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**Around***the***O**<sub>U</sub>

## Boot camp helps Native tribes expand broadband access



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The University of Oregon is hosting the Oregon Tribal Broadband Boot Camp this week, when about 50 tribal members from around Oregon and the Northwest are learning the nuts and bolts of establishing and improving Internet infrastructure in tribal communities.

"This is the right place and right time to get like-minded tribal folk onto campus and to get them sharing their expertise and knowledge," said Jason Younker, the UO's assistant vice president and adviser to the president on sovereignty and government to government relations. Younker is also chief of the Coquille Indian Tribe, based in Coos Bay.

The boot camp began Sunday with a group dinner at the [Many Nations Longhouse](https://longhouse.uoregon.edu/) (<https://longhouse.uoregon.edu/>) and continues through Thursday. Topics include funding opportunities, planning a network, opportunities for building wildfire cameras and towers, and technical know-how sessions on topics such as crimping and splicing cables.

Just as important as the technical knowledge being imparted are the human networks being established, said event organizer Matt Rantanen, director of technology for the Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association and member of the Cree tribe.

"Everyone has something to learn and everyone has something to teach," he said.

At a similar boot camp in California, members of the neighboring Yurok, Hoopa and Karuk tribes created relationships and now are working together and sharing resources for the first time, he said.

Rantanen also expressed appreciation for the UO's support in hosting the Oregon boot camp.

"The support of Chief Younker is unparalleled," he said. "And it's nice to see participation from the Oregon tribes."

Oregon has begun applying for federal funds to help rural and tribal communities build out broadband networks, but the amount the state will receive has yet to be determined, said Daniel Holbrook, manager of the Oregon Broadband Office. He said each state is expected to receive more than \$1 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill of 2021.

"We can't afford to miss out on this opportunity," Younker said. "We are simply trying to prepare tribes for what is possible when you build out your networks."

Internet connectivity has become an integral part of modern life, and something many people take for granted, but for people living in rural and tribal communities, it's a luxury, he said. Particularly during the pandemic, having access to the Internet was critical for remote learning, but for many tribal members access to broadband Internet was not available.

"That means you have two years of students who are behind and not prepared to go to college," he said.

"I would like the tribes to know, it doesn't have to be this way," he added. "There is help and technical expertise available at the UO and we are willing to help in any way we can."

Funding for the boot camp comes from the Oregon Broadband Office, the UO's [Network Startup Research Center](https://nsrc.org/) (<https://nsrc.org/>), the Tribal Digital Village Network, Link Oregon, the Burns Paiute Tribe, the First Nations Developmental Institute, and others.

—By *Tim Christie*, *University Communications*

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