



Evaluation of ECCCC's Indigenous Guardians Initiative

At a glance

August, 2024





Cat. No.: En4-750/2-2024E-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-73319-7

EC 24013

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Initiative Overview

The Indigenous Guardians Initiative provides Indigenous Peoples, through grants & contributions, with more opportunities for stewardship of their traditional lands, waters, and ice. Funding is provided to support Indigenous rights and responsibilities in protecting and conserving ecosystems, developing, and maintaining sustainable economies, and continuing the profound connections between natural landscapes and Indigenous cultures.

Funding and decision-making are implemented jointly with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis using a distinctions-based approach that respects and recognizes the unique perspectives, rights, responsibilities, and needs of Indigenous Peoples. This takes the form of three different approaches and structures to support Indigenous Guardians.

Indigenous Guardians launched in 2017 and was transferred to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) in 2018 through Nature Legacy, a Government of Canada wide initiative that sought to protect Canada's biodiversity, ecosystems, and natural landscapes. It included a Government of Canada investment of \$25 million over four years to support an Indigenous Guardians Pilot. In Budget 2021, with the Enhanced Nature Legacy, the Government of Canada announced up to \$100 million over five years (2021-2022 to 2025-2026). As of January 2024, over 230 projects have been funded by the Initiative.

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Scope and Methodology

Scope

The Indigenous Guardians Initiative evaluation covers the 5-year period from 2018-2019 to 2022-2023. The evaluation focusses on the following themes:

Relevance

Efficiency

Results

Design and
Governance

Performance
Information

Methodology

A variety of sources were used, including:

Document and File Review

The primary focus of the document review was ECCC's program-specific documents and Government of Canada policy and program documents, complemented by other publicly available sources.

Interviews

8 interviews were conducted with Indigenous partners.

7 interviews were conducted with ECCC program representatives.

Sample of Files

16 recipient files were selected as part of a sample to allow the evaluation to gain a more complete understanding of the Indigenous Guardians projects that were funded.

Analysis of Administrative, Performance and Financial Data

Project and performance data on program outputs and outcomes were reviewed. This includes three evaluation reports that each of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit groups completed towards the end of the pilot phase of the Initiative.



Findings (1 of 3)

Relevance

The Indigenous Guardians Initiative continues to be relevant. There are strong linkages with Government of Canada and ECCC priorities, as well as key commitments made under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Global Biodiversity Framework. Furthermore, a recent survey found that three quarters of Canadians support Indigenous Guardians and the role they play. The evaluation further noted the new increased funding is in line with increased demand for these initiatives. The Indigenous partners that were interviewed all highlighted a strong need for guardians and a more stable, long-term funding for the future.

Results

The Initiative resulted in numerous activities with strong linkages to their objectives, such as supporting Indigenous rights and responsibilities, protecting and conserving ecosystems, developing and maintaining sustainable economies, connecting to natural landscapes and Indigenous cultures, and knowledge transmission and generation with youth and Elders. It further supported hundreds of employment opportunities. Indigenous groups, both during interviews and in their own evaluations, noted the overall positive impacts of the initiatives.

Challenges with regards to the delivery of the initiatives were primarily tied to very lengthy processes from application to receiving the funding. Both ECCC and Indigenous partners noted this as an important issue. However, this was mitigated by the Secretariat's ability to be flexible and provide adjustments to support the achievement of results with the partners.



Findings (2 of 3)

Efficiency

The Indigenous Guardians Secretariat at ECCC was initially established to administer the Indigenous Guardians Initiative, and then went on to administer the Indigenous-led Natural Climate Solutions program, in 2021, using a similar approach. Expenditures for the Initiative increased as expected, with the vast majority going towards the contributions to the Indigenous partners. Salary expenditures were relatively stable over the evaluation period and more than \$50M of contributions were provided to Indigenous organizations, which represents over 92% of the total expenditures. There is recognition by all that ECCC needs to increase its efficiency in allowing for faster, earlier availability of funds to minimize impacts on Indigenous partners receiving late funding.

Performance Information

The Indigenous Guardians Initiative supports the core responsibility of Conserving Nature with activities towards all three of the following Departmental Results: 1) Canada's wildlife and habitat are conserved and protected; 2) Canada's species at risk are recovered; and 3) Indigenous Peoples are engaged in conservation.

While there is limited direct data that measures any of the above results for the Indigenous Guardians Initiative, interviewees, case studies and internal evaluations have all pointed to meaningful engagement of Indigenous partners.

Nonetheless, there is a need at this juncture to improve the collection of data to demonstrate results, especially with the dual role the Initiative seeks to have with regards to conservation and reconciliation. Work is already taking place to advance this.



Design and Governance

ECCC's distinctions-based approach, where specific governance approaches have been established for First Nations, Métis and Inuit, was viewed very favourably by all Indigenous partners and ECCC personnel. The approach accounts for Indigenous cultural realities, was viewed as effective, and allowed groups to be centered in decision-making.

However, some challenges were noted in the governance at ECCC of the Indigenous Guardians Initiative, with important delays in the approval of agreements and disbursement of funds. The recent findings of the Audit of the Administration of Grants and Contributions at ECCC recognized this, and the Department is developing an action plan to address internal governance processes.

Finally, there is evidence that some groups might not be able to receive Indigenous Guardians funding, as there is a requirement to be recognized by one of the three governing bodies to be eligible for funding. There is recognition, within ECCC, of a need to consider modern treaty and non-affiliated groups in future programming.

Recommendation

1

The Assistant Deputy Minister of Canadian Wildlife Service should develop, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, a performance measurement framework that identifies the data required to monitor progress against pre-established targets in order to report on Indigenous Guardians achievements and performance.



Management Response and Action Plan

Recommendation 1: The Assistant Deputy Minister of Canadian Wildlife Service should develop, in collaboration with Indigenous partners, a performance measurement framework that identifies the data required to monitor progress against pre-established targets in order to report on Indigenous Guardians achievements and performance.

Action 1: The Indigenous Guardians Initiative will develop a performance measurement framework to collect qualitative data related to the activities identified in the Contribution Agreements in place for 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 to be reported on in the annual and final reports.

Deliverables	Timeline	Responsible
Develop a list of potential qualitative targets to be included in the annual and final reports.	September 30, 2024	Indigenous Guardians Secretariat
Consult with Indigenous Partners on the proposed targets and finalize a list of targets that could be included in the annual and final reports.	November 30, 2024	Indigenous Guardians Secretariat, Indigenous Governance members: Inuit (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and 4 Inuit Treaty Organizations), Métis (Métis National Council and 4 governing members, Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Settlements General Council, Northwest Territories Métis Nation), First Nations National Guardians Network.
Modify the annual and final reports to include section on qualitative targets.	December 15, 2024	Indigenous Guardians Secretariat
Send new reports for annual/final reporting to 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 funding recipients.	March 14, 2025	Indigenous Guardians Secretariat