

Pre-Budget Submission in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget

Lakehead University

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Contact:

Moir McPherson, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor, Lakehead University
moira.mcpherson@lakeheadu.ca
807-343-8640

Richard Longtin,
Director, Government Relations, Lakehead University
richard.longtin@lakeheadu.ca
416-659-2052

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2021 Pre-Budget Submission

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada support Reconciliation through tangible projects that will support Indigenous education and training by investing \$12 million toward the proposed Gichi Kendassiwini Centre at Lakehead University.

Recommendation 2: Ensure international students can continue to pursue higher education in Canada

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INTRODUCTION

Lakehead University is pleased to provide this submission requesting support for federal funding of the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre at the University's Thunder Bay Campus.

This project complements the federal government's vision and actions to develop a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous Peoples and to make real progress on the issues most important to First Nations, the Métis Nation, and Inuit communities.

As the Federal Government is seeking opportunities to stimulate economic recovery as the country reopens following restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, realization of the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will ensure that the government is investing in a short and long-term job and economic stimulus project in a region significantly impacted by COVID-19. Generating opportunities on the campus of Northwestern Ontario's only university campus will directly support rebuilding the local and regional economy.

LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY

Lakehead University has campuses in Thunder Bay and Orillia, Ontario that serve the local populations of Northwestern Ontario and Simcoe County, respectively. Northern Ontario is home to 78% of First Nation communities in Ontario.

For the fifth consecutive year *Research Infosource* named Lakehead University as the #1 research University in Canada in the undergraduate category. Lakehead has the 4th highest graduation rate among Ontario's Universities and graduates from Lakehead's core programs in fields such as forestry, geology and resource management experience a 100% employment rate—illustrating the quality of programming delivered in Ontario's North.

SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

The Thunder Bay Census Metropolitan Area has the highest proportion of Indigenous people in Canada at 12.7% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Lakehead has a longstanding commitment to advancing the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action through its commitment to Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) peoples, and the residents of Northwestern Ontario and Simcoe County. The University has one of the highest proportions of Indigenous students with almost 14.4% (~1,250) self-identified Indigenous students across its two campuses. Lakehead University also has a proud tradition of offering a community-engaged campus environment with essential Indigenous culture and support services. In his recent keynote address to our Indigenous graduates (June 2020), National Chief Perry Bellegarde highlighted to the students that

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Lakehead University has done more to educate and empower Indigenous students than almost any other institution in Canada.

Lakehead University places an emphasis on accessibility, a commitment to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners, and the delivery of a comprehensive array of undergraduate and graduate programs. Over 90% of Lakehead University's students have faced barriers to accessing post-secondary education, including forty-four percent who are first generation students (neither parent received a University degree) and fifty-five percent who come from small, rural and northern communities. The 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.

GICHI KENDASSIWIN CENTRE

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre (meaning "higher knowledge" in Ojibwe) was created under the guidance of Lakehead University's Ogimaawin-Aboriginal Governance Council (O-AGC) along with support from Indigenous partners and other community organizations. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, this project will provide vital opportunity and access to education, research and partnership with and for the community.

The project is being undertaken to provide critically needed community and cultural infrastructure for Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario. Located in the heart of the Lakehead University campus in Thunder Bay, this facility will be a community destination that will be an expression of Indigenous culture and a centre focused on Reconciliation in the land of the Anishinaabe.

The successful realization of this project will impact over 230,000 residents of Northwestern Ontario spread across 525,000 square kilometres, by creating a central, cultural community hub to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and advance reconciliation to support improved social and economic outcomes in our region.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre is a signature project that will transform education and learning while helping create a mobile, skilled workforce for Northern Ontario. It will also ensure the development of the skills necessary to participate in regional economic opportunities and support economic diversification throughout the region. When completed, the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will be an asset of local, regional and national significance. Under its roof, it will house advanced research, technology combined with innovative teaching tailored to Indigenous students to ensure better educational outcomes in support of local labour market needs.

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The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will provide a multitude of services and nurture community and regional partnerships with immediate and long-term economic impacts

1. The construction of the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will provide immediate employment in the Thunder Bay area, including jobs in the construction industry as well as tapping into the local supply market. On a long-term basis, this Centre will be a hub of on-campus employment for full and part-time operational staff.
2. The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will include flexible access and pathways to post-secondary education that are tied to regional labour market demand. By providing greater access and outreach to rural and remote communities via Lakehead's immersive technology hub, the Centre will be a direct connector for students, businesses and northern communities, supporting economic diversification and resiliency in Northwestern Ontario.
3. Lakehead's new Industry Connector Gateway will be strategically placed within the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre and will serve Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Economic Development agencies such as the Ontario First Nations Economic Developers Association, Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business, the Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund, Ontario Professional Foresters Association, Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Through these partnerships, Lakehead will identify sector-specific needs that will result in timely industry-specific programming and training, such as Lakehead's Native Access Program in Engineering and Certificate in Geology. This is critical as it will ensure that underserved communities are incorporated in the economic rebuild.
4. Lakehead University is committed to continuing to advance the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, acknowledging that education is key to Reconciliation and to the creation of a culture of understanding across communities that will support a more equitable and inclusive future for Indigenous people. The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will help foster greater awareness of Indigenous perspectives, cultures, and histories, recognizing the wisdom that Elders and Indigenous community partners bring to inform decision making, academic programs, and learner supports.

REQUIRED FUNDING SUPPORT FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Lakehead University is seeking funding for the construction of the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre from the Federal Government.

The project consists of the construction of a beautiful new centrally-located building providing community and cultural space. The building housing the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre has been inspired by local Indigenous culture and Gichigami, and has been designed with three floors with a gross floor area of 48,000 sq. ft. The estimated costs for the facility totals \$28.5 million.

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As the Federal Government seeks projects to rebuild and stimulate the Canadian economy, the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre is shovel-ready, and could begin construction forecasted as early as October 2020.

This project would provide immediate economic stimulus and employment opportunities in the Thunder Bay region and, by extension, throughout northern Ontario. Further, once completed, the Centre will support further economic stimulus throughout Northwestern Ontario through employment, gatherings, research and cultural and academic activity.

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre supports the Prime Minister's call on the Minister of Finance to work with the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Minister of Indigenous Services to develop a new fiscal relationship with Indigenous Peoples by investing in the education and training of Indigenous students at one of Canada's leading Universities. The project is also consistent with the Prime Minister's call on the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and the Minister of Indigenous Services to co-develop and invest in distinctions-based community infrastructure plans.

An investment by the Federal Government will provide long-term support for Indigenous learners and members of the community. With a focal point on access and opportunity for underserved students, this investment would galvanize federal delivery on key commitments.

ENSURE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CAN STUDY IN CANADA

International students at Lakehead University play an important role in Northwestern Ontario's and Central Ontario's future, not only enriching our university campuses and classrooms, but also our communities.

International students help build a multicultural student body that prepares students for today's globalized world. Over the last several years, Lakehead University has focused on increasing international enrolment with a goal of developing a highly skilled workforce in the regions we serve. International students bring new perspectives and ideas to local communities, often staying after graduation to build lives and careers. They support our communities and boost local economies through volunteering and spending activities – contributing \$21.6 billion to the Canadian economy. These efforts are now threatened by Covid-19.

Lakehead University and all Canadian universities are continuing to work with public health officials to implement plans to safely integrate international students into campus life in Fall 2020. However, international students, and Universities like ourselves, have a time sensitive need for the federal government to make provisions for study permit holders to enter Canada so they may commence their studies in September.

The Government of Canada can help ensure international students can continue to study in Canada by:

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- Recognizing the \$21.6 billion dollar impact of international students in Canada, strengthening coordination across departments and investing in processes to safely and efficiently welcome international students to Canada;
- Cost-sharing safe arrival and quarantine measures with universities;
- Offsetting international student losses with a dedicated federal transfer to universities to compensate for a decline in international student enrolment; and,
- Investing in branding, recruitment and visa processing to support recovery and diversification efforts.

CONCLUSION

Lakehead University is committed to advancing the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action, recognizing that education is key to Reconciliation and to the creation of a culture of understanding across communities that will support a more equitable and inclusive future for Indigenous people.

The Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre will provide a central, cultural community hub to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and advancing reconciliation to support improved social and economic outcomes in our region.

The Centre fully supports the government's efforts to advance reconciliation and to continue to accelerate and build on the progress that has been made with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples.

Lakehead University is seeking funding for the construction of the Gichi Kendaasiwin Centre from the Federal Government.

The pandemic presents Canada, and Canadian universities with both an opportunity and a threat to the internationalization of our campuses, further undermining economic resiliency in the regions we serve.

Internationalization benefits individuals, societies, and economies. For domestic students, there is the opportunity to acquire global perspectives by learning alongside students from around the world and studying abroad – experiences that will position them better for the global economy. For international students, there is the opportunity to learn in high-quality institutions that give them a competitive advantage in their careers when they return to their home countries or if they stay in Canada. In both cases, students become ambassadors for our country and Lakehead University

Lakehead University is asking the Federal government to ensure that international students can arrive into Canada to start or resume their studies, even as universities prepare for largely online delivery for Fall 2020.

We would be pleased to further discuss this submission at your convenience.