

# First Nations Infrastructure Institution

## Issue

The development of infrastructure is critical to the health and sustainability of our First Nation communities. However, preliminary research suggests a gap in this development. As a result of the current approach applied to First Nation infrastructure development, this development is generally more expensive, takes more time and is less durable than that of other governments. A proactive approach is needed to ensure that projects are suitable, that best practices and industry standards are followed, and that value received is commensurate with the expenditure made.

## Background

Canada and First Nations both have an urgent need to develop a joint strategy to increase First Nation productivity with infrastructure development representing one of the most critical elements in achieving this. Unfortunately, First Nations face many challenges in this process and have been unable to fully achieve value for investments made.

A preliminary review of First Nation infrastructure by the First Nations Tax Commission (FNTC) has identified that there are gaps in planning (lack of integration between plans), project management (insufficient experience or expertise), financing (underutilization or inaccessibility of fiscal tools or insufficient fiscal capacity), and supporting legal frameworks (missing or inadequate laws) facing many First Nations.

The federal government has committed to a series of significant investments in infrastructure to support a better future for Indigenous Peoples with almost \$4.7 billion in planned infrastructure investments over the next five years to include education infrastructure (\$969 million), social infrastructure (\$1.2 billion), green infrastructure (\$2.2 billion), and community infrastructure (\$255 million).

Taking the example of provincial precedents and models such as Infrastructure Ontario, which provides similar services and support to health, education and local government infrastructure projects in that province, First Nations are working with the First Nations Tax Commission (FNTC) to advance the concept of a First Nations Infrastructure Institution (FNII) as a new element of the *First Nations Fiscal Management Act* (FMA).

In concept, FNII could provide the following services:

- **Support Projects with Standards and Laws** – Help with implementing standards and laws required to support infrastructure projects and improve economic development. This will save participating First Nations time and money and help ensure First Nation infrastructure is at national standards.
- **Assessment and Development Support** – Assess infrastructure project readiness and develop infrastructure development plans so First Nations can build the legal and administrative capacity to manage the infrastructure cycle from planning to construction to operation, maintenance and replacement.
- **Infrastructure Planning Support** – Support integrated infrastructure planning (economic, capital, financing) and provide capacity to complete these planning elements of infrastructure development. This will help interested First Nations to access available federal resources.
- **Project Management** – Help First Nations build capacity to efficiently project manage and build infrastructure projects. In some cases, FNII could also provide project management services.
- **Training and Certification** – Offer certified training and systems for First Nation administrations to support the operation of sustainable infrastructure systems through the Tulo Centre of Indigenous Economics.
- **Advocacy** – Advocate for and develop new FMA revenue streams within an improved fiscal framework to finance infrastructure projects.
- **Risk Assessment and Management** – Assess infrastructure risks and develop risk management strategies to improve access to financing.

**Recommendation**

That the federal government collaborate with First Nations to develop legislation for a First Nations Infrastructure Institution dedicated to improving the process of developing infrastructure on First Nations lands.