



## Commission on Navajo Government Development hears chapter improvement reports and votes to allow hybrid meeting options

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**WINDOW ROCK Ariz.** — This week, the Commission on Navajo Government Development (CNGD) held a two-day work session to receive reports on Navajo chapter governance and to enable commissioners to attend meetings either in-person or virtually as part of the ongoing coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic. CNGD noted that their work session was held in person in Flagstaff, Arizona, while observing both Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Navajo Department of Health (NDOH) guidelines for mitigating Covid-19.

The work session's main purpose was to introduce the four new members, who were confirmed to the commission in March by the 24th Navajo Nation Council.

This week's session also emphasized the assessment of current and past Navajo Chapter government structures and systems relative to the preliminary results of the CNGD's ongoing study on Navajo Nation Chapter Governance during COVID-19.

Their research was conducted on 66-chapter officials and administration staff via an online survey further to examine their community's response to the pandemic.

The CNGD acknowledged the findings could present opportunities to explore how the pandemic's influence could positively affect future policy decisions at all levels of governance. Additionally, they hope the study's results will trigger long-term changes contributing to the digitalization of the Navajo Nation.

Division of Community Development (DCD) Executive Director Dr. Pearl Yellowman and Administrative Service Centers (ASC) Department Manager Sonlatsa Jim-Martin, also presented the Navajo Nation's current Chapters Ecosystem.

In their presentation, CNGD was informed of the DCD and ASC's current, past and future projects endeavor relative to the CNGD's chapter study and provided a comprehensive analysis of the Navajo chapter government.

Following the presentations, systematic concerns within chapter governance were raised when Navajo Tax Commission Executive Director Martin Ashley provided a presentation on "Navajo Nation Local Governance Act (LGA) and Chapter Distribution Authorization." According to Ashley, some of the LGA and Distribution processes have remained unchecked since their codification in 1998.

"The LGA requires the 5 Management model to be put in place for LGA-certified chapters so that they can get the funding, but some resolutions put it in conflict," said Ashley.

The LGA was codified by Council Resolution No. CAP-32-98 and is intended to distribute funds to LGA-certified chapters with the full implementation of a Five Management System.

Yet, the current funding distribution to chapters is contrary to the intent of the LGA chapter distribution allocation system with Council Resolutions No. CS-79-98 and BFO-140-98.

Both of which authorize the coordination, reporting and monitoring of the funds in advance of distributions.

More specifically, CS-79-98 states, “This resolution provides an independent grant of authority for such management and expenditure of Navajo Nation funds by the Chapters of the Navajo Nation, separate and apart from other codified and non-codified resolutions of the Navajo Nation Council which may provide a basis for this exercise of Chapter authority.”

Navajo Department Assistant Attorney General, Rodgerick Begay, provided a presentation on the History of Navajo Local Governance, raising concerns about how the central government distributes funding to both LGA-certified and Non-Certified Chapters.

“There are historical practices in chapter government that do not apply in 2021, yet we hang on to old practices and laws from decades ago,” said Begay. “Why do we give chapter funds when they still need to adopt a fiscal policy, and why do we give chapter heavy equipment when they have not implemented a property policy?”

Legislative Branch Commissioner Larry Rodgers suggested positive reformation could start within addressing the Navajo Nation Title 26 task force on Chapter Regionalization.

The CNGD said they intend to explore these issues and are committed to improving the funding process for LGA-certified and non-LGA-certified chapters based on the recommendations.

Moving forward, the Commission also indicated its intent to engage with the Navajo people at their level of governance, stating, “Whether at chapters and or agency councils to solicit their input on how they truly feel about their chapter government, with an emphasis on some of the findings from this work session and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The Commission concluded by adding their intentions to include a referendum ballot question in the 2022 Navajo Nation election so the people can help determine the future of the Navajo chapter government.

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