



AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE FUND

EDUCATION IS THE ANSWER

TRIBAL COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES (TCU) VISIBILITY PROJECT



2022 OVERALL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN JANUARY 1 – DECEMBER 31, 2022

Developed in Collaboration and Consultation
with Thunderbird Strategic, LLC





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Project Overview

In November 2021, Thunderbird Strategic, LLC was hired by the American Indian College Fund (AICF) to develop and implement a one-year pilot project designed to build public relations capacity and visibility for three (3) Tribal Colleges & Universities (TCUs). The project began by AICF inviting a limited number of TCUs to submit letters of interest (LOI) from which the following colleges were selected to participate in the project:

- **College of Menominee Nation**, Keshena & Green Bay, WI, Christopher Caldwell, Pres.
- **College of the Muscogee Nation**, Okmulgee, OK, Dr. Monte Randall, Pres.
- **Cankdeska Cikana Community College**, Fort Totten, ND, Dr. Cynthia Lindquist, Pres.

Due to the relatively small size of tribal colleges and universities, many do not have adequate in-house staff to effectively handle public relations functions. Therefore, this project will provide the selected TCUs with outside counsel and support to build internal resources to maximize the time and talents of existing staff (e.g., plans, templates, training, processes, etc.).

With this idea in mind, Thunderbird Strategic will work in collaboration with the College Fund and key personnel from the selected TCUs to develop stories and secure increased public exposure in local, state, regional, and national media outlets. The media stories will showcase good works of the participating tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) in areas such as agriculture, environmental impacts, early childhood education, food sovereignty, and more.

These efforts will augment the College Fund's ongoing media relations efforts to increase awareness of the College Fund and its scholars. In addition to these efforts, the College Fund plans to invest in targeted, paid, digital ads to work alongside the TCU's public relations efforts to increase awareness of the TCUs and their work in their communities.



Overall Goal & Supporting Objectives

The overall goal of the project is to build greater public awareness, understanding and support for each participating TCU throughout their communities, states, and broader regions.

The supporting objectives for the pilot project include:

- Establish and build trusting relationships with the college presidents and support staff from the participating TCUs
- Determine a baseline of past media coverage received by the participating TCUs in local, state, national and Native American media channels
- Develop a year-long PR plan for each of the TCUs, including key performance indicators (KPIs) for measuring growth of PR coverage in the above-mentioned media channels
- Train the participating TCU team members on how to identify and pitch good stories to the targeted media outlets
- Assist the participating TCU team members in pitching and measuring earned media coverage for 12 months in the markets where the TCUs are located and creatively seek ways to amplify coverage. Develop speaking points for TCU officials on stories to build the skillset of the TCUs to handle PR internally in one year.

Project Team

The project is being conducted under the direction of AICF's President, Cheryl Crazy Bull, and the Project Coordinator is AICF's Director of Public Education, Dina Horwedel. Other members of AICF's team involved with the project include Nancy Jo Houk and Tammy Miller-Carlson.

Thunderbird Strategic is serving as the prime contractor. Thunderbird's President, Kevin Allis, is overseeing the terms of the contract, including financial and progress reporting. Thunderbird's Vice President of Strategic Communications, Lycia Ortega Maddocks, is serving as the Account Manager. In this role, Maddocks is orchestrating the daily duties of the project in collaboration with AICF and the participating TCUs.

Agency MABU is serving as a subcontractor to Thunderbird's team. MABU has assigned its Executive Vice President, Alex Mabin, to serve as Project Manager. In this capacity, he will work with other members of MABU's team of communications professionals to provide media relations, multimedia production, and digital marketing services.

Target Audiences

The target audience for this project includes reporters, editors, publishers, influencers, bloggers, and other media personnel responsible for developing and/or disseminating news and other information of interest and value to the myriad of audiences served by the participating TCU's. These audiences may include, but are not limited to:

EXTERNAL AUDIENCES

Defined as the individuals and organizations with whom the TCUs desire to attract and provide a meaningful and mutual exchange of value which may occur in many forms (e.g., intellectual, functional, social, psychological, spiritual, financial, etc.).

- Prospective students and their families, including and especially elders
- Current and prospective donors & volunteers
- High school counselors and teachers
- Tribal governments, programs, and enterprises
- Philanthropic & civic organizations
- Business and industry leaders and organizations
- Local, regional, and national government representatives

INTERNAL AUDIENCES

Defined as those individuals and organizations that are integrally connected to the TCUs through sharing of their time, talents, and other resources.

- Current students, faculty, and support staff
- Governance, including board and/or tribal leaders
- Alumni and past donors
- Strategic partners

Project Approach

Thunderbird Strategic, the College Fund, and the participating TCUs will employ a three-step approach toward implementing the communications plan. The first step will involve Thunderbird's consulting team conducting research and developing a written communications plan describing the visibility project's overall goals, target audiences, key messages, timelines, and key performance indicators (KPIs).

The next step will involve Thunderbird's team working with AICF and the participating TCUs to develop and deploy individual action plans based on the project's overall communications plan. The third step will involve measuring and reporting outcomes, as well as establishing a PR Roundtable Group to discuss sustainability and lessons learned. The efforts will focus on raising awareness, understanding and support for the selected TCU's as well as supporting the AICF's overall visibility campaign efforts as opportunities arise.

Project Deliverables

Thunderbird's consulting team will work in collaboration with representatives from the College Fund and participating TCUs to complete the following project deliverables.

Phase I – Research & Planning December 2021 – February 2022
Conduct a kickoff meeting with the College Fund
Research background information on the participating TCUs
Conduct an introductory meeting with participating TCUs to discuss the project and plans
Conduct executive interviews with the TCUs to assess PR capabilities, capacities and needs
Provide the College Fund with monthly progress reports
Assess the participating TCUs past performance for earned media and online presence
Report findings from the executive interviews and assessment process to the College Fund
Write an overall communications plan addressing goals, strategies, audiences, and messages
Conduct regular meetings with the College Fund to implement the written plan

Phase II –Development & Deployment February 2022 – December 2022
Develop an individualized PR plan of action for each participating TCU
Conduct regular meetings with each participating TCU to implement their plans of action
Develop targeted media lists for each participating TCU
Develop a training toolkit addressing best practices relating to securing media coverage
Conduct media relations training with participating TCUs using the toolkit as a guide
Work with each TCU to pitch 3-5 story ideas to targeted media outlets
Work with each participating TCU to research, write and distribute 3-5 news releases
Work with each participating TCU to seek in-kind support from targeted media outlets
Develop and incorporate content into participating TCU websites and social channels.
Plan and conduct digital advertising through participating TCU social sites

Phase III – Measurement & Reporting Ongoing

Measure key performance indicators (KPIs) resulting from the public relations program

Establish a PR roundtable group with AICF and participating TCUs to discuss best practices

Conduct a planning meeting with AICF & PR roundtable to discuss successes and ideas for connecting with AICF's other visibility efforts and campaigns

Submitting a final report describing lessons learned & ideas for project sustainability

PR Findings & Recommendations

The following public relations (PR) initiatives and needs were identified by each participating TCU as part of the “letters of interest” that they submitted to the College Fund as part of the pilot project selection process.

COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION

- Goals are to expand the college's brand awareness and attract more students.
- Revamping their marketing efforts to move from more traditional forms of outreach and advertising to more digital forms.
- Local newspapers (2) always supportive of sharing their news releases.
- Currently developing a new website which is set to launch in Q1 of 2022.
- The point of contact for this project is Tashina Williams as Director of Institutional Advancement (tawilliams@menominee.edu) 715-799-6226, (ext. 3155).



COLLEGE OF THE MUSCOGEE NATION

- Goals are to increase awareness within the communities they serve, as well as increase student enrollment, retention, and graduation.
- Plan to appoint a standing committee to oversee the visibility efforts.
- CMN's media outreach efforts are managed by the Student Success program, which includes high school campus visits.
- They want to position CMN as the leader in Native American Studies in OK.



CANKDESKA CIKANA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (AKA LITTLE HOOP COLLEGE)

- Goals are to increase awareness of the good works being done by the college to spark engagement from tribal and community members. Another goal is to share knowledge and history of the Tribe for all members to enjoy through various mediums.
- Current means of outreach include student e-mail, as well as social media accounts on Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram, Twitter and the college website.
- The point of contact for this project is DeLana Wendland, Dean of Students, delana.wendland@littlehoop.edu, 701-766-1137.



Key Messages

The messaging for this project will focus on drawing attention to the many ways in which the participating TCUs have positively impacted people in meaningful and memorable ways. The messages will be shared in human interest style stories in various mediums including print, social media, photos, videos, and advertisements. Additionally, the messaging will emphasize the vital role that tribal colleges play in creating beneficial economic and workforce impacts on behalf of tribal nations, surrounding communities, and society at large.

Communications Methods & Mediums

Due to limited staffing and financial resources, participating TCU's tend to use online media channels as their primary avenues for communicating with constituents. Thus, in terms of general communications strategy, all roads ultimately lead to each TCU's website.

Therefore, in addition to maintaining a comprehensive and interactive website, each participating TCU will be encouraged to proactively develop and disseminate content through various social media channels. For example, each participating TCU has an established and growing base of followers on social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Some are also exploring expanding into newer channels such as TikTok and Discord.

Other supporting methods and mediums to be used by the participating TCUs to regularly connect with their target audiences will include media relations, e-mail marketing, sponsored events, audio-visual media, and community outreach. Paid media will also be used sparingly to advertise through various outlets including social media, area newspapers, targeted journals, out of home mediums, and local/tribal radio stations.

Lastly, a variety of print materials and other collateral items will be used to reach target audiences including, but not limited to: brochures, flyers, posters, banners, PowerPoint templates, specialty promotional items (e.g., pens, notepads, totes, etc.) and employee ID materials (e.g., e-mail signatures, screensaver, etc.). Examples of print materials may include a welcome brochure for new students, a general information brochure for prospective students, a course catalog, educational posters, and postcard mailers.

Plan of Action

Thunderbird's team will deploy a three-pronged approach for building visibility and PR capacity in collaboration with AICF and the participating TCU's. The first component will involve the provision of training, templates, and toolkits. The second component will involve the creation and dissemination of content, and the third component will involve the establishment of a peer advisory council to share "best practices" and promote ongoing advancements and sustainability of the efforts.

COMPONENT #1: PROVISION OF TRAINING, TEMPLATES & TOOLKITS

Thunderbird's consulting team will provide two (2) training sessions to participating TCUs via video teleconference. The TCUs will be encouraged to invite 3-5 representatives from their college who are involved in communications-related activities involving community outreach, student recruitment, fundraising and/or stakeholder relations. Each training session will be recorded to allow TCUs to share with other members of their teams and/or view at a later date.

The first training session will cover "best practices" relating to public relations and communications programs for tribal colleges. Topics to be addressed will include (but will not be limited to): developing a written PR plan, creating a unique brand, developing audience-centric content, maintaining a strong online presence, and conducting media outreach efforts. Additionally, feedback will be provided on the findings and recommendations gleaned by Thunderbird's consulting team as part of the executive interviews which were conducted during the research and planning phase of the "visibility project."

The second training session will cover "best practices" relating to media relations and community outreach efforts. Topics to be addressed will include (but won't be limited to): identifying media outlets and influencers, developing mutually beneficial relationships with media professionals, creating information of interest and value, pitching story ideas, creating talking points, and determining spokespersons and subject matter experts.

This media relations training will help the TCUs prepare to engage with media reporters. Thunderbird's team will:

- Provide a media relations training and toolkit, including training on building media lists
- Provide a template and training on elevator message and key talking points
- Chart out stories to tell and determine the medium

In addition to providing “best practices” training, Thunderbird’s consulting team will provide a variety of templates and toolkits to ensure that each institution understands what foundational elements are needed to support their PR efforts. Our team will also serve as a resource for assessing each TCUs existing capacities and capabilities as follows:

- Assess and provide a template for a written annual communications/PR plan
- Assess and provide a template for a brand standards manual
- Assist TCUs in determining top leadership and board involvement, support, and spokesperson(s) for communications/PR efforts
- Assist TCUs in determining key employee roles for the communications/PR function
- Recommend software and online tools to support communications/PR efforts
- Create a wish list to modernize and/or update its website (CMS, responsive, news/blog and determine how it will be maintained)
- Provide a social media calendar template for creating an institution-wide online presence and regular activity
- Work with the TCU point persons have access to stock image assets (Adobe, Canva, iStock, etc.) and to begin planning content creation

COMPONENT #2: CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF CONTENT

Thunderbird’s consulting team will work directly with each participating TCU to create content for disseminating through their internal media outlets (e.g., website, social media, e-newsletter, etc.), as well as through external media outlets (e.g., newspapers, radio, television, blogs, etc.).

Our writers and graphic designers will identify and create content featuring three (3) primary stories for each TCU, along with two to three (2-3) supplementary stories. The primary stories will focus on drawing attention to topics that are truly unique to each TCU. The secondary stories will focus on news-related content of a timely nature.

The primary stories will be written in the form of a blog/news article (e.g., 600 - 800 words) to be posted on each TCU's website. The articles will then be repackaged in the form of a news release, e-newsletter story, one-page flyer, and social media post. In this way, the primary stories can be distributed through each TCU's existing communications channels, as well as shared with area newspapers, radio stations, and other external media outlets. These stories will focus on drawing attention to big accomplishments or major areas of study such as language curriculum, agriculture, environmental impacts, early childhood education, food sovereignty, and more. Depending upon the significance of each story, some "paid" advertising may be used to boost social media posts to improve the reach and frequency of the messaging.

The secondary stories will be written in the form of news advisories (e.g., 200-400 words) that can be distributed to external media outlets, as well as used as part of internal communications efforts (e.g., social media, e-news, website, etc.). Since the main purpose of the secondary stories will be to secure earned media coverage, our team will offer advice to each participating TCU regarding the importance of identifying a spokesperson and/or subject matter expert (SME) who will be available to for follow-up interviews by reporters, editors, or bloggers.

Examples of stories to possibly be pitched to the media include:

- Announcements of faculty, staff, alumni, and student achievements including attainment of additional education/certifications, new employment situations, etc.
- Releases publicizing college events including graduations, student events, community events, performances, talks, panels, etc.
- Announcements regarding significant college projects such as new programs, construction, scholarships, degree programs, etc.
- Releases announcing additions/promotions to staff/faculty

Lastly, our team will work with each participating TCU to identify existing digital assets that may be available for creating compelling content (e.g., photos, video footage, audio recordings, brochures, graphics, etc.). We will provide the TCUs with a hyperlink to upload such assets to our team of writers and graphic designers.

COMPONENT #3: ESTABLISHMENT OF PEER ADVISORY COUNCIL

The third component of the visibility project will center around the establishment of a peer advisory council, and measurement/reporting of results.

Thunderbird’s consulting team will work with AICF and to establish a roundtable group including 2-3 representatives from each participating TCU. The purpose of the group will be to exchange ideas for helping one another improve their media relations and community outreach efforts. The advisory council will also discuss ways in which they are measuring the results of their activities and reporting outcomes. The group will also discuss ideas for continuing to build their organization’s capacities and capabilities in the areas of PR and communications as a way of assuring long-term success and sustainability.

Milestones & Timelines

Thunderbird’s consulting team will work with AICF and the participating TCUs throughout the 2022 calendar year. We will use the following milestones and timelines as a general guide for successfully completing the planned scope of work.

Milestone	Start	Complete
Develop an overall PR plan for the visibility project	Jan. 15	Feb. 15
Develop individual PR plans for each participating TCU	Feb. 15	Mar. 15
Identify list of possible “primary & secondary stories”	Feb. 15	Mar. 15
Develop targeted media lists for each participating TCU	Feb. 15	Mar. 15
Research/write primary story #1 and create packaged content	Mar. 15	Apr. 15
Research/write secondary story #1 to pitch to media	Mar. 15	Apr. 15
Conduct “best practices” training session #1	Mar. 15	Apr. 15
Provide TCUs with various toolkits and templates	April 15	July 31
Research/write primary story #2 and create packaged content	May 15	June 15
Research/write secondary story #2 to pitch to media	May 15	June 15
Conduct “best practices” training session #2	May 15	June 15

Milestone	Start	Complete
Conduct limited “digital advertising” to boost social posts	May 15	July 31
Research/write primary story #3 and create packaged content	July 15	Aug. 15
Research/write secondary story #3 to pitch to media	July 15	Aug. 15
Create a purpose & charter for the Peer Advisory Group	July 15	Aug. 15
Identify participants for Peer Advisory Group	Aug. 15	Sep. 15
Conduct kickoff meeting for Peer Advisory Group	Sep. 15	Oct. 15
Conduct wrap-up meeting to discuss lesson learned	Dec. 1	Dec. 15
Provide final written report on project outcomes	Dec. 15	Dec. 31

The actual start and completion dates may vary from one TCU to the next based on the level and timeliness of input and approvals received from each participating organization.

Measurement & Reporting

The results of the project will be measured in the following ways:

- Paid media exposure based on gross ratings points, cost/point, frequency, and reach
- Digital media exposure measured in terms of impressions, clicks and engagement
- Earned media exposure measured in terms of its advertising value equivalency, number of media outlets providing coverage, and the positivity of tone/message
- Digital monitoring and measurement will happen in real time across multiple dashboards relating to geofencing, re-targeting, digital display, and social media



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