



**American  
Indian Policy  
Institute**

**Arizona State  
University**

# **2020 ANNUAL REPORT**



**American Indian Policy Institute**





## A YEAR IN REVIEW

In light of a global pandemic bringing life to a standstill, the American Indian Policy Institute (AIPI) continued to thrive under unique circumstances. Despite navigating the new reality of working from home, AIPI produced a robust catalog of policy briefs and even started a new blog.

While COVID-19 did not create broadband and connective issues in Indian Country, it exposed the cracks of an already fractured system. COVID-19 exacerbated the problems and inadequacies surrounding connectivity in Tribal communities, including schools, that were forced to transition to online work. Since AIPI focuses substantively on broadband access in Indian Country, the digital divide, and is the only Indigenous-led organization in the country with such a focus, our services have been in high demand during the pandemic. In fact because of this demand, we received substantial unsolicited funding from multiple reputable foundations. These funds, allocated over two years, will assist in building our capacity continuing our research, and our work towards addressing the digital divide in Indian Country. These generous gifts and our success in 2020 reflect our ongoing commitment to serving Indian Country, whatever the needs may be.

We'd also like to explain the carefully chosen photos throughout the report. The year 2020 was AIPI's first year in Watt's College on the Downtown ASU campus. The front cover shows our building, the Chase Building where our offices are on the 33rd floor near the top. The empty highway (p. 2) is what the roads looked like during lockdown, highlighting the eerie and isolated atmosphere. The penultimate photo (p. 6) is an aerial view of the Downtown campus, including Watts College where AIPI is part of a vibrant community. Finally, the image of the iconic buttes near Monument Valley is an ever-present reminder that through our work, all roads lead AIPI back to Indian Country.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- We initiated the AIPI Blog at the direction of Advisory Board
- We followed topical issues: Census and voting rights
- We created a new partnership with ASU Office of American Indian Initiatives
- We moved into new offices in the Chase Building Downtown Campus, Phoenix

### New Projects:

- We laid the groundwork for the Next Era podcast (2021 launch)

### Representation Expanded:

- Executive Director appointed to Education Task Force to Address Digital Divide in AZ Schools
- Executive Director appointed to the AISES Board of Directors

## PUBLICATIONS

- Policy Brief: [Indian Country and Census](#)
- Explainer Article: [Vote-by-Mail Policy Overview](#)
- Explainer Article: [Work From Home Best Practices](#)
- Explainer Article: [Census Response Tracker for Indian Country](#)
- Blog Series: [Stories of Resilience from Indian Country](#)
- Blog updates:
  - [CARES Act for Indian Country](#)
  - [Supreme Court McGirt Case](#)
  - [COVID Resources](#)
- Policy Recommendations: [COVID-19: The Impact of Limited Internet Access & Issues with Social Distancing for Native Students](#)
- Policy Recommendations: [Tribal Digital Divide Policy Brief & Recommendations](#)

## FUNDING

- Media Democracy Fund \$20,000 gift (unsolicited) general operating support
- Media Democracy Fund \$35,000 grant (unsolicited) for general operating support
- Ford Foundation \$150,000 over two years for capacity building (unsolicited)

# POLICY

- "COVID-19: The Impact of Limited Internet Access and Issues with Social Distancing for Native Students" (at the request of the President's Office).
- "Tribal Digital Divide Policy Brief and Recommendations" (at the request of the President's Office).
- Staff participated and presented research supporting the FCC 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Spectrum window for Indian Country.
- Participated in the Bureau of Indian Education Indigenous Peoples Caucus on COVID 19 May 1, 2020.
- Participated in House Natural Resources Tribal Subcommittee Meeting for Indigenous Peoples of the United States on the HEROES Act Benefits for Indian Country (coronavirus workshop) May 5, 2020.
- All-Staff participated in Tribal COVID Working Group.
- Discussed telecommunications access and COVID-19 with Navajo Nation Washington Office staff.
- Briefed National Telecommunication and Information Administration on 2.5 GHz Tribal Priority Window and the importance of Tribal Nations gaining access to spectrum for wireless communications during COVID-19. Participated in monthly meetings.
- Discussed general telecommunications access issues on Tribal reservations with House Energy and Commerce Committee Staff. Conducted follow-up conversations following the outbreak of COVID-19.
- Discussed COVID-19 impacts on Tribal telecommunications access and affordability and potential legislative solutions for COVID-19 stimulus packages with Native American appointee to a working group organized by the non-profit Independent Sector organization.



FULL REPORT AVAILABLE AT  
[BIT.LY/39JPHFD](https://bit.ly/39JPHFD)

## BILLS AFFECTING TRIBES



**9 BILLS**

With Tribal  
Implications  
Signed Into Law



**57 BILLS**

Were Tracked By AIPI in  
2020



**6 BILLS**

Passed In One  
Chamber But Not The  
Other



**4**

**RESOLUTIONS**

Adopted Expressing A  
Sense of Congress



**6 BILLS**

Rep. Ruben Gallego  
(D-AZ-7)



**5 BILLS**

Senator Tom Udall  
(D-NM)



**4 BILLS**

Rep. Deb Haaland  
(D-NM-1)  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
(R-AK)



**3**

**BILLS**

Senator Tina Smith (D-MN)  
Senator John Hoeven (D-ND)  
Rep. Don Young (R-AK-At Large)

# PRESENTATIONS/PRESS

- Executive Director presented on Crisis Communications at the Native American Finance Officers Association 38th Annual Spring Conference (virtually).
- Research and Policy Analyst moderated a panel discussion for the Internet Governance Forum - USA on a webinar titled, "Impact of COVID-19 on Learners and Educators."
- Executive Director interviewed for ASUNow on CIIC Town Hall on Pandemic and Systemic Infrastructure Issues in Indian Country.
- Research and Policy Analyst presented on a panel for the NetGain Partnership on a webinar titled, "Broadband Access in the US."
- AIPI Executive Director and Research and Policy Analyst presented on a panel for the ASU Construction in Indian Country Virtual Town Hall with Tribal Leaders to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic and telecommunications access in Tribal communities.
- Research and Policy Analyst conducted an interview with TRUTHOUT Reporter Jen Deerinwater for an article titled, "Pandemic and Digital Divide Threaten Accurate Census Count of Native Populations."
- Executive Director conducted an interview with CISCO Techbeat Podcast on Digital Divide and Coronavirus July 27, 2020.
- Executive Director conducted an interview with Thompson Reuters on Coronavirus and Digital Divide also on July 27th, 2020.
- Policy Communications Coordinator conducted an interview with Milwaukee Journal Sentinel for an article, 'Hard-to-count' Native American tribes lag behind rest of Wisconsin in Census Response.
- Executive Director on the impact of COVID-19 (12/2020).
- Executive Director AP story about Indigenous representation in Congress.
- FCC Closes Tribal Spectrum Priority Window Despite Objections - Native Business Magazine.





As with every organization in 2020, everything at AIPI revolved around COVID-19. Native leadership at ASU swiftly formed an internal task force to ensure Indigenous students did not fall through the cracks as classes shifted to online learning. AIPI participated in these bi-weekly meetings throughout the year. As a result, we played a crucial role in educating our instructors and ASU leadership about the significance of the broadband divide on Arizona Tribal lands. AIPI produced a pair of policy briefs and recommendations at the request of ASU leadership: Tribal Digital Divide Policy Brief & Recommendations and COVID-19: The Impact of Limited Internet Access & Issues with Social Distancing for Native Students.

In addition to serving our Native students at ASU, we participated locally, regionally, and nationally in discussions around the impact of the digital divide in Indian Country. As the only Native-led organization in the country consistently working on broadband, including several staff and Advisory Board members with Tribal broadband expertise, AIPI sprung into action to contribute our knowledge and resources. Having just released original research as part of the Tribal Technology Assessment in late 2019, AIPI is uniquely positioned to provide expertise on the subject. AIPI participated in multiple discussions and meetings on the FCC 2.5 GHz Rural Tribal Spectrum Window for Indian Country, briefings to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration on the 2.5 GHz Window, discussions with House Energy and Commerce Committee staff, and discussions with multiple working groups on Coronavirus, just to name a few.

Additionally, AIPI staff were interviewed by at least seven national publications and presented at five conferences. AIPI's visibility on the national stage substantially increased in 2020. We produced six articles, two briefs, and created and maintained a blog to relay information more quickly. The executive director was appointed to the Arizona Superintendent of Schools Digital Divide Task Force and was elected to the American Indian Science and Engineering Society's National Board of Directors. All of this exciting work and new developments took place while we also maintained our regular policy work and monthly updates, which Tribal Nations and leaders rely on in Arizona and beyond. We look forward to continuing our service to Indian Country, where our work is at the intersection of policy advocacy, and research.

**DR. TRACI MORRIS**

*Executive Director, American Indian Policy Institute*