



Targeted call for FSC Project Partners

Instructions to complete the application form

Please refer to the Future Skills Centre's (FSC) **Targeted Call for FSC Project Partners Guidelines** document when preparing your application.

This application form is structured to help you address the selection criteria for this call and give reviewers easy access to your project information. This form is divided into the following sections:

- Part 1 - General information
- Part 2 - Project summary
- Part 3 - Project details
- Part 4 - Project work plan and budget
- Part 5 - Declaration

If you would like to request accommodations or other types of support, please contact Maysa Mourad by email at targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca or by phone at 437-331-0613.

If you have any questions while compiling your application, you may contact our team at targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca. We would be happy to answer any questions.

PART 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Lead organization

Name of lead organization

Royal Roads University

Name of project lead

Zoe MacLeod

Project lead's preferred method of contact (email address and/or phone number)

Zoe.MacLeod@RoyalRoads.ca

2. Proposed project

Project title

Project Connect II: Scaling Technology-Enabled Learning for Indigenous Communities Across Canada

Project start and end dates

January 10th, 2022 to September 30th, 2023

Projects must end no later than September 30, 2023.

Amount requested from FSC (total)

\$1,463,444.83

Project partners and their location

We are currently in discussion with potential project delivery partners; see Part A 'Relevance' for further information. ETHOS Career Management Group which will provide Career Development Services for the project is located in Nanaimo, BC. <https://www.ethoscmg.com/>

PART 2 - PROJECT SUMMARY

1. Proposed project “one-liner”

How would you describe your new project in one sentence?

Project Connect has delivered positive impacts for Métis students across BC; we want to assess the project’s ability to achieve comparable outcomes with other Indigenous partners in Canada.

(30 words maximum)

2. Proposed project summary

How would you describe your new project and how it builds on the testing and learning of your current project to date?

We suggest that this summary covers the main information about how your new project addresses all selection criteria of this targeted call.

While the core learning components of the project - the Professional Project Administrator (PPA) program - will be consistent across the three planned deliveries of the program, the diversity in delivery locations, groups served, increased integration and enhancements of the learning design elements, types of employer partnerships, and wrap-around services provided to students will enable important learning on how regional and other factors may influence program design and student outcomes. While the first iterations of the PPA program generated important learnings for the various innovative and highly successful components of the PPA program, it focused on the evaluation of the learning experiences of Métis students in BC. In Phase 2 of the project we intend to broaden the scope of the program to include more diverse Indigenous groups as we scale up deliveries in new regions for new audiences. This will enable us to assess the replicability of program success with other Indigenous audiences. We will also place an increased emphasis on the Indigenization of the curriculum while maintaining the innovative student supports that have made previous deliveries successful. Equity, diversity, and inclusion will continue to be at the heart of program delivery which has as its objective the breaking down of barriers to access to high-quality training programs and therefore increased participation in Canada’s labour market by Indigenous peoples. This next phase of program testing will enable us to further strengthen our delivery of industry relevant, applied learning in an appropriate, considered, inclusive way for Indigenous learners.

(250 words maximum)

3. Additional scope

How does your new project go beyond the scope of your current FSC-funded project?

The additional scope may include expanding or extending a project model, its principles and/or components. For example, it may include expanding the project to new regions or jurisdictions,

including new or larger target populations, and testing different delivery formats to understand what works to address demands. This would assume the potential for bringing additional partners to deliver the project at a broader scale. The additional scope must be grounded in new concrete learning questions to contribute to your work and of others in the skills ecosystem.

RRU will expand the delivery of the Professional Project Administrator (PPA) program into new regions, serving new target populations (Métis populations outside BC and First Nations), with additional partners. The success of Project Connect to date provides a rationale for a 'what works' replication of this model. Will what worked with Métis students across BC work for a contextualized delivery for Métis students elsewhere? Can the model be adapted for delivery for First Nations? Can we assess online readiness to ensure barriered/remote communities are able to benefit from online skills-focused training? We will test this learning model with new audiences; we will refine our model to adapt the curriculum to include relevant Indigenous perspectives and cultural components; and we will assess the impacts of the extended supports available through the program to recommend strategies for systems supports to inform a more caring post-pandemic higher education environment for Indigenous students.

(150 words maximum)

4. Importance of the additional scope

Why is the additional scope of your project important to your organization, sector and target populations? Why is it timely?

The Professional Project Administrator (PPA) program has delivered positive results for Métis students in BC. These results include strong student outcomes (97% completion rate over two cohorts) and helping students attain employment. We now need to scale up deliveries for new audiences in new regions to determine if these successes can be replicated. There is an ongoing and well-recognized disconnect between the labour market and Indigenous workers with the latter participating at a lower rate relative to non-Indigenous people. Narrowing this gap is a critical step in addressing the growing labour shortages across Canada. Addressing this participation gap will require a range of interventions including, critically, closing the skills gap faced by Indigenous workers. Appropriate, proven online training programs will be essential in addressing the skills gap, especially if we are to address the unequal access to training opportunities experienced by many Indigenous people in Canada.

(150 words maximum)

PART 3 - PROJECT DETAILS

In this section, please provide information about how your new project supports each of the selection criteria of this targeted call.

We provide prompting questions to help you address all criteria in the application guidelines. You may prepare this section following the prompting questions in sequence or using your own sections and narrative.

Although you have flexibility regarding the format for this section, please make sure that you address all criteria according to the prompting questions. Reviewers will assess your application by scoring each criterion individually.

This section should not exceed **seven** pages. We anticipate that most proposals will present this section in **five** pages.

Selection Criteria:

A. Relevance

The proposed project aligns with FSC's strategic priorities as outlined in its Strategic Plan: 2020-2023.

- “What Works” replication: Our goal for the proposed project is to scale Project Connect and the Professional Project Administrator (PPA) program beyond its initial target community into new target populations and regions. We believe that the success of the PPA program with Métis students in BC indicates the potential to create broader impacts across this area of the skills training ecosystem (online skills training delivery for Indigenous audiences). We wish to assess this potential by delivering the program for other Indigenous groups in western Canada.
- Responsive career pathways: The PPA program is a new approach serving the specific training needs of a population – Indigenous People – who experience unequal access and barriers to training opportunities. The PPA program provides high quality, targeted, accessible and innovative training, that is culturally inclusive, with extensive student supports during and after program completion. Initial results are highly promising (97% retention with strong employment outcomes) suggesting the value of evaluating the program with new audiences to assess scalability.

The proposed project will continue to help address systemic challenges facing Canada's future skills development ecosystem. A major challenge faced by Indigenous people is unequal access to training opportunities because of cost, geography, background, and other barriers. The PPA program is a fully online, low barrier-to- entry program, that provides extensive supports for student success. Students are provided with computers, digital literacy training, one-on-one tutoring and coaching support throughout the duration of the program. Cultural components are embedded in the program and play a central role in the delivery. A program Elder shares both cultural knowledge and provides additional support to students as required. The program builds hard skills in areas such as project and data management, as well as human skills such as communication and teamwork. By creating a welcoming environment where students see their needs supported and their culture reflected, we have been able to generate exceptional program retention rates and solid employment outcomes. We

look forward to scaling this project to deliver similar impacts for other Indigenous communities in Canada.

We are aware of demand for this program within, and outside of, Indigenous communities. When we approached one Nation in northern BC about the opportunity to partner on a future delivery of the PPA program, the response was *“We’re definitely interested in participating in the delivery of this program, we were actually trying to brainstorm some training options for this exact need, so this is perfect timing”*. Another Nation responded with interest and said that they saw the Project Management component of the PPA program as complementary to other capacity building initiatives they were pursuing. We are also part of a pending proposal with an organization working with marginalized youth; this organization perceives the PPA program as a stepping stone for youth struggling to break into the workforce. Although we have never advertised this program outside of the Métis community in BC, we have seen immediate interest in the program whenever we describe its content to potential partners. The innovative design of the program with its mixture of credit and non-credit components, as well as the way culture is incorporated into the delivery, should generate on-going demand from communities as awareness of the program increases.

This program is timely because it addresses labour market needs – the labour shortage facing many sectors of the economy – and the imperative to address the “unequal access to training opportunities based on income, geography, and background” (*Strategic Plan 2020-2023*, Future Skills Centre) that remains a stark reality for Indigenous people. Addressing these barriers is a multi-faceted process. We believe that culturally inclusive, online, skills-focused training based on labour market needs – like the PPA program – can make an important contribution to breaking down these barriers.

B. Innovation and evidence

Our project can be considered innovative in the sense that it moved beyond the standard skills-based approach to training to a program focused on addressing the wholistic needs of our students. When we began the development of the Professional Project Administrator (PPA) program, we had a limited idea of how to incorporate Métis culture in the program. We were fortunate to build a relationship with a Métis Elder who guided us to create meaningful experiences that strengthened students’ connection to their culture, and to the training program. The cultural components generated powerful comments from students about their program experience.

Similarly, when we developed our program plan, we knew we wanted to embed career supports which we delivered near the end of the first cohort. As it became clearer that our partnership with our career development services provider was working well and students were learning to articulate their new skills and finding enhanced employment opportunities, we began to integrate these supports from the beginning. We also extended the supports post-program, helping students connect with employers, refine digital resumes, and prepare for interviews. The outcomes were clear: students were prepared and confident going into job interviews – and were getting those jobs.

These are two examples of how evidence is informing and will inform our project model. In our new project we will continue to refine and develop both cultural inclusion and our suite of student supports. For example, students have expressed appreciation for cultural activities and the inclusion of Indigenous ways of being and knowing in a few areas of the program. They have also asked us to 'Indigenize' more courses and we will honour that request in future program iterations.

We will continue to generate evidence and insights through our project research team (*Natoonikew Aansaamb* – 'Searching Together' in Michif) which follows the maxim 'nothing for us, about us, without us'. Along with RRU staff and our Métis Elder, PPA graduates play a key role in evaluation. Graduates conduct interviews and code interview responses, developing skills and collecting data on their own and other student experiences. This action research project will continue to provide feedback to the program team to shape future iterations of the PPA program, and generate knowledge for sharing through knowledge mobilization activities.

We believe the PPA program is a successful model for online skills-based training for Indigenous communities. We need to replicate it to prove it. Implications for the skills training ecosystem as it relates to the needs of Indigenous learners may be significant. Despite efforts to increase the inclusion of Indigenous workers in the workforce, labour market outcomes and employment rates for Indigenous people continue to lag significantly behind non-Indigenous workers (*Inclusive Futures: Indigenous Engagement in Canada's Workforce*. 2020. Action Canada). Addressing this gap is not only an equity issue to ensure Indigenous people have the skills to share in Canada's prosperity, but it is also imperative to help address labour shortfalls for sectors of the economy. If our model for online skills training is replicable with other Indigenous communities, we can contribute knowledge to help address some of the barriers that stand in the way of Indigenous students accessing training and succeeding with their learning. We know that for the training and employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to be narrowed, online training will need to play a role. The literature on online skills delivery approaches for Indigenous learners in Canada is somewhat limited and dated. Our goal for the project is to both test our delivery model with new audiences and contribute to the knowledge base regarding online skills training delivery designed to meet the needs of Indigenous learners.

C. Learning

Key learning generated by *Project Connect* includes:

- The extensive wrap-around supports in the project made important contributions to student outcomes. These supports included an Indigenous counsellor, professional coaching, and career preparation and supports that remain accessible to students post-completion.
- The inclusion of culture within the program had a positive impact on students. As one student stated: "the amount of culture...I had no idea we would experience anything like it." Our Métis program Elder played a key role in sharing culture within the program.
- It's possible to build strong, supportive communities online. Program staff were surprised at the depth of community created by learners. This contradicts the not-uncommon view that

building community online with Indigenous learners may be challenging. While not our experience with Métis learners in BC, we recognize that for some of these students the program was their first opportunity to connect with their culture which may have influenced their experience.

The critical learning question to be addressed by the new project is: can we replicate the success of Project Connect with other Indigenous communities? Are there differences to measure between Indigenous groups, or is there as much variation within each group as between them? We are interested to see how the more innovative aspects of the program – the cultural components and wrap around supports – will be received by Indigenous learners from other communities. Will they create the same positive impacts? Will learners develop the same strength of online community? Importantly, will student outcomes be similar across the different groups and if not, why? If not, what adjustments can or should be made to address outcome differences?

As part of this delivery we will collaborate with researchers focused on developing a better understanding of how we assess the readiness of students to learn online, and in turn, how we can improve our practices for online and mobile learning. Advancing Online Readiness through the Global Educational Learning Observatory (GELO) Project aims to collect data-driven evidence to inform evolving practices for online learning, and readiness for online learning. The team at EILAB <https://eilab.ca/> will use these results to refine the existing GELO suite of online readiness tools. By doing so, the project aims to increase support for Indigenous learners and remote and rural learners to enhance their digital skills and competencies for learning in online and digital spaces.

The global pandemic has brought new challenges for students as universities pivoted to online learning and the recent discovery of the remains of children at Residential School sites brought additional need for Indigenous students to have access to counselling and mental health supports. When students come to a University campus they have access to certain support structures – drop in health centre, financial aid office, career counselling, fitness centre. As we look to build new technology-enabled learning environments and specifically with Indigenous communities, how can we create a community of care and trust? How can we replicate those human interactions missing from an online experience? How will embedding and integrating appropriate wrap around supports (e.g., counselling, career development, coaching and mentoring) better support Indigenous students to be successful in a University online learning environment? How can we reimagine universities to not only be learner-centred, but human centred – where there is passion about the long-term success and progress, financial well-being, and mental health of students? We aim to study the impacts of the extended supports available through the program so that we can recommend strategies for whole systems supports that will inform a more caring post-pandemic higher education environment.

D. Equity, diversity and inclusion

RRU continues to demonstrate its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through a number of concrete actions, including through building strong relationships with Indigenous

communities. Royal Roads' vision is an inclusive, diverse workforce that understands and demonstrates best practices in EDI in research, scholarship, teaching, and human resources.

Phase 2 of the project will use previous learning and evaluation to inform all aspects of Project Connect by using RRU's EDI's principles in practical and meaningful ways. Our long-standing and positive relationships with Indigenous communities is a direct result of how we choose to work with community partners. At all times we strive to follow an Indigenous wholistic framework that has the whole person at its core and contains the principles of *respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility* (the '4 Rs') as its key pillars

(<https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontlineworkers/chapter/indigenous-ways-of-knowing-and-being/>). The 4 Rs intersect with EDI principles and are reflected in the design and execution of both the original project and Phase 2 that builds on learning from Project Connect.

From the beginning, the design of the PPA program closely reflected discussions with employment training staff at Métis Nation BC (MNBC) and led to our partnership in Project Connect. MNBC staff identified a skills gap for their Métis clients in the area of project administration and asked us to create a program that met their criteria for employment-focused skills with the opportunity to earn university credits (*relevance*). A goal for the program was the inclusion of Métis culture, and RRU worked with a Métis community liaison, and a Métis elder, to include the appropriate cultural components into the program (*respect*). For the proposed project (with new Indigenous partners), we will include appropriate time for a collaborative approach to the program planning and development process. Based on our learning from the implementation of Project Connect phase 1, this process takes time and intention, if it is to be performed appropriately and intentionally (*responsibility*). It is also our intention to further the Indigenization of the curriculum, a process that will require thought, care, and resources from outside the core project team and call-upon other Indigenous student-focused areas of RRU. Creating a welcoming environment for Indigenous students depends on students seeing their culture reflected and given prominence in the program. We have been gratified by the enthusiastic reaction and appreciation by students of the inclusion of Métis culture in the PPA program. Our goal is for a more fully Indigenized curriculum that will also support our objective to scale this program for a broader Indigenous audience. Finally, our evaluation program also reflects EDI principles as well as *reciprocity* by sharing knowledge throughout and across the entire educational process and including the experience of all members of the program ecosystem.

The PPA program was designed to provide graduates with the skills required to participate in a range of industry sectors (e.g., construction, public services, education, resource development). Employers in these sectors and others are keen to secure the services of trained workers, especially given the labour shortages currently faced by many sectors and anticipated to worsen in future. Employers – for a range of reasons – wish to recruit more Indigenous workers to fill vacancies, especially companies working in northern and remote parts of Canada (*Working Together: Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada*. 2019. Conference Board of Canada). The PPA program can help further EDI in these sectors by providing skilled Indigenous employees able to step in and fill

a range of roles. Further, EDI is also enhanced by the diversity of the student body in the PPA program, diversity we anticipate continuing for future deliveries. Along with a completely Indigenous student body, the cohorts are approximately 65% female, 25% youth, 30% from rural, remote, and northern areas, nearly 15% are people with disabilities, and just over 15% have no prior post-secondary and/or can be considered to have an essential skills gap. We are proud that this program has served – and will continue to serve – a broad range of students, including some who may have felt that postsecondary education was out of their reach. Equity of access to high-quality education was a primary goal of Project Connect; we will continue with that objective for future deliveries.

E. Capacity

The project team has the skills, experience, and access to resources required to deliver a successful project with positive outcomes for learners, as demonstrated by the outcomes achieved by Project Connect. RRU staff leading this project have over two decades of experience partnering with Indigenous communities in the delivery of employment-focused, high-quality education programs, in-community and more recently, online. Since 2013, we have delivered over 20 programs in collaboration with communities, programs that have enabled graduates to obtain employment or continue their educational journey. RRU has also delivered employment skills training for hundreds of long-term unemployed individuals seeking to return to work through the provincially funded Employment Services and Supports Program and recently (2020/21) through the Community Workforce Response Grant – Skills Training for Economic Recovery program. Our Manager, Academic Analysis has expertise and experience in financial tracking and reporting for similar projects (including Project Connect) and will continue this work. Since the launch of Project Connect we have added an experienced Indigenous Online Learning Coordinator who has further strengthened our program delivery team. Indigenization is a key priority for the university and we have the support of the Indigenous Education Manager to further the Indigenization of the PPA program curriculum. As noted in the proposal, the inclusion of culture in the program was favourably received by program participants. We will continue this work in the new project with each delivery supported by an elder chosen by the partner community.

An important partner in the delivery of the proposed project is ETHOS Career Management Group (ECMG), a leader in the Employment Training industry. Since 2000, ECMG have developed and delivered nearly 13,000 highly successful career development, employment and self-employment workshops (over 100,000 workshop seats) through employment programs across BC and Alberta. ECMG has experience delivering Employment and Social Development Canada-funded programs specifically related to employment and working with inclusion groups, persons with disabilities, racialized and women survivors of trauma, LGBTQ2S+ communities, and Indigenous communities. Within this project, ECMG will deliver wrap around employment-related supports, facilitate Job Clubs and Job Sustainment Clubs, and adapt and expand their employment-focused Learning Engagement Hub (with employer database and learning management system). ECMG will provide students with access to current statistical and employer-led labour market information, represented through statistical data as well as through the hidden job market.

Our current project – Project Connect – has a good track record and is on schedule to deliver strong results and important learning regarding skills training for Indigenous learners. Although the number of students recruited for the program is lower than anticipated, our completion rate is on track to surpass our goal by a significant margin. We also pivoted effectively during the pandemic to deliver a fully online, high quality program with consistently positive ratings by students. We faced some challenges due to staffing changes at our partner organization, but communication and support from our team helped to minimize those impacts.

F. Coherence

Our main objective for this project is to test the Project Connect technology-enabled learning model with three new partner communities: two First Nations communities as well as with a Métis Nation partner outside of BC. Based on our initial results with the PPA program, we believe the program merits further evaluation as a program that ‘works’. Our completion rate among students is 97% over two cohorts with 87% of these students now working or continuing their education. Our current project partner, Métis Nation BC (MNBC), considers these results to be exceptional. This project proposes to assess the ability to replicate these results with other Indigenous communities in Canada. The PPA program to be delivered in these new contexts will undergo a process of adaptation that will be guided by our community partners. Two First Nations have expressed an interest in hosting a delivery of the PPA program as has a potential Métis community partner outside of BC.

The project activities that will support reaching our objectives include:

- Finalizing agreements for delivery with host/partner communities;
- Identification of Elder or Elders who will support the appropriate inclusion of cultural components to ensure students see their culture reflected in the program;
- Revising and adapting curriculum in collaboration with delivery partners to include relevant Indigenous perspectives and cultural components based on regional and cultural contexts;
- Planning for delivery of the program within the three possible ‘slots’ to meet funder timelines and community considerations;
- Confirming instructors for delivery and identification of mentors;
- Purchase of computer equipment to provide to students ahead of start date;
- Recruitment of students beginning four-six months ahead of the start date;
- Launch program with Digital Literacy course and online readiness assessment;
- Complete regular as well as mid-point check-in with students to assess their experience and identify challenges;
- Hold recognition ceremony (likely online, but decision made in consultation with community);
- Hire and train student researchers for the evaluation program; and
- Conduct evaluation on the program and use results to adapt/refine future iterations.

While we are still working through the pilot offerings with our current delivery partner MNBC, it’s clear that there is more work to do to support barriered students and communities to break down

systemic barriers and gain access to online skills training that will lead to employability and improved economic mobility. The budget for this new project includes funds to support Indigenization of the curriculum and an expanded evaluation process to assist in preparing the program to be offered on a national level. We will need to adapt curriculum for delivery with new partners, as well as to adapt for Pan-Canadian programming with the intent of including Indigenous world-views that incorporate personalized, experiential, place-based/informed, and intergenerational learning experiences. This is important and ambitious work and will need to include Indigenous Scholars and Elders to help inform the program, the curriculum adaptation process, our partnerships, and the evaluation of the program.

(3,500 words maximum)

PART 4 - PROJECT WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

1. Please submit a **one-page work plan** with key milestones and their timeline. **Do not** include detailed activities at this time. If your proposal is selected, we will work with you to develop a detailed work plan.
2. Please complete the project budget template provided to you as part of the application material.
 - a. Include only **new funding** associated with your new project and its additional scope. Please do not include the existing funding that is already part of your current funding agreement with FSC.
 - b. If applicable, identify new funding pending or confirmed for this project from other sources. **This funding should be included as in-kind contributions.** (Please note that funding from other federal sources cannot be counted towards in-kind contributions)
3. Please submit your work plan and budget by sending these files, along with this completed form, to targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca.
4. You may use the space below to provide comments to accompany your work plan and/or budget.


(100 words maximum)

PART 5 - DECLARATION

By submitting an application, the lead organization and its partners agree to the requirements of the following sections, detailed in the guidelines outlined for this funding call, and they affirm that they comply with and/or commit to the following:

- Organization eligibility.
- Active support for co-creating and carrying out an evaluation with an FSC-approved evaluator, if FSC decides an evaluation is appropriate for this project.
- Active engagement in knowledge mobilization activities related to the project.
- Compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans.
- Confidential due diligence inquiries from Future Skills Centre into the applicant.

Signature



Name of signing authority

Dr. Zoe MacLeod

Date

November 2, 2021