



News Release

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Trump Administration Proposes to Eliminate Tribal Scholarships

President Donald Trump is making a third attempt to eliminate the Higher Education Grant Program administered by the Dept. of Interior, which provides federal funding for tribal scholarships, including the Navajo Nation through a P.L. 93-638 contract. The Trump Administration zeroed out funding for tribal scholarships in the FY 2021 federal budget released on Monday.

“I absolutely disagree with the budget proposal put forth, but the Navajo Nation has tremendous support from House and Senate members who will stand with us to support Navajo students and funding for college,” Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez said. “This week, I, along with members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, are on Capitol Hill meeting with members of Congress to convey our concerns for scholarship funding and much more to help our future generations.”

Rose Graham, director of the Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Assistance (ONNSFA), is also hopeful that Congress once again rejects the Trump administration’s attempt to eliminate the Higher Education Grant Program as it did in 2019 and 2020.

“The Trump administration has made it abundantly clear that it is not interested in providing support to Native Americans seeking a college education,” said Ms. Graham. “It appears the Trump administration is doing its best to keep a college degree out of reach of Native Americans.”

The Higher Education Grant Program helps undergraduate students, who are determined to have a financial need. A majority of the students served by ONNSFA fall into that category. Need-based students receive \$2,500 per term, which helps students cover the balance of tuition and fees, room and board, textbooks, and transportation costs.

Federal funds, provided through the Higher Education Grant to the Navajo Nation, made up more than 53 percent or \$13.4 million of the \$25.3 million awarded to students in 2019. Other sources of funding included Navajo Nation funds of \$10 million, Trust funds of \$1.3 million, and Corporate funds of \$545,606.

“Navajo students already face tremendous challenges when they seek a college degree,” Ms. Graham said. “Many could not afford a college education without the support provided through the Higher Education Grant Program.”

The Higher Education Grant Program is a highly effective program that provides funds for undergraduates. An average of 1,291 Navajo students attain college credentials, including Associate degrees, Bachelor’s degrees or certificates each year. An average of 117 students attains Master’s or Doctorate degrees each year. Navajo Nation funds are used to provide awards to students in this category.

A majority of students served by ONNSFA attend colleges and universities within the Four Corners region – New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. A single undergraduate student living on campus may expect to pay \$30,628 per year at Arizona State University, \$28,396 per year at Northern Arizona University, \$25,374 per year at Fort Lewis College and \$22,912 per year at the University of New Mexico.

“Our students need every available financial-aid resource to attain a college education even if it’s a fraction of the total cost of attendance,” said Ms. Graham. She speculates that the Trump Administration’s rationale for eliminating the Higher Education Grant Program is to make student loans a primary source of funding for college.

“We do not encourage students to take loans,” Ms. Graham said. “There are too many people who are not able to retire due to huge student loan debts that have not been paid off.”

Ms. Graham said the office is currently working to secure Forward Funding for the Higher Education Grant Program so that federal funds are provided to tribes well before students begin school.

“It will take a concerted effort to get Congress to restore funds for the Higher Education Grant Program and institute Forward Funding,” Ms. Graham said.

“Students and parents are encouraged to email or call members of Congress and ask that funds are restored for the Higher Education Grant Program,” she said. “More than 13,000 students submit applications to ONNSFA for financial aid. They can make a significant impact.”

Visit www.usa.gov to find out how to contact your Members of Congress.

HIGHLIGHTS OF BUDGET CHANGES
By Appropriation Activity/Subactivity

APPROPRIATION: Operation of Indian Education Programs ^{1/}

	2019 Actual	2020 Enacted	2021 Request	Change
<i>Elementary and Secondary (forward funded)</i>				
ISEP Formula Funds	[404,165]	415,351	409,589	-5,762
ISEP Program Adjustments	[5,479]	5,489	5,585	+96
Education Program Enhancements	[12,278]	14,303	10,101	-4,202
Tribal Education Departments	[2,500]	2,500	0	-2,500
Student Transportation	[56,413]	56,991	57,113	+122
Early Childhood and Family Development	[18,810]	18,852	19,254	+402
Tribal Grant Support Costs	[82,935]	83,407	83,567	+160
Subtotal, Elementary and Secondary <i>(forward funded)</i>	[582,580]	596,893	585,209	-11,684
<i>Elementary/Secondary Programs</i>				
Facilities Operations	[68,795]	74,897	67,585	-7,312
Facilities Maintenance	[59,774]	60,906	60,749	-157
Juvenile Detention Center Education	[500]	500	503	+3
Johnson-O'Malley Assistance Grants <i>(TPA)</i>	[14,903]	20,335	14,640	-5,695
Subtotal, Elementary/Secondary Programs	[143,972]	156,638	143,477	-13,161
<i>Postsecondary Programs (forward funded)</i>				
Haskell and SIPI	[22,694]	23,748	20,647	-3,101
Tribal Colleges and Universities	[70,793]	74,282	69,782	-4,500
Tribal Technical Colleges	[7,505]	7,914	7,514	-400
Subtotal, Postsecondary Programs <i>(forward funded)</i>	[100,992]	105,944	97,943	-8,001
<i>Postsecondary Programs</i>				
Tribal Colleges and Universities Supplements <i>(TPA)</i>	[1,220]	1,220	0	-1,220
Scholarships and Adult Education <i>(TPA)</i> ..	[34,996]	34,333	0	-34,333
Special Higher Education Scholarships	[2,992]	2,992	0	-2,992
Science Postgraduate Scholarship Fund	[2,450]	2,450	0	-2,450
Subtotal, Postsecondary Programs	[41,658]	40,995	0	-40,995
<i>Education Management</i>				
Education Program Management	[25,053]	32,300	33,686	+1,386
Education IT	[10,302]	10,307	15,344	+5,037
Subtotal, Education Management	[35,355]	42,607	49,030	+6,423
TOTAL APPROPRIATION	[904,557]	943,077	875,659	-67,418

^{1/} For reference, the table includes 2019 amounts in the budget structure enacted in 2020. Funds prior to 2020 were funded in the Bureau of Indian Affairs Operations of Indian Programs account.