

IELCC in BC: 2019-20 Annual Report

Prepared by BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (IELCC TI Agreement CRF: 016648065)

*Prepared for First Nations Leadership Council & Employment Skills & Development Canada
July 31, 2020*

Background/Context

In British Columbia, the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) mandated BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS) to lead the 2017 regional engagement work, and, ultimately to serve as the Regional First Nations ELCC Coordinating Structure for the development and implementation of the First Nations IELCC Framework in BC. As such, BCACCS's mandate includes regional coordination, community engagement, leadership, program, policy development support, research, partnership development, and accountability for key deliverables.

In November 2019, Employment Skills & Development Canada (ESDC) and BCACCS finalized the IELCC Transformation Initiative Agreement number CRF: 016648065, outlining key terms, activities, and deliverables. Included in this is the requirement (Section 10) for Annual Reports, including progress on key milestones/activities/expenditures, lessons learned, and partnering activities. This report serves to meet this requirement for the 2019-20 fiscal year.

In addition to the formal annual report, BCACCS has provided the following updates on the work and progress of IELCC in BC:

- Interim Report to ESDC, dated December 16, 2019; and
- Ongoing dialogue and briefings for the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC), as the Regional Governance body.

This Annual Report will provide an accounting of key activities, outputs, and learning in relation to the implementation of the Annual Operating Plan (also known as the IELCC Investment Strategy in BC) and the three pillars of the IELCC Framework (2018):

- **CAPACITY:** Increasing the capacity of the IELCC sector, including leaders and practitioners:
 - **First Nations Wage Enhancement**
 - **Community-Led Planning & Development**
 - **Service Development & Enhancement**
 - **Sector-Building & Leadership Development**
- **QUALITY:** Increasing the quality of IELCC services and supports (as outlined in *BCACCS Elements of Quality Child Care from the Perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples in British Columbia* [BCACCS, 2005]):
 - **First Nations Wage Enhancement**
 - **Community-Led Planning & Development**
 - **Service Development & Enhancement**
 - **Minor Capital**
- **ACCESS:** Increasing access, for Indigenous families, to quality IELCC services and supports:
 - **Service Development & Enhancement**
 - **Minor Capital**

2019-20 was the **first full year of implementing** the *IELCC Investment Strategy in BC*, so investments with (and in) First Nations communities were **balanced** with the ongoing need to developing relationships, policies, and systems - the foundation upon which this 10+ year transformation initiative will grow. This approach takes time and resources, and is fundamentally necessary *"To support the development of high quality, culturally appropriate, sustainable programs, services and supports for children and families through ongoing community engagement, collaborations, partnerships and coordinated approaches to planning, implementation and governance."* (BC First Nations ELCC Framework – Draft Mission Statement).

Progress on Annual Operating Plan

An initial step for all First Nations wanting to access the available investments in 2019-20 is to register in the BCACCS's managed **IELCC database/portal**. This process has a year-round 'open-intake' and starts with providing registrants key background information on IELCC in BC, clarified data management and privacy policies, offered regional contacts (IELCC Regional Community Facilitators). This process ensures that Nations are only asked once to provide key information:

- **Contact Information**
 - Chief or Council Member
 - Nation/Community Administrator
 - Signing Authority
 - Finance Contact
- **Community Information**
 - Demographics
 - Language Groups
 - IELCC Services Scope & Key Service Data (# children served; types of services; funding received; # staff; etc.)
 - Nations Served
 - Information Collection & Consent

In 2019-20, there were **109 Nations that submitted registrations** (*by March 31, 2020 61 were completed and 48 were in-progress*), making each eligible to apply to access the investments in 2019-20 and 2020-21. These registrations covered the entire province, with the following figures for each of the five regions within British Columbia:

- **Fraser Region:** 13 registrations
- **Interior Region:** 25 registrations
- **Northern Region:** 33 registrations
- **Vancouver Coastal Region:** 6 registrations
- **Vancouver Island Region:** 32 registrations

First Nations Wage Enhancement (2019-20)

This area of investment was a continuation of the work began in 2018-19, investing to enhance the wages of Early Childhood Educators in First Nations communities as a means of increasing quality and building the capacity of the sector and First Nations communities. These investments are also working to achieve equitability and non-discrimination in access to supports and services for First Nations children and families, as articulated in several rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

While output numbers (below) reflect the overall impact of FNWE, it should be noted that the initiative involves two streams of enhancement: (a) an hourly wage top-up and (b) an annual incentive payment. Payments are made in two (retroactive) payments, one (P1) at the mid-point and one (P2) after the fiscal year has ended.

Key Outputs

- **# of Nations Applied for FNWE (P1/P2): 63/38***
 - *Fraser Region: 7/5*
 - *Interior Region: 17/11*

- Northern Region: 16/9
- Vancouver Coastal Region: 6/5
- Vancouver Island Region: 17/8
- **# of Early Childhood Educators receiving FNWE: 730**
- **# IELCC spaces in participating programs** (P1): 5188**
 - Fraser Region: 959 spaces
 - Interior Region: 1866 spaces
 - Northern Region: 797 spaces
 - Vancouver Coastal Region: 457 spaces
 - Vancouver Island Region: 1109 spaces
- **# children enrolled in spaces** supported (P1): 3892 (1217 on waitlists)**
 - Fraser Region: 736 (64 on waitlists)
 - Interior Region: 1470 (640 on waitlists)
 - Northern Region: 604 (133 on waitlists)
 - Vancouver Coastal Region: 282 (251 on waitlists)
 - Vancouver Island Region: 800 (129 on waitlists)

**The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in a shifting of priorities and/or the temporary closures of many programs, has resulted in a lower number of Nations making application for the Phase 2 FNWE payments for 2019-20 (as application cannot be finalized until the end of the fiscal year).*

***These spaces are inclusive of licensed (Group 0-3; Group 3-school age; Group school age; Group Multi-Age; Preschool) and unlicensed child care, AHS programs, Language Nests, Aboriginal Supported Child Development, and Aboriginal Infant Development.*

In 2019-20, additional work included:

- Updating the inventory of eligible programs and clarifying eligible staffing positions.
 - Shift of initial Elder Involvement funding, under FNWE in 2018-19, to now reside in the Service Development & Enhancement funding for 2019-20 and beyond. This decision came out of discussions
- Determining strategy to expand program, to include urban programs/services
- Supporting the development of *Next Step: A Competitive, Publicly Funded Wage Grid is the Solution to BC's ECE Shortage (CCCABC & ECEBC, 2020)* - <http://www.ecebc.ca/wage-grid.pdf> - to explore potential implications and considerations for FNWE.

In a brief feedback process, during July 2020, a handful of IELCC Stakeholders were asked for their feedback about the **First Nations Wage Enhancement** funding and whether it had been impactful in their programs and communities. **100%** of those responding indicated it had either been "Impactful" or "Very Impactful"; while many reported how meaningful it is to the teams of staff, to receive that kind of recognition and incentive, one respondent spoke about the far reach of such investment:

"The first-time staff have ever been paid a living wage in community...ever. Most staff were at minimum wage and have been there for over 15 years. The centre was bankrupt and barely able to open. This has decreased worker stress and allowed for more opportunities to hire younger staff to be mentored by older. These younger staff want to pursue ECE certification and will start the process this Fall. With an aging staff it is imperative to start training younger staff and wage enhancements also help to incentivize the next

generation to see that this is a career that will provide for families where it traditionally hasn't" (IELCC Stakeholder, July 2020).

Moving forward, in 2020-21, this work will continue to grow and evolve. Priority areas include (a) costing the expansion of the FNWE to include urban Indigenous IELCC, (b) impact assessment (through employer feedback) to better understand the impact of the FNWE on recruitment and retention issues, and(c) ongoing work with others in BC to explore wage grids and enhancements.

Community-Led Planning & Development (2019-20)

This investment supports First Nations in BC in a process of local engagement, dialogue, exploration of opportunities and needs related to quality IELCC, and the determination of priorities (which can then serve to support the application for Service Development & Enhancement).

While much of these investments were technically made in the 2018-19 fiscal year, the work of the IELCC Regional Community Facilitators and the IELCC office staff remained focused on supporting this work in local communities:

*"The funding enabled the small XXXX administration to explore ways to enhance early childhood education. **These were crucial planning activities and opened Chief and Council's eyes to the opportunities that childhood education can create for a small nation**" (IELCC Stakeholder, July 2020).*

"This funding made a significant impact on our community as it allowed us the time to connect with community members, community partners and Elders to assess what they thought the gaps were with our programming. We were in the process of building and Early Learning program and this information has allowed our department to make informed strategic plans for the next five years in our Early Learning Department. It also guided us in know what would create the most impact when applied for the Service Enhancement funding" (IELCC Stakeholder, July 2020)

Community-led planning and development are processes that are iterative and ongoing, so we anticipate much of this work to continue growing and informing the *IELCC Investment Strategy in BC* in 2020-21 and beyond.

Service Development & Enhancement (SDE) and Minor Capital

First Nations that have completed the registration and community-led planning processes are able to access the Service Development & Enhancement and/or Minor Capital funding, in order to action the local priorities identified.

Key Outputs

- **# SDE applications: 10** (4 approved; 6 pending)
 - Fraser Region: 1
 - Interior Region: 2
 - Northern Region: 3
 - Vancouver Coastal Region: 0*
 - Vancouver Island Region: 4
- **# SDE initiatives that include focus on Language &/or Culture: 10**

- # SDE initiatives that focus on Increasing Quality: 10
- # SDE initiatives that focus on Increasing Capacity: 10
- # SDE initiatives that focus on Increasing Access: 10

**Anecdotal feedback to date, from this region, has been that lack of staffing has impeded the ability of Nations to make application in 2019-20.*

These investments have ranged in size and scope, and have been supported through the development of strong working relationships between community leaders and IELCC staff members.

*“XXXX Nation is **very proud** to have just received this fund so that we can incorporate a language and cultural coordinator into our Early Learning programming. **This position will allow us the time to reach out to Elder’s and knowledge keepers to gather information and create XXXX Nation specific resources for our programming.** The timing is very important for us as we are losing Eldering in our community and we have just opened up a child care facility” (IELCC Stakeholder, July 2020).*

As anticipated, these Service Development & Enhancement initiatives have significant cross-over with other areas of investment too; for example, one community was able to access funding to assist with training (a local priority linked to quality, access, and capacity):

*“This funding helped many Indigenous communities have access to much needed certification training. Many of our Indigenous communities’ struggle with finding certified ECE’s to work in the field. This limits the opportunities for early years programming. **Having this program has allowed 18 participants from around the nations to take the training, this expands communities resources and allows participants to work in their own communities.** BCACCS was excellent in helping our organization be successful in our application. They were full of new ideas and helped us with innovative new ideas for delivering the training” (IELCC Stakeholder, July 2020).*

This investment area will continue to grow and evolve in 2020-21 and beyond, responding to the opportunities and needs identified through locally-led consultation, engagement & prioritizing. **As the fiscal year was ending, these funds were starting to be shifted to support First Nations communities and organizations in their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is anticipated that this (ongoing support for COVID-19 responses) may be a significant change in 2020-21.**

IELCC Sector-Building & Leadership Development

- **IELCC Leadership Forum** (May 23, 2019)

This gathering convened IELCC and political leadership to strengthen working relationships, review the IELCC Framework (2018) and IELCC Investment Strategy in BC (2019), and to explore the issues of relationship-building, collaboration, and First Nations Governance in BC. A full report of the forum was published and can be accessed here - https://www.acc-society.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/2019-5-23_FNELCC_Leadership_Forum_Report_Final.pdf.

Key Outputs

- **# Participants: 89**

- **# First Nations represented: 21 Nations**

*“Building relationships and trust **takes time**” (IELCC Leadership Forum Contributor, May 2019).*

*“It’s a long process but **this is what capacity building is**” (IELCC Leadership Forum Contributor, May 2019).*

- **Indigenous Early Childhood Education (IECE) - Entry to Practice Initiative**

In September 2019, there was a *Sector Building & Capacity Building Scoping* Document drafted; this document provided further details/thinking for intended outcomes/purpose, specific strategies, timelines, stakeholders to engage, linkages to other areas of IELCC work, and questions for consideration. This document included the **IECE Entry to Practice Initiative**; while much of these specific strategies were not able to be implemented in this year (as other investments took priority for the available staffing resources), it is worth noting that BCACCS has been able to leverage some innovative approaches that will serve this broader piece of work. A key example of this is the *Service Development & Enhancement* funding that was invested in a community to host a unique ECE training program. Unique, innovative, community-based ECE training opportunities was a component to the **IECE Entry-to-Practice Initiative**; while this example may be happening outside of the overarching strategy, the experiences and learning from this site will serve the broader work in 2020-21.

- **IELCC Regional Planning Strategy in BC**

Working in partnership with the First Nations Leadership Council and the Government of Canada (IELCC Secretariat and other key representatives), BCACCS was able to move forward with the design and initial implementation of the IELCC Regional Planning Strategy in BC. This strategy outlines a process of engaging key stakeholders to gather and analyze information about IELCC investments in BC and to use this analysis to shape the next iteration of the IELCC Investment Strategy in BC.

In the 2019-20 fiscal year, the key work was the research and design of the strategy, as well as initial discussions with IELCC Secretariat representatives. **The first meeting, of key First Nations leadership representatives in BC and key federal government representatives focused on IELCC funding and policy, is scheduled for June 2020** (so outputs will be reported in 2020-21 Annual Report).

Key Learning in 2019-20

BCACCS’s IELCC staff and management reflected on some of the key learning from the 2019-20 fiscal year; key feedback centres on four interrelated themes (supported by feedback statements from staff):

1. **Capacity:** The work to design, implement, sustain, and grow this kind of initiative requires capacity building at multiple levels: the individual level, the community level, the sectoral level, and internally, at the organizational level for BCACCS. **This work is complex and time consuming - it can only happen once relationships are established, trust begins to build, and needs/opportunities are understood.**

- *“I didn’t realize how challenging it was to launch this kind of program - creating funding policies and processes has been incredibly challenging. What surprised me was - what I would have hoped for - is a bigger response from community. A more*

significant uptake on the funding opportunities - it's been a little limited so far. This is what I am trying to understand."

- *"We didn't have a pre-determined program and responding to the local process requires time. It requires an entirely different approach. To me, it needs a specific relationship to be built with leadership - so that the work isn't just delegated to others. This is new and it definitely takes additional time - but it raises more understanding and profile. It's a good thing."*
- *"The First Nations agenda is so busy - there is so much going on. It's a good problem to have, to some degree, but communities are simply overwhelmed. This makes thoughtful planning and applying for funding very complex."*

2. Complexity & Simplicity: The work is complex, on many levels. Relationship building amongst various stakeholders is often complex - as are the administrative processes that support investments. **While there can be a need for complexity, at times, there must remain an invitation to consider the shared learning and see what can (or should) be simplified.** At the heart of this work, to date, has been a deep commitment to learning and growing - with IELCC colleagues within BCACCS and communities.

- *"We didn't know what we didn't know - so we try to have patience - but trying to build things as we evolve and grow is a challenge. Maybe a necessary challenge?"*
- *"The time from approval to actual funds in community is long - but the issue is limited staffing resources [for the pieces of work that have to happen in that time] - this is part of learning and growing, but we need pay attention, as it is impacting how willing community is to work with us."*
- *"The master funding agreement process - has been time consuming, and possibly feels more rigid than the intended flexibility of the work.....but the intent is to build infrastructure that is aligned to that broader 10-year vision [of autonomy and jurisdiction]. It's hard for established programs and staff to see this. How do we balance the vision with the intent to be as accessible as possible - especially for communities that have often missed out....are we perpetuating the very thing we wanted to avoid?"*

3. Relationships, Responsiveness, and non-Indigenous Funding Traditions: The beauty of the IELCC initiative is that BCACCS and/or Nations are not being asked to work strictly within traditional fiscal year terms or dates. This approach supports multi-year agreements with Nations; while all funds may not go out in a given fiscal year, these funds are held in trust for Nations, should projects not unfold as planned and/or require additional capacity development.

Given the importance of relationships and capacity building, responsiveness is a critical approach for achieving the intended outcomes of this work. **Meeting and honouring community 'where they are' does not often line-up neatly with traditional funding practices.** While this may add complexity for stakeholders who want to work within more traditional structures, it (a) is not aligned with the intentions of the IELCC Framework, and (b) it does not allow maximum impact for Indigenous children, families, or Nations.

- *"The ability for us to have that flexibility - we've been able to get funding into places that haven't been able to access it before. We aren't focused on numbers - we're focused on opportunity."*
- *"As an Indigenous person, you want to build that trust and stay strong in it...so even the hard conversations - I feel like it's easier for me have those hard(er) conversations, because I want to keep those relationships strong."*

- *“The deep and ongoing work of relationship building - this has been a game changer for some communities. Communities that had never completed an application form and, with the support of the IELCC staff, were able to complete their first one in a supported way.....now they’ve applied for all of the available funds! They are even helping other communities to make their applications now!”*

“The XXXX administration was working very closely with BCACCS’s IECC staff. This collaboration was based on personal meetings, phone calls and e-mail correspondence. The discussions included a wide range of topics and BCACCS staff supported XXXX in their (at times) unconventional approach to early childhood education. XXXX is a very small First Nation and this situation is calling for outside the box thinking – a situation that was and is fully supported by BCACCS staff. The at times unorthodox approach to childhood education resulted in exciting results, e.g. the publication of a children’s book (English and bi-lingual version) and interesting concepts for environmental education (forest education program for young children). It was also refreshing to see that the agency was able to provide flexibility in order to help XXXX achieve access to specific funding programs that would normally be out of reach for a small nation with no land base.” (IELCC Stakeholder, July 2020)

Moving Forward in 2020-21

Key priorities in moving forward in 2020-21:

- Engaging First Nations leadership to ensure they are aware of available funds and are supported to access them.
- Supporting First Nations communities and organizations to access funding to support their COVID-19 responses; ensuring the same level of responsiveness and flexibility is available to support locally-determined responses to keeping members safe and healthy.
- IELCC Regional Planning Strategy in BC: continuing the roll-out of that strategy.
- Development and initial implementation of IELCC in BC Evaluation/Impact Framework, including the co-development of “..reporting and performance measures...” as outlined in section 35.1 of contract.
- Growth of existing investment streams (FNWE, planning, services, COVID, etc.)
 - *Research & costing of expansion of some investments to include Urban Indigenous IELCC*
- Capacity Building - internal (BCACCS) and external (communities, sector)

Distribution of IELCC in BC Annual Report for 2019-20

A copy of this report (accompanied by a covering briefing note) will be shared with the First Nations Leadership Council, including

- Union of BC Indian Chiefs
- First Nations Summit
- BC Assembly of First Nations

In addition, the report will be posted to the BCACCS website and will be shared through the established communication channels (e.g. social media, e-Newsletter).