

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Digital Inclusion in Native Communities: A National Study on the Role of Tribal Libraries

The Federal Communication Commission's *2010 National Broadband Plan* charges public libraries across the United States with helping to bridge the digital divide. This charge is of special significance in Native Communities where tribal libraries often are the only free and reliable source of public computers and the Internet.

To ensure that tribal libraries have the resources they need to contribute to the development of more digitally inclusive communities in Native Communities, the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums is conducting two national surveys. One survey will seek to determine the technology and digital access needs of Native Communities residents and the second will look at the capacities of tribal libraries to meet those needs. The surveys will provide up-to-date, comprehensive data on how Native Communities residents access and use the Internet and the first-ever data on tribal citizens' use of technology and the Internet at tribal libraries. The surveys, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, will inform a study that lays the groundwork for improving digital inclusion in Native Communities. The study will summarize survey findings, highlight examples of digital inclusion excellence in tribal communities, and recommend a strategic agenda for strengthening digital inclusion in tribal communities.

The study will specifically address:

- How tribal libraries **are serving** the technology needs of their service populations
- What tribal libraries **need** to improve digital inclusion services
- How Native Communities residents actually **access** and **use** the Internet and computer technology
- How they **would like to use** computer technology and the Internet, and how their tribal libraries can help meet those needs (with infrastructure, hardware, software, bandwidth, etc.)
- What **additional adoption needs** Native Communities residents have, and how libraries can serve those needs
- What the **gaps in library infrastructure, service, and training** may prevent Native Communities residents from gaining the same quality of life benefits from digital inclusion that American citizens in the mainstream achieve

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Community-oriented and truly effective deployment of communications technologies within Native Communities has the potential to level the negative social, cultural, and economic impacts that history has caused Tribal Nations and Native communities to endure. New commercial, educational, and health care opportunities, as well as social stability and quality of life issues, may genuinely be addressed through broadband and other communications mediums.

—Office of Native Affairs and Policy
Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau
Federal Communications Commission 2012
Annual Report

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As closely as possible, the Tribal Library Survey will replicate recent national surveys that studied the digital inclusion capacity and needs of public libraries. Unfortunately, the nation's 285 tribal libraries were excluded from these surveys, an oversight that will adversely impact the ability of tribal libraries to serve their communities and will deny them a voice in policymaking conversations at all levels of government, if not addressed. Similarly, the Individual Survey will closely replicate recent national studies that excluded tribal populations.

To disregard Native communities' needs and the role of tribal libraries in providing core digital inclusion services is to condemn indigenous populations to falling even farther behind mainstream America in terms of digital access, adoption, and applications. Data describing the capacity of tribal libraries to drive digital inclusion are critical to leveling the technological playing field and to giving Native Communities a seat at the table where key digital inclusion policy and investment decisions are made.