



Navajo Nation set to receive support from first round of CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funding

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The United States Departments of the Treasury and the Interior announced Tuesday the distribution of \$4.8 billion among all tribal governments in the first round of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) Coronavirus Relief Fund (Fund) awards.

The Navajo Nation Council is set to introduce legislation to accept and manage expenditures for COVID-19 response activities, in-line with federal law and as-required by the Navajo Nation Code.

“The Navajo Nation Council appreciates this first distribution to tribal governments of CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund support,” said 24th Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon. “We, as Navajo leaders, have been listening to the needs of the Navajo People and our communities, and we will ensure that necessary funds are equitably and responsibly allocated within the time given to us.”

The first distribution of tribal funding comes amid a lawsuit by a group of Tribal nations brought against the Treasury for its decision to include Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs), which are for-profit non-tribal government entities, in the distribution of the \$8 billion Fund.

After missing the statutory deadline to issue the funding to tribal governments, the Treasury and Interior Departments announced today that it will begin distribution of 60 percent of the Fund. The formula the Treasury and Interior Departments agreed upon is based on tribal population data used in the distribution of the Indian Housing Block Grant (IHBG) with a floor of \$100,000 for each tribal government.

The remaining 40 percent will be distributed at a later, unannounced, date based on tribal employment and tribal COVID-19 expenditure figures.

Until the eligibility of ANCs is determined, the calculated portions for those entities will be withheld pending litigation.

“Now that the first amount of COVID-19 relief funding has been issued to tribes, it is the Navajo Nation Council’s responsibility to create the legislation and proper fund management plan that will help us better respond to this pandemic,” said Council Delegate Jamie Henio, chairman of the Budget and Finance Committee.

The Treasury previously published additional guidance outlining the ways the Fund monies may be spent. Under the law, funds may support activities from the period beginning Mar. 1, 2020 and ending Dec. 30, 2020.

Costs that are covered under the Fund include necessary expenditures incurred due to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Costs must not have been included in the most recent tribal budget as of Mar. 27, 2020. Under the law and the Treasury guidance, tribal governments are able to decide what is reasonably necessary to respond COVID-19.

The Treasury’s guidance included a non-exclusive list of eligible expenses, such as: medical expenses, public health expenses, payroll expenses for those responding to COVID-19, expenses to help facilitate compliance with public health orders and expenses associated with providing economic support for COVID-19-related impacts. Other related expenses are allowed that support the Navajo Nation’s efforts

to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Any legislation related to the Fund will be considered by the Budget and Finance Committee, the Naabik'iyáti' Committee and the full Navajo Nation Council.

The Office of the Speaker and the Office of Legislative Counsel, with additional support from other legal advisors to the government, have prepared an initial legislation establishing a fund management and expenditure plan. That legislation will be introduced into the Navajo Nation Council's legislative process tomorrow, May 6, and will be available for public comment.

Members of the general public may provide public comment and testimony relating to the COVID-19 Fund monies. Comments will be accepted in written form by submitting an email to comments@navajonnsn.gov. Comments may also be mailed to: Executive Director, Office of Legislative Services, P.O. Box 3390, Window Rock, AZ 86515.

Comments may be made in the form of chapter resolutions, letters, position papers, etc. Please include your name, position title, address for written comments. For digital comments, a valid email address is required. Anonymous comments will not be included in the legislation packet.

"We thank our Congressional partners for working hard to convey to the Treasury and Interior Secretaries the importance of getting this funding out the door and to tribal nations," said Speaker Damon. "We also thank President Trump for approving this relief package for all tribes. The support this relief funding provides to the Navajo Nation demonstrates the significant challenges we face in flattening the curve of COVID-19 among our people."

The Navajo Nation Council is the governing body of the Navajo Nation government and is organized within the Legislative Branch. The 24-member Council is elected from representative districts comprised of 110 local chapter governments. More information can be found at: www.navajonationcouncil.org.

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CONTACT EMAIL: nnlb.communications@gmail.com
Byron C. Shorty, INT Communications Director, (928) 287-2085.