

Innovation in Education Program: National Program Guidelines 2025 to 2026



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Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada

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Introduction

The Government of Canada is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership as the foundation for transformative change. The implementation of the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) requires transformative change in the government's relationship with Indigenous peoples.

These efforts must be guided by Canada's obligation to respect and uphold First Nations' inherent Indigenous and treaty rights, including those rights to education referenced in specific treaties and self-government agreements. The nation-to-nation relationship between the Government of Canada and First Nations is rooted in historic treaties, the numbered treaties, self-government agreements, and section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, as, guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and informed by the [Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) and the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action](#).

1. Program introduction

The Innovation in Education Program is designed to support regionally-driven, First Nations-defined processes that enable First Nations-led organizations to manage and oversee First Nations education innovation project selection and funding allocations.

The program supports the development and implementation of First Nations innovative education program pilots. For example, projects related to:

- technology
- land-based learning
- Indigenous language and culture

which aim to improve education outcomes for First Nations communities, schools and students.

This program replaces the Innovation Activities Program that was offered under the discontinued New Paths for Education. Innovation in Education Program is 1 of several contribution programs, along with Research and Learning and the Education Partnerships Program, which complement Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) funding efforts towards First Nations elementary and secondary education.

The investment in this program reaffirms the Government of Canada's commitment to working collaboratively with First Nations to ensure that all First Nations students receive a culturally-responsive, high-quality education that improves student outcomes, while respecting the principle of First Nations control of First Nations education.

These guidelines were initially developed in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the National Indian Education Council (NIEC) and are intended to help eligible beneficiaries in the development of their costed work plans.

These guidelines set out the program delivery requirements for funding recipients that enter into a funding agreement with ISC for the delivery of the Innovation in Education Program.

These guidelines are effective as of April 1, 2025 and replace the [Innovation in Education: National Program Guidelines 2024 to 2025](#).

These guidelines are to be read in conjunction with the funding agreement signed by the funding recipient.

2. Objective

The program's objective is to lead to the development and implementation of best practices in innovative education programs and services for First Nations students.

3. Expected results

The program is a small part of broader efforts to improve First Nations elementary and secondary education. Activities are expected to help improve the overall quality of education in First Nations and contribute to the following specific expected outcomes:

- First Nations have increased education system capacity
- First Nations carry out activities to increase capacity and have flexibility to meet their education system needs and priorities
- education services and resources better reflect student needs, culture and language
- First Nations students participate and progress in their elementary and secondary education
- First Nations students on reserve achieve levels of secondary education comparable to non-Indigenous students in Canada

Outcomes may also be identified by regional education agreements.

4. Eligible recipients

Recipients eligible to receive funding include:

- First Nations or bands
- tribal councils, political or treaty or settlement organizations
- other First Nations education organizations designated by First Nations including:
 - school boards
 - First Nations education authorities
 - First Nations regional representative organizations
- recipients in Yukon and Northwest Territories

Depending on the nature of the regional agreement, funding may be allocated to a First Nations organization to administer the program regionally and distribute funding to specific projects based on available funding and First Nations decisions.

5. Eligible components and activities

The program supports activities towards the development and implementation of innovative education program pilots. For example, projects related to:

- technology
- land-based learning
- Indigenous language and culture

Eligible activities include those which lead to:

- piloting a new program in school

- piloting an adaptation of an existing program for a new purpose or audience in school
- assessing and measuring the impact of a pilot project first created under the former New Paths for Education Program, based on same types of objectives and outcomes

or

- sharing the story of successfully piloted innovations nationwide

6. Expenditures

6.1 Eligible expenditures

Eligible expenditures must be directly related to the eligible activities set out in the work plan that has been approved through a First Nations-led regional process.

Eligible expenditures may include the following:

- salaries, fees, tobacco and honoraria for professional services, for example:
 - researchers
 - language professionals
 - advisors
 - Elders and guest speakers
- salaries, benefits and wages for employees
- transportation and accommodation costs for eligible participants incurred as a direct result of participating in an eligible activity not already covered by elementary and secondary program funding
- learning materials, including those required for land-based education
- materials and equipment purchases or rentals
- printing and publishing costs including online publishing costs
- facility rentals
- hospitality
- curriculum and instructional materials development costs
- diagnostic, testing and evaluation tools
 - professional services
 - professional development and support activities
- costs associated with coordination of region-wide education programs and services
 - program modification or adaptation
- funding for liaison with:
 - First Nations education and community service providers, for example, child and family services and employment programs
 - provincial service providers
 - education organizations to support improved education outcomes

Administration costs include, but are not limited to:

- management of regional program processes such as travel, honoraria
- clerical support
- office supplies
- collection, maintenance and reporting of data and information in accordance with program and financial reporting requirements
- costs associated with ensuring that personal information is appropriately managed and safeguarded during its collection, use, disclosure and disposal

Administration costs must not exceed 15% of the sub-total amount requested before administration costs.

Further distribution of funds by ISC's funding recipients:

- When a funding recipient further transfers to a third party funds that were received under this program, the 15% allowed for administration costs must be divided between the parties, as agreed to between the parties
- The total administration costs retained by all parties must not exceed 15% of the approved sub-total amount before administration costs
- Travel expenses are to be claimed at actual cost but cannot exceed the rates and allowance established in the National Joint Council [Travel Directive](#) in effect at the time of travel. Expenses which exceed the rates and allowance set for in the directive are ineligible and will not be paid

6.2 Ineligible expenditures

Ineligible expenditures may include the following:

- purchase or construction of a building
- activities related to minor or major capital projects and teacherages funded under ISC's [Capital and Facilities Maintenance Program](#)
- operations and maintenance activities
- expenditures funded through on-going regular programs

The list of eligible and ineligible expenditures provided in this section is not exhaustive. Regional offices and other ISC contacts are available to answer questions and provide guidance related to eligible and ineligible expenditures.

7. Proposal process

First Nations partners will drive the development or the selection of costed proposals. If the total costs of identified projects are lower than the total program budget allocation, final decisions regarding the release of these funds will be made together by First Nations and ISC.

First Nations partners are accountable for coming forward with proposals which include the following:

- activities to be undertaken
- expected results
- costs

8. Managing conflict of interest

It is necessary to avoid potential, perceived and actual conflicts of interest and any situation that might cause doubt in objectivity. As such, a procedure to manage conflicts of interest must be developed and put in place.

Recipients that manage the adjudication and administration of funding of the program must demonstrate transparency and accountability in their policies and processes.

This includes having:

- a conflict of interest policy
- written standards, policies and procedures on the project selection process for funding
- an available list of successful proponents

Individuals cannot participate in the evaluation of a proposal in the following situations:

- individual has assisted in the preparation of the proposal, is an employee of the applicant, has provided consulting services, in any capacity, to the organization submitting the proposal or may in the future
- individual will be a team member on the proposed project
- individual is a relative or close friend of any of the employees of the management team of the eligible recipient which submitted a proposal

Conflicts of interest may arise during the review of proposals. These situations must be managed in an open and transparent manner.

Should a situation arise that presents a real or potential conflict of interest during the review process, the impacted individual must withdraw themselves from the deliberations concerning the specific proposal.

9. Funding

9.1 Maximum amount of funding

The Innovation in Education Program provides \$6 million in national funding annually. The distribution of this funding will depend on:

- the availability of funds in the overall Innovation in Education Program funding level

- the regionally-based allocation methodology jointly developed between ISC and:
 - Assembly of First Nations
 - National Indian Education Council
 - Chiefs Committee On Education

9.2 Funding approaches

Transfer payments to funding recipients of the Innovation in Education Program may be made using fixed contribution or flexible contribution depending on the recipient's eligibility and the service to be delivered.

ISC regional officers can provide information on the eligibility requirements of these funding approaches and on the requirements related to the management of the funds.

The funding approach used to transfer funds to a recipient is identified in the recipient's signed funding agreement.

The following specific program directions for the management of transfer payments complement the directions provided in the recipient's signed funding agreement and are to be read in conjunction with the funding agreement.

Fixed contribution funding

Reallocation of funding:

- during the fiscal year, recipients may reallocate a reasonable percentage of funds among the eligible activities and expenditures of their ISC-approved proposal for the Innovation in Education Program

Unexpended funding:

- recipients may retain unexpended funding from a fiscal year, to expend in the 1 year period immediately following the fiscal year for which it was provided, on eligible activities and expenditures outlined in these guidelines

Flexible contribution funding

Reallocation of funding:

- during the fiscal year, recipients may reallocate a reasonable percentage of funds among the eligible activities and expenditures of their ISC-approved proposal for the Innovation in Education Program

Unexpended funding:

- recipients may retain unexpended funding remaining at the end of each fiscal year to expend in a subsequent fiscal year, to further achieve results toward their ISC-approved proposal for the Innovation in Education Program

10. Reporting requirements and monitoring and oversight activities

10.1 Reporting requirements

The reporting requirements, such as program reports and financial reports and their respective due dates are listed in the recipient's funding agreement.

Recipients must report on all funds received and expended, including the use of unexpended funding they were allowed to retain to use in another fiscal year. Consult the funding approaches section of these guidelines for details on the use of unexpended funds.

All recipient reporting requirements are subject to monitoring and oversight activities to determine the accuracy of the information provided to ISC.

10.2 Monitoring and oversight

To ensure that the program or strategy outcomes and objectives are being met and opportunities for continuous improvement with a goal to improve results for Indigenous peoples are being identified, activities including audits, evaluations, as well as targeted program or strategy reviews may be conducted in collaboration with the recipient, for example, desk and on-site reviews.

11. Personal information

ISC's collection and use of personal information and other records for the purposes of targeted program reviews, for example, desk and on-site reviews will be limited to what is necessary to ensure that the program delivery requirements are met.

ISC is responsible for all information and records in its possession. The confidentiality of the information will be managed by ISC in accordance with the [Privacy Act, R.S.C., 1985, c. p-21](#) and other related policies on privacy.

Recipients are responsible for the protection of personal information as per provincial privacy statutes and regulations, and the recipient's policies up to the point that the personal information is transferred to ISC.

12. Accountability

ISC is committed to providing assistance to recipients in order to help them effectively carry out their obligations under these guidelines and their funding agreement. In the event of an inconsistency between the guidelines and Regional Education Agreement (REA) provisions, the REAs will prevail to the extent of the inconsistency or conflict.

Regional offices and other ISC contacts are available to answer questions and provide guidance related to ISC programs and funding. Recipients must:

- deliver the programs and strategies in accordance with the provisions of their signed funding agreement and the delivery requirements outlined in these guidelines
- ensure that the necessary management controls are in place to manage funding and monitor activities
- exercise due diligence when approving expenditures
- ensure that such expenditures are in accordance with the eligible expenditures set out in these guidelines

First Nations partners and recipients are expected to make information about their projects available for sharing in order to allow for exchange of learning and knowledge.

13. Contact information

To find out more about the program, visit:

- [Innovation in Education Program](#).

The Innovation in Education Program is a regionally-based program. Visit the [Regional offices](#) page to find your regional contact.

You can also write to:

Education Branch
Indigenous Services Canada
10 rue Wellington - Suite 1455, Mailstop 25E-19
Gatineau QC K1A 0H4
Email: education-education@sac-isc.gc.ca

To learn more about education programs, consult the [national program guidelines](#).