

l'Initiative
d'innovation
autochtone



Indigenous
Innovation
Initiative

Annual Report

FY 2022-2023

Dream Medicine



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada



Grand Challenges Canada®
Grands Défis Canada

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TREE OF LIFE
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A message from the team

Welcome to the 2023 Indigenous Innovation Initiative annual report, a window into our remarkable journey over the past year. With great enthusiasm, we invite you to join us as we reflect on our achievements and our profound impact. Throughout this transformative period, we have wholeheartedly dedicated ourselves to creating an inclusive space within the innovation ecosystem, nurturing sustainable growth and empowerment for Indigenous innovation. While challenges have marked our path, we recognize that these experiences are essential in constructing something truly extraordinary. As we evolve into an organization that endeavours to meet our community's needs, we remain committed to dreaming, collaborating, and serving our community.

We deeply appreciate the privilege of working alongside exceptional innovators and community. Your unwavering support has been invaluable, and we eagerly anticipate cultivating new relationships and continuing to grow and learn together. Drawing inspiration from the wisdom of innovators from both past and present, we aspire to contribute to an ecosystem where dreams are nurtured, and aspirations flourish for all.

All our relations,

The Indigenous Innovation Initiative Team



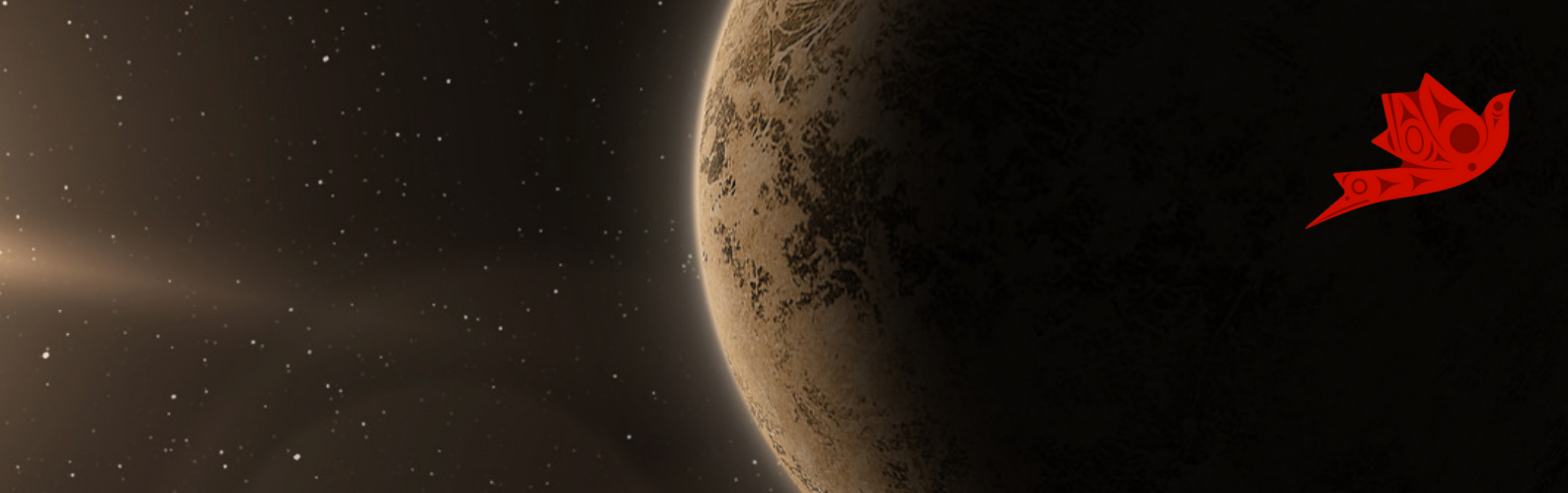


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Dreaming of a future where Indigenous innovation thrives



The inaugural phase of the Gender Equality Program marked the start of an exciting journey for all participants. Novel ideas were nurtured by visionary minds, inspiring the next generation of Indigenous innovators and pushing the boundaries of innovation by centring it on Indigenous knowledge systems. Invaluable insights were gained from the program's initial iteration. We endeavoured to adapt and advance our program in response to the feedback we received from applicants. Particularly, we addressed certain aspects of the application process to more accurately mirror the essence of community, inclusivity and enhance transparency.

In the first round, certain applicants felt the feedback they received was incongruent with their applications. Therefore, we embedded interviews for top-scoring applicants to allow for more meaningful interaction between the team and applicants. This will enable applicants to better explain and communicate their projects through a video call. In addition to interviews, we made the selection process as transparent as possible by providing applicants with the scoring criteria through the **Scoring Matrix**, which is readily available on our website. Regarding the application itself, we received feedback that the word count was limiting, so we simplified the application to only include six questions. The application was constructed so applicants could upload videos, audio, and other files to best express and reflect their ideas. Lastly, we opted for a rolling intake to alleviate pressure and stress around deadlines while distinguishing between different application cycles. The rolling intake model also enables the program to be more responsive to seasonality, such as land-based work. Once a cycle ends, applicants can still submit their applications which will be considered in the following cycle.

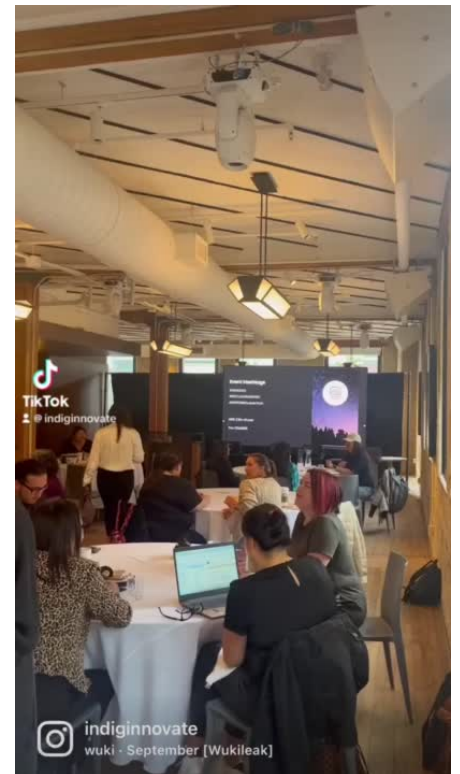
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Spirit Reclamation Gathering



From October 5th to 7th, 2022, Indigenous women, Two-Spirit individuals, and gender-diverse thought leaders convened for the Spirit Reclamation Gathering. This event was conceived during the inaugural meeting of the Inclusive Indigenous Economic Ecosystem Collective for Innovation, Entrepreneurs, and Sector Leaders (IIEEC) in October 2020. Chaired by the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) and the Indigenous Innovation Initiative, comprised of esteemed members from the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association (NACCA), Futurpreneur, and the Indigenous LIFT Collective, and the IIEEC aimed to cultivate an inclusive innovation ecosystem rooted in collaboration and diversity. This collaboration led to the **Spirit Reclamation Gathering**—an endeavour uniting the IIEEC with essential ecosystem partners from across Turtle Island and the world. In this groundbreaking initiative, national organizations shaping Indigenous entrepreneurship and innovation joined forces with a diverse group of Indigenous entrepreneurs to create an innovation journey map to identify the varied assets and resources innovators need for success. Ongoing efforts to maintain the momentum set out by the first gathering have culminated in the Spirit Reclamation Gathering II in June 2023 and talks of future events.



Paving the way to a future of inclusive economies one grant at a time



There is no better way to demonstrate the importance of Indigenous innovation than deep diving into the outcomes of the first cohort of innovators funded through the inaugural Gender Equality program in 2021.

The first cohort of innovators spanned multiple diverse industries, from cosmetics to agriculture to the aviation sector. They employed 22 people, comprising 80% of their employees, with a total salary of \$534,663. Of all the amazing outcomes from this cohort, innovations promoted economic empowerment, improved products and service provision, cultural revitalization, greater gender awareness, and capacity building.

Through the creation of jobs and leadership roles for Indigenous, POC, women, trans, non-binary, and/or gender-diverse individuals, innovators have been breaking ground in the creation of inclusive economies, thereby contributing to economic reconciliation. Taking a holistic approach to innovation and drawing on traditional knowledge has allowed for innovations to be more inclusive and culturally relevant, resulting in higher-quality products and services to community. Developing solutions beyond gender binaries to provide services, products and information, challenging cisheteronormativity, employing queer/trans-inclusive language, and creating safe and affirming spaces are important contributions to Indigenous gender equality. Lastly, innovations from the first cohort have created opportunities for community to learn, build relationships and reduce the barriers to participation in different sectors.

It's clear that the innovators from the first cohort are committed to creating impact through their work. This impact could expand to more Indigenous communities and inspire other novel solutions across Turtle Island.

The dream medicine



Muskrat Storytelling

Muskrat Storytelling is an app which reclaims culture-based pre- and post-natal health, birth and parenting wisdom to assist expecting parents in their pregnancy journey. Interviews are currently being conducted with Indigenous knowledge keepers to develop app content that will include traditional birthing knowledge and public health information. Muskrat Storytelling strengthens familial relationships, positive cultural identity and community knowledge by reclaiming culture-based practices around birth.

Iskwew Air

Iskwew Air is dedicated to connecting people to the land and bringing traditional Indigenous knowledge systems to aerospace. The airline is not only the first Indigenous woman-owned airline; they have increased the visibility and representation of Indigenous women, Two Spirit, trans, queer, non-binary, and gender-diverse peoples in the aerospace and aviation tech world through training and events. Iskwew Air organized an online Indigenous Innovation in Advanced Air Mobility event in September 2021, including a breakout circle centred on "Equity Lens Investment in Advanced Air Mobility."

Cheakamus (Ch'iyākmesh) Centre

Cheakamus (Ch'iyākmesh) Centre is an environmental education facility committed to facilitating opportunities to empower Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people in the trades through education, leadership training and employment. The training is a collaborating of Aboriginal Housing Management Association, British Columbia Institute of Technology and community and industry partners that is centered on Indigenous knowledge systems, demonstrating cultural revitalization. The knowledge and skillset students acquire not only propel them to green career pathways but are offered in safe spaces and are culturally relevant.



Request for Proposals

In March 2023, we launched the next phase of the **Advancing Indigenous Gender Equality through Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship program**. In this round, we intentionally created space for applicants to self-select their projects into either the proof of concept (seed) or transition to scale (TTS) stage. This decision was influenced by insights gained from the previous round, and we remain committed to incorporating community feedback as we adapt and refine the program.

We recognize that, in many cases, it is difficult for Indigenous Peoples to start and grow a business or organization. Frequently, there are additional barriers for First Nations, Métis, or Inuit women, Two Spirit, queer, trans, non-binary, or gender-diverse persons in Canada in the entrepreneurship, business, and social innovation space. Therefore, the main goal of Advancing Indigenous Gender Equality through Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship is to support innovation and entrepreneurship by and for First Nations, Métis, or Inuit women, Two Spirit, queer, trans, non-binary, or gender-diverse persons in Canada. This program is supported by the Department of Women and Gender Equality (Canada) (WaGE), Grand Challenges Canada, the University Health Network, the McConnell Family Foundation, the Tree of Life Foundation, the Pathy Family Foundation, and other supporters.



We hosted three webinars which served as information sessions for potential applicants and anyone interested in the Indigenous Innovation Initiative. Live sessions were also hosted on Instagram and Facebook weekly to allow for informal interaction with the team!

Policy & Environmental, Social and Governance Reporting



Policy Framework

From February to April 2023, an engagement program was created, and discussions were facilitated through various platforms on the processes and mechanisms to support the growth of the Indigenous innovation community. These discussions culminated in a gathering on April 6th whereby a group of 20 Indigenous innovators gathered on unceded Algonquin territory, Ottawa, at the Bayview Yards Innovation Centre to continue the conversation and outline key action items. The final result was a **report** outlining a policy framework to co-create an environment where Indigenous innovation can flourish.

ESG in the Indigenous innovation ecosystem

The current climate crisis has made it evident that new ways of thinking and being are needed for the emergence of a shift toward inclusive climate solutions. Finding ways to centre Indigenous knowledge systems in ESG reports has recently garnered more attention as emerging trends and research point to Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being as being key to tackling climate change. This year, we conducted an environmental scan in preparation for planning how to Indigenize the current industry ESG template. Key trends and future directions include an increase in focus on Indigenous sovereignty, a greater emphasis on decolonization and the integration of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems to work collaboratively towards inclusive climate solutions.



Looking ahead

Throughout this report, we have looked into the past and explored the present. As we look into the future, we are reminded of the values of inclusion, self-determination, sustainability and creativity that we set out for ourselves and this platform. The Indigenous Innovation Initiative has undergone a remarkable evolution. Initially conceived with a vision to support and empower Indigenous innovation, it has steadily transformed into a dynamic force driving positive change.

As we continue to evolve, valuable insights from community were incorporated, leading to continuous adaptation and refinement. With each iteration, the Indigenous Innovation Initiative has grown stronger, aligning itself with the needs and aspirations of Indigenous entrepreneurs and thought leaders. In the future, we hope to continue contributing to inclusive innovation and propelling Indigenous communities toward a future defined by creativity, resilience, and self-determination.

**"Creating the conditions for
the future of an inclusive innovation ecosystem."**

-Sara Wolfe



The future is now

Innovation is a key driver of economic, social and environmental progress. Time and time again, we are reminded of the importance of investing in Indigenous innovation. It has become clear that it is imperative to agitate and diversify projects and organizations that receive funding to ensure that Indigenous Knowledge systems are leveraged in an all-encompassing manner.

Investing in Indigenous innovation is vital in empowering Indigenous economies, revitalizing Indigenous communities and, most importantly, reconciliation. Barriers to accessing capital have been, and continue to be, reiterated by community. As we move forward, we look forward to co-creating an Indigenous innovation ecosystem that upholds self-determination and self-governance.

The world is changing. Indigenous knowledge systems are being called on to find solutions to global problems. From climate change to governance, Indigenous ways of Knowing and Being hold teachings that can inform modern-day policies for all. Now more than ever, Indigenous innovation is critical in leveraging Indigenous Knowledge systems to find bold solutions to global problems.

**"You are the invitation, you are the role model
for the next generation of Indigenous brothers
and sisters to dream."**

-Workshop participant



Indigenous innovation is dream medicine. By investing in Indigenous innovation, we are realizing the dreams of our ancestors, uplifting communities and re-affirming self-governance and self-determination of Indigenous economies. Dream medicine is about putting bold ideas at the forefront of decolonizing social finance.

Want to be part of this journey with us?

Join us



Follow our journey online, or email us at info@indigenousinnovate.org for opportunities, partnerships or more information.



July 2023

Indigenous Innovation Initiative
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We are grateful to live and work on Dish With One Spoon Treaty territory, the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaawbe, the Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee, and which continues to be a gathering place for people from many nations.



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Autochtones Canada

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