

THE WHITE HOUSE

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## **FACT SHEET: Strengthening Tribal Communities through Education and Economic Development**

Today, the President, accompanied by the First Lady, is making his first Presidential trip to Indian Country. The Administration is taking action to strengthen Native American communities through education and economic development. These initiatives build on the significant progress the President has already made in partnering with tribes on a nation-to-nation basis to promote prosperous and resilient tribal nations.

Underlying this progress is President Obama's firm belief that tribal leaders must have a seat at the table. To make this commitment a reality, the President has hosted the White House Tribal Nations Conferences with tribal leaders every year he has been in office, and last year, he established the [White House Council on Native American Affairs](#) to ensure cross-agency coordination and engagement with Indian Country. Furthermore, the President's 2015 Budget proposes a more than \$3 billion increase in support to tribal communities, American Indians, and Alaska Natives, as compared to 2009.

Greater engagement and collaboration with tribes has led to substantial advances in tribal self-determination. These accomplishments include the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, which recognizes tribes' inherent sovereign right to protect Native women from domestic violence; amendments to the Stafford Act, which authorizes federally recognized tribes to directly request federal disaster assistance; and the Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service guidance on the application to certain tribal benefit programs of the general welfare exclusion from federal income tax. Additionally, the President has worked to heal the U.S. relationship with Native Americans by acknowledging the difficult and painful U.S. history of broken promises, and by settling longstanding legal disputes such as the *Cobell* and *Keepseagle* litigation and 80 breaches of trust lawsuits brought by Indian tribes against the United States.

Despite this unprecedented progress, the President recognizes that much work remains, and he is eager to partner with tribal nations to create meaningful and lasting change. As part of this year of action to expand opportunity for all Americans, the Administration is taking new steps focused on two of Indian Country's most pressing challenges: education and economic development.

## **IMPROVE THE BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION**

In today's global economy, a high-quality education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a prerequisite to success. President Obama has set out a vision for education that includes raising the bar for all of the nation's learners. In his first term, he signed an Executive Order to establish the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education and to strengthen the relationship between the Departments of Education and the Interior. Native American students continue to lag behind their peers on national assessments, account for the highest dropout rate of any racial or ethnic population, and hold a dramatically lower share of baccalaureate degrees than the rest of the population. In strong partnership with tribal nations, the Administration has continued to identify and promote critical reforms that prepare American Indian students for leadership in their communities and success in the 21st century.

### **Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)**

The Department of the Interior's (DOI) BIE educates 48,000 American Indian students across 23 states at 183 elementary and secondary schools and dormitories. BIE works with tribes to promote self-determination to ensure students are college- and career- ready, with an emphasis on Native American language, history, and culture. The BIE confronts unique challenges due to school remoteness, difficulty attracting highly effective teachers and principals, lack of IT infrastructure, and compliance with 23 different state assessments.

With only 34.6 percent of BIE schools meeting the adequate yearly progress goals established in accordance with federal law, these students deserve more support so they can get the quality education they deserve.

- Release a blueprint for a 21st Century education for the BIE. Today, the Departments of the Interior and Education Study Group will release a “[Blueprint for Reform](#),” a comprehensive plan to redesign the BIE to achieve one overarching goal: for tribes to deliver a world-class education to all students attending BIE schools. The Administration will take immediate action on several of the Blueprint’s key recommendations.

- Issue a Secretarial Order to transform the BIE into a School Improvement Organization. Today Secretary Jewell will sign an order to increase tribal control of schools by shifting the BIE from a direct operator of schools into a resource provider to tribally controlled schools, as recommended in the Blueprint. The transformed BIE will assist tribes in operating high-performing schools through customized technical assistance, including developing the schools’ educational leadership skills and delivering resources informed by best practices in student supports, instruction, financial management, organizational management, and teacher training, recruitment, and retention.

- Connect BIE schools and dorms to high speed Internet and support digital learning. To accelerate the speed at which students in BIE schools experience the benefits of the President’s ConnectED vision, DOI is partnering with the private sector to support digital learning and broadband connectivity. DOI will appoint an E-Rate specialist, funded in coordination with the Broad Foundation, to provide technical assistance to increase the competitiveness of E-Rate applications from BIE-funded schools. DOI will also issue a directive that prioritizes right of way permits for broadband reaching BIE schools for the next two years, and announce new connectivity for the more than 1,000 Native children who live in federally-funded dormitories while attending public schools outside of their reservation. These dorms have historically been burdened with limited and aged technology. Verizon, working with Alcatel-Lucent and Cross Wireless, will wire all 10 dorms with wireless broadband connectivity provided at no cost for up to two years, and provide each student with a wireless device like a laptop or tablet, to ensure that learning does not stop at the classroom door.

- Issue waivers giving BIE schools greater flexibility and support to carry out critical school improvements. ED will provide guidance to tribally-controlled grant schools regarding permissible spending activities under various ED programs. To create incentives for schools to invest in school improvements and reforms, ED will support BIE-funded schools in requesting waivers from certain restrictions on federal education funding.

- Provide National Board Certification (NBC) training to existing BIE instructional staff. Over three years, BIE will pay for NBC training for any teacher interested in pursuing their NBC certification. Going through NBC certification training is a rigorous, peer-reviewed process that provides high-quality professional development to teachers and ensures they have the skills necessary to improve student achievement. NBC teachers could extend their impact in a role as instructional leaders in their schools and communities so they can provide the support and resources necessary to help colleagues in their schools improve.

## **SUPPORT THE** **ACADEMIC** **ACHIEVEMENT OF** **ALL NATIVE** **AMERICAN STUDENTS**

ED is committed to supporting the efforts of school districts, states, tribes, and other organizations to better meet the unique educational and culturally-related academic needs of Native American students. ED will support states, tribes, and school districts in implementing rigorous college- and career- ready standards and new systems of support for American Indian and Alaska Native students so that these students remain on track for success.

- Share Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates with tribes to help Native American students apply for college financial aid. President Obama recently launched a new FAFSA Completion Initiative to give more Americans the opportunity to afford, attend, and graduate from college. To ensure that the FAFSA is not a barrier to college access for Native American students, ED will finalize guidance that permits states to share FAFSA completion information with tribal education officials.
- Host a Native Languages Summit. This month, ED, in partnership with the Departments of Health and Human Services and the Interior, will host a summit that brings together over 300 participants, from across the country to discuss how federal resources can support Native American language revitalization. Additionally, ED will provide technical assistance to school districts to address the unique cultural and

linguistic needs of Native American students, and examine current and future funding programs to identify additional support and resources.

- Hold listening sessions on school climate to ensure Native American students receive a nurturing, supportive education that respects their identities and backgrounds. The White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education will conduct a listening tour at which schools and communities will identify ways to improve school climate, discuss recent research, and highlight ways communities are proactively supporting Native American students. The listening tour will focus on bullying, disproportionate discipline, and offensive imagery and symbolism.

## **SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES**

Tribal communities have made significant economic progress in recent decades, with increases in income and improvements to living standards. Nevertheless, wide disparities still persist both between tribes and between Native Americans in general and the overall U.S. population. Indians living on reservations have seen their personal incomes nearly double since 1970, a faster rate of growth than for the U.S. population as a whole or for any other racial and ethnic group. However, the average poverty rate for these communities from 2006-2010 was 30 percent versus 14 percent nationally, and the child poverty rate was more than 15 percentage points higher than the national average, at 36 percent. In that same period, when the U.S. unemployment rate was just under 8 percent, the average unemployment rate in Indian Country was nearly 15 percent.

The Administration has partnered with Native communities to strengthen their economies through funding, technical assistance, and legal and regulatory improvements. In 2013, Native Americans benefited from approximately \$18.64 billion in federal spending, including \$2 billion in food assistance, \$5.5 billion in education-related funds, and \$5.3 billion for the Indian Health Service. In 2013 alone, USDA Rural Development invested \$628.4 million in economic projects that directly benefitted tribal communities. Today HUD released the application for its annual Indian Community Development Block Grants, with \$70 million available to improve housing and support economic opportunity in Indian Country. The Department of the Interior now administers over one billion dollars in funds to buy back and consolidate fractionated lands burdened by multiple owners, due to the *Cobell* settlement. To increase tribal sovereignty, remove regulatory barriers to development, and support Native entrepreneurs, the Administration will announce new initiatives to support economic development in Native communities.

- Removing regulatory barriers to infrastructure and energy development on Indian land. BIA will announce a proposed rule to modernize and streamline the approval process for rights-of-way, which are required for all new infrastructure construction on tribal lands, including transmission lines and broadband access. The new regulations propose strict timelines for BIA approval, eliminate the need for pre-development surveys to receive BIA approval, and limit BIA's scope for issuing disapprovals. Providing greater deference to tribes increases certainty and promotes infrastructure development on Indian lands that can lay a foundation for economic development and improved quality of life.

- Removing barriers to land development through increased tribal self-governance. BIA will announce a new training series to help tribal leaders implement the Helping Expedite & Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership (HEARTH) Act. When a business needs to build a factory or a family wants to purchase a new home on a reservation, the lease generally needs BIA approval. Since 2012, the HEARTH Act has allowed tribes to expedite the process for long-term leasing of federal Indian trust lands by establishing and enforcing their own land leasing regulations. 21 of the 300 tribes with federal trust lands have submitted regulations to BIA, and 12 tribes to date have already received approvals. Through these new training programs, BIA further supports tribal self-governance. This builds on DOI's progress in strengthening tribal control over tribal resources, including comprehensive surface leasing reform in 2012 and a commitment to increase land held in trust. DOI already is half way towards its goal of restoring 500,000 acres of tribal homeland held in trust.

- Making federal data and resources for tribal economic development easier to find and use. Tribal leaders need access to quality data as they make policy decisions and create tribal development plans. The federal government collects large amounts of data, but this data is not always easily accessible or usable. The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, in collaboration with the Departments of Commerce and the Interior and other agencies, will partner with tribes in a series of workshops to improve tribal access to data and create new tools to make data more accessible for tribes. Additionally, to help Native communities more easily find resources for economic development, the Department of Health and Human Services will release an *Economic Development Resource Guide* that compiles a range of the Native-oriented funding and technical assistance opportunities offered by the Administration for Children and Families.

- Encourage the use of tax-exempt bonds for tribal economic development. The Treasury Department will conduct outreach to tribal leaders and bond practitioners to expand awareness and understanding of Tribal Economic Development (TED) Bonds. Tribes can use TED bonds to finance economic development projects such as laying new broadband fiber, improving access to clean water, or building hotels for tourists. Currently a tribe may apply for up to 20 percent of the approximately \$1.3 billion in remaining aggregate TED bond authority.

- Support the growth of new markets for Native American small businesses. The Small Business Administration (SBA), USDA, and DOI will announce new initiatives to support Native American-owned businesses. To help Native-owned businesses access export opportunities, USDA will host a “Made in Native America” forum this fall as part of the “Made in Rural America” initiative. To connect Native-owned small businesses to millions of dollars in possible contracting opportunities, SBA is announcing a commitment to host two Native-focused American Supplier Initiative events this year and to create a new American Indian and Alaska Native portal on its [BusinessUSA](#) website to connect businesses to government assistance programs. To increase federal procurement opportunities for Native-owned small businesses, DOI will issue a new directive to improve the implementation of the Buy Indian Act and to increase its procurement purchases by Native-owned small businesses by 10 percent.
  
- Support Native American veterans through employment and small business opportunities. The Indian Health Services (IHS) and BIA, which combined employ over 20,000 people, will announce a new commitment to increase the number of veterans hired by each agency. IHS will increase the percent of new hires that are veterans from 6 percent to 9 percent and BIA will boost their percent of new hires that are veteran from 9 percent to 12.5 percent. SBA will host a Native veteran focused [Reboot to Business](#), SBA’s Introduction to Entrepreneurship class in Albuquerque, New Mexico, featuring a customized curriculum with Native-specific government programs and lending opportunities to provide Native veterans with entrepreneurship training. The Department of Veterans Affairs, working with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, will host veterans’ economic summits to train human resource professionals on connecting veterans with employers, and include events supporting the Choctaw Nation and the Blackfeet Nation.