



RESPONSES TO COVID-19: AGENCY OVERVIEWS, UPDATES, AND CHANGES IN SERVICE

April 6, 2020

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STATE-TRIBAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE

MAY MEETING UPDATE

Chairman Jason Small directed staff to transition the State-Tribal Relations Committee's May 6-8 meeting to electronic delivery. It's hoped we can still effectively conduct virtual meetings with the CSKT Tribal Council and Blackfeet Tribal Business Council as planned, and conduct STRC business and receive study updates as well.

Legislators on other committees have suggested breaking the format for the meeting into smaller chunks. The following is a draft outline based on the original draft agenda. It is subject to change. A formal draft agenda and meeting materials will be posted on the [committee's website](#) approximately 2 weeks in advance.

May 6, 1-3 p.m.	Meet with Blackfeet Tribal Business Council
May 7, 10 a.m. to 12 pm	Meet with CSKT Tribal Council
May 7, 2-4 p.m.	Conduct STRC business, updates on study information requested
May 8, 9-11 a.m.	Conduct STRC business, updates on study information requested

EXECUTIVE BRANCH UPDATES

GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Governor's Office of Indian Affairs held an interagency call with tribal governments and is routinely communicating with tribal incident command centers.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- Conducted phone outreach to each Tribal Health Director, Urban Indian Center Director, and the Indian Health Service Area Office. Invited all to attend a weekly COVID-19 call. Many are now participating.
- Sending major governor directives directly to tribal partners and ensuring they are aware of legitimate COVID-19 state resource sites.
- DPHHS scheduled and held a tribal specific call with tribal partners to provide updates on COVID-19 crisis, discuss Medicaid changes, provide legitimate COVID-19 state resource site, and most importantly provide the opportunity for them to ask questions of leadership and public health staff.

- Participating in several national calls in which federal agencies are seeking feedback from Tribes (tribal consultation) on how monies in federal COVID-19 stimulus packages should be allocated and distributed.
- DPHHS stood up a tribal specific COVID-19 resource information page on its website - <https://dphhs.mt.gov/tribalcovid19>.
- DPHHS scheduled and held a tribal specific call with tribal partners to discuss telemedicine/telehealth policy changes and their applicability in delivering health care and billing accordingly.
- DPHHS is amending Public Health Emergency Preparedness Task Orders for tribal governments to include additional dollars to assist with addressing the COVID-19 crisis. Those task orders will go out early this week for signature. Once returned, DPHHS will execute and get some dollars out the door to tribes fairly quickly.
- DPHHS distributed personal protective equipment to many organizations that including tribal disaster and emergency services, Indian Health Service hospitals, and Urban Indian Health Centers.
- The day-to-day work continues to answering inquiries, checking in with folks, and discussing resources and needs, etc.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Office of Indian Country Economic Development (OICED)

- The OICED team is working remotely and sent out an e-blast titled [OICED Is Open for Business and Ready to Serve You](#) that links to the latest updates of COVID19. This e-blast went to all tribal governments, tribal economic development departments, grantees of the Tribal Business Planning Grant (TBPG), Montana Indian Language Program (MILP), Indian Equity Fund (IEF), Native American Business Advisor (NABA), and tribal tourism partners. Individuals can ask to be added to OICED's email distribution list by sending an email request to doctribal@mt.gov.
- The team sent out a [survey](#) to assess if and how COVID19 is impacting grantees' ability to complete contracts that will expire in May 2020. As a result, 15 NABA and IEF grants are in the process of being amended to extend them into the next fiscal year.
- The State Tribal Economic Development (STED) Commission strategic planning session that was scheduled for May 4-6, 2020 in Browning, MT has been postponed indefinitely as has a spring OICED team tribal tour. However, the STED Commission is still accepting responses to its limited solicitation for facilitation services for the strategic planning session.
- Filming sessions for tribal tourism videos that had been scheduled for March 19-23, 2020 have been shifted to July/August 2020 and will be usable for our summer 2021 campaign. Two tribal tourism articles that Smithsonian is putting together for the Indian Country Region have shifted from a May 4 to June 28, 2020 publication date.

- The OICED team has sent out a [mobile DocuSign download link](#) to all OICED program grantees. DocuSign is the application that Commerce uses for all electronic contract signing. This allows tribal chairs, presidents, and tribal contract signers to get notifications of incoming contracts and documents for their signature that they can execute from their phone, rather than having to be at a computer and logged into an email. Staff is gathering data to develop customized drawdown forms for each grantee to allow for tracking, authorizing, and executing drawdown requests remotely, rather than requiring tribal or contract staff having to obtain original ‘wet’ signatures from each of the authorized signers and approvers.

Census impacts related to Indian Country

As of April 6, the Census self-response rate in Indian Country is much lower than the rest of the state. Montana has an overall self-response rate of about 36%. In counties that contain reservations within their boundaries, the self-response rate ranges from 7% to 17%. The exception is Lake County, where the self-response rate is almost 26%. Updated data is available [here](#).

The Department of Commerce provided the following information regarding the affects COVID-19 has had on the agency’s Census promotional efforts in Indian Country:

The 2020 Decennial is the first-time residents can self-respond to the Census online, by phone, as well as the traditional response by mail. Montanans can respond to the Census today at my2020census.gov or by calling [1-844-330-2020](tel:1-844-330-2020) – and they don’t need their official Census ID code in order to do so. This is the key message currently from the State Complete Count Committee as Montanans are home caring for children and social distancing.

We and our federal and non-profit partners have pulled down our planned in-person Census events and have switched our efforts to doing much more virtually to promote the fact that Montanans can self-respond to the Census, which means a Census Bureau enumerator doesn’t need to knock on their door. The State CCC digital campaign is targeted toward hard-to-count populations including remote rural and reservation areas. Weekly, we get reports on our digital campaign and are redirecting the outreach to areas with low Census response rates.

For April 1, Census Day, we promoted a statewide social media push to have “trusted voices” across the state share the reason the Census mattered to them. We provided a script, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram examples, and key messages to share. We are continuing this effort through the period of social distancing reaching out to community and reservation leaders statewide.

In mid-March, [the state’s newest PSA](#) launched on broadcast TV and radio. It’s the fourth such PSA we’ve run on broadcast and radio. It’ll remain on air through spring. We have contacted the Tribal Radio stations to make sure they have and are airing the state produced PSA about the Census

Our Census weekly e-newsletter is still going out the door to about 6,000 partners. We also have a weekly partner call for anyone that wants updates every Thursday at noon. We also have a bi-weekly call with our partners NADC and Western Native Voice specific to tribal outreach efforts. And, we continue to add materials including those for Native American audiences to the CENSUS.MT.GOV website. Despite

teleworking, we remain in constant communication with partners and constituents who have questions about the Census.

Because the Census suspended its update/leave operations¹, this means at least 100,000 Montana households, primarily in rural and reservation areas, did not receive any Census materials. To make sure these households knew they could respond now, we partnered with Western Native Voice to send a mailing to all those in their database who had pledged to do the Census. The mailing included the state produced rack card providing key reasons for doing the Census. We also supported the Montana Non-Profit Association's effort to mail thousands of postcards to residential PO boxes directing folks to fill it out online or by phone today.

We are continually tracking response rates for every Montana Census tract and the state and are partners are regularly adjusting our strategies and efforts to hone-in on those tracts with low rates. We also are shifting in response to Census operational timeline changes to make sure to match our promotional efforts when various operations resume.

For the last few months, we've been establishing "Be Counted" locations across the state to help folks who might not have internet or phone access self-respond to the Census. Many of those locations are public facilities – libraries, food banks, non-profits, etc. As most of those facilities have closed to protect against the spread of coronavirus, we won't be publicizing the locations. When those sites re-open, they'll still be able to assist in providing Wi-Fi and phone connections.

INDIAN EDUCATION FOR ALL

At the Office of Public Instruction, the Indian Education for All staff is offering support to teachers via online learning forums. They're also retooling Indian Education for All lessons so they can be used independently by students at home if they have online access, though not all do. Materials are available at:

<http://opi.mt.gov/Educators/Teaching-Learning/Indian-Education-for-All/Indian-Education-Classroom-Resources>

¹ The Update Leave operation is designed to occur in areas where the majority of housing units either do not have mail delivered to the physical location of the housing unit or the mail delivery information for the housing unit cannot be verified. The purpose of this operation is to update the address and map feature data for the area assigned and to leave a questionnaire package at every identified housing unit.