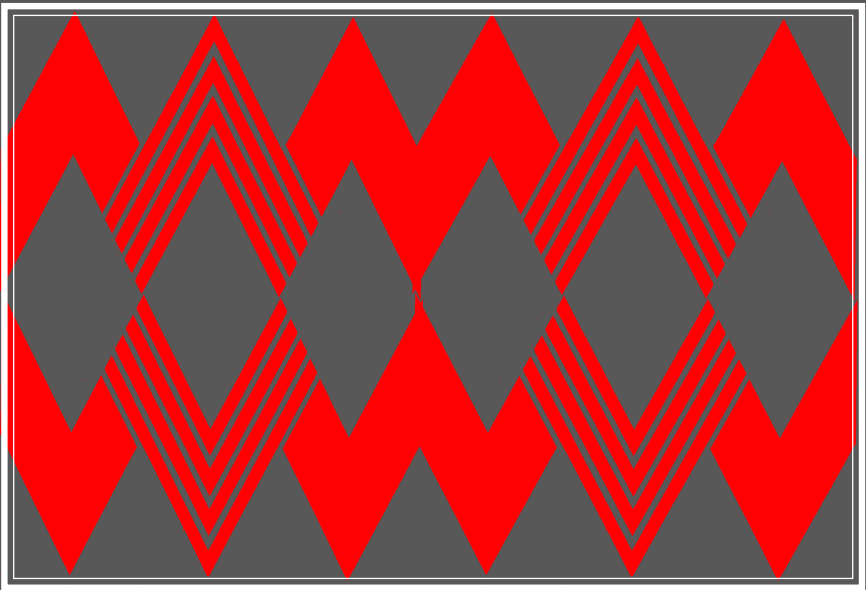


CONNECTING

Indian Country



**Tribally-Driven
Telecommunications
Policy**



The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was founded in 1944 in response to the termination and assimilation policies of the United States. NCAI stressed the need for unity and cooperation among native governments for the protection of their treaty and sovereign rights. Since its inception, NCAI has been working to inform the public and Congress on the governmental rights of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Today, NCAI is the largest national organization representing American Indian and Alaska Native governments.

NCAI wishes to thank all of its Digital Divide Task Force members and advisors and the AOL-Time Warner Foundation for their support. This project would not have been possible without their counsel and assistance.

- July 2001

CONNECTING

Indian Country:

**Tribally-Driven
Telecommunications
Policy**

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INTRODUCTION

As inner-city and rural areas work to make high-speed Internet services available to their citizens, much of Indian Country struggles with a much more fundamental problem - how to build a basic telecommunications structure for their communities.

In 1999, two groundbreaking studies found that the telecommunications capability of Native American and Alaska Native areas lags far behind the rest of the United States. First, the Economic Development Administration published a technology infrastructure survey based on the responses of 48 tribes. The survey found that, within the responding Native communities, that only 39 percent of the rural households had basic telephone service, with far fewer having personal computers (9 percent) and Internet access (8 percent).¹

One month later, the Commerce Department issued similarly bleak statistics in a comprehensive report that compared telephone, computer, and Internet penetration among U.S. populations. It showed that, for telephone penetration, rural Native American households rank far below the national average (76.4 percent to 94.1 percent). With respect to computers, the number of rural Native American households with a computer was much lower than the national average (26.8 percent to 42.1 percent), as was the number of Native American households with access to the Internet (18.9 percent to 26.2 percent)².

Without access to technology, Indian Country cannot participate fully in the digital economy, nor can it harness the latest tools to improve the delivery of health care and education to community members. However, access is just one of many significant issues that must be addressed. With access comes the responsibility of making technology relevant to broader community needs. In fact, the technology gap in Native communities may be best seen as encompassing several distinct areas - access, economic development (including workforce training and education), content, and sovereignty.

¹Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Assessment of Technology Infrastructures in Native Communities*: June 1999.

²National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, *Falling Through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide*: July 1999.

In June 2000, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) received a grant from the AOL-Time Warner Foundation to provide leadership for tribes that are seeking to address telecommunications policy within their communities. Since that time, NCAI has worked through its Digital Divide Task Force³, Tribal Leader Summits⁴, and the Internet⁵ to close the technology gap in Indian Country.

This report highlights the recommendations that have resulted from NCAI's efforts to date. However, because telecommunications and technology are constantly changing and because different tribes have different needs, the recommendations that follow should be viewed as a starting point for continued discussion with tribal leaders about their policy priorities and goals.

A CCESS

The families of the Santa Rosa Reservation in California know all too well the tragic results that can arise from the lack of basic telephone service. In April 2001, as Thomas Torteze returned home from a tribal meeting, he discovered a car accident, one that involved his two daughters, aged 20 and 12. Because there was no phone on the reservation, he could not dial "911" for assistance. Instead, he was forced to drive his daughters to a fire station nearly ten miles away. There, officials called for help, but it was too late for his 20-year-old daughter, who died as a result of injuries. The impact of this and other similar incidents likely would have been lessened had residents been able to dial "911." Today, Anza Electric Cooperative, the U.S. Forest Service, and Verizon are working with the Tribe to install phone service on the Reservation.

It is astounding that entire communities in the United States still find themselves without the basic ability to call for emergency help on a telephone in this age of broadband Internet access. It should not take loss of life or property to spur federal agencies and the private sector to work with tribes to

³ See Appendix A.

⁴ See Appendix B.

⁵ NCAI's web-based technology infrastructure clearinghouse can be found at www.indiantech.org.

develop a telecommunications and technology infrastructure. Instead, federal agencies and business should pro-actively support public and private sector policies that will help to build a telecommunications system that meets the demands of the 21st Century.

Today, the lack of infrastructure and equipment is the greatest obstacle to connectivity in Native communities. In addition, limited access to capital often prevents tribes from building telecommunications systems and seriously undermines the formation of tribally-owned businesses that could provide telecommunications services. In order to address this fundamental issue of access, participants at NCAI's Tribal Leader Digital Divide Summit, held in November 2000, set forth the following recommendations.

The high cost of telecommunications services must be addressed.

In June 2000, the Federal Communications Commission took steps to improve two federal universal service programs that are designed to ensure that low-income Native Americans can afford telephone service.

Link-Up America provides qualified residents on tribal lands with up to \$100 to cover the costs associated with connecting to the telephone network. Eligible charges include any connection charges the carrier customarily assesses, including facilities-based charges associated with line extensions or the construction of facilities needed to initiate service. The subsidy does not apply to charges for facilities or equipment on the customer side of the connection, such as inside wiring. Link-Up also includes a plan to encourage local telephone companies to offer low-income subscribers a deferred payment plan for hook-up charges.

The Lifeline Assistance program waives the federal subscriber line charges (currently \$3.50) for qualified subscribers and an additional reduction in a qualified subscriber's local phone bill. Carriers may receive between \$30.25 and \$32.85 in monthly subsidies for qualifying subscribers on tribal lands, depending on factors such as state matching. As a result, most qualifying subscribers receive local phone service for \$1 per month.

Universal Service Eligibility

Currently, eligibility for the Link-Up and Lifeline programs is determined by the federal government, based on participation in certain programs, such as Medicaid, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income, federal public housing assistance, and the Low income Home Energy Assistance Program. Sub-

scribers on tribal lands may also count participation in any of the following programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Head Start (if income eligible), or the National School Lunch Program. Some tribal leaders have expressed concern that these eligibility requirements are too narrow and that they fail to include all needy individuals, some of whom may not receive services from federal means-tested programs.

NCAI urges the FCC to consult with tribal nations regarding the current Life-line/Link-Up eligibility criteria to ensure that it is broad enough to include all Native households that do not have access to basic telephone service, and to examine whether tribal nations should be authorized to set their own eligibility criteria for participation in these programs.

Eligible Telecommunications Carriers

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 requires certain criteria to be met for designation as an eligible telecommunications carrier in order to receive Life-line and other universal service support. The law requires states to make these designations for carriers over which they have jurisdiction, and the FCC to make designations for carriers that are not subject to state jurisdiction.

In June 2000, the FCC established a process for carriers to determine from whom they should seek designation to receive support to serve high-cost areas, both on tribal lands and non-tribal lands. Under this framework, carriers seeking a designation of eligibility for service provided on tribal lands may petition the FCC for designation, and the FCC will proceed to a determination on the merits of such a petition if it determines that the carrier is not subject to the jurisdiction of a state commission. The FCC also committed to resolving requests for designation for the provision of service on tribal lands within six months of determining that the carrier is not subject to the jurisdiction of a state commission. Finally, the FCC issued a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comment on the adoption of a rule that would require designation requests filed under section 214(e), either with the FCC or a state commission, to be resolved within six months of the filing date and on alternative methods by which state commissions, tribal authorities, and FCC can work together to further facilitate the expeditious resolution of designation requests from carriers serving tribal lands.

The FCC should make a formal commitment to act promptly on pending and future petitions seeking designation as eligible carriers on tribal lands, including petitions from tribal telecommunications companies and from wireless and satellite carriers.

Publicizing Universal Service Programs

FCC rules currently require eligible telecommunications carriers to publicize the availability of Lifeline and Link-Up support in a manner designed to reach those likely to qualify for these programs. According to testimony received at the NCAI Tribal Leader Digital Divide Summit, held on May 15, 2001, this requirement is not being met on Indian lands with any regularity. Several tribal representatives expressed their frustration with their local carriers' failure to promote these programs to tribal subscribers. On the other hand, tribal telecommunications companies, such as Gila River Telecommunications, Inc., have publicized Link-Up and Lifeline through a variety of mechanisms, including door-to-door promotions.

The only way that universal service programs will be successful in increasing connectivity to telephone service is through consumer use. *Therefore, NCAI urges the FCC to work with telecommunications carriers and tribal nations to develop more effective methods of publicizing universal service programs that benefit Native consumers, and to take appropriate remedial action against those telecommunications carriers that fail to promote and provide Lifeline and Link-Up on tribal lands.*

The federal government should encourage tribal-business partnerships and should provide incentives to businesses that provide telecommunications services to tribal nations.

FCC Tribal Lands Bidding Credit for Wireless Services

FCC rules that took effect in October 2000 established a bidding credit program for actions to provide incentives to wireless telecommunications to serve tribal lands. The credit equals \$300,000 for the first 200 square miles of qualifying tribal land, plus \$1,500 for each additional square mile, not to exceed \$500,000. A bidding credit recipient must file a performance certification three years following the initial license which shows that it has constructed and is operating a system capable of serving 75% of the population of the tribal land.

NCAI encourages the FCC to work with Indian nations to promote the tribal lands bidding credit and to ensure that recipients of the credit deploy wireless services in a manner that meets the needs of tribal consumers.

FCC Indian Telecom Training Initiative (ITTI)

For the last two years, the FCC has sponsored conferences designed to provide information to tribal leaders and businesses to help increase telecommunications services to tribal residents. The 2000 ITTI conference included approximately 600 participants and 32 booths from 27 different business and government entities. The 2001 ITTI-Industry Conference, held in June, addressed industry's questions on initiating contact and developing programs with tribal governments. It covered tribal priorities and business opportunities in telecommunications, how to work with tribal governments, tribal sovereignty issues, and community protocols and concerns as they relate to building telecommunications and utilities infrastructure and markets. At ITTI 2001, to be held in September, the FCC and National Exchange Carrier Association will bring together their own experts, along with representatives from other federal government agencies, telecommunication companies and emerging technology firms, to inform tribal governments about various facets of telecommunications services and how different technologies, regulatory rules, and government programs can be used to benefit tribal communities.

NCAI supports ITTI as a way to increase tribal-business networking and urges the FCC to work directly with NCAI and other tribal organizations on conference planning and publicity efforts.

NATIVE Act

On April 24, 2001, Senators Baucus (D-MT), Daschle (D-SD), Bingaman (D-NM), and Johnson (D-SD) introduced the Native American Telecommunications Improvement and Value Enhancement Act (NATIVE Act, S. 761), which would create a \$1 billion revolving loan fund for tribal cooperatives or tribal entities that have partnered with a telecommunications carrier to create a wireline or wireless telecommunications infrastructure. The NATIVE Act also would establish a grant program to provide matching grants to tribes to conduct feasibility studies for tribal telecommunications projects.

Both the revolving loan and grant program would expire when 94 percent of households on tribal lands have telephone service or ten years after the date that the first loan is made, whichever comes first.

NCAI strongly supports the enactment of S. 761 and other legislative proposals designed to promote the deployment of basic telephone service, as well as advanced technologies, to Indian Country.

Technology Neutral Internet Deployment

Two pending bills, S. 966 and H.R. 2038, would authorize the Agriculture Department's Rural Utilities Service, in conjunction with the Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration, to provide low-interest loans and other extensions of credit to companies that provide broadband technology to rural and underserved areas. Eligibility would be "technology neutral," which means that broadband services could be provided via satellite, telephone, cable, wireless, or any other kind of technology. Funds could be used to cover the costs of construction, improvement, and acquisition of facilities and equipment.

NCAI supports the passage of proposals, such as S. 966 and H.R. 2038, which take a technology-neutral approach to the deployment of high-speed Internet access to underserved areas.

Tribes should have a portion of the broadcast spectrum reserved for their use.

There is evidence that wireless technology can be used to provide basic and advanced telecommunications to Indian Country in some unserved areas at a more economical rate than traditional wireline service. Despite this, the majority of Indian tribes have been excluded from spectrum auction proceedings.

NCAI recommends that the FCC provide for a specific allocation of spectrum that will benefit tribal nations. In addition to spectrum at 3,650 to 3,700 MHz, the FCC should consider the allocation of Part 15 unlicensed spectrum at 900 MHz, 2.4 GHz, 5 GHz, and 5.8 GHz for shorter links. While the latter option would not be a workable solution for reservations that include a large geographic area, it could prove useful in some rural areas where interference from other signals is minimal or non-existent.

Technical assistance and telecommunications funding should be increased.

Technology Opportunities Program (TOP)

President Bush has proposed a major cut to for the Technology Opportunities Program (TOP), a critical technology access program, from \$45.4 million in FY 2001 to \$15.5 million in FY 2002. TOP, formerly known as the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIAP), is a competitive grant program that provides resources to rural and underserved communities for advanced telecommunications technologies. Projects funded in FY2000 include: the Round Valley Indian Health Center, to use telemedicine to improve health care services; the Pueblo of Santa Ana, to create a wireless community network to provide Internet access to the pueblo and information-sharing among tribal government departments; and, the Suquamish Indian Tribe, to use wireless technology to provide educational services to the tribal families and children.

NCAI urges Congress to reject proposed cuts to TOP and to provide at least the FY 2001 funding level for this critical program.

Community Telecommunications Planning Act

Tribal governments would be among the eligible applicants under the Community Telecommunications Planning Act (S. 1056), which would provide funding to help areas build their telecommunications infrastructure.

The bill would authorize a total of \$60 million for FY2002, and such sums as necessary in following fiscal years, for the grant program. This funding would be distributed among the following cabinet agencies: Commerce (\$25 million for FY2002); Agriculture (\$25 million for FY2002); and, Education (\$10 million for FY2002). Priority for grant funding under the bill would be given to eligible entities that propose to use their awards in rural and underserved areas.

NCAI supports the passage of S. 1056 and other legislation, such as the NATIVE Act, which would provide funding for tribal telecommunications infrastructure planning.

Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should establish toll-free or local numbers for Indian Country.

During NCAI's Tribal Leader Digital Divide Summit, participants indicated that one of the top barriers to household Internet use was lack of local access numbers. For individuals who are forced to utilize a long-distance number to reach their ISPs, accessing the World Wide Web on a regular basis quickly becomes a cost prohibitive proposition.

In order to encourage increased household Internet usage, NCAI believes that ISPs should establish toll-free or local numbers for Indian Country.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WORKFORCE TRAINING, AND EDUCATION ---

1 990 Census figures show that one of every three Native Americans live in poverty - compared to one in eight of the general U.S. population. Per capita income for Native Americans is \$8,234, compared to the U.S. average of \$14,420, and the average unemployment rate on reservations is 14.4 percent, compared to the national average of 6.35 percent. In fact, on some reservations, between 40 percent and 60 percent of the population is unemployed. Given the disparity between these figures and the economic health of the United States, it is imperative that tribes have the ability to fully utilize technology to create jobs and strong tribal economies.

Some tribes are already achieving this goal through creative locally-based solutions. The Tulalip Tribe's Technology Leap Initiative, using a unique regional partnership with the University of Washington and Everett Community College, has developed a comprehensive plan that is being used to create a tribal technology infrastructure while providing tribal members with the education needed to develop and maintain the system. The Fort Berthold Reservation's Neighborhood Networks Center, funded through the Department of Housing and Urban Development, provides services and computer access through six satellite centers that are part of the Tribe's employment training program.

While programs like these are encouraging, more must be done to promote technology-based tribal economic development.

Information about business and contracting opportunities should be made available to tribes.

Participants at NCAI's Tribal Leader Digital Divide Summit urged the dissemination of information regarding business development opportunities for tribes, including contracting, technology-based business, and e-commerce.

One existing approach is Native eDGE (economic Development Guidance and Empowerment), which is a federal interagency initiative designed to facilitate sustainable economic development within American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Native eDGE includes a telephone call center, a publications clearinghouse, a web site, and a technical assistance information center. The web site links federal agencies, educational institutions, and organizations through a single portal so that tribes, Native Americans, lending institutions, and private businesses can collaborate to promote economic growth. Native eDGE serves as a one-stop shop for access to information, federal and non-federal grants, loans, loan guarantees, and technical assistance for American Indians and Alaska Native organizations and individuals. The web site contains specific resources for individual projects, information from Native eDGE partners, publications on economic development, and other information.

NCAI strongly urges Congress to enact the FY 2002 request of \$1.25 million for Native eDGE and supports increased efforts by HUD to promote technology-related business opportunities to tribes through Native eDGE.

Model programs and success stories should be highlighted.

Not only do model programs and success stories demonstrate how some tribes are developing sustainable technology plans and policies, they also create a toolkit of best practices for tribes that are just beginning to explore how information technology may be used to meet community needs.

As part of NCAI's efforts, it has included media reports highlighting tribal technology success stories on its www.indiantech.org website. It also is working to create web-based best practices directory to show how Indian nations are successfully incorporating technology in their communities.

While these efforts are useful, they should be supplemented. *NCAI recommends that best practices programs, such as Harvard University's Honoring Nations and those administered by the Council for Excellence in Government, establish technology awards to help identify and share information*

about initiatives that have been effective in addressing tribal technology infrastructure needs.

The federal government should support efforts to encourage Native Americans to enter technology careers.

NCAI successfully worked to secure funding for an initiative to encourage Native Americans to pursue degrees in information technology and other science and technology fields through the FY 2001 VA-HUD Appropriations Act (P.L. 106-377). The Act provides \$10 million to the National Science Foundation for this purpose, as well as to build the capacity of tribally controlled community colleges and their K-12 feeder schools to offer high-quality science and technology classes.

Level funding is proposed for the initiative in FY 2002. *NCAI urges Congress to continue to support the NSF program and others that will increase the number of Indian students who are preparing for careers in technology.*

CONTENT

The creation of culturally and socially relevant Internet content is essential to the development of tribal constituencies and to the legitimate representation of American Indians on the Internet. Although many tribes and tribal organizations have official web sites, there exist many more that misrepresent the culture, beliefs, and general information of tribes. The challenge for tribes and individual American Indians today is to produce culturally and politically relevant content in order to establish an online community.

Many tribes have expressed an interest in using technology for cultural and language preservation activities, and some tribes are developing electronic libraries that contain this kind of information. For example, the Comanche Tribe is working with the National Indian Telecommunications Institute to develop a tribal dictionary that will be available in CD and print versions. The CD version will feature multimedia pronunciation and vocabulary guides that feature tribal elders. However, with the creation of sensitive cultural content comes the concern and need to protect that content from abuse and misuse.

Technical assistance and funding for tribal content development is needed.

Participants at the NCAI Digital Divide Tribal Leaders Summit recommended that technical assistance and funding be devoted to tribal web development. Suggested activities include: providing training and access to software; disseminating information regarding security and legal issues, including intellectual property protection; creating a clearinghouse that features information about “model” tribal websites; and providing assistance in developing tribal intranets.

NCAI recommends that non-profit organizations, such as CompuMentor and NPower, work with NCAI, tribes, and Indian web developers to provide individualized, as well as general, technical assistance on tribal web development.

S OVEREIGNTY

Tribes, as sovereign entities, have the right to exercise civil regulatory authority over lands under their jurisdiction and activities taking place thereon. This responsibility extends to all areas related to telecommunications and is therefore part of any discussion surrounding technology policy. In fact, many of the policy recommendations contained in this report are based on the fundamental principle of tribal sovereignty. That said, there are several other areas that deserve attention.

Information about sovereignty and telecommunications policy should be made available to tribes.

Participants at NCAI’s Tribal Leader Digital Divide Summit stated that a web site showing the legal and political infrastructure needed to protect tribal sovereignty with respect to telecommunications is needed. Such a web site could also examine the “ownership of airspace” and include information for tribes seeking to establish their own telecommunications companies.

Cultural content on the Internet must be protected.

There exist many hundreds of web sites that grossly misrepresent tribal nations, their cultures, and their beliefs. Tribal leaders have recommended that a web site devoted to identifying such pretenders be developed and that the legal issues surrounding the ownership of cultural content be examined. In addition, some have suggested that tribal governments develop codes that would sanction individuals who misrepresent the tribe on the Internet or that they develop a process for certifying “authentic sites.” Finally, many tribal leaders have recommended that tribes should have the right of first refusal on the use of tribal seals, insignia, and names.

Federal officials must be educated about tribal telecommunications issues.

Federal officials who influence telecommunications policy must be educated with respect to tribal technology issues, including and especially those surrounding sovereignty. In order to achieve this goal, it is imperative that Indian nations actively participate in outreach activities and regulatory and legislative proceedings.

CONCLUSION ---

Indian Country stands at a technological crossroads. Department of Commerce statistics show that telephone penetration on reservations can be as little as 20 to 70 percent, compared to the national average of more than 98 percent. But these same studies show that, when Native Americans gain access to computers and the Internet, they are among the highest users of tools to find information such as job listings. However, Indian nations must do more than just incorporate technology into their communities. They must make technology fit the image of their culture, rather than make their culture fit the image of technology.

Too many times, Native Americans are overlooked because people fail to understand their needs. NCAI is hopeful that this report and the policy recommendations summarized on the following pages will serve as a starting point for public and private officials who wish to work with tribes to close the technology gap in Indian Country.

SUMMARY OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The high cost of telecommunications must be addressed.
 - ◆ The FCC should consult with tribal nations regarding the current Lifeline/Link-Up eligibility criteria to ensure that it is broad enough to include all Native households that do not have access to basic telephone service, and to examine whether tribal nations should be authorized to set their own eligibility criteria for participation in these programs.
 - ◆ The FCC should make a formal commitment to act promptly on pending and future petitions seeking designation as eligible telecommunications carriers on tribal lands, including petitions from tribal telecommunications companies and from wireless and satellite carriers.
 - ◆ The FCC should work with telecommunications carriers and tribal nations to develop more effective methods of publicizing universal service programs that benefit Native consumers, and should take appropriate remedial action against those carriers that fail to promote and provide Lifeline and Link-Up on tribal lands.
 2. The federal government should encourage tribal-business partnerships and should provide incentives to businesses that provide telecommunications services to tribal nations.
 - ◆ The FCC should work with Indian nations to promote the tribal lands bidding credit and should ensure that recipients of the credit deploy wireless services in a manner that meets the needs of tribal consumers.
 - ◆ NCAI supports the FCC's Indian Telecom Training Initiative as a way to increase tribal-business networking, and urges the FCC to work directly with NCAI and other tribal organizations on conference planning and publicity efforts.
 - ◆ Congress should enact the Native American Telecommunications Improvement and Value Enhancement Act (S. 761) and other
-

legislative proposals designed to promote the deployment of basic telephone service, as well as advanced telecommunications technologies, to Indian Country.

- ♦ Congress should pass legislation such as S. 966 and H.R. 2038 that take a technology-neutral approach to the deployment of high-speed Internet access to underserved areas.
3. The FCC should provide for a specific allocation of spectrum that will benefit tribal nations.
 4. Technical assistance and telecommunications funding should be increased.
 - ♦ Congress should reject proposed cuts to the Technology Opportunities Program.
 - ♦ Congress should pass the Community Telecommunications Planning Act (S. 1056) and other legislation to provide funding for tribal telecommunications infrastructure planning.
 5. Internet Service Providers should establish toll-free or local numbers for Indian Country in order to encourage increased household Internet usage.
 6. Information about business and contracting opportunities should be made available to tribes.
 - ♦ Congress should enact the FY 2002 request of \$1.25 million for Native eDGE.
 - ♦ HUD should increase its efforts to promote technology-related business opportunities to tribes through Native eDGE.
 7. Model programs and success stories should be highlighted through private and non-profit awards that help to identify and share information about initiatives that have been effective in addressing tribal technology infrastructure needs.
 8. The federal government should support efforts to encourage Native Americans to enter technology careers, including the \$10 million
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National Science Foundation initiative to build the capacity of tribally controlled community colleges and their K-12 feeder schools to offer high-quality science and technology classes.

9. Technical assistance and funding for tribal web development is needed, and non-profit organizations should work with NCAI, tribes, and Indian web developers to provide such assistance on a individualized and general basis.
10. Information about sovereignty and telecommunications policy should be made available to tribes.
11. Cultural content on the Internet must be protected.
12. Federal officials must be educated about tribal telecommunications issues, regulatory and legislative proceedings.



A

APPENDIX A

NCAI DIGITAL DIVIDE TASK FORCE

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 - ◆ **Wade Henderson**
Executive Director
Leadership Conference
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 - ◆ **The Honorable Jay Inslee**
U.S. House of Representatives
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 - ◆ **Don Kashevaroff (Seldovia Village)**
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 - ◆ **Chad Smith (Cherokee)**
Principal Chief
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 - ◆ **Marcia Warren (Santa Clara Pueblo)**
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-



NCAI TRIBAL LEADER SUMMITS

November 16, 2000 - St. Paul, MN

The first NCAI Tribal Leaders Digital Divide Summit, held November 16 in conjunction with the NCAI Annual Session in St. Paul, Minnesota, was a resounding success. Approximately 70 people representing tribal governments, tribal and non-Indian telecommunications companies, federal agencies, and non-profit organizations attended the four-hour Summit.

Following opening remarks from NCAI President Susan Masten, Marcia Warren, Special Advisor to the Secretary of Commerce, provided an introduction to digital divide issues in Indian Country. Karen Buller, President of the National Indian Telecommunications Institute, explored current efforts to address the Digital Divide in Indian Country. Then, Albert Soatikee, Secretary of the Board of Gila River Telecommunications, Inc., and Victor Rocha, the founder and operator of Pechanga.net, discussed how they are using technology to spur economic development and to provide relevant information/advocacy tools.

After the panel discussion, participants broke into smaller workgroups, where they had the opportunity to delve deeper into the following areas with the expert panelists:

- ◆ Access;
- ◆ Economic Development
- ◆ Sovereignty; and
- ◆ Content.

Each of the workgroups provided recommendations, which would later form the basis for NCAI's technology policy report.

May 15, 2001 - Ledyard, CT

More than 50 tribal leaders, industry representatives, and federal officials participated in NCAI's second Digital Divide Summit on May 15. The group was joined by Roderick Porter, Chief of the Federal Communications Commission's Common Carrier Bureau, who had the opportunity to hear the concerns and views of Indian Country in an informal and in-depth setting. Following opening remarks from NCAI President Susan Masten, attendees explored a wide range of technology issues, including:

Increasing Access to Technology

Irene Flannery, Vice President for the High Cost and Low-Income Division of the Universal Service Administrative Company, spoke about the Lifeline and Link-Up programs, both of which can subsidize telephone service for income-eligible individuals living on reservations. She indicated that the FCC will be examining eligibility issues affecting Lifeline in the future and said that NCAI will be notified about the comment period.

Robin Fohrenkam, a Director for Gila River Telecommunications, Inc., discussed his Tribe's efforts to promote Lifeline and Link-Up, which have to date only seen limited deployment in Indian Country. Mr. Fohrenkam also spoke about the emerging tribal telecommunications industry and the creation of tribally-owned telecommunications companies.

Providing Technology-Based Education and Training To Tribal Members

Tina Hone, Vice President for Public Policy, PowerUP, spoke about her organization's efforts in Indian Country. PowerUP works with schools, community centers and other locations across the country, to provide underserved young people with access to the wide range of content and information on the Internet. Launched in November, 1999, it is comprised of dozens of non-profit organizations, major corporations and state and federal government agencies.

John McCoy, Director of Government Affairs for the Tulalip Tribes, discussed his Tribe's Technology Leap Initiative, which is a regional partnership with the University of Washington and Everett Community College that is designed to build the Tribe's technology infrastructure while providing technology education to tribal members.

Exercising Tribal Sovereignty Through Technology Policy

Geoffrey Blackwell, Attorney Advisor to the Federal Communications Commission, spoke about the FCC's government-to-government policy and its Indian Country initiatives. More information can be found online at www.fcc.gov/indians.

Karen Buller, President and CEO of the National Indian Telecommunications Institute, engaged participants in a discussion about the "Do's and Don'ts" of doing business in Indian Country in order to refine a presentation that she was scheduled to give to industry representatives at an upcoming FCC conference.

Kade Twist, Policy Associate, Benton Foundation, spoke about the need to express tribal interests through telecommunications policy, both internally and externally.

Using Technology As An Economic Development Vehicle

Earl Evans, a former tribal development specialist for HUD's Office of Native American Programs, described Native eDGE (economic Development Guidance and Empowerment), which is an interagency initiative to facilitate sustainable economic development within American Indian and Alaska Native communities. It includes a telephone call center, a publications clearinghouse, this web site, and a technical assistance information center. The web site links seventeen federal agencies, educational institutions, and organizations through a single portal so that tribes, Native Americans, lending institutions, and private businesses can collaborate to promote economic growth. Brian King of Harvard University's Native American Program, discussed how tribes can use technology to achieve economic development goals.

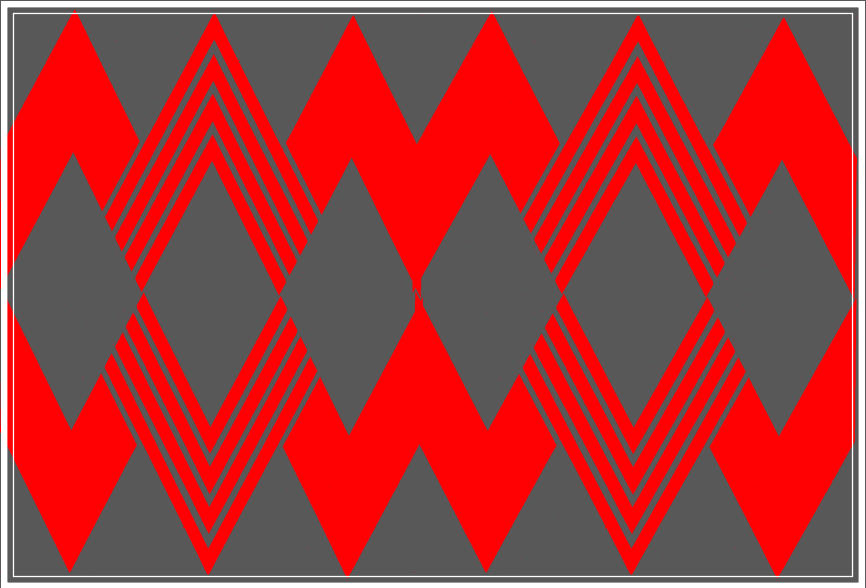
Developing Indian Content for the Internet

Valerie Fast Horse, Council Member, Couer d'Alene Tribe, spoke about how her Tribe has used its website to define its message to non-Indians and how the Internet can be used to educate the public about tribal governments.

Victor Rocha, Pechanga.net, and Acee Agoyo, Indianz.com, two pioneers in the development of Indian-specific content, discussed how they have harnessed technology to provide useful and timely information to Indian Country.



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