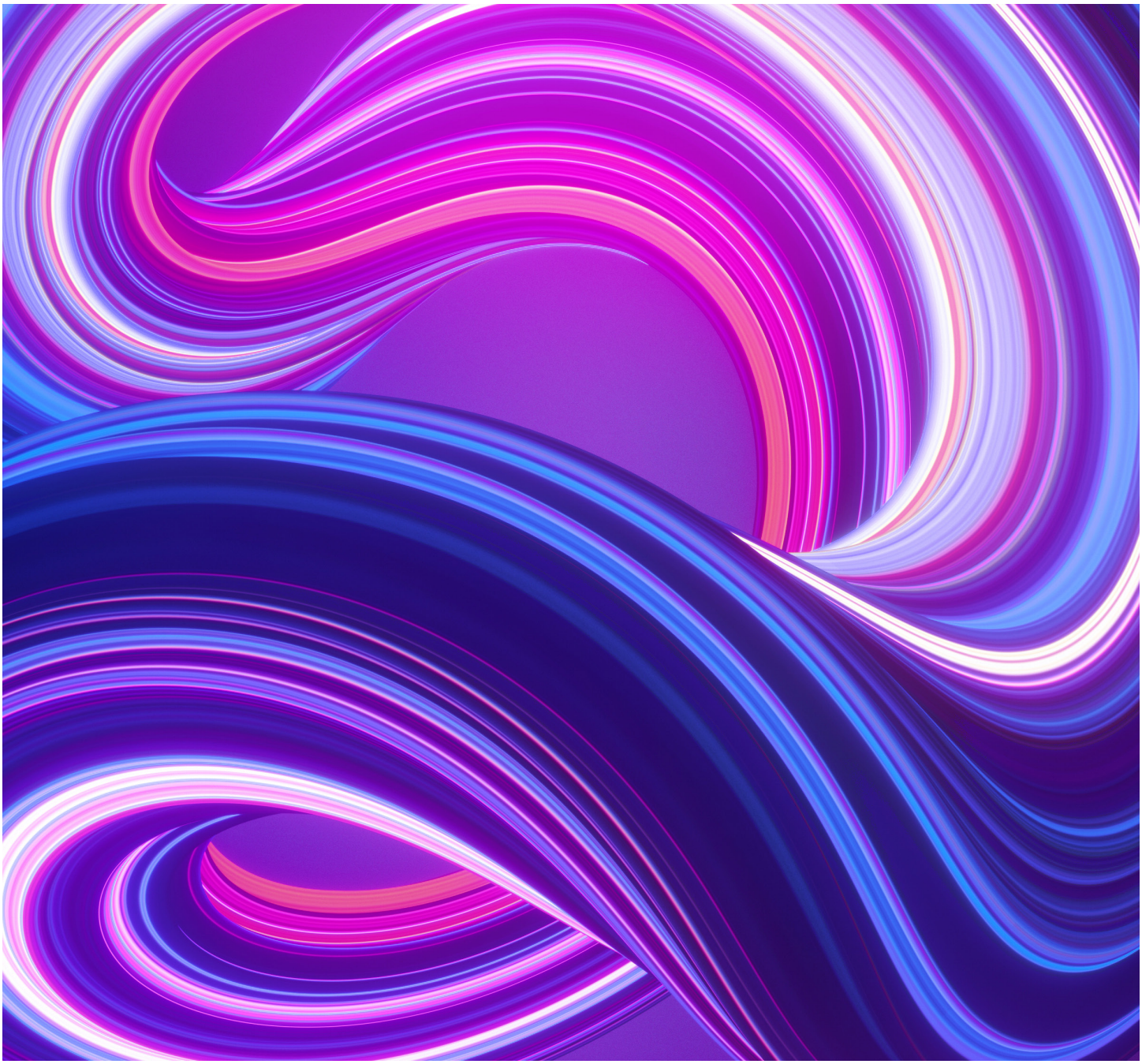

# Indigenous ICT Development Centre

## Learning Brief – February 2022

Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures

Blueprint

# Table of Contents

## About the Future Skills Centre

FSC is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce.

As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

FSC was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

## About Blueprint

Blueprint was founded based on the simple idea that evidence is a powerful tool for change. We work with policymakers and practitioners to create and use evidence to solve complex policy and program challenges. Our vision is a social policy ecosystem where evidence is used to improve lives, build better systems and policies and drive social change.

Our team brings together a multidisciplinary group of professionals with diverse capabilities in policy research, data analysis, design, evaluation, evaluation, implementation and knowledge mobilization.

As a consortium partner of the Future Skills Centre, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to generate evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures

Blueprint

Canada

# Introduction

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is one of the fastest growing industries in Canada; however, this growth does not offer equitable opportunities for all Canadians, with Indigenous people in particular highly underrepresented in ICT occupations.

The Indigenous ICT Development Centre (I-ICT), led by FireSpirit and IDFusion, was a project to design and deliver an ICT training program for un- and underemployed Indigenous people at two sites in Manitoba: Winnipeg and The Pas.

In 2019, FireSpirit and IDFusion received a grant from the **Future Skills Centre (FSC)** to fund the design and delivery of the program.

As a consortium partner of the FSC, **Blueprint** works with partners to generate research and evidence to solve future skills challenges. We worked with FireSpirit and IDFusion to design and implement a **continuous learning approach** that generated practical, timely and actionable evidence throughout the course of the project. This report shares the key insights and lessons from our continuous learning activities.

## About the pilot

The I-ICT program aimed to increase ICT skills amongst un- and underemployed Indigenous people in Winnipeg and The Pas with the ultimate goal of increasing the presence of Indigenous people in the ICT industry more broadly. The pilot combined in-class training, self-directed learning, and work-based training to enable participants to learn new skills and then apply their learnings in real-world situations.

At the start of the program, there were seven participants enrolled in training at the Winnipeg site and six enrolled at the site in The Pas. Five trainees had work placements in Winnipeg, while one had a work placement in The Pas. All five trainees in Winnipeg were reported to have completed in-class training and their work placement, while no participants in The Pas completed either in-class training or a work placement.

# Continuous Learning Approach

Blueprint initially worked with FireSpirit and IDFusion to design an evaluation approach that would assess the process of implementing the project and the outcomes achieved by participants. As we better understood the need for evidence that could support iteration and adaptation of this new model, Blueprint shifted to a continuous learning approach. This approach allowed us to generate practitioner-focused evidence and use data to improve the experience of those served through the program more quickly than through typical program evaluations.

Our approach focused on collecting information about participant experiences in the program and translating insights into program improvements and adaptations to meet the needs of both participants and project partners. During our focus groups, surveys and interviews with program participants as well as the implementation team, we asked them to share their experiences of the program, identify bright spots and pain spots, and share ideas for program improvement. We also incorporated technical advice and guidance to support the design and delivery of the program.

**Our continuous learning approach included three phases of research:**

## Phase 1

Conducted in **August 2019** after the launch of the program and included:

- An on-site focus group in Winnipeg with program participants
- Interviews with members of the implementation in Winnipeg and The Pas

## Phase 2

Conducted in **January–February 2020** at the mid-point of program training and included:

- A virtual survey for program participants in both Winnipeg and The Pas

## Phase 3

Conducted in in **January 2021** after the conclusion of the program and included:

- Virtual in-depth interviews with program participants from Winnipeg
- Virtual in-depth interviews with select members of the implementation team
- A virtual focus group with members of the implementation team in Winnipeg and The Pas

We held weekly status meetings with the implementation team to learn about program activities and updates as well as to discuss next steps and support real-time decision making. We also drew on administrative data and an ongoing implementation journal that the I-ICT team were asked to complete each week from December 2019 to December 2020.

Throughout our engagement with this project, we developed two learning reports, which were shared with the I-ICT implementation team to support program iteration and strengthen the delivery for subsequent program cohorts.

# Key Insights

This section provides an overview of what happened during project implementation and the experiences of participants and members of the project implementation team.

An important limitation of the data collected with participants is that no participants came forward from the site in The Pas to be interviewed. As a result, this report only includes experiences of the trainees in Winnipeg, with some information about delivery and implementation in The Pas provided by the implementation team at that site.

### 1. Participants were motivated to start the program, enjoyed the instruction they received and felt supported by the implementation team

All the participants we spoke with shared a high level of initial excitement to join the I-ICT program. Reasons for enrolling included the specific focus on Indigenous people, the short duration of the program compared to similar certificate or degree programs, the opportunity for workplace learning and the chance to switch careers from physically demanding and dangerous jobs. Several participants expressed that they were passionate about ICT and had a prior interest in ICT before joining.

Most participants felt particularly supported throughout the training by the implementations teams at the partner organizations. We heard stories about the leads attending class with them, being responsive to their challenges with training and being people they felt they could turn to if they were having issues.

### 2. Initial challenges led to important pivots in program design and delivery

The majority of participants we spoke to reported a significant set of challenges with the pace and content of in-class training. After receiving this feedback from participants, the implementation team paused the program delivery, and selected a new curriculum and delivery partner. The program was revised to focus on foundational aspects of ICT and to move at a slower pace.

The participants we spoke with all spoke positively about this change. They were happy that their concerns were addressed by the implementation team and were hopeful that the training would be adjusted and restructured to suit the learners better. After the pause, the trainees we spoke with reported a high level of satisfaction going into the second round of training.

### 3. Work placements as part of the work-integrated learning of the curriculum were unevenly distributed and impacted by COVID-19

The program was designed to include work placements to ensure participants had the opportunity to apply their in-class learning in a work environment. The COVID-19 pandemic had a large impact on the ability to place participants in office settings, and when opportunities became available, some participants reported that they were not comfortable working on-site in the early days of the pandemic. Due to this, not all participants received work placements.

The IDFusion offices — where all five work experience participants in Winnipeg completed their work placements — were not able to accommodate all five trainees on a daily basis. This meant that some trainees were able to work in the office while others mostly worked from home, creating some inconsistencies in work placement experiences between participants at the Winnipeg site.

### 4. Some challenges arose in securing employment outcomes

Despite five trainees completing work placements, only two were employed at the end of the training, with one additional participant securing employment in the sector. When employment opportunities did not come through for the other participants, they expressed a sense of disappointment, with some reporting that this situation deterred them from pursuing an ICT career in the future. The trainees that we spoke with who did find employment because of the program spoke extremely positively about this outcome and felt that their lives had been substantially changed by participating in the I-ICT training.

# Lessons Learned

This section summarizes some of the important lessons learned from our continuous learning approach alongside FireSpirit and IDFusion.

### 1. Indigenous designed, led, and delivered ICT training and workplace integration is desirable

Our learnings suggest that Indigenous-focused ICT programming to upskill and provide employment is a desirable way amongst participants to address the needs of Indigenous people seeking employment in this sector. Participants in the program spoke positively about the potential of an Indigenous-led ICT program and its alignment with their specific needs and goals. Participants also pointed to the high demand for talent in the ICT sector and its potential to provide employment for Indigenous people who reside in rural and remote communities as a desirable pathway to fill an important need.

### 2. Engagement of stakeholders is important for aligning program with needs

Understanding the needs, perspectives and contexts of the people this program was trying to serve was an important success factor for the project. Engagement of program participants in order to understand their experiences was critical for adjusting program delivery and ensuring it was appropriate to their needs. Particularly for Indigenous communities, co-creation, consultation and deep understanding of context are critical for surfacing key unknowns, fostering sustainable relationships and ensuring program design is culturally relevant and community led.

### 3. Ensuring a strong and clear pathway from training and work experience to employment outcomes is needed

Our learning activities highlighted the motivation and excitement that participants felt at the beginning of the program. For those who completed training, secured work placements and gained employment, the journey through the program continued to build on this motivation and excitement. Those who did not experience this journey shared feelings of disappointment. This highlights the importance of ensuring that programs like this build a strong pathway from training, to work experience to employment, building on the motivation and excitement of participants to learn new skills and embark on a new career path.

### 4. Investing in design and implementation planning is important

The implementation team noted that a more substantial pre-delivery period would have enabled them to plan better for potential challenges to delivery and identify risk mitigation strategies in advance. Throughout pilot delivery, the implementation team consistently identified and responded to new challenges that required problem-solving and program iteration throughout the pilot's roll-out. Many of those in-flight adaptations had substantial impacts on the trainees' experiences and outcomes.

Future Skills Centre | Centre des Compétences futures

Blueprint