

ANNUAL REPORT 2021

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View of Phoenix skyline
from Piestewa Peak

INTRODUCTION

MISSION & VISION

The American Indian Policy Institute is an Indigenous-led and staffed research institute at Arizona State University, whose work supports Tribal communities and Indigenous peoples nationwide. We do this by creating academic research and by analyzing and developing policy on the key issues in Indian Country, and by building capacity within an ecosystem of lifelong learning. AIPI's expertise and focus is substantively on broadband technology and digital equity, with expertise in tribal telecommunications, communications policy, and newly emerging systems as they impact sovereign Tribal nations.

AIPI's core commitment to Indian Country focuses on new directions and initiatives centered on sovereignty, community service, dedication to research and learning through public service, and supporting tribal communities and leaders in finding solutions while allowing AIPI to be part of the solution in shaping new strategies for Indian Country.



The AIPI Staff at the 2021 staff retreat, pictured from l-r: H. Trostle, J. di Filippo, E. John, S. Vermillion, B. Santistevan, K. Talbert, T. Morris

INTRODUCTION

YEAR IN REVIEW

The American Indian Policy Institute saw a lot of growth in 2021. The desire to fulfill our mission to Indian Country continues to be at the forefront of our work. During 2020 and well into 2021, we continued to see the impact of COVID-19 across Indian Country and the world. There were continued struggles with education, health care and a shortage of supplies. The lack of connectivity on Tribal lands only exacerbated those issues. The mission AIPI works to carry out focuses substantively on broadband access in Indian communities. We continue to be the only Indigenous led organization in the country with this focus and our expertise has seen steady growth and impact in the effort to bridge the digital divide. Earlier this year, we moved into our new office space at the Arizona Center on Van Buren, which puts us just a few minutes away from the Downtown campus.

The American Indian Policy Institute added some new staff and said goodbye to others. In January, we hired EJ John (Navajo) as our Policy & Research Analyst. EJ monitors federal, state, and local policy. Because of his expertise he offers policy analysis and contributes to policy development. In March, we hired our first Research Professional, H. Trostle (Cherokee), they research key issues in Indian Country, with an expertise in broadband policy they create documents and presentations on Tribal broadband. Also joining us in March, Kristen Talbert (Dakota), she is our Indigenous



Arizona Center Building

Leadership Academy Program Coordinator, and our first cohort is already in progress! In July, we hired Sadie Vermillion (Pawnee), as the Policy & Research Assistant, she provides support by conducting background policy research and assurance checks for our research and policy arms. In August, we hired Beth Santistevan (Southern Ute), as the Policy & Communications Coordinator. Beth will help us tell our story and elevate our visions by showcasing all the hard work we do at AIPI.

POLICY

POLICY PRIORITIES

Indian Country saw a significant shift in Federal Policy in 2021. The new administration led by President Biden renewed its commitment to Indian Country and took action to engage with Tribes on key issues like infrastructure development, climate change, and voting rights. This new initiative led to many developments in proposed legislation and administrative actions at various government agencies.

Throughout the year, AIPI attended many of the Tribal consultations and congressional hearings that went along with these new developments. Overall, these new initiatives have been supportive of Tribes and they have been a good first step in addressing many of the challenges in Indian Country. [View all of AIPI's monthly policy updates, policy briefs and reviews here.](#)

The Policy & Research team authored three resolutions and presented them to the Technology and Telecommunications Subcommittee where they underwent a rigorous editing and revision process by the Subcommittee. Eventually, the resolutions passed unanimously both through the Subcommittee and the Economic, Finance, and Community Development Committee, and were also taken up and passed in the General Assembly as resolutions for NCAI.

The resolutions put forth by AIPI concerned improvements to the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, emphasized the need for the use of an expansive definition of Connectivity Program, emphasized the need for the use of an expansive definition of Sovereignty.

- [Calling on the Federal Communications Commission, Congress, and the Administration to Discontinue Use of the Designation "Rural Tribal Lands"](#)
- [Calling on the Federal Communications Commission to Increase Access to Spectrum Through Tribal Priority](#)
- [Calling on the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the Treasury Department to Empower Tribal Nations by Excluding the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Duplication Restriction in the Tribal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund Duplication Restriction in the Tribal](#)

POLICY

POLICY PRIORITIES

PUBLISHED

In addition to monthly policy updates, each year the Policy team at AIPI publishes a number of policy briefs and reviews on the latest substantial policies affecting Indian Country. In 2021, AIPI published four such articles:

- Indian Country's Voice: Recognizing, Respecting, and Protecting our Electoral Power
- AIPI Policy Article: How the American Rescue Plan Impacts Indian Country
- AIPI Policy Article: The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program
- AIPI Policy Brief: Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act – Broadband Analysis

BILLS & ACTIONS

Out of the 360 bills and actions reviewed by AIPI in 2021, several were significant:

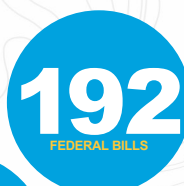
- March 11, 2021 - H.R. 1319 is signed into law, The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021
- August 10, 2021 - H.R. 3684 is signed into law, The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
- October 27, 2022 - H.R. 5746 was introduced, The Freedom to Vote: John R. Lewis Act.

YEAR IN REVIEW

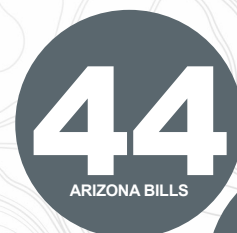
BY THE NUMBERS...



CONGRESSIONAL



FEDERAL



STATE

RESEARCH

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The American Indian Policy Institute has built a strong research team this year. Although our research centered on Tribal broadband, it began to lay the groundwork for future research into climate change, cyber security and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). The team supports the policy arm of AIPI by assisting with the analysis of the major bills from the Federal government, including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.



AIPI Research Professional, H. Trostle

Trostle had a research paper's abstract accepted to the Journal of the American Planning Association and was invited to submit a full paper on Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Tribal broadband data. Trostle's book chapter on the 2.5GHz Tribal Broadband Priority Window is also out for editing and will soon go to peer-review.

AIPI Research Professional H. Trostle spent the July 4th Weekend at the Tribal Wireless Bootcamp at Rantanen Ranch in Southern California. The bootcamp was a chance to learn firsthand how Tribes can deploy their own wireless internet networks.

In May, AIPI launched the *Tribal Broadband* page on the website to consolidate information for individual Tribal members, Tribal nations, providers, organizations, researchers, and others wanting to learn more about Tribal broadband. The page includes information on the Emergency Broadband Benefit, spectrum sovereignty, community network programs, and ways to get involved.

REPRESENTATION

PANELS & PRESENTATIONS

The American Indian Policy Institute was extremely visible in 2021. Staff attended and presented at numerous conferences. The staff are also sought after speakers to represent their work on Tribal broadband and policy. Our message stays consistent with regard to Indigenous research, a primarily participatory approach to research will paint a more clear picture of why a “one size fits all” approach to Indian Country is not the right approach.



AIPI Research Team

The AIPI Research Team presented at the AISES conference, “The Wireless Potential of Native Nations: Notes From the First Tribal Wireless Bootcamp.” the session allowed the AIPI research team to highlight methods used by Native Nations in building Internet service for themselves as well as some of the unique opportunities that can expand digital equity on Tribal lands.



Indigenous Connectivity Summit 2021

INDIGENOUS CONNECTIVITY SUMMIT 2021

AIPI’s participation at the ICS was represented by Dr. Traci Morris, H. Trostle, EJ John and Sadie Vermillion. Sadie, EJ, and H. each earned training certificates for their completion of all 12 of the pre-Summit trainings. Additionally, Dr. Morris and H. Trostle presented an innovative session on broadband mapping.

EJ John took part in a virtual panel for the Practicing Law Institute (PLI) at the 39th Annual Institute on Telecommunications Policy and Regulation in. John discussed issues surrounding the recent investments in Tribal broadband that were made through new laws passed by Congress.



EJ John

REPRESENTATION

AIPI IN THE PRESS

The American Indian Policy Institute has seen a substantial rise in media representation. The need for Tribal broadband has been extremely newsworthy since the pandemic demonstrated the desperate need to bridge that digital divide. Members of the team have been frequently interviewed and authored articles on behalf of AIPI. Here are few media highlights of 2021.



In April, Dr. Morris testified at the "Subcommittee Hearing: Infrastructure in Indigenous Communities: Priorities for the American Job Plan" Morris

expressed the lack of access to reliable

broadband in Indian Country, and the trust responsibility of the Federal Government toward Tribes. In February, Dr. Morris authored an article, "Indian Country's excited about the first Native American secretary of the interior - and the promise she has for addressing issues of importance for all Americans" for "The Conversation".

On May 18, our Policy and Research Analyst, EJ John, took part in joining a conversation "Billions to the Rescue" on Native America Calling to discuss the funding appropriated to Indian Country in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).



In August, Research Professional H Trostle was interviewed by City and State Magazine New York, "Fighting the digital divide with tribally owned fiber."

Trostle commended the Mohawk Nation and their broadband network, but noted there isn't a one size fits all approach for Tribal Broadband.

CAPACITY BUILDING

CAPACITY BUILDING

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The American Indian Policy Institute (AIPI) began the Indigenous Leadership Academy (ILA) this year. With a focus on emerging leaders, there has never been a leadership program like this before in the country. The ILA is designed to be a 10 module course. The one-of-a-kind curriculum was written by Dr. Denise Bates. The Indigenous Leadership Academy was started with seed money from APS. The funding has been renewed for another year from APS, so we are looking forward to another group of amazing emerging Indigenous leaders. We are so grateful for their investment in the American Indian community.

The ILA inaugural cohort has recently been selected. There are 11 tribes represented. All participants live in Arizona and have a passion for working with and for Indigenous communities. [You can find a full list of the cohort on our website.](#)

In conjunction with the Indigenous Leadership Academy, Kristen Talbert authors a biweekly blog which focuses on aspects of leadership centered in Western philosophy but with an Indigenous perspective. She also teams up with the Labriola National American Indian Data Center to cultivate an Indigenous leadership reading list.

THOUGHT LEADERS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

After a competitive application process, the American Indian Policy Institute announced the 2021-2022 inaugural cohort of the Thought Leaders Fellowship Program (TLFP). This year's cohort includes three faculty affiliates, Angela Gonzales Ph.D., Stacy Leeds J.D., and Denise Bates Ph.D.

This highly competitive program has brought together some of the best and brightest Native American academics with the shared goal of furthering Indigenous scholarship and research. The TLFP will provide fellows with a rigorous curriculum and ample opportunities to engage and network with Tribal leaders, industry experts, and university professionals. In conducting their research, fellows will produce publishable-quality research with the option to present at conferences, seminars, and lecture series.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As with many working with or supporting Tribal Nations, 2021 was an incredibly busy year. Following on the heels of the exceptional year of 2020, where everything at AIPI revolved around COVID-19, the pandemic was still not over. The pandemic shone a light on the rurality of Tribal Nations and drove attention to the essential needs which were clearly non-existent in these communities. Native communities were the “canary in the coalmine” and deficiencies in access to information, and health care created an opportunity for AIPI to put our mission into action. Significant legislation impacting Tribal Nations kept everyone busy. There were a few highlights of the year I’d like to mention:



Traci Morris, Executive Director

- Complete staff turnover in 2021; there are six different Tribal nations represented at AIPI.
- A significant capacity-building program was launched
- Four primary policy documents published
- New research objectives were planned
- Representation gained national traction

While you can read more about these in detail throughout this report, I want to explain why this year changed everything. In a nutshell, this is the year the team gelled around a mission of service and put it into practice, the branches that makeup AIPI, policy, research, and capacity building have come to life, and the team at AIPI is solely responsible for its success. I am proud and honored to work with these folks, their commitment to Indian Country is what drives them, the collective team, and shapes all the work we do. So as you read this annual report and as you look at what we’re doing in 2022, keep in mind that this is a highly functioning team making this happen. If you see them at a conference or online, thank them for their work.



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