



# TRIBAL/INTERIOR BUDGET COUNCIL – March 2022 Meeting Minutes

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## Executive Summary

**All presentations, handouts, and attachments are posted to the [TIBC Webpage](#) under [Meeting Materials](#).**

The Tribal/Interior Budget Council (TIBC) convened virtually March 21-25, 2021.

- All six subcommittees convened from March 21-23, 2022.
- On March 24-25, 2022, a quorum was present and official business was conducted.
- A motion to adopt the March 2022 Agenda passed.
- A motion to adopt the September and November meeting minutes passed.
  - During the November 2021 TIBC meeting, the September meeting minutes were incomplete, and a motion to postpone approval of the minutes to the March 2022 meeting passed.
- The TIBC Protocol was adopted by the Tribal members on November 5, 2021.
- TIBC discussed improvements to the FY 2024 Tribal Budget Submission, including the use of estimates of costs for programs where that data is reliable and available. TIBC also discussed the need to continue to improve program data and collaboration with



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Tribes to build capacity to produce that data. A full-year FY 2022 budget was enacted just before the March 2022 TIBC meeting, and Indian Affairs representatives provided a detailed overview of those enacted amounts in comparison to TIBC recommendations and the President’s Budget Request. In addition to regular appropriations, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law,” includes certain advance appropriations that become available over five years and that require an operating plan be submitted by Indian Affairs for the use of such funds. Indian Affairs provided an overview of those efforts and operating plan, which will be included in the President’s Budget Request. Since the President’s FY 2023 Budget Request was not released as of the date of this TIBC meeting, the convening to formulate the TIBC FY 2024 Tribal Budget Submission was postponed until the release of the President’s request. Once the request is released, TIBC representatives will be notified to schedule a meeting to formulation the FY 2024 request. During the March 2022 meeting, one resolution was passed, in support of Forward Funding for the BIE Higher Education Grant Program.

### Opening Remarks

#### **Tribal Co-Chairs Opening Remarks**

*TIBC Tribal Budget Submission Formulation* – Tribal leaders discussed their recommendation to postpone the TIBC Tribal Budget Submission formulation discussion until after the President’s FY 2023 Budget Request for Indian Affairs accounts is released. The methodology developed by the Tribal leaders of TIBC relies on information from the President’s Budget. Developing an FY 2024 recommendation without an FY 2023 budget decreases the efficacy of the collaborative nature of the process by not having a clear picture of the Administration’s plans for FY 2023. A motion to postpone the formulation of the FY 2024 tribal budget submission until after the release of the FY 2023 Indian Affairs budget request passed.

*White House Council on Native American Affairs* – Tribal leaders discussed the issue of the White House Council on Native American Affairs (WHCNAA) having no Tribal leaders on the council. Tribal leaders expressed their concern that convening the WHCNAA to develop or improve Federal Indian policy without Tribal government representatives on the council is a continuation of paternalistic governance over Native American Affairs. One Tribal leader expressed that the Federal government should not be making policy “about us, without us.”

*Interagency MOU on Treaty and Reserved Rights* – Tribal leaders expressed concern that the [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) Regarding Interagency Coordination and Collaboration for the Protection of Tribal Treaty Rights and Reserved Rights](#) was not signed by the Executive Office of the President (EOP), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), or the Department of the Treasury (Treasury). Executive Order (E.O.) 13175 on Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments states that, “Agencies shall respect Indian tribal self-government and sovereignty, honor tribal treaty and other rights, and strive to meet the responsibilities that arise from the unique legal relationship between the Federal Government and Indian tribal governments.” E.O. 13175 defines the term “Agency” as any executive department, military department, Government corporation, Government controlled corporation, or other establishment in the executive branch of the Government (including the Executive Office of the President)[.]”



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Tribal leaders expressed that the exclusion of EOP, OMB, and Treasury from this MOU is either an oversight or a continuation of gate-keeping policy on the United States' trust and treaty obligations to Tribes.

*TIBC Tribal Budget Submission and Unmet Obligations* – Tribal leaders are changing their approach to the TIBC Tribal Budget Submission for FY 2024 to reflect estimates of the full obligation of programs, where that data is available. Tribal leaders are concerned that compliance with an increase or decrease scenario for the Tribal recommendation creates an unfair comparison of progress on fulfilling the trust and treaty obligations because the actual need may be several magnitudes greater than what is put forward in a particular increase scenario. So, beginning with this year's TIBC Tribal Budget Submission, certain estimates for programs and their methodologies will be included in the recommendation so that the progress of the Administration and Congress can be measured against the true obligation of that particular program. Eventually, Tribal leaders would like to have an estimate for each program, but instead of waiting until 100 percent of the data is in place, the Tribal leaders of TIBC have decided to put forward estimates and methodologies for arriving at those estimates where those amounts are readily available. Indian Affairs replied that it wants to share that story as well, noting that it is largely made up of tribal citizens who want to go back to their communities someday when their work is done and know that they worked to tell the truth for Indian Country. Indian Affairs also identified that there is a measure of current practices and there is a measure for best practices. Indian Affairs is committed to exploring best practices and what is actually needed, and not just current practices.

*DOI Coordination with Congress on Budget and Appropriations Policy* - Tribal leaders across Subcommittees underscored the importance of the Administration working with Budget Committees in Congress, in addition to Appropriations Committees to achieve necessary changes in funding such as accounting for CSC and Section 105(l) lease payments as mandatory spending and providing for Advance Appropriations for all Indian Affairs accounts.

*Trust Services at the Local Level* – Some Tribal leaders were having issues connecting with Trust officers for beneficiary services at the local level. Tribal leaders were concerned that the streamlining efforts of BTFA may have affected responsiveness to services. Representatives from BTFA asked to connect with commenters directly to hear more details and address their concern both at the local level and system wide, if there is an issue to address.

*Assessment on Regulatory Changes Since January 20, 2021* – Tribal leaders request an assessment on the progress that Indian Affairs is making in addressing the structural changes during the Trump Administration that resulted in decreased services across Indian Affairs programs and activities.

*Unmet Obligations Assessment Commitment* – Tribal leaders requested that the Administration commit to working with Tribes to develop an estimate of the unmet obligations of each Indian Affairs program. Indian Affairs representatives supported the proposal and hoped for continued follow up with TIBC and with all Tribes to address the costs to fully operate each Indian Affairs program. Tribal leaders greatly appreciate the commitment, but recognize that resources and



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personnel are necessary to achieve this data collection effort. Indian Affairs recognizes and supports that additional resources are needed, but note that there are several currently advertised positions to begin to work on this data effort.

*Data Capacity at Tribal Governments* – Tribal leaders propose that tribal governments are in the best position to collect their own data, but that tribal governments need resources to build this capacity. While some Tribes have been working to collect and analyze data on issues for a very long time, others may lack the resources to do so, which makes an unequal playing field for producing this data. Tribal leaders commented during this discussion that the intent of building capacity to collaborate on data with the Federal government is not for means testing, which is incongruent with the trust and treaty obligations of the United States to Tribes. Tribal leaders also discussed that data capacity is needed, but that other data analytics use representative samples all of the time and are routinely relied on by the Federal government. As such, Tribes and the Federal government should work together to develop representative data samples so that progress can be made on cost estimates for better funding, regardless of whether 100 percent of the data is in place.

### **Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs (AS-IA) Opening Remarks**

*Land Into Trust Process* – The BIA put together a team it calls a strike force to address the Land Into Trust application process, unifying the procedure of staff across the bureau in the land into trust process. Indian Affairs has unified this process across bureau staff to make sure that the regulations are easy to navigate and the process for federal staff is consistent. These improvements streamline the process and make the timeline more predictable for Tribes.

*Public Safety and Justice Investments* – The Administration was happy to see investments in public safety and justice in the FY 2022 Omnibus spending bill. Indian Affairs staff frequently hear about the need for more resources for Public Safety and Justice across Indian Country and are dedicated to advocating for these resources as an ongoing high priority of the Administration.

*Board School Initiative* – The initial Boarding School Report will be submitted to Secretary Haaland on April 1. Once transmitted the Secretary will make a determination on next actions. Indian Affairs is also pleased that the FY 2022 Omnibus spending bill includes funding to continue the work of the Boarding School Initiative. The initial phases were funded using existing resources, and dedicated resources to further this mission will help address the healing of tribal communities related to the effects of boarding schools.

*Renewable Energy* – Indian Affairs received funding for renewable energy in the FY 2022 Omnibus spending bill and is excited to continue the priorities of the Administration to build a sustainable and renewable energy future for Indian Country.

*Indian Land Consolidation Account* – Indian Affairs is happy that Congress adopted funding for the Indian Land Consolidation account proposed by the Administration, despite it being funded at drastically less than the President's Budget recommended. Indian Affairs recognizes the importance of having this funded account in place as the Cobell Settlement funding and authority expires. Restoring Tribal homelands will continue to be a top priority of this Administration.



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Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons – The initiative of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons continues to be a top priority of the Administration and of Indian Affairs. DOI continues to work with the Department of Justice (DOJ) as part of the White House Council on Native American Affairs; the Savannahs Act, for which DOJ is the lead; and the Not Invisible Act, for which DOI is the lead for part, and DOJ and DOI work collaboratively on another.

Renegotiation of Interagency Agreement on “477” Program – Indian Affairs continues to work on the renegotiation of the Interagency Agreement on the “477” Program.

Land Into Trust Application Process – On average, applications currently take approximate 960 days to complete. Indian Affairs finds this timeline unacceptable and is working on solutions to reduce the amount of time it takes to complete a land into trust application. 1,100 applications are currently submitted, representing approximately 250,000 acres. Indian Affairs is working on updates to the regulations that are intended to reduce the time it takes to complete an application to less than one year.

Tribal Management and Co-Management – The WHCNAA is working on implementation of [Joint Secretarial Order 3403](#) on Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters and is asking for Tribes to submit proposals for management and co-management plans so that solutions to the stewardship of Federal lands and waters can be tribally-driven and tribally lead. The Administration encourages submission of stewardship proposals pursuant to this order as one way to engage directly with the WHCNAA.

Secretary’s Tribal Advisory Committee – DOI continues to work to finalize membership nominations and get the Secretary’s Tribal Advisory Committee off the ground and running.

### Bureau of Indian Affairs Update and Discussion

BIA Staffing – BIA continues to address staffing and advertise current and new positions. The pandemic continues to impact employment across sectors, both public and private. While some aspects of hiring have been slow to fill, others have been successful, such as Emergency Management Staff, which has tripled since the pandemic. In the instance of BIA Office of Justice Services (OJS) personnel, a waiver has been granted for OJS to conduct its own internal background investigations that allow personnel to begin their academy training while their federal background check is being completed. This is an improvement because the length of time it takes to get a federal background investigation was causing approved applicants to miss training schedules at the police academy, which puts an otherwise approved employee behind schedule in training.

Indian Land Consolidation – BIA was a bit disappointed in the FY 2022 Omnibus funding bill for the amount provided for the Indian Land Consolidation Program. The President’s Budget Request for FY 2022 was \$150 million. The House recommended \$75 million. The final enacted amount was only \$7 million. BIA staff recognize the importance of restoring tribal homelands and will continue to pursue funding for this programs. Even though the Cobell settlement



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authority expires in November 2022, the BIA has no intention of letting go any realty staff. The process is important, and retaining staff to continue to the work is important.

*Return to Work Plan* – BIA has a return to work plan that is in place. It is a four phase approach that is scheduled to be implemented by May 2022; however, BIA also recognizes that it must respond to the pandemic and any changes that may arise. If a new variant emerges that affects national progress in addressing the pandemic, the BIA is prepared to adjust its schedule accordingly. The BIA is also committed to honor the decisions of Tribal governments with respect to the pandemic.

*BIA Field Operations and Budget Update* – For the BIA Field Operations and Distributions of Funds update, please click [here](#).

*Timely Drawdown of Funds* - BIA Field Operations and the Office of Budget and Performance Management (OBPM) underscored the importance of drawing down funds timely and particularly drawing down funds so that they are not returned to Treasury. Today's discussion, and many other discussions of TIBC, have centered on the unmet costs throughout Indian Country. Tribes and Indian Affairs reach out to Congress to advocate for additional funds, but when funds are not drawn down timely or are not drawn down at all and are returned to Treasury as they expire, it presents the narrative to Congress that the funds are not needed or that Tribes do not know what to do with the funds received. In order to help all Tribes receive more funding, it is critical that funds are drawn down timely.

### Bureau of Indian Education Update and Discussion

*Update* – To view BIE's detailed update, click [here](#).

*ISEP Funds for Allowable Operations and Maintenance* – Tribal leaders raised the issue of the BIE weighted student unit being less than the comparable per student investment in public school students and that the actual amount going to students is even less due to inadequate funding for facilities operations and maintenance. There are certain allowable expenses within ISEP funding to address BIE schools operations and maintenance and schools often use ISEP dollars to address these needs because of the condition of the school facilities. Tribal leaders expressed that they often have no other choice because you need a functioning facility. However, this means that addressing the ongoing operations and maintenance of the facility results in further diminished ISEP resources for students. Tribal and Federal partners agree that the issue is driven by insufficient Congressional appropriations for Facilities Operations, Facilities Maintenance, and the Education Construction Account Facilities Improvement and Repair. Tribal leaders call on BIE to request increases for these facilities accounts so that ISEP funds are not repurposed for the unmet obligation of maintaining habitable and functioning BIE schools.

*School Replacement Costs* – In furtherance of the FY 2024 Tribal Budget Submission approach of including actual costs for certain Indian Affairs activities, Tribal leaders and Federal partners discussed the costs of school replacement. Representatives of Indian Affairs stated that the current cost estimate for the replacement of one school is approximately \$85 million as of March 2022.



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*Projected Birthrates for School Size Estimates* – Tribal Leaders comment that there is a restriction against using projected birth rates for the estimate of school size for building, etc. Tribal leaders comment that there is a need to develop buildings that recognize the birth rate and growth of tribal communities so that the facilities can be the appropriate size for when children begin their education. The rate of construction and school replacement under the current funding is such that being unable to use projected birthrates to estimate school sizes substantially harms communities in their efforts to educate their children.

### Bureau of Trust Funds Administration Update and Discussion

Update – To view BTFA’s detailed update, click [here](#).

### Indian Affairs Budget Update and Discussion

Update – To view the Office of Budget and Performance Management (OBPM), Budget Formulation and Financial Management’s detailed update, click [here](#). To view the latest BIA Comp tables, comparing enacted spending to TIBC Recommendations, click [here](#); for the BIE Comp table, click [here](#).

*NATIVE Act* – Tribal leaders asked about the funds provided to implement the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act, including whether the money has been awarded and/or expended and what are the criteria for the award of those funds. Indian Affairs replied that the funds have been awarded and there is a grant award process that is implemented by the Office of Indian Economic Development (OIED). Funds are awarded as part of the Tribal Tourism Grants Program (TTGP), a competitive, discretionary program administered by OIED’s Division of Economic Development. For information on the TTGP, click [here](#).

*Tribal Request vs President’s Request vs Enacted* – Tribal leaders thank Indian Affairs for its work in presenting the TIBC Tribal Request versus the President’s Budget Request vs the amount enacted by Congress. However, Tribal leaders also point out that the information provided for comparison in the OBPM presentation appears to indicate success in the budget formulation and appropriations process, where the reality of the full obligation is much greater. Tribal leaders discussed the importance that visual representations such as these reflect the full picture of program costs so that they are not misleading to those that are not familiar with the conditions of Indian Country or the details of the trust and treaty obligations to Tribes.

*Indian Reorganization Act Caps on Land Acquisition* – the authority for land acquisition within the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (IRA of ’34) is relied on, in part, to continue the restoration of tribal homelands after the expiration of the Cobell Settlement resources and authority. There is a \$2 million cap on the dollar amount for acquisition authority pursuant to the IRA of ’34. Indian Affairs worked with Congress to reason that the cap established in 1934 does not make sense in 2022, but Congress ultimately did not act to adjust the dollar amount cap on this land acquisition authority. Indian Affairs requested \$14 million and reasoned that it should at least be raised to \$10 million. Tribal leaders were upset that Congress would not adjust this





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dollar amount cap on the authority and asked who in Congress doesn't understand that the cost of land has increased since 1934?

### Legislative Update

Legislative Funding Update – To view the Legislative Update presentation, click [here](#).

Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization – to view a legislative update presentation on the recently reauthorized Violence Against Women Act, click [here](#).

Domestic Violence and Drug Addiction Resources – Tribal leaders note that there is often a strong link between domestic violence and drug addiction, and it underscores the need for federal resources and coordination of resources to combat drug use and addiction as part of the holistic approach of addressing domestic violence.

### Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Overview

Update – To view the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law Overview Presentation, click [here](#).

### Subcommittee Report Outs

#### Public Safety and Justice

- Tribal leader request for better DOJ/DOI collaboration on tribal public safety and justice issues.
- OJS said it would provide a report at the next meeting of total public safety and justice spending compared to Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) report cost estimates – are the operations losing or gaining ground?
- OJS said it would provide an analysis of public safety and justice spending compared to inflation.
- Tribal leaders want to know why the TLOA report relies on 2013 Labor Force Report data.
- Tribal leaders ask why the President's Budget Requests does not incorporate the findings of TLOA reports for cost estimates in its requests.
- Tribal leaders want more first responders for Missing and Murdered in tribal communities, underscoring the importance of the first 48 hours.
- Tribal leaders support more funding in response to the *McGirt* Decision.
- Tribal leaders seek to further discuss how the *McGirt* decision affects Tribes in P.L. 280 states?
- Tribal leaders would like to discuss how the public safety and justice needs for Tribes in P.L. 280 states being addressed by the Administration in the Budget, beyond the amounts Congress is choosing to appropriate?
- Tribal leaders want to discuss changes in operations and budgets in response to VAWA Reauthorization. How will DOJ, DOI, and DHHS collaborate on changes?

#### Transportation

- The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law requires a report on tribal roads, in consultation with Tribes. What are the BIA's plans to accomplish this report with Tribes?



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- Tribal leaders proposed that TIBC could be a forum to collaborate on the transportation funding distribution methodology.
- Tribal leaders discussed how weather events have an outsized impact on gravel and earthen roads that can be completely washed out by a single event, making tribal transportation facilities acutely vulnerable to extreme weather events in comparison to other transportation networks with greater numbers of paved roads.
- Tribal leaders discussed action on the Roads Data Pilot Project and asked for a commitment from Indian Affairs to move the project forward.

### Budget

- Tribal leaders discussed how to best restructure TIBC recommendations in the annual Tribal Budget Submission to capture unmet obligations.
- Tribal leaders want a commitment from the Administration to measure and request that Congress fulfill Unmet Trust and Treaty obligations as part of the President's Budget Request.
- Tribal leaders propose studying models for measuring unmet obligations, such as through the IHS Budget Formulation Workgroup. The Administration should work with IHS to discuss their process to consider improvements. Tribal leaders emphasize that this is not a request to identically adopt the process, but to use best practices. How does IHS end up better off in the Budget Formulation Process than Indian Affairs with the Administration?
- Tribal leaders want to improve the TIBC formulation process to tell the whole story of obligations to demonstrate that increases year over year against the total unmet obligation show that the increases in spending are comparatively not even close to the Treaty and Trust obligations owed.

### Data

- Indian Affairs offered to provide and produce construction assessment lists for consideration as part of the TIBC Tribal Budget Submission.
- Tribal leaders recommend that the DOI Strategic Plan needs greater collaboration with Tribes in its development.
- Tribal leaders discussed the need for an Indian Affairs-specific Strategic Plan?
- Tribal leaders discussed deficiencies in the goals and methodology of the strategic plan such as GPRA measures that do not measure mission performance, only program performance (did the money get out on time, instead of: was the money enough, is the mission operating in a way that supports achievement of its purpose).
- Tribal leaders proposed that strategic plans with regard to nation-to-nation relationships should adopt a diplomatic model, not a grants recipient model. The failure is that the practices and processes of Indian Affairs do not match the language that they are using in reports.
- What are Indian Affairs' use and plans with the Tribal Citizenship Enrollment Data? Are there plans to keep this data up to date?
- Tribal leaders have continuing concern over the lack of progress on the DOL Labor Force Report, noting that DOL – Employment and Training Administration passed the project off to DOL – Bureau of Labor Statistics. Tribal leaders re-emphasize the call for a Tribal Working Group to unpack the findings of its issue paper report. The working group needs



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to have tribal leaders and not exclusively data experts. Tribal leaders also seek better collaboration between Indian Affairs and BLS on this report.

### **Land, Water, and Natural Resources**

- Tribal leaders expressed concern over the lack of engagement from federal partners that have specific programmatic expertise on the projects that are known and have been underway for several meetings.
- Tribal leaders seek broad support from TIBC and the Administration on passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 2773/ S. 2372) because it would drastically increase funding for Natural Resources programs for Tribes.
- Tribal Leaders discussed using geospatial mapping (like ARC GIS) to develop maps of tribal lands as they relate to other federal lands, as a method of supporting co-management opportunities with data.
- Tribal leaders want more funding for co-management of federal lands and resources.
- Tribal leaders want successful pilot programs taken out of perpetual pilot phase and implemented for all Tribes (Ex: Alaska Subsistence).
- Tribal leaders promote the use of Tribal Ecological Knowledge as a solution to reduce costs associated with climate change (Ex: burning underbrush for wildfire fuels reduction, managing snowpack to promote habitat restoration, and reforestation planning that doesn't plant trees so close they make fires worse and starve other parts of the natural habitat)
- Bio-Mass and Co-Generation Energy Projects could be implemented as part of co-management projects that reduce underbrush.
- Tribal leaders want to discuss further with IA on the best account funding location to improve co-management activities that comply with Tribal leaders discussion and goals (TPA lines or TMDP, etc.)

### **Education**

- To view the Education Subcommittee overview presentation, click [here](#).
- Tribal leaders support and would like to promote collaborative data assessment projects on shortfalls for schools.
- Tribal leaders ask the administration to ask for increased Operations and Maintenance funding in its Budget Request to Congress. Why does the Administration keep underestimating these costs? Tribal leaders discussed that these needs are necessary, but the Administration must request the adequate resources to address these issues, instead of relying on borrowing the funds from accounts intended to benefit Native students and teachers.
- Tribal leaders also discussed the use of ISEP funds to pay for staff for the lunch room. School nutrition programs are important, but Tribal leaders have issue with pulling from ISEP funds to pay personnel for child nutrition due to how underfunded ISEP is. Tribal leaders request support from Indian Affairs and from other Tribes in getting USDA to cover more of the cost of providing meals at schools, so that ISEP funding can go to student learning in the classroom.
- Tribal leaders were pleased to see that employee benefits were extended to BIE teachers and that pay is indexed to Department of Defense pay scale. Tribal leaders support these



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increases in pay to get better salaries, but it underscores the need for additional funds for BIE to pay teachers and to improve the investment for students in the classroom.

- BIE said it would provide an analysis on ESSA Title VI funding to BIE-funded schools.
- Tribal leaders want to explore why BIE-funded schools do not receive Impact Aid Funding. Tribal leaders call on the Administration to support that funding intended for the benefit of Native students go to where those Native students actually go to school.
- Omnibus guidance calls for BIE to include fixed costs for TCUs that were excluded from its FY 2022 request. What is the status of including these fixed costs increases in the budget request?
- Tribal leaders continue to call for discussion on solutions to the moratorium on expanding BIE-funded schools.

### New/Old Business

Subcommittee Attendance – meeting quorum in subcommittee has been a recurring issue, but attendance for each subcommittee meeting was recently very high, including a high number of TIBC voting members and key federal partners. Tribal leaders discussed filling the vacancies where identified, but also noted that actions in subcommittee can still be brought forward during a full TIBC meeting with a quorum present, so there is nothing specifically limiting the work that is being done in Subcommittee. The final resolution of this issue was postponed so that a motion in support of a resolution could be discussed before the end the meeting.

Forward Funding for BIE Higher Education Grant Program – A motion was put forward by the Navajo Nation in support of forward funding for the higher education grant program. The motion passed and a final record of the resolution will be posted on the TIBC webpage and transmitted to Indian Affairs.

In Person vs Virtual for the Next TIBC Meeting – Indian Affairs is able to meet in person if the location is a low-risk area at the time of the meeting. If the area is considered high risk for the transmission of COVID, it will need to seek approval to attend those meetings of 50 or more. Indian Affairs representatives expressed that having the meeting in person could be a very risky and costly endeavor. Since the pandemic is still taking place, but there are not situations like emergency declarations in place, that could result in spending Tribal and federal resources booking the event only to cancel and not be able to recover those expenses. Indian Affairs is eager to meet again, in person, but wants to be cautious of wasting federal funds that are for the benefit of Tribes on booking an in-person meeting with ongoing pandemic uncertainty.