

## APPENDIX 2: INDIGENOUS FUNDING FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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### Background

Since 2018 the Community Funding Unit within Social Development, Finance and Administration has been working with leaders from Indigenous organizations to achieve two primary goals: i) to increase funding to Indigenous-led organizations and grassroots groups; and ii) to improve granting practices to ensure funding is accessible and flexible and that groups and organizations are able to self-determine funding priorities and needs.

The Indigenous Funding Framework development process was first presented to Toronto City Council in [2020](#) with updates provided in [2021](#), [2022](#), and [2023](#). An overview of early development work was also presented to the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee in early [2022](#).

The Indigenous Funding Framework has been co-designed with a working group of representatives from Indigenous organizations and with leadership from the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council <sup>1</sup> and the Indigenous Affairs Office to address the historic underfunding and structural barriers Indigenous not-for-profit organizations have faced in accessing financial support from the City of Toronto.

#### Early Work – Amendments to the Toronto Community Grants Policy

In 2019, the Community Funding Unit worked with four Indigenous-led organizations - Native Women's Resource Centre, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council and Native Child and Family Services of Toronto – to update the [City of Toronto Community Grants Policy](#) to explicitly recognize the unique status of Indigenous communities and align granting practices to support self-determination. The updated Policy further notes that “The City further commits to ensuring equitable access to granting which includes, but is not limited to, specific funding support and Indigenous-specific funding streams, particularly in instances where there exists a history of inaccessibility to funds that would be beneficial to Indigenous communities.” These recommended changes were presented to and adopted by the Toronto Grants Coordinating Committee.

Community Funding's Letter of Understanding template was also updated to include self-determination and to reflect a more supportive funding relationship.

#### COVID 19 Investments to Indigenous Communities

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted Indigenous communities with health and socio-economic impacts further amplifying longstanding disparities in access and resources. Near the outset of the pandemic, Indigenous leaders in Toronto quickly mobilized to provide an Indigenous-led response as their communities were being

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<sup>1</sup> The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council is a growing coalition of 24 member agencies that focuses on research, policy and advocacy to support Indigenous people living in Toronto. The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council also works with non member agencies or “friends”.  
Addressing Reconciliation and Equity via Community Funding

disproportionately impacted by employment disruptions, closures, growing food insecurity, and more.

Due to this collaboration and advocacy, unprecedented levels of funding were provided to support vaccine engagement, equitable access to vaccines, mental health supports, and to meet the exacerbated gap of unmet basic needs within Toronto's Indigenous communities. Indigenous-led responses were supported in various funding streams with some funding distributed via the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council.

**Table 1: COVID-19 Investments from 2020 - 2023**

Funding Source	Investments to Indigenous-led Organizations
TO Supports	\$1,335,000
Mental Health	\$110,000
COVID Equity Plan	\$500,000
Vaccine Engagement	\$1,000,000
Total	\$2,945,000

The "[take what you need and leave what you don't](#)" funding approach was piloted during the COVID-19 response to support greater self-determination for community-driven responses. In this approach, funding is pooled and then distributed to organizations based on need with the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council serving as an Indigenous intermediary.

## **Development of the Indigenous Funding Framework**

The development of the Indigenous Funding Framework was initiated in 2020 and included various components designed to learn from the experience of Indigenous-led organizations accessing funding, other funders who have developed more community-based approaches to investing in Indigenous communities and aligning with key City strategies and priorities. This included:

- The establishment of an advisory committee consisting of leaders from Indigenous-led organizations funded by Social Development, Finance and Administration.
- Key informant interviews with other funding organizations.
- A grey literature review of emerging funding promising practices, including a review of relevant City strategies.
- Surveys and roundtable conversations with both Indigenous organizations and funders supporting Indigenous communities.
- A funding pilot leveraging the "take what you need, leave what you don't" approach developed by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council.

### **Initial Research and Alignment with City Strategies**

While the development of the Indigenous Funding Framework was led by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council and the member organizations, additional research was completed by Community Funding to learn from other City divisions and funders. A

grey literature review of existing Indigenous specific funding streams and informational interviews with key divisions and external funders were conducted in 2021. Information about granting processes such as eligibility criteria, grant priorities, application reviews and panels, funder relationships and reporting were collected. Common themes from this review were trust-based philanthropy, reciprocal relationships with funders, and allowing more flexibility in how funding is spent.

Other City strategies and plans were reviewed to ensure the Indigenous Funding Framework was in alignment with these guiding documents. The [Indigenous Health Strategy](#) notes that Indigenous people experience higher rates of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, involvement with child welfare, food insecurity and challenges within the education and justice systems – all contributing to poor health outcomes. Dedicated resources and funding for Indigenous organization is needed to create accessible programs and services, that are culturally appropriate, safe, and all barriers to optimal care have been removed.

The Indigenous Funding Framework aligns with the [Reconciliation Action Plan](#), specifically actions 6, 9, and 23 which commit to resolving structural barriers, increasing funding allocations to Indigenous organizations, increasing the number of Indigenous organizations receiving funding, and co-developing Indigenous specific grant streams while shifting power to ensure Indigenous communities can self-determine how funding is allocated to address community identified needs.

Community Engagements

In 2023, the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council led a series of engagements for both Indigenous not-for-profit leaders and funders to learn more about the needs of Indigenous communities as it relates to future funding structures and promising practices.

Two surveys were created collaboratively with the input of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council and Community Funding. The surveys were developed by the advisory committee and focused on narrative feedback. Fourteen (14) Indigenous organizations and seventeen (17) funders with Indigenous specific funding responded to the surveys. Survey questions asked about funder relationships, funder understanding of cultural needs, outreach tactics, evaluation methods and other general questions about the organization or funder. Each survey consistent of twenty-two (22) questions. All feedback collected was voluntary and anonymous.

Two roundtable discussions were held – one for Indigenous organizations and one for funders. Each session consisted of a presentation from the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council about the current work on the Indigenous Funding Framework, a summary of the survey results and a guided discussion. Twelve (12) Indigenous organizations and thirty-eight (38) funders with Indigenous specific funding attended the roundtable discussions.

**Table 2: Key feedback from the survey and roundtable discussions:**

Theme	Feedback
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Support Self-Determination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funding flexibility and a commitment to supporting Indigenous self-determination is required to address changing needs within Indigenous communities.</li> </ul>
Deepen Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous organizations want meaningful relationships with their funders. This includes regular and consistent communication.</li> </ul>
Reduce Administrative Burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70% of Indigenous organization stated that writing funding proposals becomes additional work for staff and management, and that this work is not part of their regular duties.</li> <li>Provide additional time for Indigenous organizations to complete grant applications</li> <li>Focus application and reporting questions on areas relevant to the work of Indigenous organizations.</li> </ul>
Application Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>56% of Indigenous organizations reported having grant applications declined in the past three years.</li> <li>Provide flexible application formats.</li> <li>More personalized outreach needs to be conducted in Indigenous communities.</li> <li>An easily accessible, annual calendar of granting opportunities would better support Indigenous applicants.</li> </ul>
Funder Cultural Competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>63% of funders stated they are working towards feeling confident as a funder to build a sound understanding of Indigenous communities, cultures, programs and services. 31% of funders said they do not feel confident in these areas.</li> </ul>
Selection Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include Indigenous community members in selection processes.</li> <li>Do not employ colonial ways of identifying conflicts of interest.</li> </ul>
Increase Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous organizations require core funding.</li> <li>More funding should be dedicated to Indigenous organizations in all grant streams.</li> </ul>

#### Sample responses from engagement activities:

*“Culture is immeasurable, it cannot be calculated. Culture is part of who we are as Indigenous people and therefore should be viewed as an outcome. Therefore, it is suggested that all funding within urban Indigenous organizations should be automatically given the flexibility to include/account for cultural considerations”*

- Indigenous Organization

*“Many reporting tools are created unilaterally and imposed without consultation or collaboration with Indigenous recipient organizations. This poses a barrier for organizations with limited administrative capacity and specialized staff”*

- Indigenous Organization

### Indigenous Funding Framework Pilot – “Take what you need, leave what you don’t”

Building on the success of the "take what you need, leave what you don't" funding process developed by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council during the COVID-19 response, \$0.625 million of funding was first piloted under the Indigenous Funding Framework in 2021.

The “take what you need, leave what you don’t” or community basket approach is a method of distributing funds that supports self-determined funding priorities and an Indigenous-led process. All members and friends of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council are offered an even share of the total funding available and organizations can opt in or out depending on their organization’s need at the time. If organizations opt out of the funding or choose not to receive the full amount of funding, the additional funds are evenly distributed again between all participating organizations. The process demonstrates the nimbleness of grant making responses that emerged during the pandemic and provides pathways to post-pandemic funding that addresses reconciliation commitments.

Funds received through the Indigenous Funding Framework were unrestricted in use and all participating members and friends of the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council are Indigenous-led not-for-profit organizations with social service mandates serving Torontonians. All organizations meet eligibility requirements.

The pilot has continued since 2021 with \$1.25 million allocated in 2022, \$1.85 million in 2023, and \$1.95 million in 2024. The Indigenous Affairs Office has contributed \$500,000 of funding per year with funding that was secured through the 2022 budget process to support the Indigenous Funding Framework.

### Pilot Funding Results and Leanings

In 2021, 17 Indigenous organizations participated in the Framework pilot. Key impacts of the 2021 funding include:

- 33% of the funding was leveraged to support the increased personnel costs required to meet higher demands for services and to adapt services to meet the needs of Indigenous communities.
- 26% of funding was directed to support pandemic-related health and safety costs.
- 21% was directed to support food insecurity within the Indigenous community via meals and food hampers.

In 2022, the funding available to support the Indigenous Funding Framework increased by almost fifty per cent to \$1.25 million based on the additional funds secured through

the 2022 budget process noted above. This funding was shared amongst 18 Indigenous organizations who self-identified the following priorities:

- Most organizations continued to use a portion of the funding to address COVID-19 health and safety initiatives including the purchase of personal protective equipment and enhanced cleaning regimes.
- Most organizations dedicated significant funds to addressing persistent food insecurity within the Indigenous community intensified by inflation.
- With the flexibility enshrined in the funding model, organizations were able to dedicate funding to purchase traditional medicines, as well as to provide housing supports and education materials to community members.

In 2023, 23 Indigenous organizations were funded with a total of \$1.85 million. Organizations reported using the unrestricted funds for costs such as food assistance, administrative costs, professional development, small repairs, equipment, and staffing. Many organizations reported that the self-determined nature of the funding was crucial to helping their organizations run and address costs that would normally not be supported through other funding sources.

Examples of feedback received in the 2023 annual reports:

*“These funds are not just financial resources – they are opportunities for us to respond swiftly to the evolving needs of our community. With this flexibility, we have been able to create essential programs and supports precisely where they are most needed, fostering an environment conducive to healing and growth”*

- 2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations

*“Many non-profits, including us, operate mainly on project-based funding, which rarely leaves space for administrative expenses, rent, capital upgrades, and other essential expenses. So, this funding was crucial for our organization to keep our doors open and programming running.”*

- Tungasuvvingat Inuit Toronto

*“Funding for the enhanced cleaning project has allowed Wigwamen to ensure that the common areas in our multiple-unit buildings and scattered housing units are cleaned and sanitized more regularly and more thoroughly than we have been able to do in the past. For the tenants, the result is an increased sense of pride in their building. For the general public, the message is that Indigenous affordable housing is well maintained and is something which ought to be welcomed in the community.”*

- Wigwamen

The following organizations participated in the 2023 Indigenous Funding Framework pilot, each receiving \$78,022.

- 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations

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- Aboriginal Legal Services
- Anduhyaun Inc.
- ENAGB Youth Program
- Gabriel Dumont Non-Profit Housing
- Miziwe Biik
- NaMeRes
- Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
- Native Earth Performing Arts
- Native Child and Family Services Toronto
- Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto
- New Frontiers
- Nishbnawbe Homes
- Ojibiikaan
- Ontario Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Strategy
- Our Children's Medicine
- The Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts (ANDPVA)
- Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society
- Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
- Toronto & York Region Metis Council
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit Toronto
- Urban Indigenous Education Centre
- Wigwamen

### Learnings for Other Granting Programs

Community Funding provides other funding opportunities for not-for-profit, grassroots and resident-led groups to design and lead community-based projects that provide social services and encourage resident engagement and leadership development. Through the learnings from the Indigenous Funding Framework, Community Funding has implemented processes in other granting streams that align with the principles and goals of the Framework.

**Table 3 – Community Funding Grant Programs Leveraging Indigenous Funding Framework Principles**

Grant	Description	Unique Features	Total Contributions in Indigenous Groups
Local Leadership Grant	Provides funding for resident-led groups to inspire their neighbourhoods with events	Since 2022, a portion of the funds were allotted to an Indigenous organization to act as a trustee and create a self-determined process for Indigenous residents to access the funds for projects that met the grant priorities. These funds have	\$103, 800 has been allocated since 2022

Grant	Description	Unique Features	Total Contributions in Indigenous Groups
	or activities that advance key themes in the <a href="#">Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy</a> .	<p>been held by Nishnawbe Homes to support residents in creating community gardens and beatification projects.</p> <p>Since 2023, groups that applied through the generic grant call and were identified as Indigenous-led have been reviewed by an Indigenous review panel in connection with the Indigenous Affairs Office and Environment and Climate division. The funds allocated to the Indigenous-led resident groups have not required a trustee since all groups had already been funded directly by the Indigenous Affairs Office.</p>	
Youth Violence Prevention	Provides multi-year funding for projects focused on violence prevention and intervention for youth ages 10 to 29.	<p>In 2020, the Indigenous, youth-led organization ENAGB Youth Program received funding for City-wide programming. The Indigenous Affairs Office supported the development of a culturally appropriate review process for Indigenous applicants.</p> <p>ENAGB was not asked to re-apply in the 2023 grant call and funding was rolled over in order to enable the organization to continue intensive case management services for their Indigenous youth.</p>	Since 2020, \$1.8M has been allocated
Community Services Partnership	Provides ongoing support to Toronto's not-for-profit community-based organizations to offer high quality and	Through the CSP renewal process, funding for Indigenous organizations was made unrestricted to support the self-determination of funding priorities by each organization in line with their organizational mission and priorities.	In the 2023 \$558,820 was allocated to four organizations



Grant	Description	Unique Features	Total Contributions in Indigenous Groups
	relevant services that respond to the changing needs of the community and strengthen the city's well-being.		