

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 996

To award grants to certain institutions of higher education to educate and train students to participate in the telecommunications workforce.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 25, 2021

Mr. WICKER (for himself, Ms. SINEMA, and Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To award grants to certain institutions of higher education to educate and train students to participate in the telecommunications workforce.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improving Minority
5 Participation And Careers in Telecommunications Act” or
6 the “IMPACT Act”.

7 **SEC. 2. TELECOMMUNICATIONS WORKFORCE TRAINING**
8 **GRANT PROGRAM.**

9 (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

1 (1) ASSISTANT SECRETARY.—The term “Assist-
2 ant Secretary” means the Assistant Secretary of
3 Commerce for Communications and Information.

4 (2) COVERED GRANT.—The term “covered
5 grant” means a grant awarded under subsection (b).

6 (3) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-
7 ty” means a historically Black college or university,
8 Tribal College or University, or minority-serving in-
9 stitution, or a consortium of such entities, that
10 forms a partnership with 1 or more of the following
11 entities to carry out a training program:

12 (A) A member of the telecommunications
13 industry, such as a company or industry asso-
14 ciation.

15 (B) A labor-management organization.

16 (C) The Telecommunications Industry
17 Registered Apprenticeship Program.

18 (D) A nonprofit organization dedicated to
19 helping individuals gain employment in the tele-
20 communications industry.

21 (E) A community or technical college with
22 experience in providing workforce development
23 for individuals seeking employment in the tele-
24 communications industry or a similar industry.

1 (4) FUND.—The term “Fund” means the Tele-
2 communications Workforce Training Grant Program
3 Fund established under subsection (c)(1).

4 (5) GRANT PROGRAM.—The term “Grant Pro-
5 gram” means the Telecommunications Workforce
6 Training Grant Program established under sub-
7 section (b).

8 (6) HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE OR UNI-
9 VERSITY.—The term “historically Black college or
10 university” has the meaning given the term ‘part B
11 institution’ in section 322 of the Higher Education
12 Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1061).

13 (7) INDUSTRY FIELD ACTIVITIES.—The term
14 “industry field activities” means activities at active
15 telecommunications worksites, such as towers, con-
16 struction sites, and network management hubs.

17 (8) INDUSTRY PARTNER.—The term “industry
18 partner” means an entity described in subpara-
19 graphs (A) through (E) of paragraph (3) with which
20 an eligible entity forms a partnership to carry out a
21 training program.

22 (9) MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTION.—The
23 term “minority-serving institution” means an insti-
24 tution described in section 371(a) of the Higher
25 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1067q(a)).

1 (10) TRAINING PROGRAM.—The term “training
2 program” means a credit or non-credit program de-
3 veloped by an eligible entity, in partnership with an
4 industry partner, that—

5 (A) is designed to educate and train stu-
6 dents to participate in the telecommunications
7 workforce; and

8 (B) includes a curriculum and apprentice-
9 ship or internship opportunities.

10 (11) TRIBAL COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY.—The
11 term “Tribal College or University” has the meaning
12 given the term in section 316(b)(3) of the Higher
13 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c(b)(3)).

14 (b) PROGRAM.—The Assistant Secretary, acting
15 through the Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives es-
16 tablished under section 902(b)(1) of division N of the Con-
17 solidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (Public Law 116–
18 260), shall establish a program, to be known as the “Tele-
19 communications Workforce Training Grant Program”,
20 under which the Assistant Secretary awards grants to eli-
21 gible entities to develop training programs.

22 (c) FUND.—

23 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in
24 the Treasury of the United States a fund to be

1 known as the “Telecommunications Workforce
2 Training Grant Program Fund”.

3 (2) AVAILABILITY.—Amounts in the Fund shall
4 be available to the Assistant Secretary to carry out
5 the Grant Program.

6 (d) APPLICATION.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—An eligible entity desiring a
8 covered grant shall submit an application to the As-
9 sistant Secretary at such time, in such manner, and
10 containing such information as the Assistant Sec-
11 retary may require.

12 (2) CONTENTS.—An eligible entity shall include
13 in an application under paragraph (1)—

14 (A) a commitment from the industry part-
15 ner of the eligible entity to collaborate with the
16 eligible entity to develop a training program, in-
17 cluding curricula and internships or apprentice-
18 ships;

19 (B) a description of how the eligible entity
20 plans to use the covered grant, including the
21 type of training program the eligible entity
22 plans to develop; and

23 (C) a plan to increase female student par-
24 ticipation in the training program of the eligible
25 entity.

1 (e) USE OF FUNDS.—An eligible entity may use a
2 covered grant, with respect to the training program of the
3 eligible entity, to—

4 (1) hire faculty members to teach courses in the
5 training program;

6 (2) train faculty members to prepare students
7 for employment in jobs related to the deployment of
8 next-generation communications networks, including
9 5G networks, and fiber infrastructure, particularly
10 in—

11 (A) broadband and wireless network engi-
12 neering;

13 (B) network deployment;

14 (C) industry field activities; and

15 (D) cybersecurity;

16 (3) design and develop curricula and other com-
17 ponents necessary for degrees, courses, or programs
18 of study, including certificate programs and
19 credentialing programs, that comprise the training
20 program;

21 (4) pay for costs associated with instruction
22 under the training program, including the costs of
23 equipment, telecommunications training towers, lab-
24 oratory space, classroom space, and instructional
25 field activities;

1 (5) fund scholarships, student internships, ap-
2 prenticeships, and pre-apprenticeship opportunities;

3 (6) recruit students for the training program;
4 and

5 (7) support the enrollment in the training pro-
6 gram of individuals working in the telecommuni-
7 cations industry in order to advance professionally in
8 the industry.

9 (f) GRANT AWARDS.—

10 (1) DEADLINE.—Not later than December 31,
11 2022, the Assistant Secretary shall award all cov-
12 ered grants.

13 (2) MINIMUM ALLOCATION TO CERTAIN ENTI-
14 TIES.—The Assistant Secretary shall award not less
15 than—

16 (A) 30 percent of covered grant amounts
17 to historically Black colleges or universities; and

18 (B) 30 percent of covered grant amounts
19 to Tribal Colleges or Universities.

20 (3) EVALUATION CRITERIA.—As part of the
21 final rules issued under subsection (g), the Assistant
22 Secretary shall develop criteria for evaluating appli-
23 cations for covered grants.

24 (g) RULES.—Not later than 180 days after the date
25 of enactment of this Act, after providing public notice and

1 an opportunity to comment, the Assistant Secretary, in
2 consultation with the Secretary of Labor and the Sec-
3 retary of Education, shall issue final rules governing the
4 Grant Program.

5 (h) TERM.—The Assistant Secretary shall establish
6 the term of a covered grant, which may not be less than
7 5 years.

8 (i) GRANTEE REPORTS.—During the term of a cov-
9 ered grant received by an eligible entity, the eligible entity
10 shall submit to the Assistant Secretary an annual report
11 that, with respect to the preceding year—

12 (1) describes how the eligible entity used the
13 covered grant amounts;

14 (2) describes the progress the eligible entity
15 made in developing and executing the training pro-
16 gram of the eligible entity;

17 (3) describes the number of faculty and stu-
18 dents participating in the training program of the el-
19 igible entity;

20 (4) describes the partnership with the industry
21 partner of the eligible entity, including the commit-
22 ments and in-kind contributions made by the indus-
23 try partner; and

24 (5) includes data on internship, apprenticeship,
25 and employment opportunities and placements.

1 (j) OVERSIGHT.—

2 (1) AUDITS.—The Inspector General of the De-
3 partment of Commerce shall audit the Grant Pro-
4 gram in order to—

5 (A) ensure that eligible entities use covered
6 grant amounts in accordance with—

7 (i) the requirements of this section;

8 and

9 (ii) the overall purpose of the Grant
10 Program, as described in subsection (b);

11 and

12 (B) prevent waste, fraud, and abuse in the
13 operation of the Grant Program.

14 (2) REVOCATION OF FUNDS.—The Assistant
15 Secretary shall revoke a grant awarded to an eligible
16 entity that is not in compliance with the require-
17 ments of this section or the overall purpose of the
18 Grant Program, as described in subsection (b).

19 (k) ANNUAL REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Each year,
20 until all covered grants have expired, the Assistant Sec-
21 retary shall submit to Congress a report that—

22 (1) identifies each eligible entity that received a
23 covered grant and the amount of the covered grant;

24 (2) describes the progress each eligible entity
25 described in paragraph (1) has made toward accom-

1 plishing the overall purpose of the Grant Program,
2 as described in subsection (b);

3 (3) summarizes the job placement status or ap-
4 prenticeship opportunities of students who have par-
5 ticipated in the training program of the eligible enti-
6 ty; and

7 (4) includes the findings of any audits con-
8 ducted by the Inspector General of the Department
9 of Commerce under subsection (j)(1) that were not
10 included in the previous report submitted under this
11 subsection.

12 (l) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
13 authorized to be appropriated to the Fund \$100,000,000
14 for fiscal year 2021, to remain available until expended.

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