



Indspire

Indigenous education,
Canada's future.

L'éducation des autochtones.
L'avenir du Canada.

Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance

2021 Pre-Budget Consultations

Recommendations

- 1. That the government renew the Supports for Student Learning Program for a five-year period beginning April 1, 2022.**
- 2. That the government provide funding of \$100 million over five years for Indspire's *Building Brighter Futures* scholarship and bursary program beginning April 1, 2022.**

Introduction

Indspire respectfully provides the following advice on economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to the Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2021 federal budget.

Canadians are facing unprecedented challenges because of COVID-19, students are no exception. Not only have their studies been disrupted, but many have lost jobs or prospects, raising concerns about their financial circumstances and their academic future.

Statistics Canada found that post-secondary students across Canada were not only concerned with their finances during the pandemic but were also concerned about their future job prospects.¹

This is especially true for Indigenous students, many of whom may not have access to a familial safety net, nor have the financial resources required to weather the impacts of prolonged disruption to their education and employment opportunities resulting from COVID-19.

Parallel to the pandemic, Canada is reckoning with a legacy of racism and discrimination that has largely excluded Indigenous peoples from the educational, social, and economic opportunities that many Canadians enjoy.

The 2016 Census found that 44% percent of Indigenous people, aged 25-64, in Canada now have some form of post-secondary credential, compared to 63% of the non-Indigenous population. Contrasted to the non-Indigenous population, however, significant gaps persist, particularly in university education, where only 11% of the Indigenous population have any form of university credentials compared to 29% for non-Indigenous Canadians.²

Post-secondary education is key to future employment, social and economic prosperity. Indspire submits that a growing Indigenous population has the potential, with enough support, to contribute to Canada's post-pandemic economic recovery through increased labour force participation.

Gaps in educational attainment have an impact on labour market participation, leading to lower earned incomes, higher potential demands on social programs and lost productivity.

¹ Statistics Canada - Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students - Catalogue number: 11-627-M

² Statistics Canada - 2016 Census. Catalogue Number 98-400-X2016177

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards estimates that if the education and labour market gaps for Indigenous peoples were closed in Canada by 2031, Canada's gross domestic product could add \$36 billion that year.³

Indspire is dedicated to improving educational attainment at all levels for Indigenous peoples across Canada. Indspire has fostered a community of supporters from a variety of sectors that recognize the importance of improving educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Indspire recognizes the challenging circumstances that many Indigenous governments face in providing programs and services to their citizens, which has become ever more apparent during the pandemic. We advocate for increased funding across Indigenous education systems as sustained investment is required for Canada to recover from the pandemic in a manner that promotes equity of opportunity and advances inclusion of Indigenous peoples in all aspects of Canadian life.

Indspire's value is our connection to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis students in communities, remote, rural and urban across Canada. As an Indigenous organization, we are trusted by students and seen as validating their identity while supporting their aspirations.

Students share with us their experiences of institutional barriers and lack of supports to meet their needs and tell us that Indspire gives them confidence, validates their identity and helps them on their path to success.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indspire has continued to support students and has reached out to learn about the impacts of the crisis on student's lives, and the supports they require to meet growing needs.

Many students reported significant financial stress, health concerns and anxiety associated with the disruption resulting from the pandemic and continued uncertainty of when they will be able to return to continue their studies.

"It is financially hard for me with my two children to attend school and ensure my children are looked after, but I have been under more pressure after the announcement of non-essential places of work being shut down, including my children's daycare and the school my children attend."

"I had a well-paying job that would have earned me enough to pay for my tuition, books, and any other expenses for the upcoming school year. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic I am unable to work and feeling immense pressure and stress as to how I will continue to fund my education."

³ The Contribution of Aboriginal People to Future Labour Force Growth in Canada, Centre for The Study of Living Standards, Research Report 2017-07, October 2017

About Indspire

Indspire is Canada's only Indigenous national charity dedicated to advancing the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples, providing financial support for post-secondary education; promoting and supporting the achievements of Indigenous people; and assisting communities and educators in improving educational outcomes.

Indspire is an accountable, transparent organization, making our annual audited financial and impact reports available on our website.

Charity Intelligence Canada has recognized Indspire with their four-star rating and named Indspire a Top 10 Canadian Impact Charity in 2017, 2018 and 2019. Maclean's selected Indspire as a 2019 Top Rated Charity and MoneySense has Indspire on its list of 2020 top 100 Charities.

In addition to financial support from federal and provincial governments, the private sector, foundations, trade unions, educational institutions and civil society, Indspire counts over 10,000 individual Canadians among its donors.

It is our purpose, or North Star, that every Indigenous student will graduate within a generation.

Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards Program

This program provides financial assistance to students with demonstrated financial need as they pursue post-secondary studies in colleges and universities and through apprenticeships, skilled trades, and technology programs. Indspire is helping to prepare students for the jobs of the future.

Since 2004, Indspire has distributed over 42,500 scholarships and bursaries valued at over \$132 million to First Nation, Inuit and Métis learners through our *Building Brighter Futures* scholarship and bursaries program.

Our funding model is unlike any other in the country, wherever possible funds are awarded to a student to use to meet their needs such as tuition, childcare, food, cultural support, shelter, internet and utilities, travel, etc.

In fiscal year 2019-20, Indspire provided more than \$17.8 million to over 5,100 First Nation, Inuit and Métis post-secondary students enrolled in colleges and universities across Canada.

Students tell us that Indspire supports them financially, but also motivates them to succeed. A recent survey of Indspire supported students found that approximately 90% graduated, of which 53% pursued a further post-secondary credential⁴.

According to Statistics Canada, the Indigenous population is Canada's fastest-growing demographic, growing more than four times the faster than the mainstream population over the same period.⁵ Using Statistics Canada data Indspire projects that more than 130,000 Indigenous individuals ages 17-51, will be eligible to attend post-secondary education by 2023.

Indspire also anticipates growing demand arising from the removal of gender-based inequities in the Indian Act. Estimates suggest that between 270,000 and 450,000⁶ individuals will become Registered Indians and gain eligibility for post-secondary education funding over the next decade.

Many Indigenous communities have indicated that they require additional capacity to meet increasing governance demands. Nearly 50% of Indspire-funded students surveyed in 2020⁷, reported that they had returned to work in their community or found employment serving Indigenous populations, demonstrating that investments in Indspire have an impact on increasing community capacity.

Indspire hears from students that their circumstances may make them more likely to be averse to debt and less likely to borrow to pay for school. Additionally, they may not have access to a familial safety net, financial advice and the cultural and social capital to help them complete their education and get an early career head start.

What Increased Funding Will Achieve

1. The Supports for Student Learning Program

The Supports for Student Learning Program was developed to support projects, including those implemented by Indspire, that help learners improve their educational outcomes throughout their life course so that they can get the skills they need to succeed in the labour market.

Indspire receives much needed funding through the Supports for Student Learning Program, administered by Employment and Social Development Canada. As the program's current funding authorities are due to sunset on March 31, 2022, Indspire

⁴ Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards (BBF) Program Recipients' Outcomes Report – Indspire 2020.

⁵ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025a-eng.htm>

⁶ <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs/news/2019/08/removal-of-the-1951-cut-off.html> – Accessed July 22, 2020.

⁷ Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards (BBF) Program Recipients' Outcomes Report – Indspire 2020.

recommends an extension of the funding for a minimum of 5 years in Budget 2021 in order to ensure continuity of support.

2. Bursaries and Scholarships

Indspire is thankful to the Government of Canada for ongoing funding. The Budget 2017 commitment of \$25 million over five years, and additional investment of \$9 million over three years in Budget 2019 have enabled Indspire to support many more Indigenous students to achieve their potential.

To March 31, 2020 the Budget 2017 investments have allowed Indspire to support 4,475 post-secondary students while Budget 2019 funding has supported 685 students.

These commitments are important signals to other levels of government, universities and colleges, the private and philanthropic sectors, and individual Canadians, that are looking for meaningful ways to contribute to creating opportunity for Indigenous peoples.

As of March 31, 2020, Indspire has successfully leveraged Budget 2017 and 2019 funding with \$17.9 million in additional support to students from our donors and supporters.

Many Indigenous students rely on Indspire for financial assistance. In 2019-20, Indspire identified a funding gap of \$ 81.4 million, an average of \$13,070 per student. Indspire met 25% of their need and was unable to fund 1110 students.

Lack of funding is a significant barrier to educational attainment for Indigenous students and taking on student debt is a source of significant stress, which often impacts their ability to focus on their studies and achieve their goals. A recent recipient shared how the support they received has helped them cope during the COVID-19 crisis.:

“Being a student and a parent is difficult at the best of times. I can say that the additional funds received from Indspire have made a big difference in my ability to focus on my academic goals. Especially during these quarantine times when job opportunities are limited. It is a huge relief with measurable impact on my ability to successfully complete my education.”

With the educational and financial impact of COVID-19, Indspire is anticipating increased requests for support as students will demonstrate higher financial needs for the coming academic year.

In addition to a renewed 5-year commitment to Indspire's *Building Brighter Futures* scholarship and bursaries program beginning on April 1, 2022, Indspire is also recommending an increased investment to \$20 million annually to assist in meeting growing student support needs.

By increasing investments in Indspire, the Government will show leadership and incent other sectors to contribute to improving equitable access to post-secondary education. With our additional funding request, when matched by our supporters, will allow Indspire to provide more than 9,000 students annually with an average of \$3,500 in support.

Conclusion

By supporting Indigenous students through Indspire the federal government is advancing diversity and inclusion in Canada. Not only providing much needed funding, but also validating their identity and promoting equitable opportunity.

Indspire is positioned to contribute to measuring and supporting far greater achievement in post-secondary education and equipping Indigenous people to succeed in the workforce, strengthening Canada's recovery.

Economic recovery and enhanced economic resilience underpinned by increased educational attainment is the most significant way of achieving economic prosperity for Indigenous peoples, and Indspire is positioned to play a significant role in the recovery effort.

Without this much needed support, Indigenous students may be unable to continue, or complete their programs of study, resulting in lost progress and delayed entrance into the labour market at a time when Canada requires their skills, enterprise and energy to aid with stabilization and recovery from the pandemic.

Sincerely,



Roberta Jamieson
President and CEO