Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: National Guidelines 2025 to 2026

Preamble

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) is committed to working collaboratively with Indigenous partners in transforming the way the department adapts and implements policy and program reform. These guidelines are consistent with the Terms and Conditions that have been discussed with and informed by First Nations convened by the Assembly of First Nations.

On December 4, 2018, the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly passed Resolution #48/2018, which supported the First Nations Post-Secondary Education Policy Proposal to the Government of Canada. In developing the Terms and Conditions, First Nations partners have noted that they do not view this strategy as a matter of social policy and have asked that the following statements from the policy proposal be included:

- First Nations assert their right and responsibility to direct and make decisions regarding all matters relating to First Nations lifelong learning as an inherent and treaty right. First Nations assert an inherent and treaty right to education that is in accordance with their culture, values, traditions and languages to support holistic lifelong learning
- First Nations are seeking strengthened Government of Canada support for First Nations post-secondary education through treaty-based, self-government and regional models that enable First Nations control of First Nations education. Building on current best practices, the implementation of regional models will enable First Nations to holistically consider, design and implement a suite of integrated programs and services to comprehensively support post-secondary education attainment and success. Models must respect local control, honouring the autonomy of First Nations to dictate their own models that will not minimize flexibilities that First Nations communities currently have. These models, once created, must be First Nations directed and managed

In addition, First Nations have identified that amendments to federal policy and legislation, such as those that were made to the *Indian Act* to address sex-based inequities in registration, Bill S-3, can put pressure on First Nations governments to make timely and difficult decisions in regards to supporting First Nations students.

These guidelines have been amended in order to be consistent with First Nations control of First Nations education, the First Nations 2021 Post-Secondary Education Policy Proposal and the amended 2019 Terms and Conditions.

Table of contents

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 the Government of 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, section 35 of the [*Constitution Act, 1982*](#), guided by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* and informed by the [Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,](#) the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and](#) the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

1. Program introduction

ISC supports post-secondary education through 2 streams of programming:

- support to First Nations established post-secondary education institutions and First Nations-directed community-based programming, provided through the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP)
- individual student financial support through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the University and College Entrance Preparation Program

This program is a First Nations directed and regionally delivered program, with criteria established by First Nations or organizations designated by First Nations. It is proposal-driven. The level of funding allocated to recipients is based on the number and quality of proposals submitted and the available ISC PSPP budget and criteria determined by First Nations in their respective regions.

The program is not intended as a source of core operational funding.

These guidelines set out the program delivery requirements for funding recipients that enter into a funding agreement with ISC for the delivery of the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program.

These guidelines are effective as of April 1, 2025 and replace the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: National Guidelines 2024 to 2025.

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

2. Objectives

The PSPP provides funding to support First Nations to define their own partnerships with institutions in order to increase the availability of post-secondary education programs tailored to First Nations cultural and educational needs.

The overall aim of the program is to increase the number of First Nations students pursuing post-secondary education and thereby contribute to closing the education attainment gap.

The PSPP is a First Nations directed and regionally delivered program that supports:

- First Nations established post-secondary education institutions
- First Nations directed community-based programming

First Nations or organizations designated by First Nations will set criteria for funding and will adjudicate based on regional priorities to support First Nations established post-secondary institutions or community-based programming.

This component supports and respects the principle of First Nations control of First Nations education by providing funding for First Nations directed support for First Nations established institutions and community-based programming. This approach will improve the delivery of post-secondary education and will improve access to post-secondary education for First Nations students.

3. Expected results

The results of this program will enable First Nations students to achieve levels of post-secondary education comparable to non-Indigenous students in Canada.

4. Eligible recipients

Eligible recipients under the PSPP are:

- band councils of recognized First Nations bands
- organizations designated by band councils, including:

- o bands or settlements
- o tribal councils
- o education organizations
- o political or treaty organizations engaged by or on behalf of First Nations
- o First Nations established post-secondary education institutions
- the First Nations University of Canada

Although it is not mandatory, ordinarily the institution or organization delivering the program is recognized by a province or territory as a degree, diploma or certificate granting or has partnered with an institution that is recognized.

5. Eligible components and activities

The PSPP provides funding for proposals for activities that must meet the objectives and expected results of sections 2 and 3. Some examples of activities could include:

- develop and deliver post-secondary education programming for First Nations students that leads to the attainment of a post-secondary education credential
- deliver a program of study such as instruction, tutorial and teacher's salary
- adapt and convert existing courses to online delivery and distance education
- deliver an individual course
- research and development of new courses and programs
- other activities identified in regional program guidelines

6. Expenditures

6.1. Eligible expenditures

Eligible expenditures for the PSPP include the direct costs for First Nations and First Nations established post-secondary education institutions to develop and deliver programming for First Nations students that leads to the attainment of a post-secondary education credential. These may include:

- salaries and benefits of personnel
- costs associated with the development and publication of learning or instructional materials, including in partnership with recognized institutions
- costs associated with improved access to language and culture to support life-long learning
- costs associated with First Nations directed adjudication processes at the regional level
- rental of facilities to host post-secondary activities
- incremental operational costs
- administration costs, not to exceed 15% of total costs

Travel expenses are to be claimed at actual cost but can't 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.

Administration costs:

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

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 sub-total amount requested before administration costs.

6.2. Ineligible expenditures

Capital and maintenance costs are ineligible under the PSPP. Other ineligible costs include any student expenses that would be eligible under the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, such as:

- permanent staff salaries
- student tuition
- student books and supplies

7. Proposal process and assessment criteria

7.1. Regional administration options

Three options for the annual call for proposals are available in each region. The option chosen by First Nations must be submitted in writing to their ISC regional office. As a result, the administrative process for each region will differ. To learn more, contact your regional education office.

Option 1

Where First Nations in a region have designated an organization to take over adjudication and administration of the program's funding in their region, the organization will enter into an agreement with ISC that:

- defines the roles and responsibilities of all parties
- provides clear objectives
- outlines reporting requirements

The First Nations organization would fully manage the process including:

- setting local guidelines
- identifying themes and priorities
- setting proposal assessment criteria
- call out to eligible recipients
- create a selection committee
- receive and review proposals

A letter will be sent by the First Nations organization to all First Nations or organizations designated by First Nations in its region to inform them of the launch of the call for proposals.

This letter will be sent the same day the call for proposal is launched to ensure that each eligible recipient has enough time to submit a proposal.

The ISC regional office and identified First Nations organizations will enter into a funding agreement.

Option 2

First Nations-designated and directed organizations in each region will work with ISC in the adjudication and administration of allocations according to program guidelines.

Through joint development with First Nations partners in the region, ISC's regional offices will support and implement the final decisions.

A letter will be sent by the ISC regional office to all First Nations or organizations designated by First Nations in its region to inform them of the launch of the call for proposals.

This letter should be sent the same day the call for proposal is launched to ensure that each eligible recipient has enough time to submit a proposal.

ISC post-secondary education officials will draft template decision letters in partnership with First Nations to be finalized and sent out from regional directors to both successful and unsuccessful applicants.

The ISC regional office will put funding agreements in place for successful applicants.

Option 3

If the First Nations do not participate in the regional processes, ISC regional offices would manage the process, including:

- identifying themes and priorities
- setting proposal assessment criteria
- call out to eligible recipients
- create a ISC regional selection committee
- receive, review and score proposals
- validation of the approved proposals and amounts

- seeking approval on scoring and recommendations from their respective regional director general

The regional selection committees will be comprised of regional education branch staff.

ISC post-secondary education officials will draft template decision letters to be finalized and sent out from regional directors to both successful and unsuccessful applicants.

The ISC regional office will put funding agreements in place for successful applicants.

For PSPP initiatives, funding allocations are determined by a 2-step process:

- regional allocations are made based on First Nations population distribution
- First Nations designated and directed organizations in each region will work with ISC in the adjudication and administration of allocations according to the option chosen

7.2. Review and approval process

In collaboration with ISC, the regional First Nations-led adjudication bodies will review all proposals, or ISC only in the case of option 3.

A written response will be sent to applicants to confirm whether or not their proposal has been approved for funding.

Regional guidelines will set out the review and approval process. Where these have not been established, the following will apply:

- waiting list of projects may be kept by the department for potential additional investments. This list will be approved by the First Nations-led adjudication body if there is additional funding
- multi-year funding will be considered for low-risk recipients based on program effectiveness, institution stability and for project proposals that have clear annual work plans and dates for transitioning to self-sufficiency. Recipients approved for a multi-year proposal will not have to re-submit a proposal for the subsequent fiscal years covered by the approved proposal
- consideration of the provision of additional financial support for a proposal already being supported by another partner if this enhances the scope of the proposal and meets program objectives

These processes will not apply in all regions. Where the program is fully adjudicated and administered by a First Nations-designated organization, they will need to be contacted directly.

7.3. Proposal assessment criteria

Annex 1 provides an applicants' guide containing proposals assessment criteria. This annex must be used for those under option 3.

For those under option 1 where regional criteria are present, they will supersede.

For option 2, the annex will be used if the recipient so wishes or in the case where regional criteria are not developed by the First Nations.

Where option 3 is being implemented, proposals will be assessed with the following criteria, a statement of need for each specific project describing:

- background
- targeted student base
- type of program and area of study
- context of the project
- specific issues that will be addressed
- drivers leading to the funding request

Items of special note include:

- responsiveness to the educational needs of First Nations, including evidence of First Nations support for the project
- a clear project definition, including planned activities, expected outcomes and evidence of previous program success where applicable
- the use of innovative and efficient delivery methods

8. Managing conflicts 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 <mark>must</mark> 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 <mark>withdraw</mark> themselves from the deliberations concerning the specific proposal.

9. Funding

9.1. Maximum amount payable per funding recipient

The maximum amount payable to PSPP recipients normally will not exceed $500,000. Exceptions will be determined by First Nations designated and directed organizations, based on First Nations priorities.

9.2. Funding approaches

Transfer payments to funding recipients of the PSPP may be made using fixed contribution or flexible contribution depending on the eligibility of the recipient and of the service to be delivered.

Set funding may be used if the recipient so wishes.

ISC regional officers can advise on the eligibility of these funding approaches as well as 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.

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 proposal approved for the PSPP.

Recipients must obtain 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.

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 proposal approved for the PSPP.

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

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 proposal approved for the PSPP.

10. Reporting requirements, monitoring and oversight activities

10.1. Reporting requirements

The reporting requirements for program and financial reports and their respective due dates are listed in the recipient's funding agreement and 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 they were allowed to retain to use on the following fiscal year. Consult section 9.2 Funding approaches 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 to the portal should contact their regional office.

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 applicable 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 agreements.

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

ISC is accountable to provide funding to First Nations in a timely manner through contributions payments under the First Nations Post-Secondary Education Strategy.

13. Contact information

To find out more about the program, visit:

- [Post-Secondary Partnerships Program](#)

You can also write to:

Education Branch
Indigenous Services Canada
10 rue Wellington - 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 or click on the "View instructions" button on the first page of this program's data collection instrument.

Annex 1: applicants guide

All proposals will be assessed using the following criteria by the selection committee(s). Each criterion will be worth the value indicated in the second column, on a scale of 100. Recipients should ensure their proposal clearly addresses each criterion.

Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: assessment form	
Proposal assessment criteria	**Weight**
Respond to a labour market need Evidence that the project is in a discipline in high labour market demand locally, regionally or nationally should be included. Evidence of labour market research or data can be demonstrated either by using Employment and Social Development Canada's labour market information or by other sources of evidence of high demand in First Nations communities, such as: - Indigenous government administration	20

Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: assessment form	
Proposal assessment criteria	**Weight**
- teachers in First Nations schools - letters from potential employers - emerging development projects - quantitative analysis of labour shortages in a province, territory or region or in First Nations communities	
Respond to educational needs of First Nations students or have evidence of Indigenous support Project is adapted to educational needs of First Nations students and shows evidence of First Nations support for the project, such as the use of: - Elders - Indigenous mentors - tutors - availability of course in rural or remote areas - integration of language and culture into curricula	15
Planned activities, expected outcomes and evidence of previous success Proposed curriculum is presented by semester, including start and end date of course or project and method of delivery. All courses must be credited towards a certificate or diploma including projected enrollment and expected take-up or minimum enrollment. Institution's expertise and capacity to deliver proposed activities as demonstrated by past success and past measures of performance over a number of years. Institution's ability to reach a sizeable number of students identified by expected number of students. If the project is new, demonstrate the institution's record of recruitment and retention, in particular First Nations students. Level and qualification of the teaching personnel planned for the project. A maximum of 2 year multi-year funding will be considered for low-risk recipients for projects whose proposals lay out clear annual workplans and dates for	15

Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: assessment form	
Proposal assessment criteria	**Weight**
transitioning to self-sufficiency within the regular operations of the post-secondary institution.	
Innovative and efficient delivery • innovative learning tools • new instructional material for online courses, outreach • distance education • culturally adapted internships • course schedules that accommodate mature students who may have to work part-time or have day care needs	15
Budget Provide a budget detailed by: • activity with staff salaries broken down by staff categories and number of personnel • demonstration that costs are directly related to the development and delivery of the project • cost per student is justified • tuition fees are included as revenues • administration costs are within the 15% allowed	10
Funding partners Preference is given to projects that include funding partners with a firm commitment to monetary participation.	10

Post-Secondary Partnerships Program: assessment form

Proposal assessment criteria	Weight
Transition plan for migration to mainstream activities of the post-secondary education institution A clear timeline for program self-sufficiency and migration to the mainstream activities within the regular operations of the institution, including dates for the end of PSPP funding.	10
Submission quality	5
Total	100