



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

GAO REPORT: “ADDITIONAL COORDINATION AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT NEEDED FOR HIGH-SPEED INTERNET ACCESS PROGRAMS ON TRIBAL LANDS”

On Wednesday, February 3, 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released its findings and recommendations for a report titled, “Additional Coordination and Performance Measurement Needed for High-Speed Internet Access Programs on Tribal Lands”. To view the full report and highlights please visit <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-222>.

GAO Report Summary and Highlights

Twenty-one tribes, six Internet service providers, and five other groups—including NCAI—were interviewed for the report. Interviewed tribes noted the importance of high-speed internet for economic development, education, and healthcare. However, despite the benefits of service a number of barriers including rugged and remote terrain, high poverty rates, and a lack of technical expertise were barriers to infrastructure deployment and broadband adoption on tribal lands. GAO noted other issues such as high costs—both for infrastructure deployment and service affordability for consumers on tribal lands—and low population densities on rural tribal lands as additional barriers to broadband availability. While the report noted that the 21 tribes interviewed all had some level of Internet service at varying speeds on their lands, there were documented limitations in 4G high-speed mobile broadband services. Furthermore, half of the interviewed tribes noted other Internet issues such as small data allocations, slow download speeds, and unreliable connections.

Another aspect investigated by GAO included the management of the National Broadband Map (Map)—an interactive online tool that provides information on Internet and phone availability nationwide, including tribal lands. While GAO did not in examine the reliability of current Map data, they noted issues with census block designations and that a carrier reporting service in a particular area could be misinterpreted as serving the entire Census block on the Map—leading to misrepresentations of Internet access on tribal lands. GAO also emphasized a lack of coordination between the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS) citing that there needed to be joint outreach and training efforts regarding available federal funding for broadband projects on tribal lands.

Other GAO recommendations for Executive action included:

- Development of performance goals and measures at the FCC to track progress of Internet availability in households on tribal lands;
- Improve reliability of FCC data for institutions receiving funds under the Schools and Libraries (E-rate) Program by defining “tribal” on the program application; and
- Development of performance goals and measures to ensure tribal schools and libraries receive affordable Internet services.

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