



# ***Indigenous Innovation: An Important Driver of Canada's Future Economic Competitiveness***

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultations in Advance of the 2019 Budget**

**By: *The Indigenous Innovation Initiative***

**Recommendation 1:** The Government of Canada should support Indigenous Innovation programming as an important driver of Canada's future economic competitiveness and as a means to resolve intractable problems in Indigenous communities.

**Recommendation 2:** The Government of Canada should provide funding in the amount of \$20M over four years to support the **Indigenous Stars** program of the Indigenous Innovation Initiative, hosted by Grand Challenges Canada.

**Recommendation 1:** The Government of Canada should support Indigenous Innovation programming as an important driver of Canada's future economic competitiveness.

Innovation is a critical driver of economic, social and environmental progress and is crucial both for solving complex and intractable problems and driving sustainable and inclusive growth. Too often, however, efforts to catalyze innovation are inaccessible to or exclude Indigenous peoples. Currently, although innovation and social enterprises are a part of Indigenous communities there is no formal framework or structure to support Indigenous Innovation in Canada.

Beginning in 2014, a coalition of Indigenous leaders and organizations including the McConnell Foundation and Grand Challenges Canada began developing and testing new approaches to support and enable Indigenous innovation in Canada. These efforts, beginning with **Indigenous Innovation Summits** in 2015 (Winnipeg) and 2016 (Edmonton) and continuing with the **Indigenous Innovation Demonstration Fund (IIDF)**, have engaged and empowered Indigenous innovators, helping them to identify and solve pressing challenges facing their communities.

The **Indigenous Innovation Demonstration Fund (IIDF)** provided grants to organizations seeking to develop or expand their Indigenous social innovation projects and/or Indigenous social enterprises with the goal of unlocking much needed capital for these early-stage, high potential innovations. In addition to seed funding, the fund provided capacity building supports to its recipients. The IIDF provided two tiers of support, depending on the nature and stage of the innovations that applied, as follows:

- 1) **Scaling Plan Development** (\$10,000 - \$20,000 in coaching and financial support): This funding is intended to help clarify the strategic approach being taken, help develop a scaling plan, and get projects ready to implement and grow their impact.
- 2) **Impact Implementation Support** (up to \$100,000 in coaching and financial support): This funding is intended to lead to implementation of scaling plans, understanding impact, and articulation of next steps.

The primary goal of the IIDF was to test the idea that strategic support and funding for Indigenous innovators with big ideas could unlock and create positive change in Indigenous communities. The focus of the fund was on solutions that were oriented and grounded in Indigenous cultures and values. Please see **Annex 1** for a discussion of the outcomes of the fund and a list of the successful projects.

Building on the momentum from these two summits and the success of the IIDF, and recognizing the ongoing crisis in many Indigenous communities in Canada, the **Indigenous Innovation Initiative** began in January 2018, hosted at Grand Challenges Canada and funded by the *McConnell Foundation* and *Johnson & Johnson*. Our vision is to enable Indigenous innovators and communities to identify and solve their own challenges, transforming lives and driving inclusive growth and health.

Created and led by Indigenous leaders, the Indigenous Innovation Initiative platform is:

- Built on a foundation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and is deeply rooted in Indigenous values;
- Guided by an Indigenous Innovation Council which provides leadership and insight on all aspects of our work; and
- Informed by eight years of experience at Grand Challenges Canada in supporting 1000+ innovations in more than 90 countries.

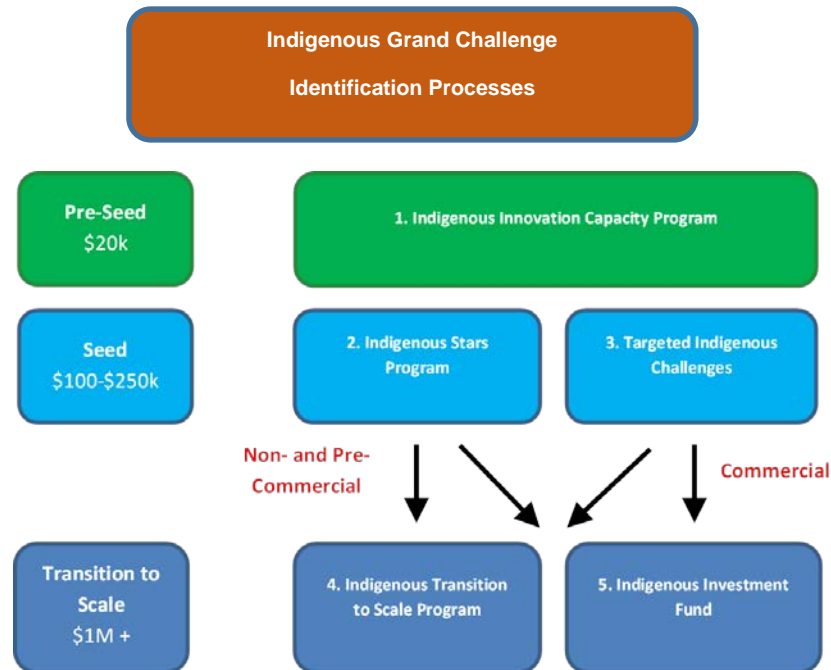
Led by **Jeff Cyr**, VP Indigenous, the III team is solutions focused, and has a solid foundation of Indigenous values. Our work is guided by the Indigenous Innovation Council including:

- **Stephen Kakfwi**, former Premier of the Northwest Territories
- **Wendy Phillips**, Elder, University of Toronto, Scarborough
- **Nadine St. Louis**, Sacred Fire Productions
- **Melanie Goodchild**, Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience
- **Max Fineday**, Canadian Roots Exchange

We are hosted by Grand Challenges Canada and share its validated innovation processes and infrastructure. Our platform (as illustrated in **Figure 1** (over)) enables Indigenous innovators to solve Indigenous Grand Challenges by:

1. Working with Indigenous leaders and elders to undertake Indigenous Grand Challenge Identification Processes to **identify Indigenous Grand Challenges** (ORANGE) in areas such as: mental health, food security, housing, inclusive growth/economic reconciliation and others;
2. Supporting innovators and working with Indigenous communities and innovators to **build innovation capacity** (GREEN); and
3. Launching **calls for Indigenous innovations** at Seed (LIGHT BLUE) and Transition to Scale (DARK BLUE) to build a pipeline of solutions to Indigenous grand challenges.

**Figure 1: Structure of the Indigenous Innovation Initiative<sup>1</sup>**



### Identify Indigenous Grand Challenges

The Indigenous Innovation Initiative uses a collaborative and consensus building approach rooted in Indigenous values and culture, to identify the most pressing or important challenges—what we call Grand Challenges—in identified priority areas. Our first Indigenous Grand Challenge Identification Process, supported by Johnson & Johnson and the McConnell Foundation, is focused on Indigenous Mental Health with additional processes to be launched in late 2018.

### Build Innovation Capacity

Another important element of our work is the **Indigenous Innovation Capacity Program** to build innovation capacity in Indigenous communities. This program would support Indigenous innovators to refine and enhance their bold ideas so that they can develop successful proposals and test their ideas through seed innovations. There would be a significant capacity-building element to this program working with communities and Indigenous innovators to catalyze their readiness to apply and to support and enable their success as social innovators. The core of this capacity building will be to embed Indigenous innovators and their problem-solving approaches in Indigenous values.

<sup>1</sup> The Indigenous Investment Fund component would be developed once the initiative has built a validated pipeline of Indigenous Innovations.

**Recommendation 2:** The Government of Canada should provide funding in the amount of \$20M over four years to support the **Indigenous Stars** program of the Indigenous Innovation Initiative, hosted by Grand Challenges Canada.

In order to begin to build a pipeline of potentially transformative Indigenous innovations, the Indigenous Innovation Initiative will launch the **Indigenous Stars Program**. This program will build on Grand Challenges Canada’s experience with its *Stars in Global Health* program to nurture and test innovative ideas from Indigenous innovators. This program, which was launched in 2011, has helped to energize global health innovation across a number of low- and middle-income countries leading to the formation of a significant pipeline of potentially transformative global health innovations. Drawing a broad range of Indigenous innovators this program would provide grant funding to test promising seed innovations.

The Indigenous Stars program would be an open platform for Indigenous innovation. It would feature a minimum of three **open calls for Indigenous innovations** a year apart and could launch as early as Spring 2019. Each of these competitions would aim to fund 20 - 25 potentially transformative Indigenous innovators in communities across Canada and would focus on the challenges that these innovators have identified in their own communities.

A key element of this program will be to reach out to and work with Indigenous communities and innovators to enable them to build their innovation capacity. The Indigenous Stars program would cost \$20M over (4) years. The Indigenous Innovation Initiative **would leverage these funds with additional support from the private and philanthropic sectors** and would also engage with other orders of government as potential partners for the Indigenous innovations that are supported.

The proposed Indigenous Stars program and the broader Indigenous Innovation Initiative **empower Indigenous innovation at the community level**, directly supporting the development of individual, community and enterprise level solutions to the complex and ongoing challenges faced by these communities. Specific outcomes would include:

<b>Short-Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energizing Indigenous innovation.</li> <li>• Engaging stakeholders in the non-profit, public and private sectors.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium-Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a pipeline of transformative Indigenous innovations.</li> <li>• Enabling impact investment to support and grow social enterprises.</li> </ul>
<b>Long-Term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving community outcomes and supporting and catalyzing Indigenous innovators to solve Indigenous grand challenges</li> <li>• Driving <b>sustainable and inclusive economic and social growth</b> in Indigenous communities across Canada</li> </ul>

## Annex 1: The Indigenous Innovation Demonstration Fund

In total, 71 applications on a variety of topics were received from across the country of which ten innovators to fund through its first competition, as summarized in **Table 1** (below):

**Table 1 – Successful Innovators through the Indigenous Innovation Demonstration Fund**

Who and Where	Big Idea
<b>Skwachay’s Lodge</b> <i>Vancouver, BC</i>	To replicate and scale the success of Skwachàys Lodge into an Indigenous hotel chain that celebrates arts and culture, but also utilizes an innovative and sustainable blended value enterprise solution to supportive housing.
<b>Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health</b> <i>Ottawa, ON</i>	To create a social enterprise called “Indigenous Infusion” – a line of healthy specialty foods inspired by Indigenous peoples in Ontario.
<b>Makoons Media Group</b> <i>Winnipeg, MB</i>	To enable the organization’s flagship digital media property, <i>Indian and Cowboy</i> , to strengthen its base and continue to grow as the world’s only listener-supported Indigenous Podcast Network.
<b>Prince Albert Indian &amp; Métis Friendship Centre</b> <i>Prince Albert, SK</i>	To support the Centre and its community partners to explore utilizing a social enterprise model to create a Discount Grocery Store that sells surplus food products to low income families at a discounted price.
<b>Wachiay Friendship Centre Society</b> <i>Courtenay, BC</i>	To conduct a Labour Market Information and Analysis (LMIA) to substantiate the need for youth training and multimedia courses that are provided through the Centre’s social enterprises Wachiay Studio ( <a href="http://www.wachiaystudio.com">www.wachiaystudio.com</a> ) and Wachiay MultiMedia ( <a href="http://www.wachiaymultimedia.com">www.wachiaymultimedia.com</a> ). The purpose of the LMIA is to assist the Centre in obtaining government funding, and enable them to scale this model.
<b>Sagitawa Friendship Society</b> <i>Peace River, AB</i>	To turn the community garden project into a social enterprise that provides produce to families and markets extra produce to local restaurants.
<b>Cross Lake First Nation</b> <i>Cross Lake, MB</i>	To work in partnership with Aki Energy in developing an Indigenous building code which ensures that the new buildings in the community are culturally and environmentally appropriate, while at the same time maximizing opportunities for renewable energy and local job creation.

<b>Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre</b> <i>Beausejour, MB</i>	To begin to explore, in partnership with Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, the creation of an Indigenous Family Reunification Centre to work with Indigenous families in crisis and reduce the number of children in care in Manitoba.
<b>Nain Research Centre</b> <i>Nain, NL</i>	To expand SmartICE, a northern social enterprise which has a near real-time monitoring and dissemination system that integrates Inuit traditional knowledge to improve safety conditions by informing decisions about coastal sea-ice travel and shipping, to additional communities across the Arctic.
<b>Aki Food</b> <i>Northern Manitoba</i>	To work expand Garden Hill First Nation's Healthy Food Market model, which works with the community to build a strong, sustainable local food system, to two additional First Nation communities in northern Manitoba.

In addition to the successful applicants, the IIDF team also worked with over half of the total applicants to support the further development of their ideas.