

SCRAMBLE FOR I.E.A. FUNDS

Lateness of Release of Fund, June 8 Deadline Leads to Furious Rush

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Funds for the Indian Education Act passed by Congress in June of 1972 were finally released this month, leaving applicants facing a tight deadline that threatens to jeopardize the intent and purpose of the Act.

\$18 million earmarked by Congress towards projects to further Indian education was not released by the Nixon administration until two short weeks ago.

Nevertheless, applicants for grants now have only until June 4 through June 8 to prepare and submit applications and almost no time at all to conduct local hearings which are mandatory under the Act.

The Act calls for parent committees and at least one public hearing within the Indian community to be served. A key feature of all programs for elementary and secondary school levels is a parent committee of the Indian children to be served by the program.

According to the Act, they must have had — a full opportunity to understand the program for which assistance is being sought and to offer recommendations.

Local input and local planning are stressed everywhere in the rules and regulations for implementing the Act, and yet

the short time frame following Nixon's release of the funds makes it almost impossible to give more than a token gesture toward the type of planning specified in the Act.

Even a BIA school administrator complained about the tight deadlines.

"They finally give you the money," he said, "and then they say that you have to apply within two weeks. I'm really disgusted with it."

"We're running into this kind of funding problem all the time and you really can't plan a good program. You can't notify your local school boards. You can't call a series of planned meetings in the community, so you wind up with a few people making the decisions for them and you hope they're right."

An educator working in bilingual programs agreed.

"The best you can do in that kind of time is to make a few hurried phone calls, maybe get together one short meeting.

"We're utilizing a lot of input from other meetings we've had for projects which fell through in the past, but which the local people had already discussed and where they set the priorities. These are programs we know they want."

In one case, he was worried about a meeting that had been called. Although those at the meeting approved a bilingual program unanimously, there was

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not adequate documentation of who was at the meeting, how many had voted, how many abstained, and whether the meeting represented the majority of people in the community.

Applications for the \$18 million may be made by state and local educational agencies, by federally supported elementary and secondary schools for Indian children (including BIA schools), and by Indian tribes, organizations, and institutions.

The definition of Indian includes Alaskan natives, whether Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut.

Funds will be provided in several areas of education. First of all, to meet the direct special education needs of Indian children, including pilot projects and demonstration programs using new ideas and new methods.

Money will be made available for planning funds and in some cases for minor remodeling of classrooms and for the purchase of equipment related to the programs.

Grants may also be made to increase educational opportunities for Indian children; to develop or continue bi-lingual and bi-cultural programs; for special health, social, and psychological needs of Indian children; for remedial instruction and programs for the handicapped; and to aid teachers and persons preparing as teachers or teacher aides who will work with Indian children.

Funds will also go toward adult education programs, particularly those designed to raise the high school literacy level of adult Indians and thereby to increase employment opportunities.

In all phases of preparing, approving, and submitting grant applications for Indian Education Act funds, the Act specifies the approval and participation of native-controlled committees where the representation is at least 50 per cent native.

With such a committee, any educational institution—even those where the majority of students are not native, may receive funds under the Act, as for example, Lathrop High School in Fairbanks, or the University of Alaska, or AMU. The project approved would still fall within the other guidelines and would aim at native student needs.

Congress provided for a fifteen member National Council on Indian Education to oversee provisions of the Act, and to function as an advisory group on

all Indian education matters under its jurisdiction.

The group, to be composed entirely of Indians and Alaskan natives, was to be appointed by the President. However, not until a court order forced him, did Nixon appoint the group. Meeting recently, the Advisory Council elected as their president Joe Upicksoun, sole Alaskan delegate.

Upicksoun commented that he would like to see that the \$18 million was not fragmented into too many small, ineffective projects.

"I would rather see the Council approve a single pilot program so effective that it would convince Congress to grant more monies in the future toward Indian education."

Upicksoun said that applicants should keep in mind that the most important part in writing the grants would be the narrative portion, which describes the project and its objectives or goals.

"The Council was successful," said Upicksoun, "in getting the Department of Education (HEW) to hire readers to pre-screen the thousands of grant applications and to present the Council with a one-page synopsis of each grant."

This will give the Council time to examine the applications and to go thoroughly into those that seem to best serve Indian education needs.

A BIA educator pointed out that "unless you have a top-notch writer for government grants, you're really going to be in a bind. A lot of small native organizations don't always have the expertise for grant-writing. The language is pretty technical."

Fancy language may be the least of the worries that face native organizations in writing their grants and meeting the June 4-8 deadlines.

Long after the grants have gone in, there will be some questions about whether or not there was time to call the public hearings with local input that Congress desired.

Public Law 92-318 intended that native people should control and direct their future educational programs, that the parents of Indian children should have a say and a choice in the education of those children.

Nixon's latest foot-dragging approach to funding has impeded that intention and sparked a last-minute scramble for valuable education money.