

March 26, 2008

Deborah J. Cavett  
Executive Director  
White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities  
1990 K St., N.W. Room 7010  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Ms. Cavett,

On behalf of the nation's 36 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which comprise the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), I am writing to voice an ongoing concern regarding federally funded collaborative projects involving TCUs and other higher education partners, in which the tribal colleges play a minor, and often token role. Over the past several years, we have encountered an increasing number of cases in which one or more tribal colleges is included in a proposal, either without any real participation on the part of TCU academic administrators in the planning process, or in some cases without actual knowledge about the project proposal prior to submission.

We understand that most federal grant programs make an effort to support proposals that are likely to have an impact on underserved populations. We believe that this priority has led to a situation where TCUs are sometimes used to demonstrate the project's "broader impact" for the benefit of the reviewers. However, if the proposal is ultimately funded, project activities often fail to address priorities of the tribal college in a manner that is likely to prove successful, or the project budget fails to include the resources necessary for the TCU to accomplish stated goals.

The tribal colleges have strong partnerships among mainstream higher education institutions that have led to positive programmatic outcomes for all institutions involved. However, an attitude exists among some institutions that tribal colleges can be exploited for their status as minority serving institutions, with little need to work with them as equal partners.

To address this concern, we respectfully request that the following policy be established within all federal grant programs: *Any collaborative proposal involving TCUs in which a non-TCU is the lead institution must include, among the supporting documents, letters of support and commitment from the TCU signed by an authorized representative of the institution (e.g. the president, chief academic officer, or director of sponsored programs).*

Although this measure alone is not likely to rectify this problem, it will help limit some of the more excessive abuses the tribal colleges have experienced. This request results from a motion passed by the AIHEC Board of Directors, on which the presidents of all accredited Tribal Colleges and Universities sit, at our Spring 2008 Board meeting in Bismarck, ND. The motion is as follows:



**MOTION:** That the AIHEC Board of Directors requests that the White House Initiative on Tribal Colleges and Universities (WHITCU) urge all federal departments and agencies to require that any proposal for federal funds (in response to a Request for Proposals or "RFP"), which directly or indirectly names tribal college(s) or AIHEC in the proposal, but is not submitted by a tribal college or university or AIHEC, must include documentation confirming that tribal college administration or AIHEC, as relevant, is fully informed of and supports the college's role in the proposed project. Further, the Board directs AIHEC staff to prepare and send a letter to all federal departments urging the adoption of the policy set forth above.

**OUTCOME:** The motion was agreed to by voice vote.

I am confident that you will work with federal agencies to address this important issue, and I thank you for your attention to our concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Crazy Bull  
Chair, AIHEC Board of Directors and  
President, Northwest Indian College