

Moolah for Facilities

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Accessing funding and strategic partners to help realize the goals of a school is a critical component of school facilities planning. This is paramount to highlight today, given one-time funding streams are being funneled into communities from COVID-19 relief funds. Facilities funding is challenging to find and is unique to each school. While many schools load their boards of directors with exceptional brainpower in educational and leadership knowledge, often missing is a development focus which includes seeking and securing funding.

Development Roles

Successful private and quasi-private/non-public schools understand the importance of development strategies as a critical piece of the school strategy to grow into its facility goal. Interestingly, many charter schools don't place a heightened priority during the initial formation of leadership teams on dedicated development team roles. Yet, to realize the incremental growth of facilities from start-up to full build-out and ongoing improvements requires a very distinct strategy to seek and secure funding. Per-pupil income will likely never cover the needed financial investment to build school facilities. Therefore, creative funding strategies need to be secured, and those responsible for seeking and securing financing should be a systemic activity among school leadership and highlighted within all strategic plans. Today, many grant opportunities are uniquely designed from COVID-19 assistance programs. Some provide funding for capital facilities, which can be difficult to find in many grant programs.

Available Only Today

One of the by-products of the pandemic is a plethora of COVID-19 relief funding. Stimulus bills first originated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, and later, the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act. Both offer significant funding opportunities available to schools via intermediaries, whether state education departments, various federal agencies, community development financial institutions, and non-profits including impact investors and many other sources. Tribal nations have unique opportunities available only to enrolled Native Americans and federally recognized tribes. In addition, many non-profits and philanthropic organizations have tailored their giving priorities to areas of special need based on COVID-19 impacts, including underserved communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. There are many funding streams available today that were unavailable before the pandemic. Most of these one-time funding mechanisms will be gone forever once expired and depleted, and many have already ended. Other unique opportunities in the current pandemic funding mechanisms are drastically reduced or elimination of cash-matching requirements. For example, tribal communities are frequently offered a no-match requirement, whereas all other applicants may be required a specific percentage match which can range from 10- to 20-percent or more.

One-Size-Does-Not-Fit-All

Every school has its own unique conditions that position them for funding resources. There are hundreds of variables that impact funding availability, eligibility, and access. For example, if a school is located on a tribal reservation or off can equate to very different advantages and disadvantages regarding access to specific funding mechanisms. Other advantages can be realized if the school is located within a designated Opportunity or Promise Zone, sometimes creating "bonus points" on some grant applications. There's also the consideration that school facilities funding could be sourced through non-educational

programs like the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency. In addition to housing, their “Single-Purpose” Indian Community Development Block Grant (ICDBG) offers capital construction funding for community facilities up to \$4 million (based on FY2021 funding). Another current source for schools on tribal reservations or possibly, off-reservation if on tribal-owned land, is the U.S. Economic Development Administration “Indigenous Communities” grant. These grants are offered up to \$5 million with a no-match requirement to tribal communities. While funding is currently offered on a “rolling basis,” this fund will be depleted at some point. Therefore, applicants should apply as soon as possible. This particular opportunity is for a school is to work directly with its tribe, or consortia of tribes, to pursue this unique grant.

In the end, funding is one of the most critical components to the operation and growth of your school. It has to be at the top of strategy planning and must be supported with the same level of expertise and dedication as other program components. Some funding is free and readily available to some schools, while others do not have this advantage. Today and always, time is of the essence to access capital facilities funding. Long-lead items, grant readiness, people resources, and allocation of resources to seek and secure funding should always be top-of-mind immediately and ongoing.



About this Document

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Ute Mountain Ute tribe opens charter school for classes



Kwiyagat Community Academy is officially on its way to shaping the futures of young Ute Mountain Utes

By Kala Parkinson Journal staff writer

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Ute Mountain Ute tribal elder Alfred Wall, center, speaks to the children at Kwiyagat Community Academy, before his blessing Monday during the first day of school in Towaoc. He was joined by tribal council members Lyndreth Wall and Archie House Jr., and Head of School Danny Porter, right.

Photo source: The Durango Journal, August 23, 2021. <https://www.the-journal.com/articles/ute-mountain-ute-tribe-opens-charter-school-for-classes/>