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Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund: Building Infrastructure for Indigenous Philanthropy

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Isidora G. Sidorovska **University of Waterloo**

This report presents a brief overview of the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF): a multi-funder, Indigenous-led initiative established to support Indigenous communities across Canada as they respond to the current health crisis. In doing so, IPRF also contributes to the construction of an Indigenous philanthropic infrastructure in Canada.

The report is based on several conversations with key stakeholders in the process of establishing the IPRF. Two in-depth semi-structured interviews with individuals that started the initiative: Bruce Lawson, CEO of the Counselling Foundation of Canada; Victoria McKenzie Grant, Teme-Augama Anishnabai Kway (Woman of the Deep Water People) and Wanda Brascoupé, Kanien'keha, Skarù rë', Anishinabe, as representatives of the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund. Along with these conversations, the analysis also draws on conversations with Andrew Chunilall, CEO of Community Foundations Canada (the host partner of IPRF), and Jennifer Brennan, Head of Canada Programs at the Mastercard Foundation, which participated in initial funder consultations that preceded the establishment of the fund. Information on IPRF objectives, priorities, and future steps come from a draft version of the IPRF founding document, which was made available by the three key informants. The interviews were conducted in the first half of May 2020.

About the Initiative

The Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF) is an initiative set up by Indigenous knowledge holders in partnership with several non-governmental funders as a tool to support Indigenous communities during the current public health crisis. While the fund itself was created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not a temporary initiative; rather, it was conceived as a long-term instrument intended to contribute to the resilience of Indigenous communities across Canada beyond COVID-19. The IPRF is a natural next step in a process of ongoing dialogue between philanthropic organizations and Indigenous leaders that can be traced back to conversations preceding the development of The Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action in 2015. In fact, several of the foundations that participated in these earlier conversations around establishing the IPRF were involved in writing the Declaration.

The IPRF is initiated by the expectation that COVID-19 will disproportionately affect rural and remote communities, due to their lack of access to capital and networks. It is this realization that generated a conversation between funders and Indigenous philanthropic knowledge holders on the need to immediately and strategically operationalize philanthropic support for Indigenous communities and shaped the current setup of IPRF as an Indigenous-led multi-funder, countrywide endeavour.



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Introduction

This report is organized into three sections. The first section provides an overview of the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund including its core objectives, as well as its overarching purpose and approach. The second section speaks to some of the key challenges experienced during the fund's implementation and highlights outcomes achieved and lessons learned so far. Part three provides an analysis of interview findings and identifies three specific aspects of the IPRF project that deserve further examination as components of an alternative model of collaboration between funders and beneficiaries.



Context

During our conversations with key informants, it became evident that widespread agreement on the necessity of a fund focused on Indigenous needs existed long before the pandemic. COVID-19 simply exposed and exacerbated the vast challenges already present in Indigenous communities, thereby magnifying the sense of urgency around creating such a fund.

COVID-19 is also believed to have acted as a catalyst for another aspect of this project: its unique status as an Indigenous-led initiative that places resources in the hands of Indigenous knowledge holders for them to decide on redistribution. Interviewees agree that while the determination and desire to support the development of Indigenous philanthropic infrastructure was present pre-COVID-19, it was not something that could have easily happened before the outbreak. The current crisis has generated a growing sense of urgency and enabled a decade-long conversation to be put into practice in less than a month's time.

As noted by one of our interviewees, the IPRF initiative is particularly vital because most Indigenous-led organizations operate as part of the third sector. This includes essential amenities such as education, healthcare, and other community services. An Indigenous-led fund would therefore be better equipped to identify and raise various issues faced by Indigenous peoples.

Another important feature of the IPRF is the ability to release resilience funding to both qualified and non-qualified donees. While working within the current regulatory framework, the fund introduces additional application and reporting requirements to ensure that non-qualified donees are also eligible to access funding. This represents a crucial step forward in rethinking some long-disputed granting policies. At the same time, it enables greater number of grassroots organizations and community nonprofits to benefit from IPRF support.

The purpose of IPRF is to provide resources that will build community resilience, which allows most fun-

ders to see their mandate within the concept. It also provides a strategic direction for IPRF, as it highlights a long-term goal beyond the current health crisis. The fund will specifically focus on issues related to education, food security, employment, housing, physical and mental health, connectivity, and justice. Geographically, it will target Indigenous needs throughout Canada and is not limited to specific groups or regions.

At this point, the types and amount of resources that will be contributed by each funder is not clear. Initial commitments have been made by several funders; however, the goal is to further appeal to private, community, and individual donors that might be interested in contributing.

In the immediate future, this money will not be held as an endowment. Instead, it will be distributed to address local needs. Besides providing grants, the funders in this collaborative are also expected to work cross-sectorally with government, charities, and private sector partners to address gaps in community infrastructure that, if filled, could increase Indigenous community resilience.

The IPRF is currently releasing support for its first round of projects, funding a total of 16 initiatives that will focus on food security, mental health, and internet connectivity. The fund will prioritize emergency responses to the pandemic until the end of September 2020. October 2020 to March 2021 will be dedicated to planning and preparing for the recovery period. Subject to the learnings of this initial phase, as of April 2021, the IPRF will work on its longer-term objectives: building stronger, more resilient, and better-connected communities.

The IPRF is intended to complement government actions and will avoid duplicating efforts and resources put in place by the state and other funders. While collaboration with the state and accessing federal funds might be an option for the future, at this point the IPRF does not plan on seeking federal funding.

Outcomes, Lessons, and Challenges

Interviewees suggested that the presence of ongoing conversations between philanthropic organizations, Indigenous peoples working in the sector and relationships with people and organizations outside the sector is what facilitated the rapid creation and launch of the IPRF. Trust, previous collaborations, mutual respect, and even friendship were also identified as core attributes that allowed the initiative to develop quickly.

At the same time, despite these well-developed relationships, there were differences that needed to be reconciled, as participants approached the process with distinct priorities, in various roles, and with diverse worldviews. These differences emerged both between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous led groups, as well as within each group itself.



1. Short-term vs. Long-term Priorities

The tension between short-term response to community needs emerging from the pandemic and the pressure for long-term thinking in addressing the crisis has been a key trait of the sector's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For the IPRF this meant balancing between the need to immediately allocate funds in response to the COVID-19 crisis and allowing sufficient time for consultations and long-term thinking and strategizing. Some Indigenous leaders noted that the issues faced by their communities—while certainly exacerbated by the pandemic—were not new. As a result, they viewed the IPRF as a rare opportunity to create impact beyond the present crisis. This would involve taking the time to devise short-term responses while also tending to the establishment of the fund, including its governance structures, organizational priorities and operating procedures. This approach differed significantly from the desires of some funders who wanted to ensure the immediate release and availability of funds to local communities to address mounting needs. As a result, some funders eventually decided not to take part in the IPRF, instead prioritizing a more rapid distribution of resources to local communities. They, nevertheless, remained engaged in conversations with IPRF funders.

Outcomes, Lessons, and Challenges


2. Heterogeneity and Representation of Indigenous Community Needs

The establishment of IPRF as a geographically expansive initiative, open to support Indigenous communities across what is known as Canada, brought another set of challenges. While such an approach sought to include all Indigenous nations and regions, it also raised feasibility concerns due to differences in local community needs. Our interviewees noted that Indigenous peoples needs are often unrightfully assumed to be homogeneous, when in fact they are multiple, nuanced, and diverse. Therefore, they argued, the leadership of the fund must include appropriate representation to ensure that all groups and regions are equally represented in IPRF's objectives and priorities.

Another concern related to an Indigenous-led nationwide project was the question of how this representation would be mandated, and whether the

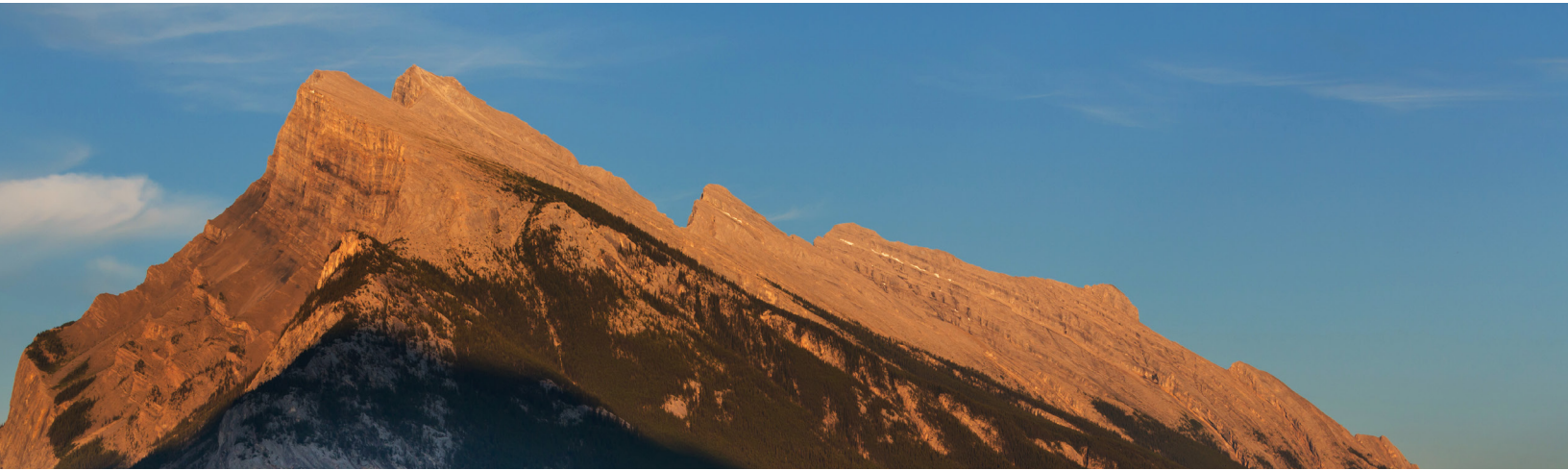
people involved in the advisory group had the permission and authority to speak on behalf of the communities they represent. While this question is beyond the scope of our study, it is important to note that it relates not only to national Indigenous infrastructure but also to Indigenous philanthropic infrastructure. As our interviewees noted, there is currently no representative body that can speak on behalf of Indigenous philanthropic organizations.

The IPRF has already established some mechanisms and tools to address the issue of representation within their project. In doing so, they highlight the importance of developing Indigenous philanthropic infrastructure, and the value of IPRF as one of the initial steps toward that goal. It is important to note that our respondents entertained the possibility that this initiative might eventually show that a cross-national approach is not a feasible strategy and that regional funds are better suited to address local community needs. These questions remain open for debate as participants in the process draw on recent experiences and evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative in the future.



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Outcomes, Lessons, and Challenges



3. Benefits of Joint Philanthropic Ventures

Participation in a pooled fund is a unique experience for many funders, as it requires abandoning strict guidelines on funding priorities in favour of looking at broader outcomes that serve similar objectives. On the other hand, joint philanthropic ventures allow the pooling of modest individual donations to ensure more substantial impact. Judging by our conversations, there is an understanding that joint philanthropic ventures bring various tangible and intangible benefits to the organizations entering the process. In this sense the adjustments described above, including flexibility around funding priorities and procedures, serve a greater purpose.

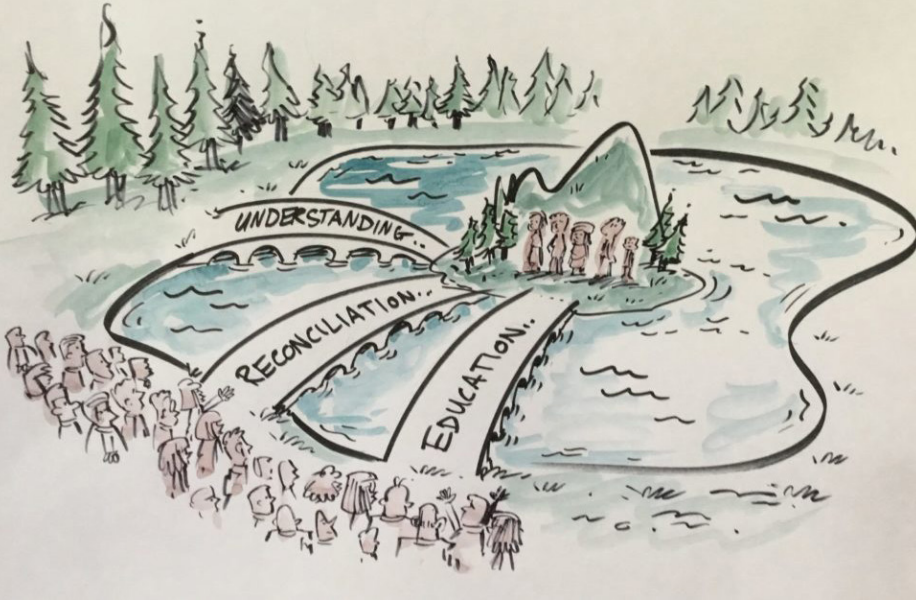
One such tangential benefit is the opportunity to collaborate on complex and large-scale issues that funders are unable to tackle independently. For example, COVID-19 highlighted the lack of internet connectivity within Indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote areas. While this is not an issue tackled by the IPRF, its identification at the funders

table triggered conversations around how foundations can help address it in partnership with the government and the private sector, and some initial steps have already been taken in pursuit of this goal.

At this point we do not have sufficient information on how the IPRF initiative will unfold in the future, however, preliminary data suggests that joining forces between funders can—especially in times of emergency—act as an important mechanism to identify and address cross-cutting issues.

The IPRF is in the early stages of its development. As participants seek to tackle complex issues, they also face difficult choices. This includes deciding between a rapid response and allowing more time for strategizing. It also means attempting to speak to the range of issues faced by diverse Indigenous communities across the country. On the funders side, we can see that the decision to take part in a funding pool requires a specific kind of flexibility, but it also provides valuable opportunities for learning and developing new partnerships and collaborations. The next section highlights areas of interest for further research and study.

Discussion and Areas for Further Study



This review of the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund has outlined three unique aspects of the project that deserve further examination:

1. Importance of relationships, previous collaborations, and existing agreements in launching a new philanthropic initiative;
2. Tension between rapid responses and long-term strategizing in situations of urgency;
3. Directed vs. autonomous empowerment.

1. Relationships, Previous Collaborations, and Pre-Existing Agreements

The case of the IPRF points to the importance of established networks, relationships, and collaborations for the swift establishment of an emergency response project. As noted, one of the reasons the initiative was quickly supported by funders is the fact that it was conceived and discussed several years in advance. It also enabled different parties to engage with complex challenges and take important risks later in the process, despite a very short timeline.

The trust and mutual respect that were already present among the key stakeholders that initiated the IPRF underlines the value of well-established networks and previous collaborations in reconciling differences among multiple agents from various backgrounds.

In this sense, the current crisis functioned only as a necessary catalyst for elevating the IPRF from an abstract, though well-developed concept, to a reality. It also points to the fact that complex interventions can be considered a feasible response in emergency situations if the right conditions are in place.

Discussion and Areas for Further Study

2. Long-Term Strategizing vs. Short-Term Urgency

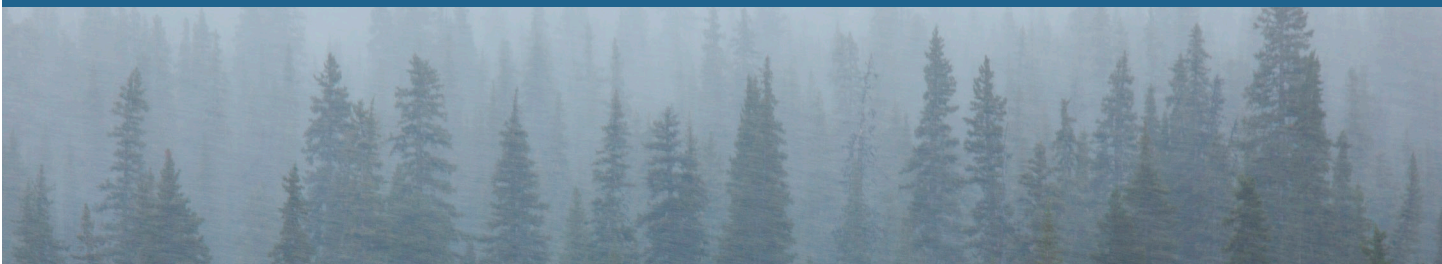
The COVID-19 outbreak has brought with an increased sense of urgency and growing calls for immediate action within the philanthropic sector. Organizations have responded by providing crucial emergency relief to communities. While the pressure to act with immediate release of emergency funds to Indigenous communities was felt by the IPRF as well, it decided to take a longer-term view and devise a response in a consultative and participatory manner. The IPRF managed to rapidly establish a governance structure and define organizational priorities and operating procedures to ensure the long-term sustainability of the initiative, that further enabled a more strategic approach response to community needs.

Such an approach was based on two realizations. First, there was a widespread belief that the social and economic issues created by the COVID-19 crisis were already present in Indigenous communities long before the current crisis. In other words, there already was a perpetual sense of urgency. Yielding to this urgency while failing to recognize the potential long-term benefits of the project would undermine its future impact. At the same time, IPRF was conceived as a nationwide and Indi-

genous-led endeavour, so any lack of democratic engagement with various parties would weaken its ability to create relationships and networks to serve one of its core objectives: IPRF contributions to Indigenous philanthropic infrastructure.

The second rationale for a long-term approach is the establishment of the IPRF as a key component of Indigenous philanthropy. While the fund initially had at its disposal CAD 1.4 million, there was strong faith that a bigger network of supporters will gather around this initiative. This meant that the IPRF had an opportunity develop and institutionalize organizational structures and procedures that will contribute to the establishment of Indigenous philanthropic infrastructure in the future. Additionally, this approach did not neglect the need for a prompt response, but rather delayed it, since the distribution of funds has been underway as of July 2020. Nevertheless, this was a major concern and deterred some of the funders from taking part in the project.

IPRF is an attempt to balance urgency alongside strategic interests to ensure that the long-term efficacy of the initiative is not compromised for immediate outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to further examine if reasonable delays to addressing strategic concerns in situations of emergency bring certain benefits when compared to more rapid responses in aid distribution.



Discussion and Areas for Further Study



3. Directed vs. Autonomous Empowerment

The case of the IPRF points to the importance of es-Empowerment is at the centre of many philanthropic endeavours that focus on building long-term capacities for future self-sufficiency. However, in its current practice, empowerment is often an externally aided process that leads to pre-identified outcomes and pre-established goals. On the other hand, the purpose of empowerment is autonomy, or the creation of capacity for future independence and self-sufficiency. As such, it must also include a right to self-determination. To achieve this, resources need to be provided without predefining the outcomes and the conditions of such development.

From the funders' perspective, the IPRF represents a different model of interaction with grantees, as funders have little influence over how and where resources will be allocated. According to one of our respondents, this process of handing over both capital and power is not easy for foundations. Yet, by allowing a self-directed process to unfold, this model of philanthropy enables a shift from externally directed empowerment to autonomy and self-development.

The series of case studies that this report is a part of show that, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, funders have given substantially greater autonomy to community partners in allocating and organizing emergency response funds. Funders have removed—or greatly reduced—application and reporting requirements, removed restrictions on previously restricted funds, and relied on local groups and organizations to direct their emergency responses.

As this crisis subsides, it is essential that the effectiveness of these approaches is compared to traditional grant making models. In this sense, the IPRF, along with other similar examples, can serve as a model for rethinking some existing philanthropic practices.



Conclusion

The IPRF is both simple and complex project that involves multiple stakeholders and tackles a range of issues that require careful consideration. As such, it might not be the obvious first choice as an emergency response during a crisis. However, this example shows how established trust, previous collaborations and partnerships—along with analysis and agreements that were already in place—can fast-track a project that would typically take years to establish. This suggests that complex, multi-actor projects can be an important resource in coping with unanticipated change and situations of urgency if the right conditions exist.

We can also see that despite perceived urgency, the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund has decided to take a more strategic, and a process-oriented approach. The fund has initially focused on establishing procedures and practices and has worked on developing capacity and infrastructure. However, it still managed to address immediate needs in the near future. As the project unfolds, it will be interesting to see whether balancing short- and long-term approaches is possible in times of crisis and what trade-offs accompany this approach.

Eventually, the IPRF also represents a unique model of collaboration, where philanthropic organizations cede their power to an autonomous, advisory council to respond to its own community needs. As such, the IPRF facilitates self-directed empowerment. Depending on its effectiveness, the IPRF warrants further exploration as a resource and model in designing future development interventions.

Acknowledgements

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