

Enabling Connectivity in First Nations Communities

ISC's Role Through the First Nations Infrastructure Fund

National Indigenous Connectivity Conference
Tsuu T'ina Nation (Calgary, AB)

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Indigenous Services
Canada

Services aux
Autochtones Canada

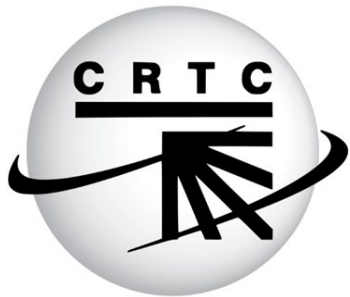
Canada

Importance of Connectivity for First Nations



Reliable, high-speed internet allows First Nations to:

- ✓ **Participate in the digital economy**
- ✓ **Maintain critical community infrastructure**
- ✓ **Deliver important socio-economic services** (e.g., healthcare, education, and emergency response).



Based on the CRTC's most recent broadband Internet service availability data, **only 65.7% of First Nation households meet the universal service objective (50/10 Mbps)** vs about 83% of rural and 96% of all Canadian households.



Supporting First Nations' access to internet speeds comparable to those of other Canadians is essential to **communities' wellbeing** and to **advancing Canada's socio-economic development.**

Importance of Connectivity in First Nations Communities for Canada

Connectivity in First Nation communities benefits both communities and the rest of Canada since it:

- ✓ Builds First Nations community capacity and skills, supporting **education, training, and knowledge sharing** with the rest of Canada.
- ✓ Enables **business development and growth**, including new digital enterprises and expansion into regional and national markets.
- ✓ Helps First Nations participate in advancing important national initiatives, such as:
 - ✓ **Creating nation-building infrastructure projects and economic opportunities** (Build Canada Strong)
 - ✓ **Building housing** (Build Canada Homes)
 - ✓ **Increasing civil preparedness, sovereignty and resilience**, including in rural, remote, and northern regions
- ✓ Advances **economic reconciliation** by reducing barriers linked to remoteness and by enabling fuller First Nation participation in the digital economy.

ISC Funding: First Nations Infrastructure Fund (FNIF)

- Established in 2007, the **First Nations Infrastructure Fund** complements the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program (CFMP), ISC's primary source of infrastructure funding.
- **FNIF purpose:** Support First Nations' initiatives for improving quality of life and the environment in their communities by **developing, expanding, and enhancing enabling public infrastructure** on-reserve, on Crown land, and on land set aside for community use and benefit.

Types of eligible projects:

- Roads and bridges
- Structural mitigation
- Energy systems
- Planning and skills development
- **Connectivity**
- Cultural and recreational facilities
- Fire Protection (incl. Fire Halls)
- Solid Waste Management
- Administrative Buildings (New)

FNIF Project Selection Process

FNIF funding is allocated through an **annual project intake process**:



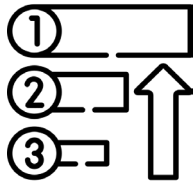
Project identification:

- First Nations **identify projects they require funding for** in their First Nations Infrastructure Investment Plans (FNIIPs).
- ISC reviews FNIIPs to **identify projects eligible for FNIF funding**.



Eligibility screening:

- First Nations **submit project proposals** for projects eligible for FNIF funding.
- ISC Regional Offices **screen the proposals** to confirm eligibility.



Prioritization: Because of limited funding, eligible **projects are prioritized for funding** at the regional level based on such factors as:

- Health and Safety
- First Nations' community-identified needs
- Potential for regional impact
- Cost-sharing opportunities
- Regulatory/environmental liabilities and risks
- Ongoing government commitments and ministerial announcements.

Connectivity Project Activities Eligible under FNIF

FNIF provides funding to on-reserve First Nations **to improve community access to high-speed internet** through:

- ✓ High-speed **backbone** (transport) **networks**
- ✓ **Broadband points of presence**
- ✓ **Local access** and **distribution networks**
- ✓ **Community satellite** and **ground-segment equipment**
 - Eligibility: **only community-serving infrastructure** (not household-level equipment)
- ✓ **Mobile** and **cellular infrastructure** that provides community-wide public benefit



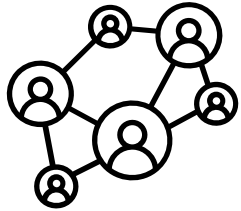
FNIF Program Limitations

- There is currently **no dedicated funding envelope for connectivity**.
 - Connectivity projects are ranked against other infrastructure projects during the prioritization process.
- ISC provides capital funding **only for connectivity infrastructure**.
 - Only limited funding for community capacity is available.
 - Operations, maintenance, and ongoing service costs are not eligible under FNIF.
- **Funding household-level consumer premise equipment (CPE)**, including individual satellite or Low Earth Orbit (LEO) user terminals, **is outside of FNIF's scope**.
- Addressing **affordability barriers** to community internet use is **outside's of FNIF's scope**.
- Improved access to high-speed increases **cyber security** risks to First Nations. ISC is exploring options for coordination with the **Canadian Cyber Security Centre (CCSC)**.



These constraints reinforce why **partnerships with other government departments and the private sector, and long-term planning** are important for advancing sustainable connectivity solutions.

Coordination with Other Government Departments



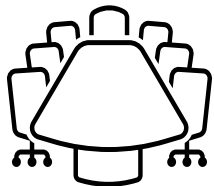
Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) leads federal broadband and mobile connectivity initiatives.

- ISED administers the **\$3.225-billion Universal Broadband Fund (UBF)**, the main federal funding for connectivity projects across Canada, including on reserve.



ISC is an Enabling Partner, working closely with ISED to support First Nations connectivity by:

- **Reviewing project short lists** and providing contextual information
- Coordinating **project funding and cost-sharing**
- Contributing **quarterly updates** to national reporting and the National Broadband Availability Map



Ongoing collaboration on First Nations connectivity happens through:

- FPT Broadband Working Group
- Federal Broadband Working Group
- Interdepartmental Working Group on Indigenous Broadband Infrastructure (ISED/ISC/CIRNAC)

FNIF: Connectivity Progress and Results

Current Fiscal Year (April 1 to Sept 30, 2025):

- ✓ **Two projects** completed
- ✓ ISC invested **\$800K** in connectivity infrastructure

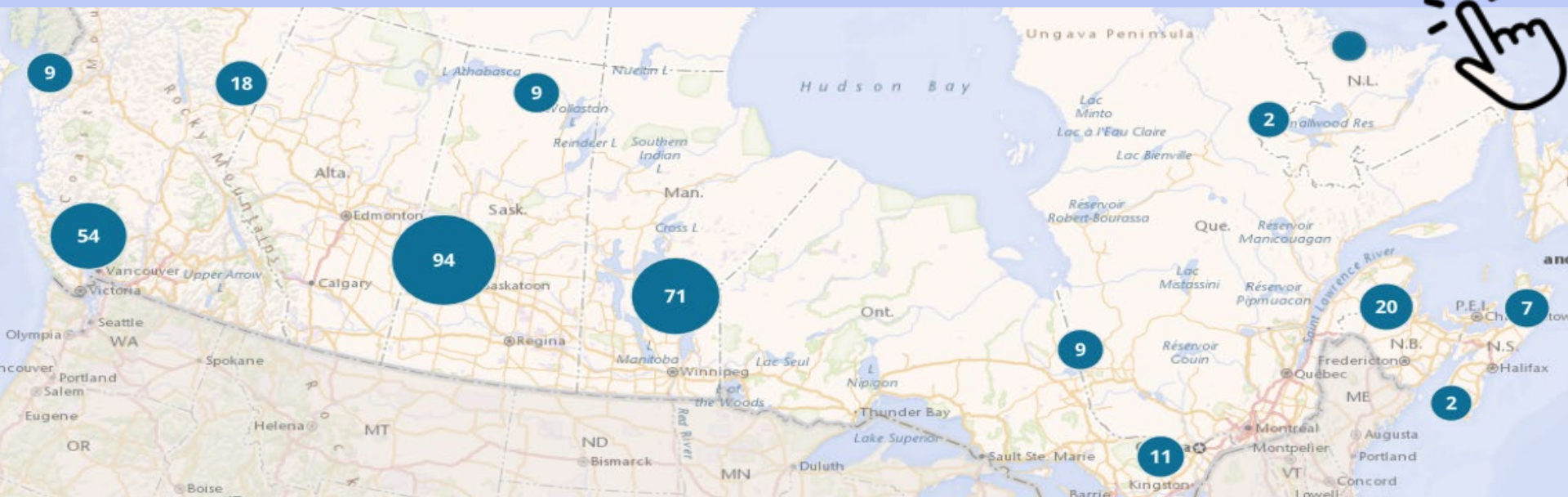
Previous Fiscal Year 2024-25:

- ✓ **Six projects** completed
- ✓ ISC invested **\$7.3M** in connectivity infrastructure

Cumulative Progress (since 2016 to September 30, 2025):

ISC invested **\$105.4M** (excluding operating expenses) in **65 connectivity projects**, **41** of which are completed, benefitting **305 communities** of about **335,000 people**.

ISC's [Indigenous Community Infrastructure Map](#) shows connectivity and other First Nations infrastructure projects supported through ISC funding.



FNIF: Examples of Connectivity Projects

AB Region – Peerless Trout First Nation

\$800K (ISC Share)

- Building **two LTE Wireless towers** to provide cellular coverage for **Peerless Lake and Trout Lake First Nations**
- Costs shared between ISC and Rogers Communications

MB Region – Anisiniw Okimawin Grand Council

\$6M (ISC Share)

- Bringing **active ethernet fibre and fixed wireless** to the **4 Island Lake communities**
- UBF funded last mile network for 1,582 households.

ON Region – Matawa First Nation

\$2.1M (ISC Share)

Replacing unreliable satellite connections with the **880-kilometer fiber-optic cable network** to resolve long standing Internet issues in **5 Northern Ontario First Nations**

BC Region – Connected Coast

\$12M (ISC Share)

- Bringing **rapid and reliable internet access** to rural and remote communities in BC, **including 44 First Nations**.
- Costs shared between ISC, ISED (Connect to Innovate program), and Province of BC.

Questions and Discussion

