



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

By: Six Nations Polytechnic

August 2020

- **Recommendation 1:** That the government create a \$3.6 billion capital fund for Indigenous Institutes to ensure Indigenous People have a safe place to learn, rebuild, and commence their journey to economic recovery and employment through education, training, reskilling, and upskilling.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government invest \$120 million over two years in an Indigenous Institutes Digital Infrastructure Program to improve the capacity to deliver required services and on-line learning, due to COVID-19.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the government increase annual investments to the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program by \$120 million to support resiliency, the capacity to respond to emergency expenditures, and sustainable programming.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the government create an Online Learning Fund for Indigenous students to enable them to cover additional computer equipment and internet access costs due to the pivot to online learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Recommendation 5:** That the government expedite delivery of the Universal Broadband Fund and the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, with priority for Indigenous communities, to support and sustain online learning and remote working during COVID-19 recovery and beyond.
- **Recommendation 6:** That the government provide adequately resourced and responsive training programs to support reskilling and upskilling and that creates an effective balance of income support.

I. Introduction

There are over 60 known Indigenous Institutes in the Canadian post-secondary landscape, endorsed and/or mandated by First Nation leadership. Since as early as 1971, Indigenous education and training provided by these Indigenous Institutes has applied Indigenous knowledge and cultures to further develop individual and collective human capacity to serve the social, cultural, and economic needs of Indigenous communities and all who share this land.

Indigenous Institutes (IIs) in Ontario have worked collaboratively since 1985. Their proven ability to deliver education grounded in Indigenous knowledge and languages with high success lead to their recognition through the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017. Inherently Indigenous, from curriculum and student services to staff, Indigenous Institutes are essential components in national efforts to inclusively rebuild the economy.

Six Nations Polytechnic (SNP), is mandated by Canada's most populous First Nation to provide community based Indigenous education and training, while respectfully interacting with and informing other knowledge systems.

SNP offers recommendations that highlight how Indigenous Institutes are key partners in Canada's COVID-19 economic recovery due to our unique capacity to engage with Indigenous Peoples to advance education, training, reskilling, and sustainable labour market participation.

II. Support Infrastructure for Indigenous-Led Education and Economic Recovery

The 2008 recession severely impacted Indigenous employment.¹ As Canada seeks to reopen the economy and retool business operations due to COVID-19, historically high unemployment rates in First Nations and the long-standing socio-economic gaps between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians will grow larger, due to new ways of doing business and the need for new skills, unless investments are made to support Indigenous-led education and training.

According to a 2020 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report, approximately 1.7 million people or 5% of the Canadian population self-identify as Indigenous (First Nation, Inuit and Métis). Adjusting from 2016 census data, as of 2020, one out of every 13 people in Canada, younger than 18 years old, are Indigenous.² Although the well-being of the Indigenous population is improving, significant gaps remain. These gaps are larger in rural than urban areas and approximately 60% of Indigenous people live in rural regions. For example, the gap in rural unemployment rate is 5 percentage points higher than in urban areas.

¹ Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada (2020)

² Assuming Ceteris Paribus on other segments of the population

Accessible and relevant education and training is fundamental to creating a resilient workforce and sustainable communities.

Yet, a 2018 Council of Ministers of Education report re-affirms that high-school dropout rates among Indigenous youth remain high, and the transition rate from secondary to postsecondary education remains low. Only 4 out of 10 on-reserve youth graduates from grade 12 compared to 9 out of 10 non-Indigenous youth and 44% of Indigenous people attain post-secondary credentials compared to 63% for non-Indigenous people.

In contrast, Indigenous Institute student success rates far exceed these levels. This is clear evidence that Indigenous-led community-based learning opportunities provided through IIs that include literacy and basic skills, secondary, training, post-secondary, and professional development are the best ways to support Indigenous learners and their success.

IIs are instrumental to the survival, continuance and repatriation of Indigenous languages and ways of knowing and being while contributing to improved Indigenous employment rates resulting from increased participation in a range of education and training disciplines.

IIs are uniquely positioned to uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples as set out in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 while advancing reconciliation by fostering reciprocity across knowledge systems and world views. For example, SNP offers a Bachelor of Arts degree in Ogwehoweh Languages in two of six critically endangered First languages and SNP is the first Indigenous Institute in Canada to adopt IBM's innovative grade 9-14 early college education model that focuses on Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math with, possibly, unparalleled success.

Recommendation 1: That the government create a \$3.6 billion capital fund for Indigenous Institutes to ensure Indigenous People have a safe place to learn, rebuild, and commence their journey to economic recovery and employment through education, training, reskilling, and upskilling.

Canada needs a robust plan to recover from the devastating impacts of COVID-19, including a strong Indigenous Institutes sector. Canada's current COVID-19 Economic Response Plan provides for the protection of assets to ensure economic recovery can occur. Individuals, businesses, and sectors are supported but direct investments to Indigenous Institutes' were overlooked.

IIs require capital investment, as part of stimulus investments, to ensure that Indigenous learners have culturally relevant and safe places to learn and pursue a career. Safe and expanded learning spaces will enhance the ability to advance Indigenous education, expand training and Indigenous-led research; facilitate innovation; and better equip IIs to respond to future skills development needs and changing labour market demands.

Recommendation 2: That the government invest \$120 million over two years in an Indigenous Institutes Digital Infrastructure Program to improve the capacity to deliver required services and on-line learning, due to COVID-19.

Digital infrastructure is a critical platform that supports the way we live and do business; education and training, in and beyond COVID-19, demands it. Targeted digital infrastructure investments can increase Indigenous education and training participation rates, with the real potential for increased numbers of employment ready graduates.

Traditionally, Indigenous learners have high interest and success in programs that are hands-on and experiential. Social distancing measures disproportionately impacted these programs. SNP, together with employers and industry partners, collaborate to address labour market shortages, and build capacity to deliver skilled trades and apprenticeship in Brantford. SNP recently received provincial authority to train apprentices in three trades however these were suspended due to COVID-19. Innovation and digital infrastructure are key to the development of alternative learning modalities and the continuance of these, and other credentials.

Recommendation 3: That the government increase annual investments to the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program by \$120 million to support resiliency, the capacity to respond to emergency expenditures, and sustainable programming.

Indigenous Institutes are culturally safe places for Indigenous learners and a starting point to personal and economic recovery. To critically respond and continue to adapt to the needs of learners, communities, employers, and address labour shortages; there is an urgent need for increased investment in the chronically underfunded Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP).

PSPP supports program development and delivery at IIs through a competitive process; Ontario region is expecting a 35% cut in 2020-2021 to accommodate shifts in funding to other regions. This decrease will only exacerbate the capacity of IIs to critically respond.

Further, demand for Indigenous labour is on the rise due to a growing Indigenous economy; Canadian diversity, equity, and inclusion measures; and a recent commitment by Canada to increase procurement to Indigenous firms from .32% to 5%. To respond to this demand, IIs need to expand programming that prepares graduates, in multiple sectors, with skills sets that meet current and future Industry need.

Many Indigenous Institutes' learners and graduates have continued their studies in a broad range of professions including doctors, lawyers, health, social service, and education and are gainfully employed in various service agencies within First Nation territories and as such, play a key role in supporting, building, and sustaining the people and lands of Indigenous communities and the overall economy.

III. Support Post-Secondary Access to Virtual Learning and Economic Recovery in Indigenous Communities

Recommendation 4: That the government create an Online Learning Fund for Indigenous students to enable them to cover additional computer equipment and internet access costs due to the pivot to online learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 5: That the government expedite delivery of the Universal Broadband Fund and the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, with priority for Indigenous communities, to support and sustain online learning and remote working during COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

Several ministries are mandated to support technology adoption, high-speed internet, and operation and maintenance of this infrastructure; investments need to be fast-tracked to ensure the road to recovery leaves no student, community, or asset behind as virtual business continues to increase.

IIs are reporting significant digital challenges for Indigenous students due to the immediate switch to online delivery. Key challenges include computer and internet access. An Online Learning Fund equivalent to \$3,000 per student will allow Indigenous students to acquire the needed equipment to pursue online learning and increase opportunities for innovative teaching and learning strategies at IIs.

Similarly, access to broadband at Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation also poses considerable challenges for remote working and learning engagement as community infrastructure and financial resources preclude adequate broadband. Expedited delivery of the Universal Broadband Fund and the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, with priority for Indigenous communities can address this need.

IV. Expand support for Reskilling and Upskilling

Recommendation 6: That the government provide adequately resourced and responsive training programs to support reskilling and upskilling and that creates an effective balance of income support.

Today, skills quickly become obsolete. There is much evidence to suggest that most of 2030's jobs haven't been invented yet. Individuals must therefore develop lifetime skills that enables continuous adaptation, innovation, flexibility, and problem-solving capacity.

But pursuing education and training should not preclude an income. Employment Insurance benefits must favour individuals who seek to train or upskill and improve employment prospecting. Additional investments in the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program and wrap-around supports such as childcare, transportation, and food are also essential. Expanding eligibility to all workers under the

Canada Training Benefit also supports a more inclusive strategy and support for lifelong learning.

V. Conclusion

Canada's competitive future is dependent on a knowledge economy and Indigenous youth remain Canada's fastest growing demographic. Improving educational attainment of Indigenous Peoples has tremendous potential to help Canada recover from COVID-19, improve productivity and the national economy through the availability of a larger trained workforce. According to a 2019 report "Can't Go it Alone", 9.2 million of Canada's baby boomers will reach retirement age and increased labour market participation rates of Indigenous peoples can contribute almost \$11 billion to Canada's GDP by 2040, posing a substantial return on Indigenous education and training investments.