

Tribal/Interior Budget Council (TIBC) Meeting Minutes

May 20, 2026

Main Interior Building, Yates Auditorium

Call to Order & Opening Prayer (9:00–9:15 AM)

The meeting was formally called to order by the Tribal and AS-IA Co-Chairs. Chairman Buster Attebery (Karuk Tribe) delivered the opening prayer, emphasizing gratitude, unity, and the importance of working together for Tribal communities.

Opening Remarks (9:15–9:45 AM)

The session began with welcoming remarks from Bryan Mercier (Director, BIA), who acknowledged the logistical challenges of the venue and set expectations for the day. Jason Bruno (Deputy Assistant Secretary – Management) highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue, partnership, and thoughtful spending. Senior leaders and Tribal co-chairs echoed these themes, stressing:

- The need for partnership, transparency, and respect for Tribal input.
- Improved communication and accountability.
- Preservation of TIBC as a partnership forum, not merely an advisory group.

Recap from Day 1: Tribal Consultation on TIBC Improvement (9:45–10:15 AM)

Participants reflected on the previous day’s consultation, sharing recommendations for enhancing TIBC processes, outreach, and effectiveness. Key themes included:

- The need for more inclusive and meaningful Tribal participation.
- Addressing communication gaps to ensure all Tribal voices are heard.
- Revisiting funding formulas to promote equitable resource distribution.

Tribal representatives emphasized the importance of partnership and accountability, urging a move beyond “check-the-box” consultation and advocating for genuine consideration of Tribal input in federal decision-making.

Budget Update (BIA/BIE/BTFA): Formulation & FY2028 Priorities (10:15–11:30 AM)

For a comprehensive understanding of the financial context and specific figures discussed during the meeting, please refer to the materials located on TIBC webpage at:

https://www.bia.gov/sites/default/files/media_document/ia_budget_update_fy25-28_tibc_spring_2026.pdf. The presentation supplements the summary provided and offer additional detail for those seeking in-depth information.

Sharon Omps (Office of Budget and Performance Management) delivered a comprehensive presentation on the budgets for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and Bureau of Trust Funds Administration (BTFA). The presentation covered:

- Enacted budgets for FY2025 and FY2026, the President’s FY2027 budget request, and the Tribal budget request for FY2027 and FY2028.
- Key figures, trends, and comparisons between Tribal requests and federal appropriations.
- Highlights of funding for public safety, education, settlements, and other major line items.

Key takeaways:

- The gap between Tribal budget requests (over \$30 billion) and enacted federal budgets (approx. \$3.9 billion) was a central concern.
- Notable decreases in funding for education, road maintenance, and other critical areas were discussed.
- Tribal leaders voiced frustration with chronic underfunding, outdated funding formulas, and the impact of inflation and rising costs.
- Calls were made for a 10% increase across all line items for FY2028, and for Congress to restore and protect Tribal Priority Allocations (TPA).

Discussion & Tribal Concerns:**1. Chronic Underfunding & Unmet Obligations**

- Tribal leaders repeatedly emphasized that federal budgets and enacted appropriations fall far short of Tribal requests and treaty obligations.
- The gap between Tribal needs (over \$30 billion requested) and actual funding (approx. \$3.9 billion enacted) was described as “deplorable and despicable,” with calls for budgets that reflect the true needs of Indian Country.

2. Outdated Funding Formulas & Tribal Shares

- Concerns were raised about funding formulas based on Tribal shares established in the 1990s, which no longer reflect current demographics, land bases, or needs.
- Tribal representatives called for a review and update of formulas to ensure equitable distribution, especially for new and large land base tribes.

3. Decreases in Key Line Items

- Specific frustration was voiced regarding decreases in road maintenance funding (from \$39 million to \$27 million), despite advocacy for increased infrastructure support.
- Similar concerns were raised about reductions in education, public safety, and natural resources funding.

4. Inflation & Rising Costs

- Tribal leaders noted that budgets have not kept pace with inflation, rising fuel and energy costs, and increased expenses for goods and services.
- Calls were made for a 10% increase across all line items for FY2028 to address these persistent shortfalls.

5. Staffing Shortages & Capacity Loss

- Many tribes reported severe staffing shortages at BIA and other agencies, leading to delays in services, loss of institutional knowledge, and diminished support for Tribal programs.
- Recommendations included exemptions from federal hiring restrictions, expanded recruitment (especially among Native professionals), and restoration of lost capacity.

6. Communication & Process Challenges

- Ongoing issues with communication, lack of timely information, and insufficient outreach to new Tribal leadership were highlighted.
- Suggestions included establishing a TIBC website, improving notification systems, and ensuring all Tribal voices are heard regardless of affiliation with national organizations.

7. Mandatory Spending & Protection of Tribal Allocations

- Tribal representatives advocated for mandatory spending for contract support costs and settlements to prevent erosion of discretionary budgets.
- Calls were made to restore and protect Tribal Priority Allocations (TPA), which have been diminished or redirected in past years.

8. Equity for Small, New, and Large Land Base Tribes

- Concerns about the lack of supplemental funding for large land base tribes, and the need for baseline support for small and new tribes.
- Recommendations included creating new supplements and updating eligibility criteria to ensure all tribes receive fair and adequate funding.

9. Consultation & Partnership

- Tribal leaders stressed the importance of meaningful consultation, partnership, and accountability in the budget process.
- The need to move beyond “check-the-box” consultation and ensure Tribal input is genuinely considered in federal decision-making was underscored.

Recommendations & Action Items:

- The TIBC body agreed to submit the FY2027 Tribal budget request as the baseline for FY2028, with a recommended 10% increase.
- A summary letter will be drafted, incorporating justification language and impact statements from the meeting, and circulated for review and approval prior to submission to the Department of the Interior.
- Tribes were encouraged to submit additional priorities or region-specific needs directly to TIBC or federal staff.
- Advocacy will continue for increased funding, improved staffing, and equitable formulas in Congressional and agency forums.

Lunch Break (11:30 AM–1:00 PM)

Attendees took a lunch break; informal discussions continued.

Recap of FY2027 Tribal Priority Ranking & Budget Submission (1:00–2:00 PM)

After lunch, the meeting resumed with a review of the FY2027 Tribal priority rankings and the process for submitting budget requests. This segment was designed to ensure that all participants understood how Tribal priorities are identified and incorporated into the federal budget process.

Core priorities identified for FY2027 included:

- **Strengthening Tribal Communities:**
 - Focused on improving housing, social services, and community infrastructure.

- Addressed needs such as elder care, youth programs, and family support services.
- **Public Safety and Justice:**
 - Emphasized the importance of law enforcement, Tribal courts, and emergency response.
 - Included concerns about staffing shortages, equipment needs, and the impact of drugs and crime on Tribal communities.
- **Trust Natural Resources Management:**
 - Covered stewardship of land, water, and environmental resources.
 - Highlighted the need for sustainable management, climate adaptation, and protection of sacred sites.
- **Economic Development:**
 - Supported initiatives for business incubators, job creation, and workforce development.
 - Addressed barriers to Tribal entrepreneurship and access to capital.
- **Education:**
 - Prioritized funding for Tribal schools, higher education, and vocational training.
 - Included requests for increased support for Johnson-O'Malley programs, Tribal colleges, and culturally relevant curricula.
- **Trust Land/Water Rights Management:**
 - Focused on resolving water settlements, protecting land rights, and improving infrastructure for water delivery and management.
- **Construction and Resource Management Construction:**
 - Addressed the need for new and improved facilities, roads, and utilities.
 - Included concerns about deferred maintenance and the impact of aging infrastructure on Tribal communities.

Discussion points:

- Participants advocated for maintaining these priorities while allowing flexibility to address emerging issues such as wildfires, flooding, and staffing shortages.
- There was a strong recommendation to update the ranking tool to make it more user-friendly and reflective of current Tribal needs.
- Improving outreach to Tribal leadership was emphasized, including strategies to ensure new leaders are informed and engaged in the ranking process.
- Ensuring all tribes have the opportunity to participate was highlighted, with suggestions for regional workshops, virtual meetings, and targeted communication.
- The importance of accurate, timely data and communication was underscored, so that Tribal needs are properly reflected in federal budget requests.
- Several participants noted that small tribes and newly recognized tribes often face unique challenges in the ranking process and advocated for supplemental funding or tailored support.
- The group discussed the need for regular review and adjustment of priorities to reflect changing circumstances, such as economic shifts, natural disasters, or legislative changes.

Discussion/Agreement of FY2028 Tribal Priorities (2:00–4:00 PM)

This session was dedicated to building consensus among Tribal and federal representatives on how to approach the FY2028 budget request. The discussion focused on both the process and the

substance of Tribal priorities, aiming to ensure that the needs of Indian Country are accurately reflected in the federal budget.

Consensus and Recommendations:

- The Council agreed to use the FY2027 Tribal budget request as the baseline for FY2028, recognizing that the previous year's priorities remain relevant and urgent.
- To address inflation, rising costs, and persistent funding gaps, a 10% increase across all line items was recommended for the FY2028 request.
- A summary letter will be drafted, documenting the rationale for the budget request, including impact statements and justification language from the meeting. This letter will be circulated for review and approval before submission to the Department of the Interior.

Key discussion points:

- **Inclusivity:** Tribes were encouraged to submit additional priorities or region-specific needs directly to TIBC or federal staff. This ensures that unique or urgent issues—such as natural disasters, regional economic shifts, or emerging health crises—are not overlooked.
- **Communication:** The need for improved communication and notification systems was emphasized. Suggestions included:
 - Creating a TIBC website to centralize information and updates.
 - Developing a directory of Tribal leadership to facilitate outreach and engagement.
 - Using virtual meetings and targeted communication to reach new Tribal leaders and remote communities.
- **Equity:** Revisiting funding formulas was discussed, with a focus on ensuring fairness for new and large land base tribes. Many Tribal leaders noted that current formulas, based on historic Tribal shares, do not reflect today's demographics or needs.
- **Mandatory Spending:** Advocacy for mandatory spending for contract support costs and settlements was highlighted. These items often erode discretionary budgets, impacting the ability of tribes to fund essential programs and services.
- **Accountability and Partnership:** Tribal leaders called for greater accountability, transparency, and partnership in the budget process. They urged federal agencies to genuinely consider Tribal input and recommendations, moving beyond “check-the-box” consultation.

The FY2028 budget will set the tone for future Tribal-federal relations and resource allocation. By building consensus and documenting Tribal needs, TIBC aims to strengthen advocacy and ensure that Tribal priorities are reflected in federal funding decisions.

Moving Forward: Process Improvement & Next Steps (4:00–5:00 PM)

The final session of the meeting focused on translating the day's discussions into concrete actions and setting the stage for ongoing improvement of the TIBC process. This segment was designed to ensure that the momentum from the meeting would carry forward and that all participants understood how their input would shape future efforts.

Immediate Actions:

- All written comments and suggestions for improving TIBC, submitted by the May 29, 2026, deadline, will be carefully reviewed and analyzed. This ensures that every voice—whether shared in person or in writing—is considered in shaping the Council’s future direction.
- The TIBC leadership and federal partners will schedule follow-up meetings, both virtual and in-person, to:
 - Refine and update TIBC protocols (the rules and procedures that guide how the Council operates).
 - Address specific recommendations from the consultation, such as improving communication, updating the ranking tool, and enhancing outreach to Tribal leaders.
 - Continue the dialogue on unresolved issues, ensuring that progress is ongoing rather than limited to annual meetings.

Long-Term Goals and Commitments:

- TIBC and its federal partners are committed to ongoing advocacy for:
 - Increased and more equitable funding for Tribal programs.
 - Improved staffing and capacity at both the federal and Tribal levels.
 - Regular review and adjustment of funding formulas to reflect changing Tribal demographics and needs.
- There is a strong emphasis on partnership, transparency, and accountability. TIBC aims to move beyond “check-the-box” consultation, fostering a culture where Tribal input is genuinely valued and acted upon.
- The Council will work to expand virtual participation options, making it easier for Tribal leaders from across the country to engage, regardless of travel constraints or geographic distance.
- Outreach and communication strategies will be improved, including the development of a TIBC website and a regularly updated directory of Tribal leadership, so that all tribes—especially those with new or transitioning leadership—are kept informed and involved.

These steps are intended to make TIBC more effective, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of Indian Country. By committing to continuous improvement, TIBC and its federal partners aim to build trust, strengthen advocacy, and deliver better outcomes for Tribal communities. The process improvements discussed are not just administrative—they are foundational to ensuring that Tribal voices are heard and that federal resources are allocated in a way that honors trust and treaty obligations.

Closing:

The meeting concluded with expressions of gratitude for the participation and commitment of all attendees, and a closing prayer to reaffirm unity and shared purpose as the Council moves forward with the FY2028 budget formulation and beyond.