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TRIBAL INTERNET ACCESS

Increased Federal Coordination and Performance Measurement Needed

Statement of Mark Goldstein, Director, Physical Infrastructure

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

TRIBAL INTERNET ACCESS:

Increased Federal Coordination and Performance Measurement Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

High-speed Internet service is viewed as a critical component of the nation's infrastructure and an economic driver, particularly to remote tribal communities. This testimony examines: (1) perspectives of tribes and providers on high-speed Internet access and barriers to increasing this access; (2) the level of interrelation and coordination between federal programs that promote high-speed Internet access on tribal lands; and (3) existing data and performance measures related to high-speed Internet on tribal lands. This statement is based on GAO's January 2016 report (GAO-16-222). For this report, GAO visited or interviewed officials from a non-generalizable sample of 21 tribal entities and 6 service providers. GAO also reviewed FCC and USDA fiscal year 2010 through 2014 program data, funding, and materials and interviewed federal officials.

What GAO Recommended

In January 2016, GAO recommended that FCC take the following actions in tribal areas: (1) develop joint training and outreach with USDA; (2) develop performance goals and measures for improving broadband availability to households; (3) develop performance goals and measures for improving broadband availability to schools and libraries; and (4) improve the reliability of FCC data related to institutions that receive E-rate funding by defining "tribal" on the program application. FCC agreed with the recommendations.

What GAO Found

In January 2016, GAO found that, although all 21 tribes GAO interviewed have some access to high-speed Internet, barriers to increasing access remain. Tribal officials and Internet providers said that high poverty rates among tribes and the high costs of connecting remote tribal villages to core Internet networks limit high-speed Internet availability and access. About half of the tribes GAO interviewed also said that the lack of sufficient administrative and technical expertise among tribal members limits their efforts to increase high-speed Internet access.

The Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Universal Service Fund subsidy programs and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service grant programs are interrelated. The programs seek to increase high-speed Internet access in underserved areas, including tribal lands. GAO's previous work on overlap, duplication, and fragmentation has shown that interagency coordination on interrelated programs can help ensure efficient use of resources and effective programs. However, FCC and USDA do not coordinate to develop joint outreach and training, which could result in inefficient use of federal resources and missed opportunities for resource leveraging. For example, USDA and FCC held separate training events in the Pacific Northwest Region in 2015 when a joint event could have saved limited training funds and reduced costs.

FCC has placed special emphasis on improving Internet access on tribal lands following the issuance of the National Broadband Plan in 2010, which called for greater efforts to make broadband available on tribal lands. However, FCC has not developed performance goals and measures for improving high-speed Internet availability to households on tribal lands. FCC could establish baseline measures to track its progress by using, for example, the National Broadband Map which includes data on Internet availability on tribal lands. FCC also lacks both reliable data on high-speed Internet access and performance goals and measures for high-speed Internet access by tribal institutions—such as schools and libraries. Specifically, FCC's E-rate program provides funds to ensure that schools and libraries have affordable access to modern broadband technologies, but FCC has neither defined "tribal" on its E-rate application nor set any performance goals for the program's impact on tribal institutions. Without these goals and measures FCC cannot assess the impact of its efforts.

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Tester, and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the state of broadband access and adoption on tribal lands as well as the government programs that promote access and adoption on tribal lands. High-speed Internet service is viewed as a critical component of the nation's physical infrastructure and a driver of economic growth. The Internet is particularly useful to tribal communities—which are generally located in remote, rural locations—as access to it offers new opportunities for growth, productivity, and innovation. According to 2013 Census estimates, more than 640,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives reside on tribal lands.[1] There are more than 300 Indian tribes in the continental United States and more than 200 federally recognized Alaska Native Villages. Native Americans are among the most economically distressed groups in the United States and, according to the Census' 2014 American Community Survey (ACS), about 28.3 percent live in households with incomes below the federal poverty level—compared to 15.5 percent for the U.S. population as a whole. In addition, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) data indicates that, as of December 2013, high-speed Internet was available to 37 percent of households on tribal lands—compared to 47 percent of U.S. households in rural areas and 92 percent of U.S. households in urban areas.

The communications infrastructure that supports Internet access is, by and large, built and operated by private industry. Advances in technology, attained through the use of fiber optics and new wireless technologies have allowed providers to offer high-speed Internet that supports new services and applications such as streaming video. In 2010, FCC stated that every household and business in America should have access to affordable advanced telecommunication service with a speed of at least 4 megabits per second (Mbps) download and at least 1 Mbps upload and that this target should be re-set every four years. In January 2015, FCC

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[1]For this testimony, GAO has defined tribal lands as lands that include any federally recognized Indian tribe's reservation, off-reservation trust lands, pueblo, or colony, and Alaska Native regions established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Pub. L. No. 92-203, 85 Stat. 688 (1971) (codified as amended at 43 U.S.C. §§ 1601 et seq.). Tribal lands do not include Oklahoma Tribal Statistical Areas (OTSA), and the population figure of 640,000 does not include the 401,000 Native Americans living on OTSAs.

adopted a speed benchmark at download speeds of at least 25 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps.

From fiscal years 2010 to 2014, the federal government provided over $33 billion in assistance to telecommunications service providers and municipalities to build or improve networks in order to further the national goal of universal high-speed Internet access. The federal government has provided this funding through the FCC's Universal Service Fund (USF) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS). RUS's programs focus on rural telecommunications development, while USF's programs focus on providing support for areas where the cost of providing services is high, as well as for low-income consumers, schools, libraries, and rural health care facilities.

My statement today is based on our January 2016 report (GAO-16-222) on tribal high-speed Internet access. [2] My statement, like the report, examines (1) perspectives of selected tribes and providers on the importance of high-speed Internet access for tribes and any barriers to increasing this access on tribal lands; (2) the level of interrelation and coordination between federal programs at FCC and USDA that promote high-speed Internet access on tribal lands; and (3) existing data and FCC performance goals and measures related to access to high-speed Internet service on tribal lands and for tribal institutions.

To conduct this work for our January 2016 report, we interviewed officials from 18 tribal governments covering 10 of the continental states, 3 Alaska Native regions, and 6 service providers operating on tribal lands. [3] We also identified and interviewed industry stakeholders such as research groups and telecommunications associations on their views regarding the barriers to increasing high-speed Internet access to broadband on tribal lands. In addition, we evaluated USF and RUS program coordination based on criteria for implementing interrelated programs developed in previous GAO work on fragmentation, overlap, duplication, and

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[2]GAO, *Telecommunications: Additional Coordination and Performance Measurement Needed for High-speed Internet Access Programs on Tribal Lands*, GAO-16-222, (Washington D.C.: January 29, 2016).

[3]For reporting purposes, we developed the following series of indefinite quantifiers to describe the tribal responses from the 21 tribal entities we interviewed: 5 of the 21 is described as "a few"; 5 to 9 is described as "some"; 10 to 12 is described as "about half"; 13 to 16 is described as "many"; and 17 or more is described as "most".

interagency coordination within the federal government.[4] Finally, to determine what data and FCC performance goals and measures exist related to access to high-speed Internet service on tribal lands and to tribal institutions, we analyzed fiscal year 2010 through 2014 data from USF programs providing assistance, reviewed applications and the guidance materials for those programs, and the agencies' performance reports. Finally, we reviewed performance goals and measures for USF programs according to criteria established in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, as amended[5] and in federal standards for internal control.[6] More detailed information on our scope and methodology for that work can be found in the issued report. We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Selected Tribes and Providers Identified Opportunities and Barriers Related to Increasing High-Speed Internet Access

Tribal officials we interviewed for our January 2016 report said they place a high priority on institutional and personal Internet access because of the numerous benefits, including the following:

- Economic Development: Officials from most tribes said high-speed Internet is essential for economic development such as finding employment or establishing online businesses. FCC also found that community access to Internet services is critical in facilitating job placement, career advancement, and other uses that help to stimulate economic activity.

- Education: Officials from many tribes stated that high-speed Internet access at schools supports educational success. For example, access can allow students to conduct online testing or to watch online lectures.

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[4]GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, GAO-15-49SP, (Washington, D.C.: April 14, 2015); GAO, *Managing for Results: Barriers to Interagency Coordination*, GAO/GGD-00-106, (Washington, D.C.: March 29, 2000); and GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, GAO-12-1022, (Washington, D.C.: September 27, 2012).

[5]Pub. L. No. 103-62, 107 Stat. 285 (Aug. 3, 1993) as amended by GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-352 (2010).

[6]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1, (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

- Health: About half of the tribes said that high-speed Internet access to support telemedicine was important to the tribe, particularly in rural or remote areas.

Officials from all 21 tribes we interviewed said that Internet service existed on at least some of their lands at varying connection speeds, ranging from less than 1 Mbps to over 25 Mbps. Some of the tribes we interviewed had at least some fiber optic high-speed Internet connections while others had slower copper lines, only mobile service, or only satellite service. Many of the tribal lands where we held interviews had some level of mobile Internet service but only a few had 4G mobile high-speed Internet services. Others had no mobile service. Further, officials from about half of the tribes we interviewed described important limitations to their Internet services, including higher than usual costs, small data allocations, slow download speeds, and unreliable connections.

Rugged Terrain, High Poverty, and a Lack of Capacity Were the Most Cited Barriers to Increasing Access to High Speed Internet in Tribal Areas

In January 2016, we found that the barriers to improvements in high-speed Internet service on tribal lands are interrelated. The rugged terrain and rural location as well as tribal members' limited ability to pay for high-speed Internet service were tribes' and private providers' most commonly cited impediments. Many tribal officials and all six providers we interviewed said these barriers can deter private investment in infrastructure needed to connect remote towns and villages to a service provider's core network—known as the middle-mile. Middle-mile infrastructure may include burying fiber optic or copper cables, stringing cable on existing poles, or erecting towers for wireless microwave links, which relay wireless Internet connections from tower to tower through radio spectrum. Tribal lands, located far from urban areas, may not have the middle-mile infrastructure necessary for providers to deploy high-speed Internet.

Tribal officials and providers we interviewed also cited limited financial resources as a barrier to high-speed Internet access. Of the 21 tribes we interviewed, many reported poverty and affordability as drivers of low subscribership to existing Internet services or as a barrier to broadening the availability of services. Poverty rates among the tribes we interviewed varied, but many were well above the 2014 national average of 15.5 percent. Two of the providers we interviewed discussed non-payment among tribal households as a disincentive to Internet service provision. One provider said that the customers it serves on tribal lands had non-payment rates double that of other customer groups, and that these rates often follow seasonal employment patterns.

About half of the tribes we interviewed told us that a lack of tribal members with sufficient bureaucratic and technical expertise was a common barrier to increasing high-speed Internet access on tribal lands. Tribal officials said that tribal members do not always have the bureaucratic expertise required to apply for federal funds, which can lead to mistakes or the need to hire consultants. A lack of technical expertise also affects tribes' ability to interact with private-sector Internet providers. For the seven tribes we interviewed that either had a tribally-owned provider or were in the process of establishing one, three of them said that the lack of expertise in the tribe was a challenge to establishing a tribally-owned telecommunications provider for high-speed Internet deployment. To address this, in the early 2000s, FCC held a number of Indian telecommunications initiatives, regional workshops, and roundtables. In fiscal year 2012, the FCC's Office of Native Affairs and Policy consulted with about 200 tribal nations, many during six separate one- to three-day telecommunications training and consultation sessions on tribal lands. These included the Native Learning Labs, where attendees could, for example, learn about data the FCC has available on spectrum licensing and USF programs, among other things. The Office held seven training workshops in fiscal years 2014 and 2015, and plans to offer more in fiscal year 2016. The goal of this new series of sessions is to provide tribal officials with information about funding opportunities and policy changes with respect to high-speed Internet, USF programs, and spectrum issues.

Interrelated Federal Programs Promoting High-Speed Internet Access on Tribal Lands Are Not Always Well Coordinated

FCC and USDA High-Speed Internet Programs are Interrelated

In January 2016, we found that FCC and USDA implement mutually supportive, interrelated high-speed Internet access programs that offer funding to either tribal entities or service providers to achieve the goal of increased access. Tribal officials we interviewed said that both FCC's and USDA's programs were important for the expansion of high-speed Internet service on their lands. Tribes sometimes qualify for benefits from

more than one of these programs, either directly or through private-sector Internet providers. Eligibility requirements are based on the need of an area as well as deployment requirements. Table 1 identifies three universal service programs that subsidize telecommunications carriers and services to areas that include tribal lands and two RUS grant programs.

Table 1: FCC and RUS Programs That Provide High-Speed Internet Services to Areas that Include Tribal Lands

	Programs	Description	Recent funding
FCC Programs	The Connect America Fund (CAF) - Formerly the High Cost Program	CAF provides subsidies to Internet providers to supplement their operating costs for providing high-speed Internet in unserved or high-cost areas.	The High Cost and CAF distributed about $20 billion in subsidies to providers between 2010 and 2014, portions of which went to providers that serve tribal lands.
	The USF Schools and Library Support Program (E-rate)	E-rate provides discounts to eligible schools and libraries on telecommunications services, Internet access, and internal connections.	E-rate provided about $13 billion in discounts to schools and libraries between 2010 and 2014, portions of which went to schools and libraries on tribal lands.
	Healthcare Connect Fund (HCCF)	HCCF provides assistance to ensure eligible rural health care providers have access to high-speed Internet services. Assistance may be provided to a service provider that serves tribal lands.	HCCF provided about $52 million to healthcare facilities in fiscal year 2014, a portion of which went to tribal lands.
RUS Programs	Distance Learning and Telemedicine program	The Distance Learning and Telemedicine program provides grants to rural communities to acquire technologies that use the Internet to link educational and medical professionals with people living in rural areas.	The Distance Learning and Telemedicine program provided about $128 million in grants and loans between 2010 and 2014, almost $3 million of which went to tribal lands.
	Community Connect Program	The Community Connect Program provides grants to rural communities to provide high-speed Internet service to unserved areas.	The Community Connect Program provided about $53 million in grants between 2010 and 2014, almost $3 million of which went to tribal lands.

Source: GAO analysis of FCC and USDA data. | GAO-16-504T

Outreach and Training Efforts for Interrelated FCC and USDA Programs Are Not Always Well Coordinated

While FCC and USDA programs that promote high-speed Internet access on tribal lands are interrelated, we found that they are not always well coordinated. Our body of work has shown that interagency coordination can help agencies with interrelated programs ensure efficient use of resources and effective programs.[7] Agencies can enhance and sustain their coordinated efforts by engaging in key practices, such as establishing compatible policies and procedures through official agreements.[8] Agencies can also develop means to operate across agency boundaries, including leveraging resources across agencies for joint activities such as training and outreach.[9]

One area lacking coordination between FCC and USDA is their outreach and technical assistance efforts. FCC and USDA independently conduct outreach and training efforts for related programs promoting Internet access. For example, while FCC officials said they invite USDA officials to FCC training workshops and are sometimes invited to USDA training workshops, they said that they do not coordinate to develop joint outreach or training events. Synchronizing these activities could be a resource-saving mechanism, which could result in a more efficient use of limited federal resources, an opportunity for resource leveraging between the two agencies and a cost-savings to the tribes attending training events. For example, USDA held a training event in Washington State in fiscal year 2015 and FCC hosted a training event in Oregon the same year. The two agencies could have planned a joint training event in the Pacific Northwest Region—each contributing to the cost of the event—that would have reduced the cost burdens for tribes. Tribal members with limited budgets would not have had to travel twice or choose between the two training events. Better coordination on conferences, as feasible, could help FCC and USDA reach a broader audience and increase the value of their outreach to tribes.

To this end, we recommended in January 2016 that FCC develop joint outreach and training efforts with USDA whenever feasible to help

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[7]GAO, *Managing for Results: Barriers to Interagency Coordination*, GAO/GGD-00-106, (Washington, D.C.: March 29, 2000).

[8]GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms,* GAO-12-1022, (Washington, D.C.: September 27, 2012).

[9]GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide,* GAO-15-49SP, (Washington, D.C.: April 14, 2015).

improve Internet availability and adoption on tribal lands. FCC concurred with our recommendation and summarized the areas in which it coordinates with USDA and said that it will continue to work with USDA to ensure more strategic and routine coordination. For example, FCC invited USDA officials to participate in all tribal consultation and training events planned for 2016.

Federal Government is Gathering Data, but FCC Lacks Performance Goals and Measures for the Internet on Tribal Lands

The Federal Government is Gathering Data on Internet Availability and Adoption in Households on Tribal Lands

FCC defines Internet availability as the presence of Internet service in an area, and Internet adoption as the number of people in the area subscribing to Internet service. In 2006, we found that data on the rate of availability and adoption of Internet on tribal lands was unknown because no federal survey had been designed to capture this information. We recommended that additional data be identified to help assess progress towards providing access to telecommunications, including high-speed Internet, for Native Americans living on tribal lands.[10] Since then, as discussed in our January 2016 report, the federal government has started collecting data on Internet availability and adoption. However, as of December 2015, FCC has not identified the performance goals and measures it intends to achieve for broadband availability or adoption on tribal lands.

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[10]GAO, *Telecommunications: Challenges to Assessing and Improving Telecommunications for Native Americans on Tribal Lands*, GAO-06-189 (Washington, D.C.: January 11, 2006).

Data on Internet Availability in Households on Tribal Lands	In 2011, The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), in cooperation with FCC and the states, began publishing the National Broadband Map, an interactive website that allows users to view information on high-speed Internet availability across the United States, including on tribal lands. The data to support the National Broadband Map is collected from service providers, including those offering service to federally recognized Indian tribes, including Alaska Native villages. The National Broadband Map website provides data on Internet availability on approximately 318 federal Indian reservations and associated trust lands, including upload and download speeds for both wireline and wireless service, technology for Internet delivery, and the number of Internet service providers.

While the National Broadband Map provides information about high-speed Internet availability, according to NTIA officials, the map is based on Census blocks.[11] If a service provider reported any availability of high-speed Internet in a Census block, the entire block was counted as served. This could create misrepresentations of service in rural areas, which generally constitute large Census blocks. Because much of tribal land is rural, the reported broadband service is shown to be greater than the actual service available on tribal lands, according to NTIA officials. Some tribal officials agreed that certain areas on the Broadband Map were inaccurate. For example, the map showed the Lac du Flambeau reservation in Wisconsin as covered because two providers reported that they provide Internet service on the reservation. However, according to tribal officials, the National Broadband Map exaggerated the level of service on their reservation making them unable to compete for some USF and RUS programs despite their efforts to document coverage problems to correct the map. One provider indicated that in rural areas, it is more difficult to get accurate data because in some cases addresses are not used, making it difficult to link service to a census block. However, in the future, this provider indicated that it planned to utilize GPS information to provide more accurate data. Five of the six providers we interviewed said that the reliability of the National Broadband Map has improved over time.

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[11]Census blocks are the basis for all geographic boundaries for which the Census Bureau tabulates data. Census blocks are statistical areas bounded by visible features such as roads, streams, and railroad tracks, and by nonvisible boundaries such as property lines, city, township, school district, county limits, and short line-of-sight extensions of roads.

Data on Internet Adoption by Households on Tribal Lands

In 2008, Congress passed the Broadband Data Improvement Act, [12] which required the Bureau of the Census to collect information from residential households, including those on tribal lands. Census captured three aspects of Internet adoption: 1) whether a computer is owned or used at the residence, 2) if the household subscribes to Internet service, and if so, 3) whether that service is dial-up or a high-speed connection.

Census began collecting the required data on Internet adoption beginning with the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS). According to Census officials, five years of ACS data must be collected to provide data for areas with smaller populations. Census officials said that this data will be available in late 2018 and will provide an estimate for Internet adoption nationwide, including the first estimates for hard to reach populations such as Native Americans.

FCC Has Not Established Performance Goals and Measures for Internet Availability or Adoption on Tribal Lands

Agency performance measurement is the ongoing monitoring and reporting of program accomplishments, particularly towards pre-established goals. Performance measurement allows organizations to track progress in achieving their goals and provides information to identify gaps in program performance and plan any needed improvements. The GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 requires annual performance plans to include performance measures to show the progress the agency is making in achieving its goals. Further, we have identified best practices in articulating goals that include:

- showing baseline and trend data for past performance, and
- identifying projected target levels for performance for multi-year goals.[13]

Making high-speed Internet, including broadband Internet, available to all Americans is FCC's stated long-term objective, but we found in January 2016 that FCC has not set goals to demonstrate or measure progress toward achieving it. The National Broadband Map is currently the best

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[12] Pub. L. No. 110-385, 122 Stat. 4096 (2008).

[13] GAO, *Agency Performance Plans: Examples of Practices that Can Improve Usefulness to Decision-makers*, GAO/GGD/AIMD-99-69, (Washington, D.C.: February 1999). While the Government Performance and Results Act is applicable to the department or agency level, performance goals and measures are important management tools applicable to all levels of an agency, including the program, project, or activity level, consistent with leading practices and internal controls related to performance monitoring.

tool for setting goals and measuring progress toward increasing the availability of high-speed Internet on tribal lands. Map data are widely used by FCC to describe the availability of broadband nationwide. For example, FCC uses data gathered for the National Broadband Map in its annual Broadband Progress report provided to Congress as required by the Telecommunications Act of 1996.[14]

To improve performance management, we recommended in our January 2016 report that FCC develop performance goals and measures using, for example, data from the National Broadband Map, to track progress on achieving its strategic goal of making broadband internet available to households on tribal lands, and FCC agreed with our recommendation.

Data Collected Does Not Allow FCC to Measure Outcomes of its E-rate Program for Tribal Institutions

Although Census is gathering baseline information on household Internet adoption, and the National Broadband Map provides data on high-speed Internet availability across the country, we found that FCC lacks the specific information it needs to measure the outcomes of its E-rate program at tribal schools and libraries. The E-rate program provides assistance to schools, school districts, and libraries to obtain telecommunications technology, including high-speed Internet. E-rate does not specifically target tribal schools and libraries, although some are eligible and receive benefits. Since 2010, E-rate has committed more than $13 billion in service provider customer fees to schools and libraries, and according to data provided by FCC, at least $1 billion of that amount supports tribal institutions.

FCC's E-rate program has a stated goal of ensuring that all schools and libraries have affordable access to modern broadband technologies. Communicating what an agency intends to achieve and its programs for doing so are fundamental aims of performance management and required under the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010. Specifically the act requires an agency to have measurable, quantifiable, outcome-oriented goals for major functions and operations, an annual performance plan consistent with FCC's strategic plan and a means to communicate the outcomes of its efforts. However, FCC has not set any quantifiable goals and performance measures for its E-rate efforts to extend high-speed Internet in schools and libraries nationwide or on tribal lands.

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[14]Pub. L. No. 104-104, § 706, 110 Stat. 56, 153 (1996).

According to federal internal control standards, government managers should ensure there are adequate means of obtaining information from external stakeholders that may have a significant impact on the agency meeting its goals. To that end, FCC collects information on E-rate recipients nationwide through questions on its application for E-rate assistance. Several different types of institutions on tribal lands can qualify for E-rate funding, including schools operated by the tribe or Bureau of Indian Education, private schools operating on a reservation, and public school districts that serve the reservation.[15] On FCC's E-rate application, applicants receiving service may self-identify as tribal, but in this instance, the application provides no definition of "tribal." We found that not all schools and libraries on tribal lands identify themselves as such during the application process. FCC provided us with information on E-rate recipients between 2010 and 2014 that self-identified as tribal, and the amounts committed to those recipients. These data may understate the amount of funds supporting schools on tribal lands. Specifically, we identified more than 60 additional school districts, private schools, and public libraries on the lands of the 21 tribes we studied that received E-rate assistance but were not included in FCC's information on tribal recipients. Consequently, FCC does not have accurate information on the number of federally recognized tribes, including Alaska Native villages, receiving E-rate support, or the amount being provided to them. Without more precise information and direction from FCC, the extent to which E-rate assistance is provided to tribal institutions cannot be reliably determined, nor can FCC rely on the information to develop quantifiable goals and performance measures for improving high-speed Internet access in tribal schools or libraries. It is important to understand how these programs affect tribal institutions because FCC has made improving high-speed Internet access in tribal institutions a priority following the National Broadband Plan, with the establishment of the Office of Native Affairs and Policy in 2010, and its current Strategic Plan.

To address these concerns, in January 2016, we recommended that FCC:

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[15]The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (ISDEA), Pub. L. No. 93-638 (1975), as amended, directs the U.S. Department of the Interior, at the request of a tribe, to contract with Indian tribes or tribal organizations to carry out the services and programs the federal government provides to Indians.

- improve the reliability of data related to institutions receiving E-rate funding by defining "tribal" on the program application. FCC agreed with our recommendation and intends to provide guidance to applicants in fiscal year 2017.

- develop performance goals and measures to track progress on achieving its strategic objective of ensuring that all tribal schools and libraries have affordable access to modern broadband technologies. FCC also agreed with this recommendation, indicating that goals and performance measures, among other things, will substantially improve the accessibility of modern broadband technologies for tribal schools and libraries.

Chairman Barrasso, Ranking Member Tester, and Members of the Committee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

If you or your staff have any questions about this testimony or the related report, please contact Mark Goldstein, at (202) 512-6670 or GoldsteinM@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. GAO staff who made key contributions to this testimony include Keith Cunningham, Assistant Director; Christopher Jones; Sarah Jones; Cheryl Peterson; Carl Ramirez; Cynthia Saunders; and Michelle Weathers.