NTIA TRIBAL CONSULTATION SUMMARY REPORT

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) invited Tribal leaders to participate in two online Tribal Consultation webinars on January 13 and 20, 2026. NTIA convened two government-to-government Tribal Consultations to seek input on NTIA's implementation of the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) and the Native Entities Grant Program (NEGP). NTIA received written and oral comments from Tribal leaders, representatives, and stakeholders throughout the Tribal Consultation process.

TBCP provides grants to expand access to and adoption of broadband service on Tribal land. NEGP provides grants to help Indian Tribes, Alaska Native entities, and Native Hawaiian organizations address broadband access, use and adoption needs in Native communities. NTIA conducted the Tribal Consultation sessions in accordance with the Department of Commerce Policy on Tribal Consultation.

NTIA structured the Tribal Consultations around the following topics and questions, which it disseminated prior to the consultation via a Dear Tribal Leader Letter:

- **Program Design & Reform**: The status of broadband deployment has changed substantially since the first TBCP NOFO was issued in 2021. These changes have resulted in the need to reconsider the most appropriate use of remaining unobligated TBCP and NEGP funding. NTIA sought input from Tribal leaders on how these programs can be reformed to better meet the unique connectivity needs of Tribal communities.

- **Alignment with Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD):** With the rollout and acceleration of the BEAD Program, which now represents the primary vehicle for large-scale broadband deployment, NTIA sought input on how the TBCP and NEGP program can be aligned with, complementary to, and non-duplicative of BEAD. NTIA also sought input on identifying priority activities for TBCP and NEGP funding considering BEAD's remaining broadband needs on Tribal lands.

- **Maximizing Impact & Use of Funds:** NTIA invited Tribal perspectives on how to maximize the impact of TBCP and NEGP funding and ensure every dollar supports meaningful broadband connectivity.

- **Technology Advancements:** Recent advancements in low earth orbit (LEO) satellite and fixed wireless broadband technologies are expanding connectivity options for Tribal communities, especially in areas where traditional terrestrial infrastructure is limited or cost-prohibitive. Understanding the latest advancements can support more informed decisions and effective use of TBCP and NEGP funding to expand reliable connectivity on Tribal lands. NTIA sought Tribal input on how advancements in LEO satellite and fixed wireless technologies have impacted broadband connectivity on Tribal lands and whether access to up-to-date information on satellite and wireless technologies would help Tribes evaluate broadband options.

- **Broadband Adoption Challenges:** Understanding broadband adoption barriers is critical to shaping programs like TBCP and NEGP to ensure they effectively support Tribal communities in achieving meaningful connectivity. NTIA sought Tribal input on the challenges affecting broadband adoption on Tribal lands, including factors such as affordability, digital skills, and availability of devices.

- **Effective Models & Best Practices:** NTIA sought Tribal input on which public or private projects and initiatives have been most effective in expanding broadband access on Tribal lands. Insights from Tribes can help identify best practices and strategies that maximize the impact of programs like TBCP and NEGP and help guide future broadband investments.

NTIA used the following agenda for the Tribal Consultations:

- Welcome
- Overview of Tribal Broadband Connectivity Grant Program (TBCP)
- Overview of Native Entities Grant Program (NEGP)
- Government-to-Government Dialogue Topics
    - Program Design & Reform
    - Alignment with Broadband, Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD)
    - Maximizing Impact & Use of Funds
    - Reducing Administrative Burden
    - Technology Advancements
    - Broadband Adoption Challenges
    - Effective Models & Best Practices
    - Additional Feedback
- Next Steps

The following summarizes NTIA's government-to-government dialogue, including input received from Tribal leaders and representatives. NTIA also invited Tribal leaders who could not attend to submit written responses to the session's discussion questions. This summary incorporates those responses as well.

Program Design & Reform

NTIA opened the dialogue by asking Tribal leaders how it can reform and design the TBCP and NEGP programs to better serve tribal connectivity as broadband support needs continue to evolve and fluctuate. The discussion question to start the conversation was "How can NTIA reform its TBCP and NEGP programs to better serve Tribal connectivity?"

Tribal leaders consistently identified flexibility and sustainability as overarching priorities. They called for broadband programs that reflect the varied needs of Tribal communities—particularly those in remote, rural, and geographically complex regions. Tribes raised concerns about the rigid deployment process, stressing that infrastructure

deployment decisions must account for unique characteristics of their communities, such as terrain, climate, transportation barriers, short construction seasons, and extremely high deployment costs. They urged NTIA to allow greater flexibility in the types of infrastructure it funds and to show more openness towards hybrid network approaches – for example combining fiber for core and middle-mile infrastructure with fixed wireless, satellite, and emerging technologies for last-mile delivery where appropriate. Participants also flagged match requirements in BEAD, compressed turnaround timelines for curing, and limited NTIA understanding of Tribal governance processes as barriers that increase the risk of eligible entities choosing not to participate.

Tribal leaders framed sustainability holistically, encompassing not only the physical longevity of infrastructure, but long-term household affordability and ultimately tribes' ability to independently maintain and upgrade networks. Participants stressed that many Tribal households lack connectivity not only because service is unavailable, but because it is unaffordable. Participants identified structural barriers (such as the 2% administrative cap), which they described as disproportionately burdensome for small tribal administrations managing multiple federal programs. As one consultation participant noted, "access is not the end state." To address long-term sustainability Tribes recommended that NTIA direct future funding toward efforts such as interconnection and regional or tribal internet exchange points. As another consultation participant stated, "sustainability means there is sufficient support to put facilities in service at performance levels that can still be sustained by the customer."

Tribal ownership of infrastructure emerged as a key component of long-term sustainability. Participants expressed hope for greater Tribal government involvement in TBCP and NEGP decision-making, planning, and development arguing that deeper collaboration between Tribes and NTIA across these phases would lead to more realistic implementation of connectivity infrastructure, knowledge exchange, workforce development, economic diversification, and the overarching priority of maintaining Tribal sovereignty.

Alignment with BEAD

NTIA asked Tribal leaders two questions to guide this discussion: "How can NTIA adapt its TBCP and NEGP programs to be aligned with, complementary to, and non-duplicative of BEAD?" and "What activities should be the focus of the TBCP and NEGP programs given the progress of the BEAD Program?"

Tribal leaders generally spoke positively about the quality of support TBCP has provided, praising their direct and collaborative approach and the willingness to engage with Tribes through forums such as Tribal Consultations. Tribes expressed feeling "heard" during these sessions. Several Tribes recommended TBCP and NEGP receive more staffing, permanent authorization, and a clearer institutional distinction from BEAD—primarily to ensure dedicated broadband support for Tribal Entities. Additionally, participants called for more clearly defined roles between TBCP/NEGP

and BEAD. A common vision among several participants that emerged was one in which the tribal programs focus on smaller scale adoption activities—including but not limited to community planning, digital equity efforts, middle-mile connectivity—while BEAD continues to support broad network infrastructure development. In short, participants see the division this way: BEAD builds the network for communities and TBCP and NEGP ensure those community networks are operationally sound and sustained.

Tribes vocalized concern that BEAD has not operated as a tribally centered program. Compared to TBCP and NEGP, leaders characterized BEAD as more for-profit focused. Tribal leaders acknowledged that revenue-based goals are a common and necessary measuring point for federal initiatives, but argued that profit should not be a primary driving when developing sustainable infrastructure for communities in need. Speakers also pointed to prior diversion of BEAD funds away from Tribal priorities as auxiliary points towards their concerns around consistent Tribal-focused support that prioritizes the long-term sustainability of their communities.

Participants identified several challenges in the BEAD consultation processes, including inconsistent communication, lack of transparency, shifting program rules without Tribal input, and short administrative response timelines that conflict with Tribal governance systems. Many Tribes reported that consultations functioned as procedural formalities rather than substantive engagement, resulting in decisions being made without meaningful Tribal participation—including the exclusion of Tribal leadership from technology policy decisions directly affecting their lands. Participants strongly opposed grant structures that positioned Tribes as subrecipients of state broadband offices, arguing that this arrangement undermines Tribal sovereignty and the overarching government-to-government relationship. To address this, speakers called for enforceable consultation mechanisms, including formal resolutions or letters of Tribal consent. Specific proposals included joint letters from states and Tribes affirming the equitable consultation occurred and that both parties reached shared agreement on program development plans.

Additional comments raised concerns that BEAD funding primarily benefits legacy carriers while failing to prioritize new tribal deployment, tribal-owned infrastructure, and long-term community sustainability. Participants also raised issues related to tribal consent, right-of-way management, inaccurate mapping, and lack of transparency in Broadband Serviceable Location (BSL) determinations.

Tribal leadership expressed optimism about the relationship TBCP has built with the Tribes and voiced hope for continued collaboration as focus shifts toward the long-term aspects of infrastructure development. They continued to emphasize the importance of honoring government-to-government relationships throughout the program lifecycle to protect Tribal sovereignty and ownership of the broadband network infrastructure.

Written submitters offered additional perspectives on the BEAD relative to TBCP and NEGP. One Tribe shared: “BEAD is primarily designed to fund large-scale

infrastructure deployment, particularly fiber, while TBCP and NEGP should focus on gaps BEAD cannot effectively serve. These include remote and islanded communities, redundancy, rapid deployment needs, affordability, and long-term operations. TBCP and NEGP should support projects that states decline as too expensive or complex, even though they are essential for Tribal connectivity. These programs should prioritize Tribal ownership, affordability mechanisms, and operations and maintenance, ensuring BEAD-funded infrastructure on Tribal lands achieves meaningful adoption and long-term sustainability."

Maximizing Impact & Use of Funds

NTIA opened this topic by asking, "What steps should NTIA take to stretch every dollar as far as possible and maximize the impact of TBCP and NEGP with respect to broadband connectivity on Tribal lands?"

Speakers noted that the effectiveness of funds depends heavily on factors such as timeliness of fund release, inflationary cost pressures, and inflexible program structures. Tribes reported that rising material, labor, and transportation costs reduce project scope when funding is delayed, resulting in fewer connections and diminished community benefit. Participants called for expedited fund disbursement, predictable timelines, inflation-adjustment mechanisms, and stronger interagency coordination. Speakers also advocated for streamlined environmental clearance processes, flexibility of deployment plans based on Tribe's situational awareness (allowing Tribes to communicate more realistic connectivity solutions based on their familiarity with their lands), and greater federal coordination with utilities and carriers to reduce cost burdens.

Tribal leadership stressed that the impact and use of funds should not be measured solely by initial connection costs, but also the long-term maintenance costs communities must shoulder. Speakers described that some broadband technologies may appear lower-cost at the front-end based on installation and execution type, but their long-term maintenance are virtually unsustainable—particularly for lower-income communities or those in geographically complex areas that requiring intensive upkeep. Consequently, Tribes strongly advocated for Tribal representatives to have a seat at the table when funding decisions are made to ensure equitable and realistic planning for broadband development. Participants flagged that not all states required Tribal consultation for BEAD funding, which they urged NTIA to treat as a "red flag" when evaluating recipients. Without meaningful Tribal representation in early planning and funding discussions, projects cannot accurately forecast costs, either short or long-term, for efficient and sustainable service delivery. Additionally, speakers expressed frustration with limited federal coordination in negotiations with utilities and carriers, noting that tribes are often left to independently resolve high-cost infrastructure access challenges.

Tribal leadership called for greater flexibility and independence in how Tribes manage broadband development, enabling projects to adapt to challenges faced during

deployment. Participants discussed the need to adjust broadband development plans in response to their unique communities' circumstances, without having to deal with project rescopes or other major federal interventions which can impact development time. The ability to actively shape development in alignment with community needs minimizes project delays and reduces exposure to price fluctuations in materials, transport, and any other production factors. Flexibility in technology selection—including exploring emerging technologies and community-based manufacturing or training proposals—was identified as a critical strategy for maximizing long-term impact. Participants strongly communicated that giving Tribal communities the agency to develop infrastructure tailored to their unique needs not only stretches funding farther, but advances Tribal sovereignty and ownership over the evolution of Tribal broadband networks. Intentional investment in workforce development, digital skills pipelines, training programs, and Tribal-controlled infrastructure was consistently identified as essential to maximizing long-term impacts of funds.

Reducing Administrative Burden

NTIA invited Tribal Consultation participants to share insights on ways TBCP and NEGP could optimize the administrative process, opening discussion with the question "What steps can NTIA take to reduce administrative burdens and red tape for Tribal governments?"

Generally, Tribal leadership identified administrative burden as one of the most significant systemic barriers to tribal participation in broadband programs. Tribes described several common challenges, complex compliance systems, short curing windows, complicated and inconsistent reporting requirements, portal changes, and duplicative documentation—all of which overwhelm both large and small Tribal administrative teams. Participants noted that Tribal governments often manage multiple federal programs simultaneously, making tight timelines and inconsistent requirements particularly burdensome. Speakers provided potential improvements, including longer response windows (30–60 days), consolidated reporting requirements, streamlined portals, standardized document templates, and greater flexibility in submission protocols.

Tribes also called for greater recognition of Tribal governance structures and respect for their standards and protocols. Speakers offered examples of administrative complications NTIA created that conflicted with the Tribal government procedures - such as last-minute federal reporting requiring Tribal government official sign-off when relevant committees and representatives may not convene in time to respond.

Affordability presented another significant barrier. Participants identified the high cost of applications, consultants, engineers, and other compliance preparation components as deterrents to participation—especially given the risk of non-award. Many Tribes called for application support funding or pre-award assistance programs to reduce this financial risk. One Tribal leader summarized these challenges by stating, "The administrative burden is heaviest on turnaround times and

the expense of applications and responses. If it wasn't for the Capital Project Fund, we wouldn't have enough money to apply because the cost of application is significant, and the cost of expertise is high. There is [also] a big risk of non-award. A grant program available to tribes to cover some of the cost of application would be helpful when expertise is required, and the risk of non-award is significant."

Tribes also emphasized the need for clearer guidance, technical assistance, and more consistent administrative processes to lower barriers for Tribes that may be unfamiliar with the grant process but are fully qualified to pursue opportunities for broadband.

Written contributors echoed these concerns and raised the idea of dedicated support agencies for tribes. As one contributor stated: "The permitting hurdles are overly arduous and cumbersome. The creation of a permanent or temporary Tribal Permitting Agency that can assist tribes with navigating [engaging with the various government agencies], should be viewed as essential to expedite processes and maintain aggressive construction windows."

Technology Advancements

On the topic of broadband technology progress, NTIA posed two questions to Tribal leaders: "How have recent advancements in LEO satellite and fixed wireless broadband technologies, impacted broadband connectivity in Indian Country?" and "Would additional information on the latest advancements and improvements in satellite and/or wireless technologies assist in evaluating broadband technology options?"

Participants emphasized that technology policy must prioritize long-term sustainability, scalability, reliability, and digital sovereignty over short-term cost minimization. While acknowledging that LEOs may play a role in moving Tribal communities from no connectivity to a workable connection, Tribes expressed strong skepticism about framing LEO as a primary broadband solution across Tribal communities. Concerns included bandwidth constraints, lack of service guarantees, unreliable connectivity in harsh, rural, and remote conditions, vulnerability in emergency and healthcare contexts, and long-term dependency on external service providers as opposed to Tribal-owned providers. Participants described fiber infrastructure as the most future-proof technology, capable of supporting the widest range of long-term needs. They also highlighted the potential of emerging technologies such as optical wireless transmission and spectrum-sharing models. Tribally controlled fixed wireless systems were viewed as promising solutions when concretely aligned with Tribal ownership and governance. One participant provided their perspective, stating "LEO is the lowest impact. It does not have the community or economic force multiplier that other technologies provide."

Tribal leaders also stressed affordability as a critical factor in keeping implemented infrastructures sustainable for the local communities it serves. Participants recommended evaluating wireless and satellite technologies separately when reviewing potential deployments, noting that the challenges and costs differ significantly. Tribes shared that the long-term and recurring costs of satellite service for consumers are

extremely high compared to initial launch period pricing. Speakers called for greater federal support in securing reasonable contractual agreements with service providers, as well as expanded support for Tribal-owned service providers, to empower communities to maintain their own connectivity. Tribes were vocal that providing this level of support would also advance economic and workforce development, enabling community members to build the skills needed to independently upgrade networks after federal programs conclude. The overarching message was that technology choices must align with long-term Tribal sovereignty, resilience, and economic self-determination.

Written submissions from Tribal leaders echoed the call for increased flexibility in broadband development, with sustainable and future-proof solutions identified as keys to maximizing program funds. One submission described LEO as a support system rather than a final connectivity solution: "Fixed Wireless and LEO should not be viewed as similar. LEO should be viewed as a support system and not as a final means of connectivity. With Fixed Wireless, there is at least the potential for future wired connectivity, with LEO this does not exist and the barriers of entry to offer competition are substantial. This is not to say LEO has no place in creating broadband connectivity; LEO can offer temporary connectivity while real, tangible infrastructure is being built in tandem. These dollars being invested towards LEO does not offer tribes or the United States at large enough ROI to prove sustainable or even viable long term."

Broadband Adoption Challenges

NTIA opened this phase of discussion by asking "What challenges exist with respect to broadband adoption on Tribal lands?"

Tribal leadership emphasized that broadband access alone does not equate to meaningful connectivity. Tribes identified significant challenges related to digital literacy, affordability, cultural relevance, cybersecurity, and community trust. Elders and low-income residents face barriers not only in accessing service, but in understanding how to safely and effectively use digital tools. Participants stressed the importance of Tribal-led, culturally grounded, adoption programs over externally imposed approaches that may resonate with users. Digital literacy and awareness initiatives focused on common online threats including phishing attacks, identity scams, and general online safety education were identified as urgent priorities for advancement within Tribal institutions and communities. Participants framed adoption efforts as requiring sustained investment in digital skills training, culturally relevant content, train-the-trainer models, and community education to enable Tribes to meaningfully benefit from broadband access. One example offered was the need to reach community members who may not yet know how to use a computer mouse, let alone navigate complex programs or web pages. Attendees emphasized that broadband adoption is a long-term social and cultural process, not a short-term technical intervention and building digital literacy requires ensuring all tribal community members develop trust and confidence in the support systems created to help them.

Written contributions flagged the cost of deployment as another key challenge. One submission posted a direct question, "What set asides or allocations are going to be made by NTIA to the tribes in order to adequately address workforce development without jeopardizing or reducing deployment funding?" Additionally, Tribes raised concerns about the difficulty of pursuing other federal funding opportunities given the capacity constraints Tribes may face, "We are aware of additional funding opportunities through USDA, TBCP, and BEAD; however, the lack of dedicated grant-writing capacity and the significant financial burden of required matching funds remain extremely prohibitive obstacles for our Tribe." More Tribes spoke towards affordability as a major barrier in their write-ins, with potential solutions shared by another contributor, "The most significant challenge to broadband adoption on Tribal areas is ensuring the price is affordable for all. To address this challenge will require action on two fronts: (1) reducing costs for the most vulnerable, low-income Native Americans through a program the same or similar to the now-ended Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), and (2) ensuring the ongoing operations and maintenance costs related to the TBCP-funded networks are supported, thereby making these Tribally-owned operations sustainable."

Effective Models & Best Practices

To help identify the best strategies to support future developments within TBCP and NEGP, NTIA asked Tribal Consultation participants: "What types of projects or initiatives –either public or private– have been most effective in advancing broadband access in Indian Country?"

Participants highlighted that effective models centered on early operational support, sustainable partnerships, interconnection and collaboration, and peer learning networks. Programs that fund initial operational costs were identified as essential for building sustainable Tribal broadband enterprises. Tribes emphasized the value of partnerships with experienced providers structured to respect Tribal sovereignty and long-term Tribal control, creating platforms for knowledge exchange and workforce development.

Participants strongly encouraged Tribes to collaborate across Indian County - sharing technical expertise, policy strategies, and operational lessons learned. Intertribal learning was framed as a key resilience strategy, one that reduces isolation and prevents communities from repeating one another's mistakes. One Tribal leader summarized this approach: "If your Tribal nation needs help, reach out to another Tribe that has gone through the same thing — don't fail alone." These models were identified as essential for building long-term institutional capacity and sustainable broadband ecosystems.

Additional Feedback

Following the conclusion of the primary discussion topics, NTIA opened the floor for general insights from Tribal leadership.

Additional feedback centered on the need for long-term continuity in Tribal broadband funding and policy. Participants emphasized that one-time funding cycles are insufficient to address the scale of connectivity gaps across Tribal lands. Time constraints, administrative barriers, and funding limitations often prevent Tribes from serving all households within single grant cycles, leaving many communities partially connected. Tribes strongly opposed replicating BEAD structures within TBCP and NEGP and cautioned against policies that prioritize LEO systems over other network types. Participants repeatedly called for annual Tribal broadband funding programs, long-term federal commitments, and preservation of dedicated Tribal programs.

Participants emphasized that Tribal broadband policy must be grounded in sovereignty, self-determination, and long-term nation-building, not short-term deployment metrics. They called for TBCP and NEGP's future development to continue promoting the sustainable growth of Tribal communities' digital literacy and independence. Whether measured in economic terms development (e.g., where service provider maintenance is handed off to Tribal providers in the long-term), or from a workforce perspective providing opportunities for Tribes to learn and enhance the skills to independently maintain the broadband infrastructure developed with grant funds, Tribal independence and empowerment must remain a core program priority. One Tribal speaker concluded, "All the comments made today are in light of self-determination, Tribes can determine their own futures."

Written submissions reinforced the theme of sovereignty, with strong calls for Tribal integration throughout the development process to ensure long-term sustainability and Tribal ownership of the infrastructure. Contributors stressed the importance of centering Tribe's real-life perspective in decision-making: "NTIA must defer to Tribal Nations when reviewing our project proposals that prefer certain broadband deployment technologies over others. NTIA should also allow appropriate technology combinations of fiber optics, fixed wireless, and satellite solutions based on local, on the ground Tribally determined realities rather than prescriptive technology mandates for funding approval." In engaging with state and federal governments, Tribes referenced concerns with previous instances and called for more support in ensuring more meaningful collaboration: "Previous consultations by state offices seemed to be only 'checking a box' and ended up creating strain and more distrust between Tribal and state/federal governments. What irrevocable guarantees are there that this will not be the case again?" Additionally, Tribal leaders used their submissions to highlight the importance of centering Tribes in the planning process: "Tribal integration must be a foundational element of these programs, and broadband should be treated as a core utility—no different from water or electricity. Simply extending non-Tribal commercial broadband into Tribal communities, with access as the sole "benefit," is insufficient. Sustainable pricing models or permanent subsidies are necessary to ensure both access and meaningful opportunity."