



NAVAJO PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Yideeskáágóó Naat'áanii: Leaders Now and into the Future

Questions from Rep. Gosar for Ms. Shawna Becenti, Head of School, Navajo Preparatory School, Farmington, NM

1. What processes are necessary to help improve your working relationship with the Bureau of Indian Education?

Navajo Preparatory School appreciates the ongoing support and guidance of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). BIE staff, such as our regional facilities specialist, Sandra Ahasteen, is essential in supporting schools by providing training and ensuring timely responsiveness.

Processes that would support efficiency and productivity might include the following:

- Increase staffing to increase the frequency of training opportunities and support to schools
- Hold regular project follow-up meetings to ensure timely progress updates and problem resolution. These meetings should include school leadership, regional BIE representatives, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Initiate a task force to streamline BIE processes for deferred maintenance and facility management. This task force should include representatives from BIE, schools, and tribal leadership.
- Increased coordination between the BIE and the Division of Facilities Management and Construction (DFMC). DFMC operates in a silo, leading to delays and miscommunications. A more integrated approach where DFMC communicates effectively with other BIE programs is essential.

2. What systems are needed to improve the operations of the Bureau of Indian Education?

The following systems should be implemented to improve BIE operations:

- Increased involvement in DFMC training programs to ensure school officials understand BIE's expectations and procedures for maintenance requests, funding approvals, and project management.
- Clear and transparent tracking mechanisms for work orders, allowing schools to access real-time updates on project status.
- A workforce capacity review to address staff shortages and high turnover rates in BIE, particularly in facilities management.

3. What systems are needed to improve the processes by which the Bureau of Indian Education to fulfill the deferred maintenance requests?

Implementing systems and processes that assist in completing projects in a timely manner. I suggest the following systems:

- Ongoing Area Coordination (OAC) meetings to move projects forward. These meetings should have structured agendas that include project funding updates, safety considerations, and specific next steps for completion.
- Training on the full project cycle, ensuring that school officials and BIE personnel understand the process from start to finish, including submission, review, approval, funding, and implementation.



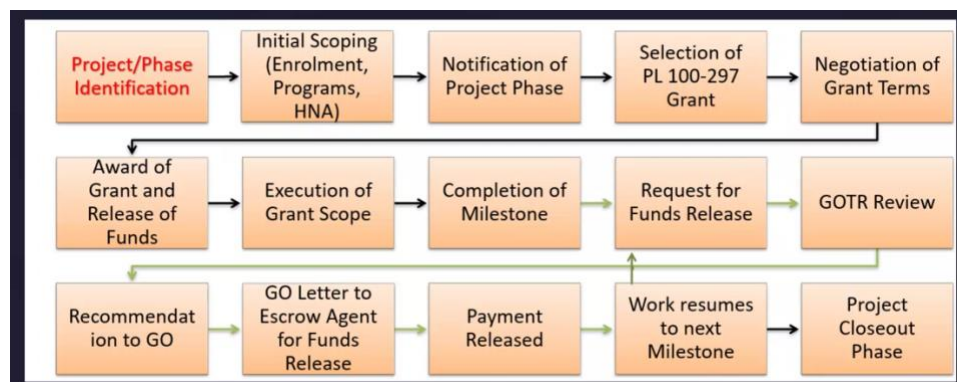
NAVAJO PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Yideeskáágóó Naat'áanii: Leaders Now and into the Future

- Addressing the backlog inherited from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): DFMC was recently transferred to BIE and needs additional staffing and resources to manage the backlog of projects from BIE-funded schools.
4. In your written testimony and during the hearing, you mentioned that you had submitted back in 2014 for your school to get HVAC systems at four residential facilities. This request was included in the FY 2021 Greenbook budget at \$3 million but, as of today, the work order has not been filled and is sitting at step 5 of a 15-step process. Can you expand on the issues with getting this project completed? What are the fifteen steps that need to be completed? What is your recommendation for improving the work order process?

Some of the issues that have impacted our HVAC project completion have been the following:

- There was a delay in project selection and funding: While Navajo Prep submitted the HVAC project request into Maximo in 2014, it was not selected for funding until 2021. This seven-year period resulted in significant delays in the project completion.
- There was a lack of Tribal consultation: While the BIE began implementing the project in 2022, they did not conduct Tribal consultation and failed to notify the Navajo Nation about the Public Law 100-297 contract option, which would have allowed Navajo Prep to take ownership of the project earlier.
- The DFMC did not complete designs, which impacts the overall budget: The project was included in the Fiscal Year 2021 Greenbook at \$3 million, but as of 2024, funding was reduced to \$2.59 million. This reduction in budget was due to the allocation of funds that DFMC committed to securing architectural designs. However, upon review, Navajo Prep determined the designs lacked architectural finishing and must be re-done. The architectural designs secured by DFMC reduced the remaining budget and resulted in additional work that still must be completed. In addition, the cost of completing the project has increased due to inflation and market costs. Funding for this project has not been increased.
- Slow grant negotiation and funding release: In June 2024, Navajo Prep formally requested to assume the project, however, the BIE has not yet released the funds. The project is stalled at step five of a 15-step process, preventing the release of funds needed for implementation. Here is the outlined 15-step process. This flow-chart was provided to our school by the DFMC.





NAVAJO PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Yideeskáágóó Naat'áanii: Leaders Now and into the Future

- Excessive supervision and oversight: The DFMC has informed Navajo Prep that although the HVAC Project was selected as a Public Law 100-297 contract option, DFMC requires that they approve all plans prior to procurement to ensure compliance with the BIA Construction Handbook. Such a process should not be required as the Navajo Nation has elected to complete the project via the Public Law 100-297 option.

We have found the New Mexico Capital Outlay grant awarding process offers a more streamlined approach that upholds Tribal sovereignty and local control. This approach to Tribal sovereignty and local control allowed Navajo Prep to construct 13,600 square foot residential facility in one year. The State of New Mexico capital outlay process provides the grantee the opportunity to execute the project.

As requested, here is the process that we follow when implementing capital outlay projects with the State of New Mexico:

1. The State of New Mexico passes legislation to award Capital Outlay funds.
2. The awarded entity submits a scope of work and budget to the State of New Mexico. In the scope of work, the awarded entity defines project needs and estimated costs. It takes a week at the most for the budget and scope of work to be developed and approved by the State.
3. The State of New Mexico and the awarded entity complete an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), which is signed by both parties. The implementation of the IGA takes 2 days for processing and approval.
4. The awarded entity follows procurement policies and secures quotes and agreements. The awarded entity submits a Notice of Obligation (NOO) to the State of New Mexico. Once the NOO is approved, the project can officially begin. The procurement process may take up to a month if an RFP is required, however the processing of NOO takes up to 2 days.
5. The awarded entity reports progress toward the scope of work and budget through an online portal maintained by the State of New Mexico. Updates in the state's online portal take a day at the most.
6. The awarded entity ensures that all components of the project are successfully completed and pays any outside contractors for their work. The awarded entity then submits a Request for Reimbursement to the State of New Mexico. The Request for Reimbursement includes the approved NOO, signed check, all invoices and supporting documents for payment from the State. From the submission of the reimbursement to funds sent to the school, the process takes up to a month in most cases.
7. The awarded entity closes out the final project in the State of New Mexico's online portal. The awarded entity notes if this project was a segment of a larger project with additional NOOs.

The DFMC could improve timely project completion rates by implementing a similar approach to New Mexico's Capital Outlay process. However, the New Mexico Capital Outlay process can present undue hardship to awarded entities if they do not have the funds to complete the project initially up front and wait for reimbursement. The DFMC could address this need by providing the fund awards to the awarded entity upon the approval of the NOO.



NAVAJO PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Yideeskáágóó Naat'áanii: Leaders Now and into the Future

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information regarding the Congressional Testimony I shared on February 12, 2025.

Sincerely,

Shawna Allison Becenti

Navajo Preparatory School

Head of School