

Towards a National Indigenous Guardians Network

Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance

From the Indigenous Leadership Initiative¹

Summary

As part of its commitments to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples of Canada, youth, employment and training, and environmental protection, the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) respectfully requests that the Government of Canada consider widely-supported proposals to 1) establish a National Indigenous Guardians Network and 2) commit funding for community-based Indigenous Guardians of \$500 million over five years.

This will promote a wide range of economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits. It will enable Indigenous communities across the country to fulfill their cultural responsibilities to lands and waters, and to participate in and contribute to Canada's economic prosperity in a way that recognizes and respects the inherent authorities of Indigenous Nations and their Aboriginal and Treaty Rights and Titles.

Context

Indigenous peoples in Canada have long been stewards of the lands and waters in their traditional territories. The relative health of these lands is a testament to this relationship. Indigenous cultures, languages, and practices have developed in tandem with these territories, and have been passed down through generations.

However, as highlighted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, many of these on-the-land connections have been lost, resulting in the breakdown of the social fabric within communities. Indigenous youth are particularly vulnerable to alienation when erosion of social cohesion, loss of intergenerational learning, and disconnection from cultural practice, skills and purpose occurs.

Economic and employment disparities between the Indigenous Peoples of Canada and non-Indigenous Canadians also continue to grow. Unemployment rates in Canada are two times higher for Indigenous Peoples, and three times higher for those living on-reserve. Indigenous Peoples also experience markedly lower high school and university completion rates and lower median incomes.

What are Indigenous Guardians?

Around the world, Indigenous Guardian programs are emerging as a powerful tool to address these issues. These Nation and community -based initiatives employ Indigenous Guardians to manage and steward their lands and waters in a way that allows for cultural vitality while also preparing a new generation of Indigenous youth for the challenges and opportunities of today.

Guardians are employed as the "eyes on the ground" in Indigenous territories. They monitor ecological health, maintain cultural sites, protect sensitive areas and species, interpret culture and heritage aspects

¹ The Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) focuses on Indigenous land management and strengthening Nationhood. ILI is a partner in the International Boreal Conservation Campaign.

for visitors, contribute to land and marine planning and management, and promote intergenerational sharing of Indigenous knowledge. They also help build capacity to engage with other land users, development proponents, and governments, thus strengthening decision-making at all levels.

There are approximately 30 Indigenous Guardians programs in place across Canada, including: the Haida Watchmen, the Coastal Guardian Watchmen Network, the Innu Environmental Guardians, and the Lutsel K'e Ni Hat'Ni Dene. Long-standing Guardian programs such as those of the Innu and Haida have helped build capacity and leadership within those Nations, have supported the negotiation of key agreements with Canada and others, and are models for other Nations building similar programs.

Australia has developed a very successful Guardians-like program, entitled "Working on Country", a partnership between the government of Australia and the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, where the federal government has invested over \$560 million since 2007 to create over 770 full-time equivalent jobs for Indigenous Rangers. Using both Western science and Indigenous ecological knowledge, Ranger teams now manage over 1.5 million square kilometers of lands and sea across Australia.

Documented benefits from this program include: increased employment and associated tax revenue (particularly in remote areas), increased training and employability, reduced welfare payments, reduced criminal offences and rates of violence against women, increased health outcomes, and a greater sense of confidence and well-being in Indigenous communities.

Recent studies for the Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet Office demonstrate that when social, economic and cultural values are considered, every dollar invested in Rangers returns an estimated \$3 in social, economic and cultural value.

The Opportunity for the Government of Canada

A National Indigenous Guardians Network represents a powerful opportunity for the Government of Canada to fulfill its 2015 Speech from the Throne promise to forge renewed, Nation-to-Nation and Inuit-to-Crown relationships with Indigenous Peoples. As part of Federal Budget 2017, ILI respectfully calls on the Government of Canada to allocate \$500 million over five years to support Indigenous Guardians in Canada.

This investment fits squarely within federal mandates to promote and create training opportunities and good quality jobs, particularly among youth; to promote reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples; and to address key priorities such as climate change and getting products to market sustainably. There is no better way to express Prime Minister Trudeau's affirmation that "no relationship is more important to me and to Canada than the one with Indigenous Peoples".

It will also help to achieve the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples standard of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), which the Federal Government has publicly committed to meet. Guardian programs provide opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to be fully engaged in reviewing resource development projects (a 2015 Speech from the Throne commitment), which in turn will create greater certainty for industry seeking to advance projects.

Federal support for Guardians responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, particularly its calls to action on education and training for young Indigenous Canadians; efforts to eliminate gaps in

education, employment and health outcomes; the development of culturally appropriate curricula; and support for reconciliation with the corporate sector.

Guardian programs will reduce unemployment, create new employment futures for many talented Indigenous youth, and create positive role models of active community members rooted in their cultures and fulfilling their cultural responsibilities.

Proposed Approach

Guardians reflect a Nation-to-Nation and Inuit-to-Crown approach. Indigenous Peoples bring territory - specifically the land or waters to be watched by Guardians – Indigenous policy and legislative framework, and their cultural connection to the land, while the federal government contributes funding and a policy or legislative framework to support Indigenous governments in running their own stewardship programs.

There are over 600 First Nations and many Inuit communities in Canada, all of whom could benefit from Guardian programs². However, Guardian programs will be most effective, relevant and appropriate where key conditions are met: 1) a defined Nation-to-Nation or Inuit-to-Crown relationship; 2) stable governance; 3) land or marine use plans to steward Indigenous territories; and 4) demonstrated commitments to Indigenous-led stewardship.

ILI projects that within the first five years, at least 200 communities could establish Guardian programs. These will be run by trained coordinators, each with a small core team of Guardians, and will participate in a Guardian Network that provides ongoing access to training and support over time.

Ultimately, the Guardian Network will become an independent Indigenous organization that can administer funding directly. However, while the Network is being established it could be hosted within the Federal Government.

Key Activities

Creation and delivery of Indigenous Guardian programs that respond to the vision and priorities of their communities is at the heart of this proposal. Activities include:

1) Investments in Community Guardian Programs:

Existing Guardian programs vary considerably in size, capacity, and funding sources. They often are caught in a project-to-project cycle. As a consequence, they struggle to provide stable employment, which is one of the most significant benefits demonstrated by such programs in Australia.

Overcoming this barrier and creating the conditions for long-term success requires federal investment in core program infrastructure on the ground.

Federal funds should therefore be directed primarily towards core employment costs, both for Guardians and program coordinators. This approach will maximize the rate of return on federal investments, while leveraging investments by other governments, industry, and others.

² The Assembly of First Nations passed a supportive resolution at the 2015 Special Chiefs Assembly held in Gatineau Dec 8-10th 2015 (<http://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/resolutions/res-sca-2016.pdf>)

2) Training

Access to quality training has been identified consistently as key to the success of on-the-land programs and to the experience and job satisfaction of coordinators and Guardians. This will include:

1. University-accredited training for program coordinators, to ensure they have the unique mix of land and marine management, leadership, and hands-on skills required to design and run effective Guardian programs;
2. Regional training for Guardians in on-the-land practices such as land/marine planning and monitoring of water quality, wildlife populations, and ecological changes related to climate change; and
3. Safety, land and marine management training for Guardians, delivered through local partners.

Training for program coordinators will be guided by a standardized national curriculum, based on a specialized pilot currently underway through Dechinta Bush University³ in partnership with ILI. Once the pilot is complete, this training will be delivered through both Dechinta and satellite bush campuses across the country.

Coordinator training includes 15 weeks in participants' home communities, supporting design of their own stewardship programs. This is a core aspect of the Guardians model and is critical to its ultimate success.

3) Network Operation

The Network would initially be formed by Nations with existing Guardian programs, and expanded over time to include all interested Nations. A national board of directors with knowledge of on-the-land stewardship approaches and experience with similar program models would govern the Network. A small national staff would provide support, coordinate regular national Guardian gatherings, and promote effective communication within the Network and with external players.

4) Program Development and Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation has been an important component of the Australian program, and will be a vital tool for ensuring the success of Canada's program. An early priority for the Network will therefore be the development of a robust evaluation framework that reflects an Indigenous approach to defining success. ILI will work with a number of experts to develop this framework, such as the National Consortium for Indigenous Economic Development at the University of Victoria. ILI also plays an important support and advisory role to communities interested in Guardians and will support the Network on governance, program design, and coordinator training moving forward.

³ Dechinta is an NWT land-based institution focused on training the next generation of Indigenous leaders and researchers. It offers university accreditation through the Universities of Alberta and British Columbia and McGill.

Resources

The table below outlines estimated costs for the first five years of the program.

Estimated Costs

ESTIMATED COSTS (\$ MILLIONS)	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
Community Guardians	\$18.5	\$45.0	\$75.5	\$116.5	\$158.5
Training	\$5.35	\$8.7	\$14.4	\$20.4	\$19.8
Network Operation	\$1.25	\$1.25	\$2.5	\$3.0	\$3.0
Program Development, Evaluation	\$0.75	\$0.75	\$1.0	\$1.5	\$2.35
Total Annual Cost	\$25.85	\$55.7	\$93.4	\$141.4	\$183.65
Total 5-Year Cost: \$500.0 million					

Outcomes

The following outcomes are anticipated.

By the end of Year 1:

- 10 new community-based programs established;
- 30 existing programs supported;
- 25 Guardian program coordinators in training;
- 160 Guardians employed on-the-ground; and
- National curriculum for coordinator training completed.

By the end of Year 5:

- 225 community-based Guardian programs established or in design phase;
- 185 Guardian program coordinators in training or fully trained;

- Over 1500 Guardians employed on-the-ground;
- Comprehensive training delivered through national, regional and local institutions; and
- Governments involved as key partners across the country.

Results

Australian evaluators calculated that every dollar invested in their Indigenous Rangers program created at least \$3 in social, economic and cultural value. Preliminary work in the Northwest Territories suggests similar returns of at least 2.4:1, with significant additional benefits to be realized as these programs mature.

The Government of Canada's \$500 million investment in Guardians over five years could leverage well over \$1 billion in social, cultural and economic benefits, including:

For Individuals: meaningful employment and income, employable skills, improved educational outcomes, improved individual and family health, increased pride and cultural connection, and reduced reliance on social assistance.

For Communities: healthier members, greater youth retention, broader participation in governance and decision-making, and increased expressions of title and sovereignty.

For Governments: a new Nation-to-Nation and Inuit-to-Crown relationship; improved youth educational and employment outcomes; enhanced social acceptability of development projects; improved environmental quality; and significant savings on social costs, including reduced reliance on social assistance and the justice and health care systems.

For Canada: increased cultural exposure and understanding of Indigenous Peoples; a renewed Canadian identity that both respects and reconciles our diverse histories; and new pathways towards truly shared prosperity.

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