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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

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### AB 221 (Ramos) - Tribal Nation Grant Fund

**Version:** January 8, 2025

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** August 18, 2025

**Policy Vote:** G.O. 15 - 0

**Mandate:** No

**Consultant:** Janelle Miyashiro

**Bill Summary:** AB 221 makes various changes to the Tribal Nation Grant Fund (TNGF) and the processes used by the TNGF Panel (Panel) for awarding grants from the fund's available resources and for distributing funds to eligible tribes, as specified.

**Fiscal Impact:** Unknown, potentially significant fiscal impact to the Gambling Control Commission for workload associated with administering the TNGF. The Commission notes the bill removes the Panel's ability to establish grant expenditure deadlines for new or recurring grants, which may compound workload increases associated with managing and tracking an ever-growing number of grants. To the extent this workload is significant, there will be cost pressures to the Commission (Gambling Control Fund).

**Background:** The TNGF is a fund created through many of the California tribal-state compacts for the purposes of effective self-governance, self-determined community, and economic development. The 2012 tribal-state gaming compact between the State of California and the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria was the first compact to provide for the TNGF. Since that time, numerous tribal-state compacts have included the TNGF.

In September 2018, Governor Jerry Brown signed AB 880 (Gray, Chapter 801, Statutes of 2018) which established the TNGF in law. The bill also established, within state government, the Panel that is composed of nine total members, and the Tribal Nation Grant Fund program, through which the Panel may award grants and make other distributions from the fund to eligible tribes, as defined, with the assistance from the Tribal Advisor, the Bureau of Gambling Control, and the Commission, as specified. Only non-gaming and limited gaming (350 or fewer gaming devices) tribes in California are eligible for these funds. Approximately 72 tribes are eligible for participation in the program.

Eligible tribes can apply for more than one grant, and more than one eligible tribe can apply jointly, but the funds cannot be used for gaming or per capita payments. Eligible purposes or projects may include, but are not limited to, development of curricula in a tribal language or culture, housing, support for compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act, vocational training, community development, investments in tribal schools and colleges, support of tribal government institutions and tribal courts, non-gaming economic diversification, or investment in public health, information technology, renewable energy, water conservation, cultural preservation or awareness, educational programs, or scholarships.

The Panel of tribal leaders, with the assistance of the Governor's Tribal Advisor, is responsible for awarding grants and other distributions from the fund to eligible tribes

and for creating the policies for the administration of the TNGF program, pursuant to the provisions of the TNGF authorizing legislation.

In Fiscal Year 2019-20, the Panel established the Equal Distribution Grant as the first grant under the TNGF program. Designed to be as accessible as possible while remaining compliant with the law, the initial grant was approved at \$400,000 per eligible tribe. Tribes were encouraged to apply based on the priorities, needs, and opportunities specific to their communities. The Panel awarded 65 grants of \$400,000 each to eligible tribes, funding various programs and projects for a total distribution of \$26 million. Several of these grants were later redirected to eligible purposes to address challenges related to COVID-19, as specified. Since fiscal year 2021-22, the Panel has continued to award Equal Distribution Grants annually through the TNGF program. The grants have ranged each year from \$450,000 to \$600,000 per eligible tribe.

**Proposed Law:**

- Expands the definition of “eligible tribe” to also include a tribe with a class III gaming secretarial procedures.
- Defines “equal shares grant” to mean an annual grant awarded by the Panel to an eligible tribe in an amount that is equal to that which is awarded to other eligible tribes.
- Defines “specific distribution grant” to mean a grant awarded by the Panel to an eligible tribe for a specific purpose.
- Provides that grants may be made as specific distribution grants to fund a specifically described purpose or projects, or as equal shares grants for distribution to eligible tribes in equal amounts. An eligible tribe may apply for both types of grants.
- Requires that a request for a specific distribution grant shall be made by submitting a specific distribution grant application on a form developed by the Panel.
- Provides that a specific distribution grant shall be used to fund specifically described purposes or project generally relating to self-governance, developing or sustaining a self-determined community, and economic development, as specified.
- Requires that a request for an equal shares grant shall be initially be made by submitting an equal shares grant application on a form developed by the Panel, as specified. Each year thereafter, the application shall automatically renew subject to the Panel’s annual independent verification that the applicant is an eligible tribe. Requires that an application form developed for an equal shares grant shall include both of the following:
  - Information necessary to establish that the applicant is an eligible tribe.
  - A certification from the eligible tribe that the funds shall be used for self-governance, developing or sustaining a self-determined community, or economic development, and shall not be used for prohibited purposes, as defined.

- Requires that an equal shares grant shall be used to fund purposes generally related to self-governance, developing or sustaining a self-determined community, and economic development.
- Requires the Panel to meet to consider grant applications at least annually. To the extent required by applicable tribal-state gaming compacts or class III gaming secretarial procedures, the Panel shall award grants on a competitive application basis, as specified.
- Requires the Panel to distribute as equal shares grants \$600,000 per eligible tribe, or at least 85% of the available moneys in the fund, whichever is greater, to all eligible tribes that submitted a completed grant application or whose application was automatically renewed by the deadline established by the Panel.
- Authorizes the Panel to distribute as specific distribution grants the remaining available moneys in the fund that were not distributed to eligible tribes that submitted a completed specific distribution grant application by the deadline established by the Panel. The Panel may award a specific distribution grant in an amount less than requested in an application.
- Removes the authority of the Panel to require an eligible tribe to encumber or expend any or all of a grant within specified period of time.
- Makes technical and conforming changes.

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