

Alaska Federation of Natives Broadband Use and Adoption Consortium Tribal Broadband and Connectivity Program Project Narrative

I. Executive Summary

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has encouraged “eligible entities” to collaborate on Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) applications. To that end, the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), an “eligible entity” under Section 905(a)(8) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, has formed a consortium of eligible Alaska Native entities to submit a single TBCP application for Broadband Use and Adoption projects. Tribal colleges, institutions of higher education, vocational schools, and K-12 public schools are also covered by our application.

The Alaska Federation of Natives Broadband Use and Adoption Consortium (AFN-BUAC) is made up of 73 “eligible entities,” including 31 Alaska Native Tribal Governments, 31 Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), 6 regional non-profit Tribal organizations, and 4 Tribally Designated Housing Entities (TDHEs), as well as the Association of Alaska of Housing Authorities which is the umbrella organization for Alaska’s 14 TDHEs. Although tribal resolutions were not required for Broadband Use and Adoption applications, AFN attached a Letter of Authorization and Support from each “eligible entity” that joined AFN-BUAC to our TBCP application as a courtesy to NTIA. **See Attachment 1 - List of 73 “Eligible Entities” in AFN-BUAC.**

A consortium like AFN-BUAC is necessary to: (1) streamline the delivery of broadband education, training, equipment, and services to Alaska Native Tribal Governments, regional non-profit Tribal organizations, ANCs, Alaska Native K-12 and college (or vocational) students, tribal healthcare providers, tribal housing authorities, and Alaska Native households; (2) spur economic development and commercial activities; (3) build and strengthen online entrepreneurship for remote employment; (4) support telework and internet digital learning; and (5) enhance the largest telehealth program in the country – all of which are stated purposes for the TBCP in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

If awarded a TBCP grant, AFN will provide broadband services at reduced costs and prevent the disconnection of existing broadband service. Special attention will be paid to distance learning, telehealth, and digital inclusion. The benefits to “eligible entities,” tribal communities, and Alaska Native students and households through AFN-BUAC will be sustained well past the one-year TBCP grant period utilizing, in part, existing federal programs such as the Universal Service Fund and the Affordable Broadband Connectivity Program.

More specifically, our application contains the following seven components:

- A. Needs Assessment.** AFN will design, administer, and review a Needs Assessment to determine the bundled computer packages, Information Technology (IT) training, and monthly internet subsidy needs of the 73 “eligible entities” that are members of AFN-BUAC through 5 Outreach Specialists who are grounded in Alaska Native cultures and languages.

- B. Bundled Computer Packages.** AFN will procure and deliver bundled computer packages (*i.e.*, equipment) for our 73 consortium members during the TBCP grant period. Each bundled computer package will include a computer (*e.g.*, desktop, laptop, or tablet), Microsoft Office software, earbuds, monitor (desktops only), mouse, printer, extended support, and shipping.

As a large, statewide, Native consortium, AFN-BUAC will be able to take advantage of economies of scale that small, individual Tribal Governments and Tribal organizations cannot. We will purchase bundled computer packages in bulk at wholesale prices directly from the manufacturer. AFN has already established a business relationship with Apple and Dell regarding this project, though no contracts have been executed. Moreover, AFN will utilize one workforce during the grant period to install and maintain the bundled computer packages for our 73 consortium members through an IT “Circuit Rider” program described below during the grant period.

- C. IT Training.** AFN will design, produce materials for, and hold training on digital inclusion for our 73 consortium members. Several tiers of IT training will be available, through our IT “Circuit Rider” program (described immediately below), some of which will be held onsite in the tribal communities of our 73 consortium members, while others will be virtual. The IT training will begin with operational basics related to equipment and graduate to intermediate lessons on software. Bandwidth is limited in many tribal communities that may prevent an eligible recipient from viewing live or recorded webinars. To support those entities, AFN plans to mail hard copy materials and thumb drives containing recorded training, if requested.

- D. IT “Train the Trainer” Program.** AFN will develop, implement, and manage an IT “Train the Trainer” program. The objective of the program would be to create, sustain, and retain a viable workforce for Alaska Natives by growing an individual’s skills and relevant marketable experience, and providing them with the tools and experience they need for successful employment.

The IT “Train the Trainer” program will seek to identify Alaska Native individuals who have the requisite minimum level of skills, experience, and desire to be: (1) trained within an “eligible entity” or tribal community who can turn around and provide technical assistance and support to others within that eligible organization or surrounding tribal community(ies); (2) considered for short-term internships or apprenticeships; (3) learn skill sets and obtain on-the-job training by shadowing the IT “Circuit Rider” (IT Technicians) traveling to remote tribal communities and assisting with installation and set-up of bundled computer packages; or (4) considered as a candidate for employment opportunities, such as an IT “Circuit Rider” (IT Technician) for that tribal community.

- E. IT “Circuit Rider” Program.** AFN will design and deploy an IT “Circuit Rider” program that will consist of 10 roving IT Technicians, all of whom will be dedicated to meeting the bundled computer package installation, maintenance, and IT training needs of our 73 consortium members during the grant period.

These IT “Circuit Riders” may be based in Anchorage and in hub communities throughout Alaska’s 12 geographic Native regions. They will travel extensively to the tribal communities in AFN-BUAC during the grant period. By example, Bethel is the hub community for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, an area the size of the state of Oregon, and services 56 surrounding tribal communities.

We hope to have at least one IT “Circuit Rider” who resides in Bethel.

IT “Circuit Riders” will install and maintain broadband in homes and public computer centers at anchor institutions (*i.e.*, internet cafes) that are not yet connected to the internet. To sustain this component past the one-year TBCP grant period, and to ensure that technical support and broadband knowledge is developed within a particular “eligible entity,” AFN will integrate our IT “Train the Trainer” program with this deliverable. This will allow Alaska Natives with IT skills and talents, and who reside in tribal communities or who are employed by an “eligible entity,” to carry out the mission of AFN-BUAC long after the TBCP grant period ends.

- F. Monthly Internet Subsidy.** AFN will develop and implement a monthly internet subsidy program for the low-income tribal members, Alaska Native shareholders, and Native households including those living in Indian and public housing of our 73 consortium members during the grant period.

We will utilize the relationships that AFN has carefully cultivated with Alaska Native entities, organizations, and individuals over the past 55 years to provide a monthly internet subsidy to low-income Alaska Natives households, many of which cannot afford high-speed, reliable broadband. Several tribal communities throughout Alaska have broadband; however, the monthly cost is \$300 or more and restrictive caps on data usage makes it cost prohibitive for many. AFN-BUAC will help ensure that eligible recipients sign up for the Federal Communications Commission’s Affordable Broadband Connectivity Program \$75 monthly subsidy for those living on tribal lands, and will provide an additional subsidy of up to \$150 per month where necessary.

- G. Telehealth.** AFN, in partnership (through contract) with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, will revolutionize the delivery of telehealth across Alaska’s tribal health care system by procuring and delivering equipment to support patient care at the Alaska Native Medical Center and in over 200 tribal health facilities around Alaska, as well as training community health aides who will use the equipment to access primary and specialty care services through telehealth. Access to, and use of, existing broadband services and computer equipment by Alaska Natives will be possible through AFN-BUAC, through acquisition of new and updated telemedicine equipment where costs have previously made this impossible.

In accordance **with Section VII(B)(vi)** below, priority for the bundled computer packages, IT training, and monthly broadband subsidies outlined above will be given to the 73 “eligible entities” included in AFN-BUAC, Native K-12 students, Native college students, and low-income Native households of the tribal communities and those residing in Indian housing in our consortium. If additional funds remain, these services may be extended to AFN’s membership, which includes 157 Alaska Native Tribal Governments, 12 regional non-profit Tribal organizations, and 151 ANCs.

AFN has identified two project management options for our TBCP grant. Under “Option A,” AFN would hire an IT company – and ensure that company has the positions necessary – to carry out our TBCP deliverables. Under “Option B,” AFN would hire a Program Manager – in addition to the IT company – to perform the grant deliverables. The latter option would give us more control over the Program Manager, which is desirable to ensure the individual has the right network and professional and personal reputation to be effective in working in rural Alaska and with the Alaska Native community.