

First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy: Skills Link Program: National Program Guidelines 2025 to 2026



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Autochtones Canada

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1. Program introduction

The First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program is 1 of 2 programs that Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) administers under the [First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy \(FNIYES\)](#).

These guidelines set out the delivery requirements for funding recipients that enter into a funding agreement with ISC for the delivery of the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy: Skills Link Program 2025 to 2026.

These guidelines are effective as of April 1, 2025 and replace the [2024 to 2025 First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy: Skills Link Program: National Program Guidelines](#).

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

2. Objectives

The objectives of the Skills Link Program are:

- to support the development and enhancement of essential employability skills and knowledge among First Nations and Inuit youth that equip them to participate and succeed in the current and future labour markets, such as communication skills, problem solving and working with others
- to expose First Nations and Inuit youth to a variety of career options
- to help First Nations and Inuit youth by providing wage subsidies for mentored work experiences
- to support the provision of mentored school-based work and study opportunities such as co-operative education and internships
- to help First Nations and Inuit youth overcome barriers to employment
- to promote the roles of education and skills in successfully participating in the labour market
- to promote science, technology and other fields in high demand as an education or career choice

These objectives are consistent with and support the overall objectives of the [Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy \(YESS\) Skills Link Program](#).

3. Expected results

The desired outcome for the Skills Link Program is that First Nations and Inuit youth are employed or acquiring essential skills that will assist in gaining employment, performing effectively in workplace settings, and learning about job and career options. Key expected results of the Skills Link Program include:

- Enhanced employability skills of First Nations and Inuit youth
- Increased ability of First Nations and Inuit youth to participate in the labour market
- Reduced barriers to employment for First Nations and Inuit youth
- Increased awareness of the benefits of education

4. Funding recipients

A funding recipient is an individual or entity that has met the eligibility criteria of the program and has signed a funding agreement with ISC to deliver an initiative, program, service or activity.

5. Eligible recipients

Eligible recipients are:

- First Nations and Inuit communities
- Governments and organizations
- First Nations schools or federal schools on reserve
- First Nations and Inuit governments and organizations
- Not-for-profit associations
- Private sector employers

For co-operative education activities, only First Nations schools or federal schools on reserve may submit proposals through their administering organization.

Eligible recipients may offer employment opportunities directly to youth or enter into agreements with private sector and non-profit sector employers to access employment opportunities for youth.

Not-for-profit organizations and private sector employers based in Canada may be eligible for direct funding for activities that provide opportunities for eligible First Nations and Inuit youth in Canada and fall within program guidelines.

Not-for-profit organizations may be eligible to receive funding to cover up to 100% of wage costs and mandatory employment-related costs.

Private sector employers may be eligible to receive funding to cover funding up to 50% of wage costs and mandatory employment-related costs.

6. Eligible participants

Eligible participants include:

- First Nations youth ordinarily resident on reserve, in recognized communities or on community lands
- Inuit youth who are residents in Canada but reside outside their territory and are no longer eligible to be funded by their territory
- Since territorial governments are the primary service providers for Inuit youth who reside on their territory, youth must provide proof that they are ineligible to receive funding from their territorial government to participate in eligible Skills Link Program activities

Mentored work placements are intended for youth who are not in school, are unemployed or underemployed.

Eligible youth must be legally entitled to work in Canada. Youth refers to persons between the ages of 15 to 30 years inclusive at the start of the program's activities. Exceptions to the age restriction are made in the following cases:

- Youth participating in co-operative education placements may be younger than 15 years of age. Activities under co-operative placements are intended for students in grades 7 to 12, secondary 1 to secondary 5, who are enrolled in and attending a federal or First Nations administered school
- For activities promoting careers and science and technology, youth may be younger than 15 years of age at the start of the program's activities

7. Activities

7.1 For mentored work placements

- Work placements, mentorship or skills development sessions for youth who are not in school, unemployed or underemployed, to enable them to develop employability skills and support their educational and career development

7.2 For co-operative education placements and internships

- Activities designed to enable First Nations and Inuit youth to gain employment experience through school-based co-op or internship opportunities

7.3 For activities related to career planning and promotion of science and technology

- Activities that support the development and use of tools and products for learning, skills development, career planning and career development activities designed to support First Nations and Inuit youth entrepreneurs gain self-employment
- Career planning activities and resources targeted to First Nations and Inuit youth, including but not limited to information tools that promote the value of education and the importance of informed career decisions, career counselling, career fairs and leadership projects
- Activities that promote science and technology as an educational or career choice, including science camps, computer clubs and activities that connect science and technology to Indigenous knowledge
- Activities designed to support research and innovative projects to identify better ways of helping youth prepare for, return to and keep employment and to be productive participants in the labour force

8. Expenditures

8.1 Eligible expenditures

8.1.1 For mentored work placements

- Participant wage costs that meet or exceed the applicable minimum wage in the province or territory where the work placement occurs, and mandatory employment-related costs. Mandatory employment-related costs including the gross employee share of Canada Pension Plan, Quebec Pension Plan if applicable, Employment Insurance, vacation pay, Workers Compensation Benefits or Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail and where applicable, health insurance premiums
 - The non-profit sector is eligible to receive a contribution of up to 100% of the applicable minimum wage, plus mandatory employment-related costs (MERC). The private sector is eligible to receive up to 50% of the applicable minimum wage only
 - All employers are eligible to apply for 100% of the wage and MERC when a participant with disabilities is hired. In addition, a maximum contribution of \$3,000 per participant with disabilities may be available, on an actual cost basis, for special equipment and facilities to accommodate the participant's needs
- Youth training experiences that support the acquisition of skills required for work placements, including safety training and driver education
- Other necessary costs directly related to a work placement including, but not limited to, a criminal record check, uniforms and other office attire required by the workplace for the participant and personal safety gear such as work boots or safety hats up to a maximum of \$300 per participant

Dependent care for participants. Documentation is required including a description of the type of arrangements available in the community, if applicable. Participant costs such as living expenses, travel, room and board. International travel must be specifically authorized by ISC.

Travel expenses are to be claimed at actual cost, but cannot exceed the rates and allowances established in the [National Joint Council Travel Directive](#) in effect at the time of travel. Expenses which exceed the rates and allowances set for in the directive are ineligible and will not be paid.

8.1.2 For co-operative education placements and internships

- Salaries and employee benefits for teachers, co-op or internship coordinators, career counsellors and other staff directly related to the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy program delivery not already covered by existing programs, such as the ISC elementary or secondary education or band support or tribal council funding
- Other necessary costs directly related to a work placement including, but not limited to, criminal record check, uniforms and other office attire required by the workplace for

participants, personal safety gear such as work boots or safety hats up to a maximum of \$300 per participant

- Actual costs for special equipment and facilities to accommodate the needs of participants with disabilities, up to a maximum of \$3,000 per participant
- Staff training on co-operative education and internships
- Other incidental co-op and internship placement costs including insurance for participants during their co-op or internship placement
- Travel for co-op coordinators or teachers to meet employers in person
- Participant costs such as living expenses, and travel costs, including accommodation, meal allowances, and incidentals.

Travel expenses are to be claimed at actual cost but cannot exceed the rates and allowances established in the [National Joint Council Travel Directive](#) in effect at the time of travel. Expenses which exceed the rates and allowances set for in the directive are ineligible and will not be paid. International travel must be specifically authorized by ISC.

8.1.3 For activities related to career planning and promotion of science and technology

- Facility rental for career fairs, science camps
- Distinct materials produced exclusively in alignment with activities for students to promote specific careers, subjects, fields of study such as testimonials and biographies
- Honoraria and speaker fees, including for Elders
- Transportation
- Admission and event fees for students and chaperones

Travel expenses, including accommodation, meal allowances, and incidentals, are to be claimed at actual cost but cannot exceed the rates and allowances established in the [National Joint Council Travel Directive](#) in effect at the time of travel. Expenses which exceed the rates and allowances set for in the directive are ineligible and will not be paid.

8.1.4 For all activities

Administration costs for direct recipients must not exceed 15% of the sub-total amount requested before administration costs. The data collection instrument (DCI) will automatically calculate the amount.

Eligible administration costs include, but are not limited to:

- office or general expenses of the recipient organization
- materials
- supplies
- advertising specific to promotion of First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy program delivery
- communication and printing costs
- professional services

Further distribution of funds by ISC's funding recipients

When a funding recipient further transfers funds that they received under this program to a third party the 15% allowed for administration costs must be divided between the parties, as agreed between the parties.

The total administration costs retained by all parties must not exceed 15% of the sub-total amount requested before administration costs.

8.2 Ineligible expenditures

Ineligible expenditures include but are not limited to:

- all programs:
 - office infrastructure or equipment purchases such as computers and software
 - capital costs for the purchase of land, buildings, or the construction of a building, other than small repairs or renovations to support the participation of persons with disabilities
 - General program advertising not specific to the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy program delivery
- career promotion and awareness and science and technology activities:
 - salaries
 - training
- co-op education placements:
 - salaries or wages for students
 - dependent care or daycare

9. Proposal process

All funding for the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy will be based on approved proposals. Proposals are selected on the basis of meeting program objectives.

Applicants must submit detailed proposals for the activities to be undertaken over the course of the agreement. Proposals must clearly state how the activities will further the objectives and expected results of this program.

Eligible proposals must:

- meet the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy: Skills Link Program: National Program Guidelines
- be gender-balanced
- outline the activities to be undertaken and explain how they will meet the program's objectives
- outline the results to be achieved by the initiative or project
- demonstrate that the activities will provide assistance only to eligible participants
- provide an estimate of eligible costs, including any share incurred by partners

- for mentored work placements:
 - placement cannot exceed 11 months in duration
 - participants will be paid a wage rate at or above the applicable provincial or territorial minimum wage
 - placement must be completed by March 31 of the fiscal year in which funding is received

Submission of proposals

Only proposals submitted using the electronic proposal form issued by ISC will be considered for assessment. Refer to the proposal form and the attached instructions for application details. Incomplete proposals will be returned to applicants.

The information required in the proposal is available in the [Reporting Guide](#). Recipients who have access to the [ISC services portal](#) can access the proposal form by opening a session on the portal. If you do not have access to the portal, contact your [ISC Regional office](#) or if you are a national recipient, write to pse-eps@sac-isc.gc.ca.

First Nations organizations in **British Columbia** must apply through the [First Nations Education Steering Committee](#).

Assessment criteria

All proposals will be assessed by the following criteria:

- **Capability:** the experience and capacity of the recipient, and identified project leader, where applicable to:
 - manage the successful implementation of the activities in their proposal
 - complete the proposed employment initiative in a timely manner
- **Consultation and commitment:** The extent to which the proposal has the support of relevant organizations
- **Implementation activities:** the extent to which the proposal aligns with eligible activities and meets program objectives. The assessment will consider timelines, cost-effectiveness and the degree to which the activities will result in expected outcomes
- **Project management:** how the initiative or project will be managed, including project governance, management of project scope, human resources, risk management and project monitoring, control and reporting
- **Project costs:** realistic assessment of estimated total costs and a justification of the level of funding required
- **Cooperation and partnerships:** with other governments, employers, community-based organizations and interested organizations to encourage strategic partnerships minimize overlap or duplication and operate in synergy with other related employment, entrepreneurship, economic development and social programs

Meeting these criteria does not guarantee funding from the First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program.

Review and approval of proposals

ISC regional or national offices, or the First Nations or Inuit organization managing the program reviews and approves proposals from their member First Nations or Inuit communities. A written response is sent to applicants to confirm whether or not their proposal been approved for funding.

To find out more about the 2025 to 2026 call for proposals and the application process, visit:

- [First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program](#)

10. Funding

10.1 Maximum amount of funding

The maximum amount of funding given to a funding recipient in a fiscal year is set out in the funding agreement signed by the funding recipient. To learn more, consult [Eligible expenditures](#).

10.2 Funding approaches

Transfer payments to funding recipients of the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy Skills Link Program will be made using fixed contribution, however set contribution may be used if the recipient so wishes.

ISC 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 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.

Set contribution funding

Reallocation of funding:

Reallocation of funds is not allowed with transfer payments made using set contribution.

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 First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy: Skills Link Program.

Recipients must obtain the approval from the ISC officer responsible for the program in their region before reallocating funds.

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. Recipients must report the unexpended funding amount to their ISC officer responsible for the program in region and are to provide an unexpended funding spending plan detailing how retained funds will be spent in the 1 year period immediately following initial funding provision.

11. Reporting requirements and monitoring and oversight activities

11.1 Reporting requirements

The reporting requirements, such as program and financial reports and their respective due dates are listed in the recipient's funding agreement. Details on these requirements are available in the [Reporting Guide](#).

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

Recipients who have access to the [ISC services portal](#) can access the reporting forms by opening a session on the portal. Recipients who do not have access, should contact their [Regional office](#). If you are a current or prospective national recipient, contact pse-eps@sac-isc.gc.ca.

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

11.2 Monitoring and oversight

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

ISC may, in collaboration with the recipient, conduct audits, evaluations and targeted program or strategy reviews, for example, desk and on-site reviews to ensure:

- program or strategy outcomes and objectives are being met
- opportunities for continuous improvement are being identified with a goal to improve results for Indigenous peoples

12. 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 the funding of 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.

13. Personal information

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

ISC is responsible for all information and records in its possession. The confidentiality of the information is 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 or territorial privacy statutes and regulations and the recipient's policies up to the point that the personal information is transferred to ISC.

14. Accountability

ISC is committed to providing assistance to support recipients in effectively carrying out their obligations under these guidelines and their funding agreement.

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

15. Contact information

To find out more about the program, visit:

- [First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program](#)

Visit the [ISC Regional offices](#) page to find your regional office contact.

You can also write to:

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

To learn more about Education Programs, consult the [National Program Guidelines](#).