



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

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- **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, providing Indigenous Education. Indigenous Education can be broadly described as the skills, experiences and insights of Indigenous people that are applied to maintain or improve their unique livelihood, traditions and languages; passed down from generation to generation; and interwoven with cultural values.

Indigenous Institutes (IIs) in Ontario have worked collaboratively since 1985. Their proven ability to deliver education that is 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 a critical piece to the national efforts to rebuild the economy.

Ogwehoweh Skills & Trades Training Centre, operating as OSTTC, is mandated by Canada's most populous First Nation to provide community based, labour market demanded Indigenous education; reciprocity is a cornerstone of OSTTC.

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

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

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. The 2008 recession severely impacted Indigenous employment.¹

According to a 2020 Organization 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

Education is paramount to creating a resilient workforce and sustainable communities and it is well-established that post-secondary graduates earn considerably more than those who do not have a post-secondary education. The premium generally remains – or even grows – throughout an individual’s career, resulting in sizeable differences in lifetime earnings (Frenette 2019).

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. Arguably, Indigenous-led education is the best way to support Indigenous learners and their success which is why community-based learning opportunities at IIs that include literacy and basic skills, secondary, post-secondary, and professional development are critical.

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.

Investing in IIs, as part of stimulus investments, ensures Indigenous students continue to have a culturally relevant and safe place to learn and pursue a career; enhances the ability to advance Indigenous Education and Indigenous-led research; innovation; and better equips IIs to respond to future skills development needs and changing labour market demands.

IIs are instrumental to the survival, continuance and repatriation of Indigenous languages and ways of knowing and being; improved participation, success, and educational attainment; advancing reconciliation; and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples as set out in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. For example, OSTTC offers competitive trades training that supports and supplies the local labour market with employment ready students in Welding Techniques, Introduction to Metal Fabrication, and Manufacturing Technology-Robotic Welding. Introduction to Metal Fabrication is a program unique in itself as it is a direct employment opportunity for successful graduates to work with Walter’s Group, North America’s largest steel manufacturer. OSTTC also customizes training for employers based on their hiring needs or skills training requirements.

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 business platform; education in COVID-19 demands it. Targeted digital infrastructure investments can sustain Indigenous Education, with potential to increase enrolment.

Education programming, in partnership with colleges/universities, creates a sophisticated registrar function at IIs. IIs in Ontario endeavored to purchase a common student information system capable of meeting our complex needs. After five years, IIs have not found an affordable system to support electronic data collection.

Traditionally, Indigenous learners have high interest and success in programs that are hands-on and experiential; social distancing measures disproportionately impacted these programs. Technology assisted resources are required to support adaptive learning strategies in these program areas.

OSTTC, together with employers and industry partners, continues to address labour market shortages, and build capacity to deliver skilled trades and professional development in Six Nations. OSTTC recently received provincial authority to head the Return to School Pilot Project to continue delivering programs that were suspended due to COVID-19. As a result it became more prominent the urgent need for improving the innovation and digital infrastructure that are key to the development of alternative learning modalities and the continuance of these 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 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.

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 investments.