Post-secondary Student Support Program and University and College Entrance Preparation 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 cultures, 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 and promote 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 will be in place as First Nations proceed with the development of their regional post-secondary education models. These guidelines will be replaced as regional program guidelines are developed by First Nations and agreement is reached with ISC on implementation.

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.

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, 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:

- individual student financial support through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program and the University and College Entrance Preparation Program

- support to First Nations established post-secondary education institutions and First Nations-directed community-based programming, provided through the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP)

This program is a First Nations directed and regionally delivered program, with criteria established by First Nations or organizations designated by First Nations. These guidelines include program and eligibility information. ISC regional offices may provide additional details for the delivery of the programs and their services.

Any issues that arise concerning the interpretation of these guidelines will be resolved by the education program directorate with the support of ISC regional offices.

These guidelines set out the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP) delivery requirements for funding recipients that enter into a funding agreement with ISC for the delivery of the PSSSP and UCEPP.

These guidelines are effective as of April 1, 2025 and replace the [Post-Secondary Student Support Program and University and College Entrance Preparation Program: National Guidelines 2024 to 2025](#).

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

2. Purpose and objectives

2.1 Post-Secondary Student Support Program

The PSSSP provides non-repayable financial support for First Nations students, registered under the *Indian Act*, to advance towards a recognized post-secondary education credential as prioritized and directed by First Nations. This includes:

- Programs offered at:
    - Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CÉGEP)
    - community colleges
    - eligible colleges and universities in Canada and abroad
    - First Nations designated and directed institutions
- PSSSP financial support can be provided for undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate and advanced professional programs of study

The program's objective is to improve socio-economic outcomes for First Nations by supporting First Nations in providing eligible students with funding to access education opportunities at the post-secondary level, consistent with the principle of First Nations control of First Nations education.

The overall aim of the program is to provide First Nations with access to inclusive and quality education to close the education gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians by increasing First Nations' access to post-secondary education.

2.2 University and College Entrance Preparation Program

The program objectives are to:

- provide non-repayable financial support for First Nations students, registered under the *Indian Act*, who are enrolled in recognized post-secondary university and college entrance preparation programs

- enable First Nations students, registered under the *Indian Act*, to attain the academic level required for entrance into degree, diploma and certificate programs

If the provisions of a funding agreement are met, a recipient does not have to repay financial support to ISC. As indicated in [section 8](), recipients may issue local program guidelines for the administration of the PSSSP and the UCEPP, including guidelines regarding the repayment of financial support by students to recipients.

3. Expected results

These programs are expected to enable First Nations students to achieve levels of post-secondary education comparable to non-Indigenous students in Canada.

4. Eligible recipients

Eligible recipients under PSSSP and UCEPP 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

- self-governing First Nations in Yukon that have not yet assumed responsibility for post-secondary education through a programs and services transfer agreement or through the terms of their self-government agreement

In addition, ISC may also enter into funding agreements with funding agreement managers and recipient appointed advisors in accordance with ISC's Default Prevention and Management Policy, to administer PSSSP or UCEPP programming funds jointly with or on behalf of a First Nations community.

In the case where such an agreement does not exist, the regional office in the province or territory where the student is residing is responsible to review and assess the student applications for funding.

5. Eligible students

To be eligible for funding, students:

- are status First Nations, registered under the *Indian Act*

- maintain a satisfactory academic standing as determined by the recipient as defined in section 4, within an eligible post-secondary institution

- enrolled on a full-time or part-time basis

Applications to ISC's programs are valid for 1 school year only. To find out more about how to apply, visit the [Post-secondary education](#) page.

Northwest Territories students

The Government of Northwest Territories (NWT) provides grants and bursaries to NWT residents. Students eligible for NWT support cannot receive funding from PSSSP or UCEPP.

Program recipients must not accept applications from people whose band or community is in NWT unless the student can provide a statement from the NWT government that the student is not eligible for this support from these organizations because the student has not met their residency requirement.

James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and Northeastern Quebec Agreements students

Students who are eligible for support under The Cree School Board, Kativik Ilisarniliriniq School Board or the Central Québec School Board programs that are resourced by ISC, consistent with the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and the Northeastern Quebec Agreements, cannot apply for support under PSSSP or UCEPP unless they have been outside of their territory for more than 10 years.

Program recipients must not accept applications from people whose band or community is in Northern Quebec unless the student can provide a statement from the Cree or Kativik or the Central Québec School Boards that the student is not eligible for this support from these organizations because the student has not met their residency requirement.

6. Eligible components and activities

6.1 Eligible programs

Under the PSSSP and the UCEPP, an eligible program of studiesis one:

- for which the completion of secondary school studies, or the equivalent as recognized by the post-secondary institution or the provincial or territorial ministry of education, is required

- delivered at an eligible institution as defined in section 6.2

UCEPP programs must provide students with the necessary courses to attain their academic level for post-secondary institution entrance and be delivered at an eligible institution as defined in section 6.2.

Delivery method may be in-classroom, e-learning, distant learning or virtual learning as long as it meets all eligibility criteria.

Skilled trades and technology programs are eligible under the PSSSP provided they are delivered by an eligible institution as defined in section 6.2.

Consult [Annex 2: List of provincial or territorial ministries of education](#) for information on student admissibility to a program of study.

6.2 Eligible institutions

Eligible post-secondary institutions are degree, diploma or certificate-granting institutions in Canada, recognized by a province or territory.

Eligible institutions include educational institutions affiliated with, or those that deliver post-secondary programs by arrangement with, a post-secondary institution as well as First Nations designated and directed institutions.

For post-secondary institutions located outside of Canada, prospective students are responsible for providing relevant accreditation documentation to the First Nation or First Nations-directed organization that is responsible for administering PSSSP and UCEPP program funding. First Nations or First Nations-directed organizations will then determine the eligibility of post-secondary institutions located outside of Canada in consultation with their respective ISC regional office. Staff at the regional office can assist by connecting First Nation or First Nations-directed organizations to sources of information regarding the process for examining the status of international post-secondary institutions.

If a student receiving PSSSP or UCEPP funding is attending an accredited post-secondary institution not included in the Education Information System, recipients must submit a request to the regional ISC education office to add the institution to the Education Information System for the purposes of reporting.

6.3 Program requirements

As defined in [section 4, Eligible recipients](#), when locally administering the PSSSP and the UCEPP, recipients must meet the following minimum standards:

- provision, administration and distribution of funding, within the recipient's budgetary envelope, to eligible post-secondary education students as per the maximum amount payable outlined in [section 9.1 Maximum amount payable to students](#)

- implementation and administration of a selection priority criteria that is publicly available

- development and implementation of rules for deferring applications in situations where there are more eligible students than funds available

- implementation and administration of an appeal process that is publicly available

7. Expenditures

7.1 Eligible expenditures

Eligible expenditures for the PSSSP and UCEPP include student grants for academic and living expenses associated with pursuing a post-secondary education credential at an eligible post-secondary institution. These may include, but are not limited to:

- tuition and other student fees

- initial professional certification and examination fees

- books and supplies required by the student for their program of study

- official transcript fees

- application fees

- living expenses, including for dependents, if applicable

- expenses associated with travel home, including for dependents, if applicable

- supplemental tutorial, guidance and counseling services

- child care, as needed

- scholarship and incentive payments

- administration costs as outlined in section 7.1.1, Administration costs

Retroactive funding is not permitted for studies in a previous fiscal or academic year.

Travel support for students

Travel support does not include moving expenses such as the removal of household effects.

Recipients are encouraged to:

- ensure students seek economical means for travel

- set maximum rates for which students are to be funded

Recipients may choose to refer to the rates set for government travel in the National Joint Council Travel Directive to determine eligible travel costs.

Living allowances

- Living allowance rates will be determined by the recipient. Recipients may choose to refer to the living allowance maximums set by the Canada Student Loans and Grants or Canada Student Financial Assistance Programs to determine eligible living costs

- The living allowances will be paid in Canadian dollars regardless of the location of the institution

- Living allowances are paid for Christmas and study breaks. Additional time may be allowed for students to settle into accommodations at the place of study at the beginning of the academic year and to move out at the end of the academic year

- The recipient may provide students an advance of the living allowance, for example, rent advances

- Where a student is provided an advance, the recipient may spread the adjustment over the payment periods of the academic year and make the appropriate deductions from the living allowance for each payment period

7.1.1 Administration costs

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

Eligible administration costs include only the actual costs associated directly to administer PSSSP and UCEPP. These may include, but are not limited to:

- salaries and benefits of personnel directly employed in the administration and delivery of the funding. In the case of multiple responsibilities, the portion of the salary to be included under administration costs should be proportional to the amount of time spent fulfilling PSSSP or UCEPP duties

- materials and resources required for the management of funds

- rent and utilities

- printing and communications costs, including web presence

- travel and accommodation

- the collection, maintenance and reporting 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, retention, use, disclosure and disposal

Further distribution of funds by ISC's funding recipients: when a funding recipient further transfers to a third party, funds that were received under these programs, 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.

For travel and accommodation: recipients are encouraged to seek economical means for travel.

Recipients may choose to refer to the rates set for government travel in the National Joint Council Travel Directive to determine eligible travel costs.

7.1.2 Eligible tuition

Tuition support may be provided under the following conditions:

- students attending eligible post-secondary institutions, including compulsory student fees charged by the institution for a student

- Canadian public post-secondary institutions:

- the student will provide documentary evidence of tuition, registration and mandatory student fees
- in exceptional circumstances, tuition support may be paid directly to the student as opposed to directly to the post-secondary institution
- private and foreign post-secondary institutions

8. Local guidelines

Recipients may issue local program guidelines provided they are consistent with the terms and conditions of the PSSSP and UCEPP and the requirements set out in these guidelines.

Requirements for local guidelines are listed below. All recipients commit as part of the funding agreement to provide prospective applicants with ready access to the local guidelines.

Recipients who choose not to issue local guidelines must nonetheless deliver a clear application process for the students applying that includes determining their eligibility and prioritizing the allocation of the resources.

Recipients must make available up to date local guidelines and information about the processes for students applying for financial support and publish these online throughout the year.

Local guidelines may also include rates and allowances for amounts payable to students, provided that they do not exceed the maximum amount payable set out in section 7.1 Eligible expenditures and section 9.1 Maximum amount payable to students.

8.1 Potential selection priorities

Listed below are some examples of priority selection criteria that recipients may consider using in their local operating guidelines:

- continuing students: students already being funded through PSSSP or UCEPP
- high school graduates
- deferred students: eligible but not funded in the past due to limited funding
- recent post-secondary education graduates who wish to further their studies
- new students already studying at a post-secondary level
- returning students
- part-time students
- students with a strong academic standing

8.2 Appeal process

To ensure fairness and equitable treatment under the PSSSP and the UCEPP, recipients must have an appeal process in place that is accessible to students and publicly available.

- The appeal process must include:

    - the existence of an impartial appeal board

    - specific time frames for the appeal hearings to be set and decisions made

    - a governance process confirming that the recipient will abide by the appeal board's decision

- When an application is approved, rejected or deferred, students must be informed in writing if their application for support was approved or the reasons for rejecting or deferring the application

- Where a student is convinced that the local or national program guidelines are not being fairly applied to their situation, then the student shall have access to an appeal hearing

- There is no appeal against refusal of assistance because funds are not available

- The appeal board's ruling must be consistent with the intent of the PSSSP and UCEPP National Program Guidelines

- The appeal board's decision is final

- A student may not appeal to ISC the administrative decisions and appeal rulings made by the local appeal process

9. Funding

9.1 Maximum amount payable per student

The maximum amount payable per full-time student under PSSSP or UCEPP cannot exceed $53,000 per year.

The actual amount of funding will depend on the overall amount of funding in the program and the number of recipients selected.

On an extraordinary and justified basis, full-time graduate students in an advanced professional degree program such as dentistry, medicine or a masters or doctoral program, may be awarded funding in excess of $53,000 up to a maximum of $90,000 per year.

Such awards may be:

- granted by special request on a case-by-case basis only as determined by the recipient

- considered when a graduate student has extraordinary circumstances that warrant overriding the standard policy on maximum amounts payable

Part-time students, as defined by their post-secondary institution, may receive assistance for tuition and fees and the cost of books and supplies.

Part-time students may be awarded assistance for living allowances or travel, typically at a prorated amount, as determined by the recipient.

This is a maximum allowable payment per student. No student is automatically entitled to this amount.

The maximum amount was established to ensure that the most extreme circumstances could be funded as necessary.

The actual amount of funding available to a student will depend on the overall amount of funding available in the program and for each recipient.

9.2 Funding approaches

Transfer payments to funding recipients of the PSSSP and UCEPP may be made using fixed, flexible or block contribution, or a grant, 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 funds between the PSSSP functional area and the UCEPP functional area. Reallocation of funds toward the administration post-secondary functional area is not allowed.

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 funds between the PSSSP functional area and the UCEPP functional area. Reallocation of funds toward the administration post-secondary functional area is not allowed.

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 the program objective.

10. Reporting requirements and 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. Details on these requirements are available in the Reporting Guide.

Recipients must report on all funds received and expended, including the use of unexpected funding they were allowed to retain to use in another fiscal year. Consult section 9.2 Funding approaches for details on the use of retained unexpected 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 accountability

Activities audits, evaluations and targeted program or strategy reviews may be conducted in collaboration with the recipient, for example, desk and on-site reviews, 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.

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 the programs 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 it 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 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 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 programs, visit:

- [Post-Secondary Student Support Program](#)

- [University and College Entrance Preparation 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: 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 the Annual Register of Post-Secondary Education Students' data collection instrument.

Annex 1: Glossary

Academic year

defined by the post-secondary institution.

Band

defined by the *Indian Act*.

Canadian public institution

a post-secondary institution that receives the majority of its funding from federal and provincial governments.

CÉGEP

an abbreviation of Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel. CÉGEPs operate in Quebec.

Dependent

a person who is dependent upon the student as defined by Canada Revenue Agency and who does not receive income in excess of income allowed for a dependent spouse by Canada Revenue Agency.

Dependent spouse

a person who is married to the student or a person who has lived with the student as husband or wife for a period of at least 1 year prior to application for educational support. This person is dependent upon the student and does not receive income in excess of the level of income allowed for a dependent spouse by Canada Revenue Agency.

Full-time students and part-time students

defined by the post-secondary institution. Note that short term intensive summer programs may qualify at full time.

Post-secondary education

means a program of studies, offered by a eligible post-secondary institution, for which completion of secondary school studies or its equivalent is a prerequisite.

Post-secondary institutions

degree, diploma, and certificate granting institutions that are recognized by a province or territory in Canada or abroad. They include educational institutions affiliated with, or delivering accredited post-secondary programs by arrangement with a post-secondary institution, as well as First-Nations-designated and directed institutions.

Private post-secondary institution

a Canadian or foreign post-secondary institution which receives the majority of its funding from sources other than governments.

Program of studies

includes all post-secondary programs, at least, leading to a certificate, diploma or degree. Programs less than 1 academic year which are prerequisites to post-secondary programs of at least 1 academic year are included.

Recipient

an administering organization in receipt of funds intended to finance the PSSSP and UCEPP in accordance with the national program guidelines. This may be:

- band councils of recognized First Nations
- organizations designated by band councils
    - bands or settlements
    - tribal councils
    - education organizations
    - political or treaty organizations engaged by or on behalf of First Nations
- other First Nations organizations which have responsibility for the administration of the program or a portion of it.

Semester

a part of the academic year, as defined by the post-secondary institutions. Semesters usually cover the periods from September to December, January to April, and May to August. The number of semesters, period and length are defined by the individual institutions.

Student

an individual who has successfully applied to be funded under the PSSSP or UCEPP and fulfills the conditions of the programs in order to receive financial support to successfully attain a recognized post-secondary education credential.

Treaty or status Indian and Indian

a person whose name has been entered in the Indian Registry maintained by ISC as defined by the *Indian Act*.

Annex 2: List of provincial or territorial Ministries of Education websites

Atlantic

- [New Brunswick Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour](#)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour](#)
- [Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education](#)
- [Prince Edward Island Education and Lifelong Learning](#)

Quebec

- [Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur](#)

Ontario

- [Ministry of Colleges and Universities](#)

Manitoba

- [Post-Secondary Education in Manitoba](#)

Saskatchewan

- [Ministry of Advanced Education](#)

Alberta

- [Ministry of Advanced Education](#)

British Columbia

- [Indigenous Post-Secondary Education and Training](#)

Yukon

- [Education and schools](#)

Northwest Territories

- [Education, Culture and Employment](#)

Nunavut

- [Department of Family Services | Government of Nunavut](#)

- [Homepage | Government of Nunavut](#)