



Coalition of Large Tribes

Blackfeet Nation • Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe • Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation of Oregon  
Crow Nation • Eastern Shoshone Tribe • Fort Belknap Indian Community • Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara Nation  
Muscogee (Creek) Nation • Navajo Nation • Northern Arapaho Tribe • Oglala Sioux Tribe • Rosebud Sioux Tribe  
San Carlos Apache Tribe • Shoshone-Bannock Tribes • Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation  
Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Tribe • Spokane Tribe • Ute Indian Tribe • Ute Mountain Ute Tribe • Walker River Paiute Tribe

September 5, 2024

The Honorable Tom Cole  
2207 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brian Schatz  
722 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum  
2426 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
522 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Cole, Rep. McCollum, Sen. Schatz, and Sen. Murkowski:

As the Executive Director of the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT), an intertribal organization representing the interests of more than 50 tribes with reservations of 100,000 acres or more, we are keenly aware and have prioritized Indigenous language revitalization efforts across Indian Country. Our COLT tribes have a deep commitment in efforts to ensure that every student in Indian Country, including in Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)-operated and tribally controlled schools, have access to Native language, culture, and academic rigor. The National Fund for Excellence in American Indian Education (The Fund) is one resource to realize that goal. However, to meet its potential, it is necessary to address some of the structural barriers that have made it difficult for The Fund to begin operating and scale effectively. We support any efforts by Congress to address the technical challenges for The Fund.

As you may know, The Fund has gone through multiple efforts to launch. It was established in 2000, and then due to a cease and desist letter by an organization with the same name, Congress changed the name in 2004. At that time despite building a board, The Fund was not able to successfully raise and distribute funds and was dormant starting in 2007. In 2014, the BIE Study Group included relaunching The Fund to build public-private partnerships to support BIE students in its recommendations. Secretary Haaland prioritized getting The Fund active and running and announced the renewal of The Fund at the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit. Since then, The Fund has built a board, successfully received its reinstatement status as a nonprofit corporation from the D.C. government, and applied to reinstate its 501(c)(3) tax exempt status with the IRS. It is now lawfully authorized to operate as a tax exempt, nonprofit corporation. In order to ensure that The Fund can meet its potential, there are some issues that Congress must address.



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The federal government has a history of chartering successful funds, including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the National Parks Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, and the Foundation for America's Public Lands. Each of these organizations receive appropriations, and have been able to leverage that funding to build public private partnerships to further their goals. The Fund currently does not have an appropriation. In addition, The Fund has statutory language that caps administrative costs at ten percent of the previous years funds. This creates a significant barrier during a start-up period, requiring The Fund to raise more than one million dollars to be able to fund a full time position, creating a catch 22 given the need for staff to be able to lead fundraising activities.

We support the attached technical amendment to ensure that the structural barriers to The Fund are addressed. The BIE can be a model for Indigenous learning and achievement. However, we will need to leverage public and private resources toward that end. The Fund can play a critical role in garnering resources and driving innovation. We urge Congress to take swift action to pass the technical amendment and allow The Fund to get started on this urgent work.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [tateota@hotmail.com](mailto:tateota@hotmail.com) or (605) 828-1422.

Respectfully,

*Oliver Semans*

OJ Semans, Sr., Executive Director  
Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT)

Cc: Brian Newland, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs  
Kara Bobroff, Chair of the NFEAIE  
Senator Ben Ray Luján  
Senator Martin Heinrich  
Senator Mark Kelly  
Senator Kyrsten Sinema  
Representative Teresa Leger Fernández  
Representative Melanie Stansbury  
Representative Gabe Vasquez  
Representative Ruben Gallego  
Representative Eli Crane



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Representative Raúl Grijalva

Representative Greg Stanton