



Evaluation of the Department's efforts towards Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

Final report
June 2025



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We express our sincere appreciation to all departmental employees across Canada working from coast to coast to coast for their collaboration, guidance, support, as well as for their participation in surveys, interviews and meetings, all of which have provided essential information for this evaluation.

Evaluation context (1 of 2)

Introduction

As requested by senior management, a thematic evaluation of the Department’s efforts towards Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples was carried out during fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25 by DFO’s Evaluation Division. The evaluation was conducted in compliance with the Treasury Board Policy on Results. The evaluation captures the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG), which at the time was a special operating agency of DFO, and has since transferred to the Department of National Defence (DND) in September 2025, pursuant to Order in Council 2025-0639. As such, related responsibilities, priorities and structures have changed since the evaluation was conducted.

Evaluation objectives and scope

The evaluation assessed the themes and questions shown in Figure 1, which were collaboratively developed with officials across the Department¹, including Inuit, First Nations, and Métis employees. It employed a real-time approach, conducted in phases, to disseminate information throughout the evaluation, generate conversations and provide senior management with evidence-based information for decision-making. As a thematic evaluation, the scope covered the Department as a whole. It was not meant to evaluate the implementation of the Reconciliation Strategy and Action Plans directly, nor the Department’s Indigenous-focused programs. Rather, the evaluation was internally directed; as such, it did not collect information from Indigenous partners. Instead, evaluators supplemented their analysis with a literature and document review to incorporate external perspectives of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada.



Figure 1: Evaluation themes¹

Evaluation questions

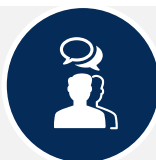
1. What does Reconciliation mean?
2. To what extent is there cultural awareness within the Department?
3. To what extent does the Department’s vision, governance structures, processes, and tools effectively and efficiently support the efforts towards Reconciliation?
4. To what extent do departmental investments and resources support Reconciliation priorities and activities?
5. What opportunities can the Department explore to advance its efforts towards Reconciliation in the future?

Evaluation methodology

Evidence was collected from various sources and triangulated to overcome any limitations and ensure more robust observations.



A review of over 150 documents and a literature review.



Interviews with national headquarters (NHQ) and regional personnel (n=35).



A financial analysis, departmental budgets and expenditures, and payments made to Inuit, Métis, and First Nations recipients/vendors.



Three employee surveys on: cultural awareness (n = 1,639), overall resources (n=84), and resources for transfer payments programs (n=22). (See [Annex A](#) for more information).

¹ For the purpose of the evaluation, governance structures and processes include roles and responsibilities, synergies, communication, decision-making, leadership, and accountability.

Evaluation context (2 of 2)

The Department's commitments to Reconciliation has been anchored in Historical and Modern Treaties, case law, Action Plan Measures under *the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Call to Action # 57), Many Voices One Mind, Minister's mandate letter commitments, and Indigenous Program Review implementation and recommendations.

Through the 2019 [Reconciliation Strategy](#), the Department formulated a vision, commitments and objectives for Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Long-term objectives in this evergreen Strategy include strengthened Indigenous-Crown relationship, recognized self-determination and reduced socio-economic gaps.

Since 2019, the Department built multiple Reconciliation Action Plans in the National Capital Region (NCR) and in other regions, as well as other guidance documents and strategies like the Indigenous Recruitment, Retention and Development Strategy, the Northern Recruitment and Retention Strategy, the Canadian Coast Guard's National Indigenous Relations Strategic Framework, and the Indigenous Program Review Action Plan.

The Department's commitment to Reconciliation is further demonstrated through tangible actions, including: contracting Elder Residents to advise on Reconciliation-related activities in the Maritimes; targeted recruitment efforts to improve the proportion of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis employees in leadership and decision-making positions; a multi-sector, multi-region working group to support the development of meaningful performance indicators; the creation of the Indigenous Employee Networks/Circles (IENs) 'By Us, For Us'; and the Indigenous Career Navigators Program. Additional examples can be found in [Annex B](#).

Reconciliation in Action

Indigenous Career Navigators Program (ICNP):

- The ICNP is a volunteer program led by the Knowledge Circle for Indigenous Inclusion (Indigenous Services Canada) that supports First Nation, Métis and Inuit employees in the federal public service nationwide by providing career advice and guidance on recruitment, retention, professional development, and career advancement. The Department had 14 out of 51 trained and certified Indigenous Career Navigators. Additionally, the only EX-level Navigator across government, who provides support to EX and EX minus one Indigenous employees within the public service, occupies a position in the CCG.
- Assists hiring managers looking for advice on how to support Métis, First Nations, and Inuit employees with their career path.
- Contributes the [Many Voices One Mind: a Pathway to Reconciliation](#) initiative across the public service.

Indigenous Employee Networks-Circles

The Indigenous employee Networks/Circles brought value to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis employees by offering spaces to come together and share ideas on job support, mentorship, mental health support, and career training. These networks-circles are organized and run by Indigenous employees for Indigenous employees.

Stand-alone Arctic Region

On October 24, 2018, the then Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and Canadian Coast Guard and the President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) announced the creation of a stand-alone Arctic Region encompassing the four regions of Inuit Nunangat, as part of the Government's commitment to advancing reconciliation and renewing relationships with Inuit, grounded in the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation, and partnership.

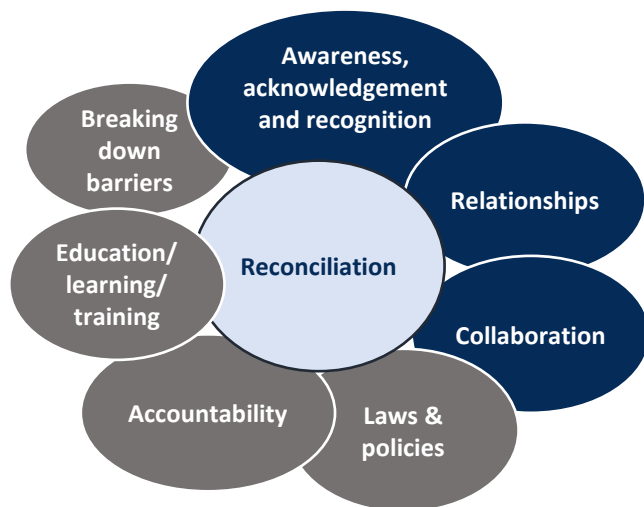
Reconciliation is centered on shared themes such as truth, relationships, collaboration, education, and breaking down barriers, all of which emphasize the importance of acknowledging historical impacts, fostering inclusion, eliminating systemic barriers, and building stronger, more respectful connections grounded in mutual understanding and cultural awareness.

To foster a comprehensive understanding of Reconciliation, the cultural awareness survey was complemented by a literature review to incorporate external perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in Canada. The findings highlight the complexity of Reconciliation, reflected in diverse interpretations and opinions.

"We keep saying the word Reconciliation but what does it mean? To me, to you, to the region?"
- Survey participant

"Reconciliation means different things from one person to another. You can come up with a fairly high-level definition and everyone agrees with it. But when you get to a more concrete level, it means different things."
- Survey participant

Figure 2: Themes identified by survey respondents to describe Reconciliation



"[Reconciliation means a] cultural shift."
- Survey participant

The survey identified seven themes on what Reconciliation means to staff, with the most common being awareness, acknowledgement, and recognition; relationships; and collaboration (Figure 2).

These themes align with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives, identified in the literature review, which emphasize that Reconciliation must begin with the truth—acknowledging past and present wrongs, along with maintaining ongoing transparency, to heal relationships.

Relationships, collaboration, accountability, and education are other frequently mentioned themes by survey respondents. These themes also align with the perspectives of Métis, Inuit, and First Nations and reflect the importance of repairing relationships through honesty, understanding historic impacts, inclusion, and cultural reconnection. Education through cultural competency training, prioritized by the Department, was noted as a positive step by survey respondents and interviewees to advance Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Some survey respondents also highlighted themes absent from key official documents such as the 2019 Reconciliation Strategy, namely: advocating for the elimination of barriers by deconstructing colonial practices, addressing bureaucratic and systemic barriers and tackling internalized racism; and integrating Indigenous knowledge within the Department's frameworks. While not being explicitly integrated into the Reconciliation Strategy, the Department has taken some steps to address these issues, as detailed in later sections.

Evaluation findings: Departmental vision and cultural awareness

Clear guidance, expectations, language, and tools are needed to cohesively and consistently operationalize the Department’s vision towards Reconciliation at every level.

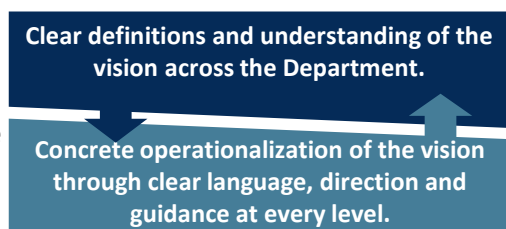
Operationalization of the vision

Almost half (46%) of employees who responded to the cultural awareness survey agreed that the Department has clear objectives regarding Reconciliation. This perception was higher among executives (63%) than managers (51%) and employees (41%).

Survey respondents and interviewees (70%) identified the need for clarity on the high-level mandate, policies and framework for Reconciliation with Métis, Inuit, and First Nations and concrete direction, guidance, tools, and priorities on how to operationalize them (Figure 3). This suggests that while high-level objectives may be clear to some, more guidance is needed to ensure all employees understand their role in achieving these goals. Considering the broad and diverse mandate and priorities of the Department, clarity is required around how Reconciliation fits within the Department’s mandate, including how to bridge the gap between legacy policy and program approaches and expectations for co-governance with Indigenous partners.

Reconciliation should be an inherent component of the work culture to foster a common understanding that advancing Reconciliation is everyone’s responsibility.

Figure 3: The link between a clear vision and concrete operationalization



Gaps were identified in the awareness of and use of key documents and learning activities to support Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Additional training and varied learning approaches were suggested to enhance cultural awareness and increase participation in training.

Cultural awareness and Learning Activities

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s Calls to Action 57 recognizes that advancing Reconciliation requires skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

Reconciliation-related learning activities positively impacted many (71%) survey respondents by enhancing their awareness and understanding of Indigenous history and rights. These activities also encouraged survey participants to examine their own perceptions, beliefs and biases towards Indigenous Peoples, as well as Indigenous-Crown relationships. However, the cultural awareness survey also revealed inconsistencies in awareness of key documents across DFO sectors, with executives being more informed. There is a need to improve the awareness and use of key documents and learning activities related to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Most respondents support mandatory training and the recent addition of the two mandatory courses². Sixty-two percent of employees completed the mandatory training by March 2025. Other federal departments have implemented cultural competency policies that require all employees to complete mandatory training on an annual basis and are reflected in performance management agreements.

Many survey respondents (59%) reported that heavy workloads or lack of time prevented them from participating in Reconciliation learning activities. Some cited a lack of awareness of relevant training (34%) and/or participation in other mandatory training (27%). A few other respondents had insufficient management support (11%) and/or found the content triggering (4%). Survey respondents suggested expanding existing learning activities and offering varied approaches to delivery, such as experiential or hands-on learning, Indigenous-led training, and having learning activities tailored by Inuit, First Nations, and Métis staff. Suggestions for additional learning and training activities included strategies to better engage with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations and implement Reconciliation policies and action plans.

² Reflecting on Cultural Bias: Indigenous Perspectives and *The Uncomfortable Truth: A Brief History of the Relationship Between Indigenous People and the Government of Canada*

Evaluation findings: Governance (1 of 2)

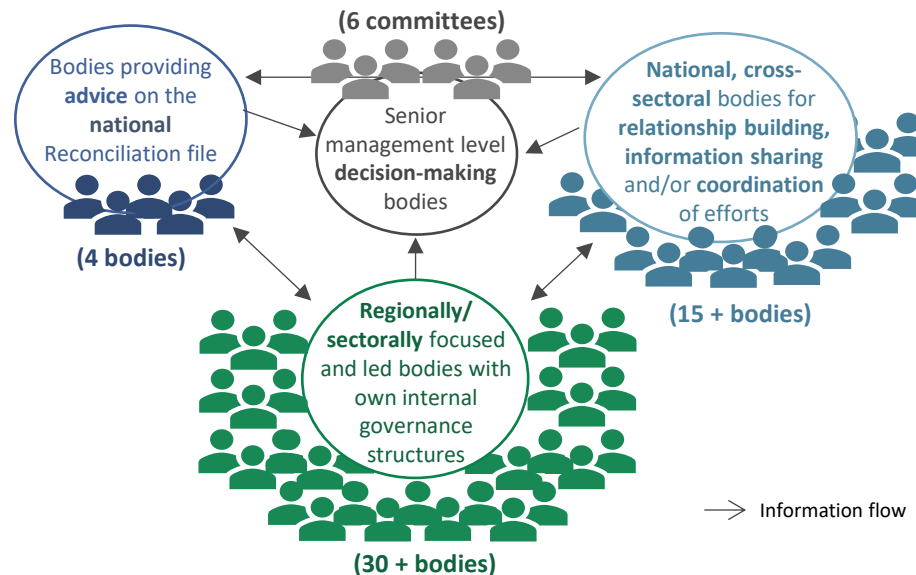
The Department has made efforts to create or modify governance structures and processes to support Reconciliation, and some Indigenous-led bodies have been created, especially to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit employees. This occurred organically and resulted in a decentralized and complex system. Clarity of roles and responsibilities could improve decision-making and approval processes.

Governance structure to advance Reconciliation

A complex internal governance structure to support Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples had organically developed over time, involving multiple bodies at the national level and across regions and sectors at varying stages of development (Figure 4). A few bodies are Indigenous-led with self-determined roles, including the National Indigenous-led with self-determined roles, including the National Indigenous Employee Circle, the Regional Indigenous Employee Circles and the Conservation and Protection Indigenous Fisheries Officers Network. There are also DFO Regional Indigenous Relationships and Partnerships Hubs that act as resources for those working on Reconciliation files and support external consultation and engagement with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations in regions.

The evaluation did not identify any consolidated and comprehensive documentation of existing bodies involved in Reconciliation efforts. Similarly, there was no central body with an understanding of all the activities occurring across the Department. However, CCG national Indigenous Relations Branch and regional Indigenous Relations and Partnerships worked in a centralized manner and had awareness of most Reconciliation activities occurring across the CCG. Evaluation participants highlighted that more clarity is needed as to who does what and how each body fits into the overall governance structure.

Figure 4: Internal governance structures for Reconciliation (Annex C)



The Department has made efforts to create or modify governance structures and processes to support Reconciliation, and some Indigenous-led bodies have been created, especially to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit employees. This occurred organically and resulted in a decentralized and complex system. Clarity of roles and responsibilities could improve decision-making and approval processes.

Decision-making for Reconciliation

At a national level, decision-making in the Department usually occurred within existing senior management-level committees³ that dealt not only with Reconciliation but multiple, sometimes competing priorities. Most national Reconciliation-specific bodies did not have a direct reporting line to senior management. For most, lines of reporting were not clearly defined. Few national Reconciliation-specific bodies (e.g., the National Indigenous Relations and Partnerships Coordination Network) had a direct reporting line to senior management.

Evaluation participants found approval processes to be long and challenging, especially when information about who is responsible for what decision is not readily available. Survey respondents also noted that communication of decisions could be timelier, including from NHQ to the regions and from senior management to the working level.

At the regional level, within DFO decision-making on Reconciliation usually took place in existing structures and bodies. However, in recent years, some regions had established Reconciliation-specific fora and had strengthened internal transparency, clarity, and accountability regarding Reconciliation. Interview participants noted that decision-making bodies were at the senior management level, and there were no equivalent bodies for mid-level management in most regions.

In contrast, the CCG incorporated regional input on Reconciliation at all levels of governance. Governance on Indigenous Relations advanced through a formal structure, starting at the working-level Indigenous Relations and Partnerships Committee, which served as the main table for the Executive Director of Indigenous Relations to provide national direction, advice and guidance to the regional Indigenous Relations and Partnerships teams as part of an established functional leadership model. Advice and guidance to the CCG's senior management on Indigenous-focused operational programming and policy was provided at the director-level by the Indigenous Relations Executive Advisory Board. Items moved up to the DG/Assistant Commissioner-level Integrated Indigenous Policy and Program Committee, then to CCG Management Board, the CCG's highest governance body which was chaired by the Commissioner with representation from CCG senior leadership. When the scope exceeded the CCG, the issues were brought to existing senior departmental committees. DFO remained engaged at all levels, with representatives from Strategic Policy and the Internal Audit Directorate on the Executive Advisory Board and the Integrated Indigenous Policy and Program Committee.

³ For instance, the Departmental Management Committee, the Departmental Policy Committee, and the CCG Management Board.

Evaluation findings: Roles, Responsibilities and Accountability

Evaluation participants recognize that senior management play a key role in advancing Reconciliation, but that leadership responsibilities are dispersed across all employees. While progress is being made to codify those responsibilities through internal accountability mechanisms (e.g., trainings, PMAs), more is required to better support Indigenous staff and define and measure progress.

Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

Within the Department, senior management is considered by evaluation participants to play a key leadership role in advancing Reconciliation efforts. Priority areas for enhancing leadership includes consistently considering Reconciliation goals, setting and communicating clear direction, ensuring that staff have the capacity and support to respond to Indigenous partners, and effectively consulting with the regions and the working level for timely decision-making.

All sources of information recognize the need to increase Inuit, First Nations, and Métis representation in senior leadership, particularly within the CCG where there is a gap in achieving the employment equity target at the executive level, to enhance cultural competency and strengthen direct engagement with Métis, Inuit and First Nations partners. Evaluation participants also proposed having an external advisory committee with Métis, First Nations, and Inuit voices as part of the Department's leadership team.

Interviewees pointed out that staff at all levels should play a leadership role. Onboarding, training and education, and clarity around roles and responsibilities were identified as key drivers to build leadership.

Support for Inuit, First Nations and Métis employees

According to the 2022-23 Public Service Employee Survey, Inuit, First Nations and Métis employees continue to disproportionately face discrimination and harassment. Recent efforts to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis employees include the creation of national and regional Indigenous-led groups (e.g., Indigenous Employee Circles, Conservation and Protection Indigenous Fisheries Officers Network), the development of Indigenous talent management plans and of the Indigenous Career Navigators Program.

Evaluation participants emphasized the need for continuous efforts to support Métis, First Nations, and Inuit employees for employee wellness, career progression, practicing Indigenous traditions and cultures and creating safe spaces for Indigenous employees to share knowledge, concerns and recommendations without reprisal.

Internal and External Accountability

Survey respondents and interviewees identified accountability as a key theme of Reconciliation. For them, accountability involves taking meaningful action, rectifying past and current wrongs and making the necessary changes within the Department.

Accountability relates to internal accountability, including towards Inuit, Métis and First Nations employees, as well as external accountability to Indigenous Peoples.

Internal accountability structures, processes, and tools vary by region and sector and are at various stages of development and use. Some regions noted having strong accountability tools that are being used (e.g., report card mechanism for measuring engagements, additional mandatory training, use of Performance Management Agreements (PMAs)). In the Maritimes region the use of PMAs for senior management and mandatory training for cultural awareness captured in their learning plans for all employees are strong accountability tools. The feedback received is that CCG's centralized, three-tiered approach to governance worked well for accountability. Yet, the majority (77%) of employees who participated in the national survey on cultural awareness responded that their team does not track progress on Reconciliation, or they were not aware if their team tracked progress.

Evaluation participants agreed about the need to better define and measure progress on Reconciliation and for stronger monitoring and reporting tools and practices. This includes creating clear links between the Reconciliation Strategy, Reconciliation Action Plans and other departmental performance measurement processes, such as those for program Performance Information Profiles and transfer payment programs. Additionally, it includes improving the associated data collection.

Evaluation findings: Coordination, Collaboration and Communication

While coordination, collaborations, co-operation and communication exist in certain regions and sectors throughout the Department, they tend to arise organically and informally among certain groups and categories of employees. Participants identified silos as contributing to misunderstandings, confusion, overlapping projects and duplications of tasks and duties. It was also believed that these gaps in communication and coordination placed a strain on First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners.

Coordination, collaboration, and co-operation

The level of formal and informal coordination, collaboration, and co-operation between bodies and groups vary.

Synergies exist in certain regions and sectors that work together by nature of location and types of engagement work. The formation of communities of practice (e.g., National Indigenous Relations and Partnerships Coordinators Network), with representation from multiple regions and sectors, facilitate information exchange and Reconciliation-related action. CCG's functional leadership model, and use of liaison officers, responsible for translation and information sharing on the ground, seem to have led to better communication systems and relay of decisions. Other interviewees expressed that existing silos and limited formal collaboration, coordination and co-operation structures and processes, particularly between the regions and NHQ, remain a challenge to a cohesive, and effective approach to Reconciliation. Many evaluation participants felt that "no one was talking to each other" particularly between regions and the NHQ, where the largest communication gap was felt. Interviewees reported a specific need for proper consultation of regional and sectoral needs.

"The issue is not to add more committees/bodies but to make the existing ones more efficient and effective."

– Interview participant

Internal and External Communication

Gaps exist in both vertical and horizontal communication within the Department. While upper management shares knowledge in an impromptu and ad hoc manner between committees, interviewees noted that communication of decisions could be timelier, including from NHQ to the regions and from senior management to the working level. Interviewees report the need for structured information flow through improved and dedicated forums or channels for reporting back on decisions or sharing information. Some evaluation respondents reported that the lack of formalized horizontal communication and authorities has led to misunderstandings and confusion in overlapping projects.

Survey respondents reported participating in internal discussions about Reconciliation throughout the Department. Unplanned discussions occurred more frequently than planned ones particularly among executives, Inuit, Métis, and First Nations employees as well as those who have been in the Department longer compared to other employees.

External communications are not always coordinated, (e.g., communiques were released with conflicting information), placing a strain on Indigenous partners and DFO's relationship with them. In addition, structural obstacles, such as language barriers and resource limitations, impact the programs' ability to communicate effectively.

Recent efforts to improve communication and coordination include the National Engagement Consultation Tracking Registry (NECTR), which supports information sharing on and tracking of engagement and consultation with Métis, First Nations and Inuit. Also, the formation of communities of practice (e.g., National Indigenous Relations and Partnerships Coordination Network), with representation from multiple regions and sectors, facilitate information exchange and Reconciliation-related action.

Evaluation findings: Investments towards Reconciliation (1 of 4)

The funding secured to support the Department’s efforts towards Reconciliation with Métis, Inuit, and First Nations is diverse and spread across sectors and regions. Contribution programs represent a significant portion of the investments, and a growing number of recipients are benefiting from them. The awareness and the use of the available transfer payment funding mechanism for Indigenous Recipients at DFO are limited. Indigenous procurement is increasing within the Department. Due to financial tracking and reporting limitations, there are challenges for the Department to take a proactive approach to quantifying resources spent across the Department related to Reconciliation.

Resources invested towards Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

The evaluation explored the feasibility of conducting a comprehensive financial analysis of the Department’s resources allocated to Reconciliation. However, this financial analysis was not feasible because financial information for Indigenous-related work is not tracked separately from core programming activities.

Consequently, the evaluation considered a methodology to assess sources of financial information that partially represent some Reconciliation-related spendings. This information was supplemented by survey information obtained from all managers and directors across the organization via two surveys. These surveys focused on the overall work, including programs’ core activities and transfer payments. The following sections are structured according to these components of the analysis.

Box 1: The Directive on Transfer Payments outlines funding mechanisms that enhance flexibility from which Indigenous Recipients can benefit:

- Grant funding;
- Up-Front Multi-Year Contribution Funding (Appendix H of the Directive); and
- Additional contribution funding approaches (i.e., fixed, flexible, block) for transfer payments to Indigenous recipients (Appendix K of the Directive).

Transfer payments to Indigenous recipients

Transfer payments are a key mechanism administered through various programs and sectors to support Indigenous Peoples and their objectives. Of the 51 transfer payment programs, there are 48 where Indigenous recipients are either the only or one of many identified eligible recipients. These programs differ in the extent to which their terms and conditions are authorized to administer the funding mechanisms to enhance flexibility outlined in Box 1.

6 programs 13%	With the authority to issue grants, up-front multi-year funding, and the additional contribution funding approaches (i.e., Appendix K).
38 programs 79%	With the authority for some (but not all) of the funding mechanisms that enhance flexibility.
4 programs 8%	Without the authority for any of the funding mechanisms that enhance flexibilities.

Utilization of these funding mechanisms related to transfer payments programs

As noted in the Guideline on the Directive on Transfer Payments, these funding mechanisms (Box 1) can be applied, under specific conditions, to support ongoing and stable relationships with Indigenous recipients for community programming reflective of the needs of Indigenous people.

The evaluation assessed employees’ awareness and use of the funding mechanisms (Appendices H and K), as well as the barriers they faced in utilizing these mechanisms. The survey of TPP managers showed that the awareness and the use of transfer payment funding mechanisms at DFO are limited. Survey respondents indicated there is a need for more guidance, human resources and training to modify existing internal practices and fully benefit from these mechanisms.

Evaluation findings: Investments towards Reconciliation (2 of 4)

Contribution programs represent a significant portion of the investments, and a growing number of recipients are benefiting from them.

Table 1 provides details on the transfer payments, managed by program sectors. The Fisheries and Harbour Management sector, which administers 23 of the 51 transfer payment programs, was responsible for most payments to Indigenous recipients.

Table 1: Transfer payments supporting Reconciliation objectives, 2021-22 to 2023-24

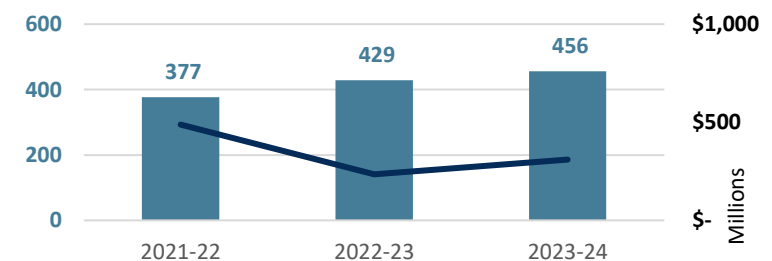
Grants and Contributions (Gs&Cs), by program sector ⁴	Total sector's transfer payments (\$)	Indigenous payments (\$)	Indigenous payments of all sector's transfer payments (%)
Fisheries and Harbour Management	1,071.8 M	700.6 M	65%
Indigenous Reconciliation Priorities	331.5 M		
Integrated Aboriginal Contribution	416.4 M		
Integrated Fish and Seafood Sector	155.8 M		
Sustainable Management of Canada's Fisheries	119.5 M		
Salmon Enhancement	40.0 M		
Small Craft Harbours Class Program	7.1 M		
Asset Disposal Programming	1.5 M		
Aquatic Ecosystems	316.9 M	135.7 M	43%
Aquatic Species and Aquatic Habitat	312.9 M		
Fisheries and Oceans-related Issues	4.0 M		
Integrated CCG (e.g., Indigenous Community Boat)	62.1 M	36.0 M	58%
Ecosystems and Oceans Science	74.8 M	1.7 M	2%
Total	1,525.5 M	874.0 M	57%

Source: Transfer payments information from [GC InfoBase](#) and the CFO sector.

⁴ These transfer payments encompass all categories mentioned in the previous slide.

The analysis covers the three years from 2021-22 to 2023-24 only, as the previous financial system did not track Indigenous payments. There are gaps in identifying all Indigenous recipients, which may result in incomplete financial information regarding external payments made through Indigenous transfer payments. While the annual value of payments have remained stable since 2021-22, the number of Indigenous recipients has increased (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Number of Indigenous recipients and annual value of Indigenous transfer payments in million \$, 2021-22 to 2023-24



Source: Transfer payments information from [GC InfoBase](#) and the Chief Financial Officer sector.

- \$874 M** Transfer Payments to Indigenous recipients (2021-22 to 2023-24)
- 57%** Indigenous proportion of all transfer payments
- 582** Different Indigenous recipients transfer payments
- + 21%** Increase in the number of Indigenous recipients between 2021-22 and 2023-24

Evaluation findings: Investments towards Reconciliation (3 of 4)

Indigenous procurement is increasing within the Department. To sustain this momentum, it is important to help Indigenous vendors understand the procurement process and build capacity to successfully participate in government contracts.

Indigenous Procurement

Indigenous procurement contributes to promoting economic development for Métis, First Nations and Inuit. There has been significant growth in Indigenous procurement, particularly for CCG fuels (Figure 6).

Contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses in 2023-24 reached \$44.6M, which represented about 5.7 per cent of all awarded contracts after exceptions (Figure 7).

A government-wide mandatory requirement of minimum 5 per cent will need to be achieved starting in 2024-25.

Figure 6: Contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses by commodity (top 3), 2021-22 to 2023-24

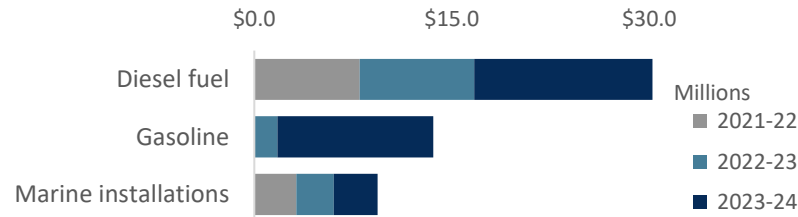
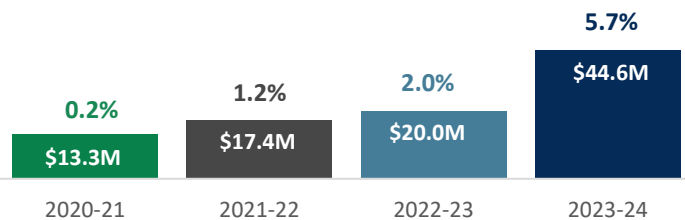


Figure 7: Contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses in million \$ and % of all awarded contracts, 2020-21 to 2023-24



Source: Consolidated dataset of proactive publication of contracts on the Open Canada portal.

Challenges associated with Indigenous procurement

Indigenous supplier capacity is insufficient in certain categories of commodities (e.g., shipbuilding) and others have long-standing exemption from competition with specific non-Indigenous suppliers (e.g., protection services, land vehicles). This poses challenges to increasing Indigenous procurement.

Finally, gaps in current processes affect the Department’s ability to accurately measure and report on procurement activities. These gaps include the lack of correlation between vendor data in the departmental system and vendors' eligibility status with the Indigenous Business Directory, which is the primary source used by the federal government to determine whether there are Indigenous businesses to fulfill federal contracts.

Additionally, there were calculation challenges at the time of the evaluation (e.g., only data reported on Open Canada could be used, which excluded Specific Service Agreements by Public Services and Procurement Canada), which have since been resolved.

Evaluation participants identified several opportunities to enhancing Indigenous procurement:

- Provide sufficient advance notices and communicate opportunities effectively, including offering training on how to apply (e.g., Procurement Assistance Canada, one-on-one workshops);
- Consider unbundling requirements and issuing smaller sole source contracts. These contracts are more culturally appropriate than competitive bids while being less cumbersome than Standing Offers; and
- Provide constructive and transparent feedback to unselected businesses.

Understanding the process and building capacity are crucial steps for Indigenous vendors to successfully participate in government contracts.

Evaluation findings: Investments towards Reconciliation (4 of 4)

Currently, the Reconciliation-related program resources are primarily contributing to enhancing internal capacity to deliver on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and recognizing the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Department’s mandated work. Although the exact spending figures are not available, evaluation participants have noted challenges regarding the sufficiency and sustainability of resources (such as financial and human resources) and the flexibility in applying policies.

Funding for Reconciliation-related commitments and priorities

Reconciliation-related investments are expected to contribute to key priority areas, such as recognizing Indigenous Peoples Rights (e.g., in managing fisheries and aquatic ecosystems, and enhancing marine safety and marine environmental protection), enhancing internal delivery capacity, or enhancing capacity for Indigenous self-determination and advancement of Indigenous cultural and economic development goals. Overall, managers and directors believe that the activities currently planned or delivered are mostly contributing to enhancing internal capacity and recognizing the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Department’s mandated work.

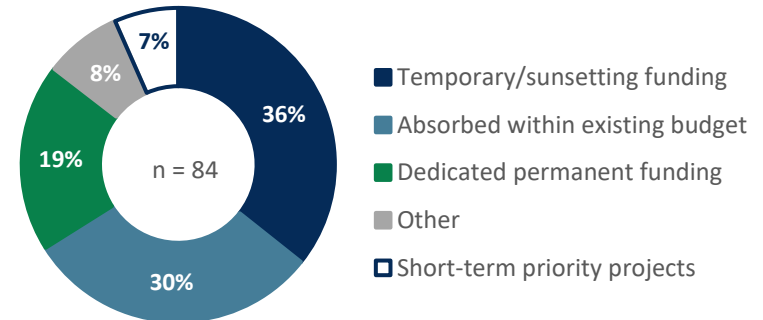
Challenges related to resources

Departmental directors and managers reported that insufficient time and resources (e.g., internal capacity, operating budgets including travel) were key limitations when it comes to advancing Reconciliation with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations.

Meeting commitments and managing increased Reconciliation-related demands and expectations is an ongoing long-term process. Yet, as shown on Figure 8, there is a heavy reliance on temporary funding (36%), and/or the Reconciliation work beyond the ongoing activities is being absorbed within the core program budgets (30%).

To better align with Reconciliation efforts and community needs, there is a call for more flexibility (e.g., with respect to deadlines, allowance for tobacco offering or honorarium for engagement activities) in support of meaningful and more culture-appropriate engagement.

Figure 8: Primary sources of funding for Reconciliation-related activities⁵, as reported by departmental managers and directors in a survey



“Any interruption due to lack of resources hinders the progress already made by the department towards Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.”

“Short-term funding allocations are not conducive to establishing trusting relationships, which is foundational to making progress on this work.”

“Travel restrictions have caused us to scrutinize travel to meet with Indigenous partners, which impacts the ability to build trusting relationships.”

“We move at the speed of trust.”

Source: Survey participants

⁵ Short-term priority projects are ad hoc activities to address emerging, usually unplanned work.

Recommendations

The evaluation demonstrated that the Department has taken meaningful steps in advancing Reconciliation. Building on this foundation, the evaluation offers four recommendations to further strengthen the Department's Reconciliation efforts. Continuing to integrate Indigenous perspectives in these efforts is essential.

In light of CCG's transfer the Department of National Defence in September 2025, separate Management Action Plans have been respectively prepared by DFO and CCG in response to these recommendations.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy and Commissioner in collaboration with relevant sectors and regions enable stronger understanding and implementation of the vision for Reconciliation by:

- a) Reinforcing employees' understanding and awareness of the vision by defining key terms, concepts and priorities and elevating First Nations, Inuit and Métis knowledge as part of the vision;
- b) Communicating vision: disseminating the vision among staff through regular conversations at different levels and developing a communication plan;
- c) Developing and implementing clear direction, guidance, and tools at all levels to improve the operationalization of the vision; and
- d) Developing an Indigenous cultural competency policy focused on addressing racism and discrimination.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister of People and Culture and Commissioner in collaboration with relevant sectors and regions expand employees' cultural awareness and competency by:

- a) Implementing the Indigenous cultural competency policy focused on addressing racism and discrimination as developed by Strategic Policy in Recommendation 1;
- b) Expanding existing learning activities through mandatory and specialized training, including consideration of Indigenous-led training and experiential/hands-on learning;
- c) Establishing accountability and reporting mechanisms to track training completion; and
- d) Continuing to address employment equity barriers related to Indigenous employment.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the Senior Assistant Deputy Minister for Strategic Policy and Commissioner in collaboration with relevant sectors and regions strengthen the Department's governance structures for decision-making, accountability, and communication by:

- a) Clearly defining the roles and responsibilities related to Reconciliation across NHQ, regions, and sectors;
- b) Establishing formal communication and coordination among departmental bodies working on Reconciliation, where appropriate; and
- c) Including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis representation in decision-making and governance structures.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that the Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer in collaboration with other sectors and regions explore opportunities to support Reconciliation by:

- a) Increasing departmental guidance, tools and procedures on options available to transfer payments programs under the Transfer Payment Policy;
- b) Increasing flexibility in the application of financial-related policies (e.g., tobacco offering, and honorarium);
- c) Improving performance measurement structures, processes and tools; and
- d) Tracking the Department's investments and spending in support of Reconciliation.

Annex A: Evaluation Methodology: Survey demographics

The evaluation conducted three surveys with DFO-CCG employees, including:

1) The Reconciliation Training Survey / Cultural Awareness

The survey was administered to all employees and collected departmental baseline information. It was developed by the Evaluation Division and the Policy Sector, with support from the Indigenous Employee Network/Circles, the Reconciliation Co-Champion Secretariat and CCG’s National Indigenous Relations Branch. With a 10% response rate the views expressed reflect only those of the survey respondents. Participants’ views on learning activities are not limited to those offered by Canada School of Public Service (CSPS) and the Department.



2) Survey on overall resources for Reconciliation⁶

The survey collected information on available funding allocated to various Reconciliation priorities and commitments, and areas of pressure and risk related to dedicating sufficient and sustainable resources. This survey provides a general overview of Reconciliation-related efforts and gaps.

84 individuals participated in the survey
25%* response rate



3) Survey on DFO TPP resources for Reconciliation⁷

The survey collected information on the DFO’s tools, authorities, and other mechanisms available for administering transfer payments to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis recipients in support of Reconciliation efforts. With a 20% response rate for the TPP survey and 25% for overall resources survey, the collected information somewhat reflects respondents’ experiences and views and does not fully represent the Department’s situation.

22 individuals participated in the survey
20%* response rate



⁶Based on HR data 2022-23, the total survey population is 15,671. The response rate of 10% represents 1,639 individuals. The departmental and regional response rates are based on HR data, whereas the rest of the data is based on total survey respondents.

⁷Respondents may not have considered programmatic Vote 10 funding (e.g., Oceans Protection Plan) as funding specific to Reconciliation.

Annex B: Evaluation findings – examples of promising practices (1 of 2)

Below are examples of promising Reconciliation-related practices taken by various sectors/regions across the Department.

Training:

- Learning activities**
- The introduction of two mandatory Reconciliation-related courses: Reflecting on Cultural Bias: Indigenous Perspectives and the Uncomfortable Truth: A brief History of the Relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the Government of Canada.
 - Conservation and Protection (C&P) branch wrapped up the “Project 57 Initiative” – a year-long effort- to promote learning and awareness on Reconciliation for C&P staff and improve collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples (Gulf Region).
 - Canadian Coast Guards’ Journey with me Video series which uses storytelling to help tell the history and show the resiliency of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Governance

- Systems & processes**
- A designated coordinator role in the Pacific Regional Director General’s (RDG) office to direct incoming information towards the correct senior management tables, which is thought to have improved response times.
 - Canadian Coast Guard’s (CCG) functional leadership model (senior and middle management Indigenous Relations governance) and approach is thought to have streamlined decisions and improved response times.
 - National Indigenous Relations and Partnerships Coordinators Network (NIRPCN) is working on improving communication and coordinating initiatives across the Department, using communiques and internal newsletters to share information on training and Reconciliation-related initiatives.
 - NIRPC and the Indigenous Relationship and Partnership (IRP) Hubs have initiated meetings, improving communication and collaboration across the Department.
 - National Engagement Consultation Tracking Registry (NECTR) is expected to improve coordination through internal sharing and tracking of engagement and consultation.
 - DFO Pacific region has adapted its processes and decision-making structure in recent years, to strengthen internal transparency, clarity and accountability around Reconciliation.
- Accountability & Leadership**
- Conversing with forums like the Hudson Bay Consortium (HBC) regularly to obtain the perspectives of Métis, Inuit, and First Nations.
 - DFO Indigenous Relationships and Partnership (IRP) Hubs have set up various informal lines of communication and ad-hoc forums.
 - Creation of National Reconciliation Co-Champions.
- Vision, Approach, Roles & Responsibilities**
- Passionate employees have gone beyond their defined roles and responsibilities to further Reconciliation practices in their line of work.
 - Review of CCG’s Vessel Naming Policy for alignment with *the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*.
 - Creation of a multi-sector, multi-region working group to support the development of meaningful performance indicators.

Annex B: Evaluation findings – examples of promising practices (2 of 2)

Governance – continued

- Indigenous Representation**
- Development of regional Indigenous talent management plans.
 - Focused recruitment efforts to improve the proportion of Inuit, Métis, and First Nations employees in leadership and decision-making positions.
 - Development of a departmental Northern Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
 - Initiation of phase 2 of the Community Engagement Coordinators initiative, which seeks to recruit eight coordinators based in Arctic communities to support information sharing and relationship building at the community and regional level.
 - In the Maritimes, they had a contract with Elder Residents to advise on Reconciliation files.
 - Moderate Livelihood Fishing Plans (MFLP) as a good practice for sovereignty recognition in the short term and the potential for the development of a Rights Reconciliation Agreement in the long term.

Documents, guidelines, tools, and strategies

- Departmental Reconciliation Strategy
- Indigenous Program Review and Action Plan
- *United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (UNDA) Action Plans
- Action Plans (Regional and National)
- Indigenous Employee Network (IEN) ‘By Us, For Us’
- Indigenous Recruitment, Retention and Development Strategy
- Canadian Coast Guard Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Toolkit
- Canadian Coast Guard’s Indigenous Relations Strategic Framework captures and organizes Reconciliation-related activities undertaken by CCG.
- Many Voices One Mind: a Pathway to Reconciliation: Departmental Action Plan.
- CCG: Guidelines for Building Relationships and Partnerships with Indigenous Communities 2023.

Hubs, groups, and forums

- Indigenous Employee Networks/Circles (IEN/IEC)
- DFO Indigenous Relationships & Partnerships (IRP) Hubs
- Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity
- BC Reconciliation and Partnerships Branch
- Indigenous Career Navigator Program (ICNP)
- National Indigenous Relations and Partnerships Coordinators Network (NIRPCN)
- CCG Indigenous Gathering Space is a place for sharing and learning for Indigenous employees, honored guests and allies.
- DFO IRP Hubs hold and provide information for external consultation/engagement.

Annex C: Departmental Bodies supporting Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

Various-governance bodies supported Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (Figure 9). Some bodies had Terms of Reference and set of roles and responsibilities. Most of the groups had unclear reporting mechanisms and membership varied. NIRPCN played a role in both bodies by providing advice and in building relationships. Indigenous-led bodies are self-determined and not mandated by the Department.

Figure 9: Evergreen map of the governance bodies that supported Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

