



07 July 2020  
House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
Full Committee Hearing on "Addressing the Urgent Needs of Our Tribal Communities"  
Statement for the Record

Founded by Internet pioneers, the Internet Society (ISOC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the open development, evolution and use of the Internet. Working through a global community of chapters and members, ISOC collaborates with a broad range of groups to promote the technologies that keep the Internet safe and secure, and advocates for policies that enable universal access.

In North America, ISOC works to ensure that rural and tribal communities have access to fast, affordable, and sustainable Internet. When we can bring broadband to the most remote and hard-to-connect communities, we pave the way for other rural communities to find connectivity solutions. Tribal communities are commonly rural and also have the added barrier of complex legal systems.

Each year, ISOC hosts the Indigenous Connectivity Summit (ICS) and brings together Indigenous leaders and community members; community network operators; Internet service providers, researchers, and policy makers. Community members discuss shared challenges to broadband access, brainstorm solutions for connectivity, and participate in an in-person technical training and deployment.

ISOC also hosted a virtual Policy and Advocacy Training ahead of the 2019 ICS, from which four participants now serve as Indigenous Connectivity Summit Policy Advisors. The Policy Advisors led the creation of a list of policy recommendations, which the rest of the ICS participants workshopped and approved at the Summit. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, we updated the policy recommendations to reflect options for short-term and long-term recommendations for connectivity.

The ICS Policy Advisors and participants called for appropriate community consultation throughout the early planning stages and deployment of broadband projects affecting their communities. Community consultations ensure that the project meets the community's needs and empowers community members to play an active role in the deployment, management, and operation of new networks in the community. Consultations can also help the non-Indigenous entities conducting the projects ensure that they get the most value for their funding. If a non-Indigenous entity deploys a network that does not meet the community's needs, project funding could be wasted on a build that does not actually achieve the community's connectivity goals.

The Policy Advisors also recommended that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) extend its Tribal Priority Window for the 2.5 GHz Educational Broadband Service (EBS) Spectrum. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, this recommendation would be particularly helpful to Indigenous communities. COVID-19 has hit Indigenous communities hard, and tribal governments would benefit from having more time to pass a Tribal Resolution to submit an application for funding as they reopen and handle the ongoing health crisis.



ISOC and the ICS Policy Advisors encourage non-Indigenous entities to implement technical training for the Indigenous communities where they deploy new networks or build on existing ones with federal funds. Technical training can create jobs in the community and assist in the sustainability of the project, as community members have a vested interest in the network's success.

COVID-19 has exposed more than ever the connectivity inequities that Indigenous communities face. We now rely even more heavily on the Internet for health care, education, jobs, and social connection, and unconnected Indigenous communities cannot access the same services necessary for modern life throughout the pandemic. Tribal communities and governments deserve proactive and culturally-appropriate policies and projects that bring high-speed, affordable Internet to their communities.

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