Broadband – also known as high-speed Internet – is today’s critical infrastructure. From education to health care, public safety to Tribal housing, broadband provides the platform to build Tribal communities. For example, distance learning supports language preservation by allowing Native language classes to be conducted online. Telemedicine increases access to specialists and preventative care that can be lifesaving while allowing Tribal members to remain in their communities. Shorter response times for police and fire fighters mean that homes and lives can be saved.

But the Internet revolution has largely bypassed Indian Country, with companies unwilling to provide their high-speed services to rural and remote Tribal communities. AMERIND Critical Infrastructure (ACI) was created to help Tribes address this disparity.

Why ACI?
The ACI team brings a unique blend of federal Indian law and broadband policy experience, as well as on-the-ground experience managing federal subsidies, grants, and loans. Geoffrey Blackwell, AMERIND’s Chief Strategy Officer and General Counsel, and Irene Flannery, Director of ACI, bring over 25 years of experience at the Federal Communications Commission, creating broadband, telecommunications, and broadcast policies and rules for Indian Country and managing federal broadband subsidies. And Kimball Sekaquaptewa, Manager of ACI, brings over 16 years of experience managing federal subsidy, grant, and loan programs in Tribal communities. “ACI is the full package,” says Flannery.

What Can ACI Do For Your Tribal Community?
The lack of broadband connectivity is too large a problem to solve as a school, library, clinic, or Tribal administration. It requires that different departments and agencies come together to identify common needs and then put together a community-based solution. “It is time to envision what digital Tribal communities look like,” says Sekaquaptewa. ACI is not your typical consultant that will come in and give you a one size fits all approach to broadband deployment. Instead, the ACI team puts you – the Tribal client – first, and will work with you to determine your community’s needs and develop a plan tailored to those needs. “Really, one size fits none,” says Flannery. ACI offers services such as strategic planning for sovereign Tribal broadband deployment; broadband subsidy, grant, and loan management; regulatory management and compliance; and social impact funding. But what exactly does this mean to your Tribal community?

Building Tribal Economies
Because traditional providers have not deployed broadband in Tribal communities – and that is not going to change – the time is now for Tribes to decide their path forward. The creation and continued growth of Tribally owned and operated broadband providers spurs Tribal economies, and Tribal ownership brings enhanced services to the community. The result is better broadband choices for homes, businesses, and Tribal anchor institutions. Profit stays local and improves economic well-being in Indian County.

Bringing and Keeping Dollars in Indian Country
Broadband subsidy, grant, and loan programs – such as the E-rate program for schools and libraries – bring federal dollars to Tribal communities. There is a lot of federal money out there to help bring broadband to rural communities, but things are changing in Washington, DC. “Now is the time for Tribal communities to benefit from these federal dollars,” said Flannery. The result is that broadband investment in Tribal communities brings improved education, health care, and community development.

Advancing Tribal Voices
Tribally owned and operated broadcast radio stations and online media enhance preservation of Native language and culture. Tribal radio enhances public safety by ensuring that local Tribal news and content is broadcast. “With a federal Tribal Priority that takes away the cost of the broadcast license, now is the time to start a Tribal radio station and, at the same time, create a valuable economic asset,” says Blackwell. The result is stronger, safer Tribal communities.

Reach Out to the ACI Team
The ACI team is ready to work with you to develop a plan to bring broadband to your Tribal community. We look forward to hearing from you and sitting down to figure out together a path forward.

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Senator Heinrich Hosts Tribal Broadband Listening Session In Santa Fe

“Access to high-speed internet is increasingly essential to daily life. We must take steps to connect all of our Tribal communities to the internet so all of our students and children can compete on an even playing field and learn the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century,” said Senator Heinrich. “Strengthening broadband access across New Mexico, particularly in our rural and Tribal communities, will improve education, boost the economy and increase public safety and civic engagement.”

The discussion focused on the FCC Schools and Libraries Program, known as E-rate, that provides discounts to assist most schools and libraries obtain high-speed internet access and telecommunications at affordable rates. While most of the nation’s public libraries have received E-rate support, only an estimated 15 percent of Tribal libraries receive E-rate funds. Information on Senator Heinrich’s bill, the Tribal Connect Act of 2017, is available at heinrich.senate.gov/download/Tribal-connect-act-one-pager.

PHOTO: U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) speaks at the Santa Fe Indian School with Tribal representatives about the legislation he plans to introduce to improve broadband connectivity in Indian Country. Pictured L. to R. Everett Chavez, Tribal Administrator Santo Domingo Pueblo; Alana McGrattan, NM State Library; Maureen Wacondo, Tribal Librarian Jemez Pueblo; Alissa Chavez-Lowe, Education Director San Felipe Pueblo; Odessa Waquiu, Education Director Zia Pueblo; Kimball Sekaquaptewa, Manager AMERIND Critical Infrastructure; Senator Martin Heinrich