



**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultations in Advance of the 2019 Budget**

**By: Lakehead University**

**Thunder Bay, Ontario**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the government support a \$10M investment towards Lakehead University's Gichi Kendaawisin Centre.

## **Lakehead University**

The Lakehead University experience comes from our unique history, geography, culture and our increasing diversity. Lakehead University has one of the highest proportions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students among Ontario universities with almost 14% (~ 1200) self-identified Indigenous students across our two campuses. International students represent 11% of the total student population. Lakehead University has a significant impact on the economic, social and cultural life of Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario.

Research InfoSource has ranked Lakehead the number one research university among Ontario's undergraduate universities for three consecutive years. We have established strong partnerships with industry and government that translate into innovative learning experiences for our students and strong employment outcomes for our graduates.

Lakehead places an emphasis on accessibility; on a commitment to First Nations, Metis and Inuit learners and on the delivery of a comprehensive array of undergraduate and graduate programs. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) has recognized Lakehead as one of the province's "equity of access powerhouses" due to the University's commitment to serving a greater proportion of underrepresented student groups. Lakehead University was the first university in Canada to implement an Indigenous content requirement in all undergraduate programs offered, and the University's commitment to Indigenous students is enshrined in the institution's Strategic Plan, Academic Plan and ongoing commitment to social justice.

Over the past years, Lakehead has bestowed more than 15 honorary doctorates and fellows on Indigenous leaders from across Canada and the United States. We have worked with and celebrated outstanding Indigenous artists, scholars and change makers such as Senator Murray Sinclair, Buffy Sainte Marie and Richard Wagamese. Lakehead University has worked to forge deeper relationships with Indigenous leaders and community members, to build new pathways and programs with Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education & Training Institute and Seven Generations Aboriginal Institute. Building the resources and environment for Indigenous youth to succeed in settings that reflect the culture and traditions of Indigenous people is paramount to Lakehead University.

## **Northwestern Ontario**

Northwestern Ontario covers the province's largest landmass, which includes more than 60 First Nations in the Treaty #3, Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Robinson-Superior Treaty territories, seven Métis Nation of Ontario Chartered Community Councils, and at least one independent Métis Nation.

Approximately half of the Indigenous populations are living on reserves and half in towns and cities across the region. The geographic size, along with the unique challenges flowing from the physical vastness and isolation of the Nishnawbe Aski territory, create unique social, health, education and economic challenges for the population in Northwestern Ontario.

While the level of degree attainment has increased among the Indigenous population in recent years, only 10.9% of the Indigenous population across Canada has a bachelor's degree or higher.

Over the next twenty years, the Indigenous population will grow to represent an estimated 40% of the total population aged 15-19 in Northwestern Ontario.

## Supporting Canada's Competitiveness

Lakehead University is hoping to partner with the Government of Canada on a project that will help ensure Canada's competitiveness through improving Indigenous post-secondary attainment, and supporting innovation and skills development. As Northwestern Ontario's fastest growing demographic, partnering with Indigenous peoples to achieve meaningful participation within the economy is critical to the region. It is well recognized that innovation is increasingly important to economic performance, productivity and competitiveness.

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre is a project, which recently received a funding pledge of \$10 million dollars of support from the Ontario Government. Lakehead is hoping the Federal Government will match this commitment. Building this facility, which reflects and celebrates the culture of Indigenous communities in the region, will help encourage and support Indigenous students pursuing postsecondary studies. As Northwestern Ontario's only university, Lakehead University has long played an essential role in the region's economic growth, helping it transition and diversify from primarily resource based to a growing knowledge based economy. Lakehead University is an integral component of Northern Ontario's competitive advantage and the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will help the Indigenous population in Northern Ontario to take full advantage of economic development opportunities and the support for work placement, training and skills development provided by the Centre.



### RECOMMENDATION

That the government support a \$10M investment towards the Gichi Kendaawisin Centre.

## The Centre

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre was designed over a decade ago under the direction of the Ogimaawin Aboriginal Governance Council (OAGC), and in partnership with Northwestern Ontario's Indigenous leadership. Going forward these partners, in collaboration with Lakehead's Indigenous faculty and staff, will form a Gichi Kendaasiwin advisory council to help guide and bring the Centre to life.

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will offer advanced research, teaching and support services to Indigenous students while providing greater access to post-secondary education, ensuring Indigenous youth have opportunities and supports to successfully pursue postsecondary studies and become leaders in shaping the future in their communities and around the world. Gichi Kendaasiwin will also expand postsecondary education opportunities for youth through outreach to communities across Northern Ontario and across Canada, thereby increasing the success of Indigenous learners, helping to share and celebrate Indigenous cultures, and promoting reconciliation and understanding between Northern peoples.

This multi-layered project will support the further development of Lakehead's Nanabijou Childcare Centre, the Achievement Program, and the Reach-up program designed to mentor young athletes and coaches in remote Indigenous communities.

The Centre will be home to several Lakehead priority initiatives designed to support Indigenous students and culture, including:

- Immersive telepresence facilities — hub-like classrooms/meeting spaces that connect with immersive learning spaces built in rural communities throughout Northern Ontario. These facilities create opportunities for students, professors, industry and community leaders to connect with each other in ways not possible with traditional video conferencing. In the long term, Lakehead will seek to establish immersive learning capacity in classrooms in remote Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario, allowing young and mature Indigenous students to access high school and post-secondary classes without having to leave their communities. The technology will also ensure Indigenous students and communities have resources to support workforce readiness training and capacity building to improve employment outcomes throughout the region.
- A language lab — the revitalization of Indigenous languages is a priority for Lakehead, Gichi Kendaasiwin will also be home to an archive and learning centre for important Indigenous documentation and artifacts, creating a space for the proper storage and display of fragile original treaty agreements, art and other cultural artifacts.
- An Indigenous Research Institute — The Institute will promote interdisciplinary collaborations among researchers from different fields to work together to serve the needs of Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario. Archiving First Nation materials will serve the communities and provide researchers with unique access to cultural materials.

## **Truth and Reconciliation**

Gichi Kendaasiwin is strategically aligned with the commitment and actions made by the Government of Canada to foster a renewed, nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

The successful realization of this project will allow Lakehead University to build on its successes and to improve the level of academic programming and services it currently provides

to Indigenous students and communities, while responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

The Prime Minister has committed to drive progress on the implementation of recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In 2016, the first Canadian University Chair on Truth and Reconciliation, Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux was established as an advisor to the Lakehead President. Lakehead has made a significant commitment to reconciliation, committing to address many of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "94 Calls to Action. In particular, #63.3 "Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect" has become a guiding principle for the commitments Lakehead has made to the Indigenous community in Northwestern Ontario.

### **Supporting Cultural Infrastructure**

In the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, he asks the Minister to work with the Minister of Infrastructure to make significant investments in cultural infrastructure as part of Canada's investment in social infrastructure. The government since launched the *Investing in Canada* plan, making over \$180 billion available to support local, provincial, and territorial infrastructure projects over 12 years. The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre is an infrastructure project of great significance on a local, provincial and national level.

### **Supporting Indigenous Students**

In the Prime Minister's mandate letter to the Minister of Indigenous Services, he asks the Minister to:

*"...undertake a review of all current federal programs that support Indigenous students choosing to pursue post-secondary education. The purpose of the review is to ensure these programs meet the needs of individual students while supporting completion of a post-secondary credential."*

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre assists with the Government of Canada's goals of supporting Indigenous students. Lakehead has a nationally recognized and authentic commitment to these students and is steadily working to increase the Indigenous student population enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs while also focusing on improving the experience and success of Indigenous students at the University over the next five years. The University's 2018-2023 Strategic Plan incorporates strategies and metrics related to Lakehead University's commitment to advancing Indigenous student participation in post-secondary education, research and community partnerships and innovation.

By partnering with Lakehead University on Gichi Kendaasiwin, the Government of Canada can support Indigenous culture, self-determination, capacity-building and skills development by encouraging more Indigenous youth to obtain post-secondary credentials, building a better future for Indigenous Peoples while strengthening Canada's and Northern Ontario's competitiveness.