additional health risks (e.g., drive-in demonstrations and presentations).

Tribal communities with limited connectivity and access to technology are at a significant disadvantage in the digital age. Internet access and cell phone service are limited in many tribal communities across the U.S. The onus is now on TCUs to adapt quickly so their community members can continue to receive much-needed services regardless of their access or inclusion in the digital world. A TAF can provide the space for the sharing of content, best practices, and follow-up support to help TCUs succeed in serving their Tribal communities.   As stated above, TCUs will both be contributors of content as well as consumers of content. Further, the TAF can model how a local TCU implementation could serve its community.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire, "COVID-19 TCUs and Universities Needs Assessment Research"

Introduction and Informed Consent

This page contains information about the COVID-19 TCUs and Universities Needs Assessment Survey. It is meant to serve as an informed consent form for TCU and/or university stakeholders who are willing to participate in survey-based research.

This research project is being conducted on behalf of AIHEC to better understand the needs of TCUs and universities in a COVID-19 environment. Today we will be gaining your thoughts and opinions to determine which needs exist in providing tribal communities with services normally provided by TCUs and universities. The information will be used in the development of resources to help TCUs and universities continue to provide these services in a COVID-19 environment.

You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel your experience as a stakeholder in the TCU community can contribute much to our understanding of the ongoing needs COVID-19 presents to TCUs in resuming services. We want to know more about how you view the COVID-19 pandemic, what you have seen the community do to help, and where you think we need to go in order to keep our TCUs strong and capable of teaching our youth.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. That means it is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, all the services you receive from AIHEC will continue and nothing will change. If you decide to change your mind at any time, you are welcome to stop participating.

We are asking you to share some information about your personal experience with COVID-19. If there is a topic that makes you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer. Please know that all information shared is considered highly confidential. The information gathered in this study will be published in academic journals only in the aggregate, to help other communities learn from the wisdom shared in this research. Participating in this research will not provide any direct benefit to you, beyond the knowledge that you are contributing to an effort to make TCUs and/universities more effective.

This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. If this information page contains any words you do not understand, or if you have any questions about the research, please email Jenni Duever at dueverje@gmail.com.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Northwest Indian College (NWIC) IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. To report a grievance or concern, please contact the Northwest Indian College IRB at (360) 392-4224, or toll-free 1-866-676-2772 x1 x4224, or irb@nwic.edu.

If you agree to participate in this project, please click 'Next' to begin the survey.

Page 1
1. On a scale of 1-5, how well prepared are you for performing your primary role in a COVID-19 environment?
   ❏ 1 - Not prepared at all
   ❏ 2 - Somewhat unprepared
   ❏ 3 - Neutral
   ❏ 4 - Somewhat prepared
   ❏ 5 - Very well-prepared
2. How have your work conditions changed as a result of COVID-19? Please check all that apply.
   ❏ No change
   ❏ Decreased workload
   ❏ Increased workload
   ❏ Furloughed
   ❏ Work from home/remote work
   ❏ Other (please specify):

Page 2
3. Challenging times can help us explore new ways of learning and teaching. What new ways of connecting with your stakeholders do you see on the horizon? Please check all that apply.
   ❏ Using more video storytelling to teach remotely (e.g., Youtube channels)
   ❏ Using web-based videoconferencing tools (e.g., Zoom)
   ❏ Using text message-based instruction
   ❏ Using drive-in "hotspot" workshops
   ❏ Using Facebook and other social media platforms
   ❏ Using drop-off learning kits
   ❏ Using one-on-one telephone and/or texting
   ❏ Using outdoor open-air facilities
   ❏ Using digital learning/virtual platforms (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas)
   ❏ Other (please specify):
4. In addition to funding, which are the best ways for AIHEC to provide support to you at the TCU and/or university? (Please rank up to three options.)
   ❏ Using web-based videoconferencing tools (e.g., Zoom)

❏ Collaboration platforms (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Google Drive)
❏ One-on-one technical assistance via phone/email
❏ Social media groups (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook group)

5. What core services/programs that you typically provide are you now unable to offer? (If you are providing all of your normal core services/programs, please type N/A.)
   ❏ <Comment box>

6. Which needs have you seen arise in the community due to the COVID-19 pandemic? Please identify local needs you've seen emerge with community members, students, and/or families. Check all that apply.
   ❏ Need more information on public health
   ❏ Need more broadband/internet access
   ❏ Need more access to nutritional foods
   ❏ Need more access to reliable child and/or elder care
   ❏ Need more access to household goods (such as soap, paper towels, or toilet paper)
   ❏ Need more access to technology (computer, tablet)
   ❏ Other (please specify):

7. Which stakeholder groups in the community represent the most important opportunities for collaboration in the COVID-19 era? Please check all that apply.
   ❏ Tribal departments
   ❏ K-12 schools
   ❏ Youth organizations
   ❏ Health programs
   ❏ Social service organizations
   ❏ Other (please specify):

8. If you answered question 7, please describe what an ideal partnership with your stakeholder group would look like.
   ❏ <Comment box>

9. What ways have you noticed TCUs and/or universities (TCU) support each other within or between TCU communities? Please check all that apply.
   ❏ Faculty mentoring
   ❏ Resource sharing
   ❏ Curriculum development
   ❏ Sharing of best practices
   ❏ Collaborative grants
   ❏ Other (please specify):

10. Which barriers have you experienced in providing services since the COVID-19 pandemic began? Please check all that apply.
   ❏ I am not confident in teaching with digital learning/virtual platforms.
   ❏ My school does not have access to digital learning/virtual platforms.

- ❏ My students and/or stakeholders do not have access to the technology and/or internet they need to access digital learning/virtual platforms.
- ❏ My students and/or stakeholders do not feel confident learning with digital learning/virtual platform.
- ❏ My students and/or stakeholders need financial assistance to participate.
- ❏ My students and/or stakeholders need child or elder care support.
- ❏ Other (please specify):

11. Which TCU or university do you currently serve?
    - ❏ <List all 36 TCUs/universities.>

12. Which is your primary role at this TCU or university? Please select the answer that best applies.
    - ❏ Administrator
    - ❏ Academic staff
    - ❏ Administrative staff
    - ❏ Faculty (primary focus teaching)
    - ❏ Faculty (primary focus research)
    - ❏ Extension educator
    - ❏ Student support staff
    - ❏ Facilities staff
    - ❏ Other (please specify):

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Thank you for participating in our survey!

Thank you for sharing your experience. We really appreciate your time.

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

COVID-19 Rapid Response Focus Group Protocol
Welcome

Introduction/Participant Assent: (10 minutes)
1. Welcome and thank everyone for volunteering to participate.
2. Introduce yourself and any co-facilitators.
3. If not already completed, ask participants to review, ask any questions, and then sign the consent form and email to facilitators.

High-Level Introduction: (<5 minutes)
Give an overview of the project and the goals for the focus group. For example, "We are talking to you to find out about needs, barriers, and opportunities that exist for TCUs and universities in a COVID-19 environment. For the purpose of this discussion, we will be using the phrase COVID-19 environment to describe what our world looks like as we begin to reopen and implement measures meant to prevent the spread of COVID-19. We would like to find out what is working, what needs additional resources, and how AIHEC can connect TCUs and universities to resources they need to provide services to their communities."

Why Focus Groups: (~5 minutes)
- Opportunity to hear your stories about how COVID-19 is affecting TCUs and universities.
- A conversation to continue the process of discovery and gain clarity on the information we have gathered so far.
- You may not have clear answers to the questions we ask today-discussions are a place to start, to begin finding themes across stakeholder groups.
- To gather additional information about where TCUs are currently and where we would like to be in the future - where are you now, what's coming up, and where do you want to go?
- We do not have to solve problems today. We are just listening, gathering information, and finding themes.

Provide basic guidelines/group agreements: Review basic guidelines with participants.
- If you feel uncomfortable during the meeting, you have the right to leave or pass on any question. There is no consequence for electing to skip a question.
- Please remember to keep personal stories "in the room;" do not share the identity of the attendees or what anybody else said outside of the meeting.
- Everyone's ideas will be respected.
- One person talks one at a time.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- Does anybody have any questions?

Warm-up Exercise? Group-level introductions? (~ 5 minutes)

- To begin, why don't we go around the virtual room and introduce ourselves. Please state your first name (or whatever you would like us to call you), what college you serve, and name one thing that has given you joy in the last week.

Engagement Questions (~20 minutes)

I want to begin our discussion today with a few questions about maintaining health and quality of life in your TCU/university in a COVID-19 environment. Each of you will have an opportunity to respond—we will go around the virtual room so everyone has an opportunity to share. When you're called on, please respond to these questions:

- How have you been affected by COVID-19?
  - Probe: What does working from home and/or increased workload mean for you in practical terms?
- How is your TCU/university responding to COVID-19?
- What do you believe are the 1 or 2 most important issues in your TCU or university that must be addressed to provide necessary services to the community?

Exploration Questions (~20 minutes)

Next, I'd like to ask you about ways to improve TCU/university capacity in providing services in a COVID-19 environment. Again, each of you will have an opportunity to respond.

- What are some ideas you have to help your TCU/university provide necessary services (research, education, community outreach) in a COVID-19 environment?
- As of this moment, what do you think stands in the way of your TCU/university being able to provide necessary services in the future?
  - Probe: What about broadband access?
  - Probe: What about IT and devices?
  - Probe: What about child and/or elder care?

Exit Questions (5-10 minutes)

Before we move on to closing comments and summarizing our discussion today, I would like to provide a space for you to offer any concluding thoughts.

- Is there anything else related to the topics we've discussed today that you think I should know that I didn't ask or that you have not shared?

Closing Comments (5-10 minutes)

Thank you for your participation in this focus group discussion. You have all raised a number of helpful insights for us to consider. We will look at what you have told us and use this information to create a Technical Assistance Framework to help TCUs/universities build capacity in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Appendix C: Focus Group Consent Form

Title of the Project:	COVID-19 TCUs and Universities Rapid Needs Assessment Research
Investigator:	John Phillips
Project Sponsor:	Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF)
Contact Information:	Jennifer Duever (636) 221-7399 jduever@gwu.edu

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part 1: Information Sheet

Introduction: This informed consent form is for TCU and/or university (TCU) stakeholders who are willing to participate in focus group-based research, titled "COVID-19 Rapid Response Capacity Building with TCU."

My name is Jennifer Duever and I am working with the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC). I am doing research on capacity building in tribal communities to enable TCUs to resume operations in a COVID-19 environment. I am going to give you information and invite you to be a part of this research.

This consent form may contain words you do not understand. Please ask me to stop as we go through the information and I will take time to explain. You may ask any questions about the information and/or what the information will be used for.

Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?
You are being invited to take part in this research because we feel your experience as a stakeholder in the TCU community can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge of the ongoing needs, barriers, and opportunities COVID-19 presents to TCUs in resuming services. You have lived in the community for a long time and bring with you wisdom from experience. We want to know more about how you view the COVID-19 pandemic, what you have seen the community do to help, and where you think we need to go in order to keep our TCUs strong and capable of teaching our youth.

What should I know about the research study?
- I will explain this research study to you. You may ask any questions you want before you decide to participate.

- Participation is voluntary; whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can agree to take part now and change your mind later.
- You may take this document home to read or discuss it with your family before deciding.

Purpose of the research: The COVID-19 pandemic is making existing challenges in tribal communities more difficult to manage, including food insecurity, family health and safety, and educational access. The shift to online education has been especially problematic due to the lack of accessibility to reliable broadband access, computers or laptops, and even electricity in homes. The AIHEC research team wants to learn more about what types of resources would best aid tribal communities in overcoming these challenges. Our research will inform the development of a Technical Assistance Framework, a tool that will be made accessible to all TCU stakeholders to expand capacity in tribal communities in a post-COVID-19 environment.

How long will I be in the study?
This research will involve your participation in a group discussion that will take about 90 minutes over Zoom conferencing. This discussion will be password protected, so your involvement in this research will maintain anonymity. After the discussion, I will write-up notes of our conversation and share with the group to offer a chance for clarification or follow-up questions.

How many people will take part in this research?
We expect to host three focus group discussions in the entire study. Each focus group discussion will have 6-8 tribal community stakeholders.

What happens if I agree to be in this research?
We are asking you to help us learn more about how COVID-19 is affecting TCUs and universities in an effort to learn more about promising practices as well as connect you to resources that might help you overcome barriers. If you accept, you will be asked to take part in a discussion with 8 other people with similar experiences. This discussion will be guided by myself, Jennifer Duever.

The group discussion will start with me making sure you are comfortable. We can also take time to answer questions about the research you might have. Then, I will ask you questions and give you time to share your knowledge and stories. The questions will be about COVID-19 in your community, how it has affected your ability to provide TCU/university services, what you might need in order to resume operations, and what has been working well in your community during this challenging time. An example of a question I will ask is "How has COVID-19 affected you?"

The discussion will take place over a password-protected Zoom video call. The entire discussion will be recorded, but no one will be identified by their full name on recording. The recording will be kept in a private folder where only members of the research team can access it.

Throughout the discussion, I will write notes about what we talk about. At the end of the discussion, I will share the themes I've noted with the group and offer time for anyone to add clarifying thoughts. I will give you an opportunity at this time to modify or remove portions of your responses, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly. Additionally, the Zoom discussion will be recorded. I will watch the recording and transcribe the discussion, taking out all participant names and identifying information. This recording will be accessible only to the AIHEC research team for a period of 8 weeks, after which the recordings will be deleted. Only a transcription without identifying information will be used for analysis.

The research team will use the information to develop a Technical Assistance Framework for members of the TCU community to use as they resume operations. We will also write a report of our findings. You and other members of this community will be able to use this information to use in planning TCU operations in a post-COVID-19 environment. The information gathered in this study will be published in academic journals, to help other communities learn from the wisdom shared in this discussion. Nothing that you tell me in the discussion will be shared with anybody outside the research team, and nothing will be attributed to your name.

What other choices do I have besides taking part in the research?
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. That means it is your choice whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, all the services you receive from AIHEC will continue and nothing will change. If you decide to change your mind at any time, you are welcome to stop participating.

Is there any way being in the study could be bad for me?
We are asking you to share with us some information about your personal experience with COVID-19. If there is a topic that makes you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer, and please know that all information shared is considered highly confidential. We will not be sharing information about you to anyone outside of the research team.

As part of the confidentiality of this project, we ask you and others in the group not to talk to people outside of the group about what is said in the group. We will, in other words, ask each of you to keep what was said in the group confidentially. You should know, however, that we cannot prevent participants who were in the group from sharing things that should be confidential.

How will this research study benefit me?

This research will inform the development of an online Technical Assistance Framework to aid TCUs and universities in resuming services in a post-COVID-19 environment. We will use the successes and challenges you share in the group to find the right resources to include in the Technical Assistance Framework. This resource will be available to you and other members of the TCU community for free.

Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent
I have been invited to participate in research about my experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study. I understand I can withdraw my consent at any time or ask questions if I feel unsure about something.

    Print Name of Participant_____

    Signature of Participant_____

    Date (Day/Month/Year)_____

This project has been reviewed and approved by Northwest Indian College (NWIC) IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. To report a grievance or concern, please contact the Northwest Indian College IRB at (360) 392-4224, or toll free 1-866-676-2772 x1 x4224, or irb@nwic.edu.