



**Indigenous Works: Evaluation Report**

**Prepared for:** Future Skills Centre

**Prepared by:** Johnston Research Inc.

This report was produced as part of a project funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC), with financial support from the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

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. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Future Skills Centre or the Government of Canada.



Canada

### 3.2 Indigenous Works:

**Project:** Luminary: Advancing Indigenous Innovation for Economic Transformation, Employment and Well-Being

**Duration:** March 2021- March 2022

**Population:** Indigenous Peoples and underrepresented groups

**Industry Sectors:** Education, Economic development

**Region(s):** Pan-Canada

#### The project aims to . . .

- Design and deliver a national dialogue with partners to co-create a National Indigenous Innovation Strategy
- Develop skills syllabus concept documents which identify the needs assessments, learning goals, and content requirements of future skills curriculum required by managers and organizations who want to increase Indigenous-led research collaborations and innovations
- Develop a Business Plan for 'Luminary' which includes a delivery platform for research and innovation skills, services, and systems enhancements which improve the Indigenous research ecosystem

#### Beginning / Past: Where the Project started

**#Spirit:** the team began the project with a strong emphasis on spirit and meeting community needs.

**#Relationships:** the team set out to build relationships with the communities that built on the Indigenous values and culture, specific to each community.

**#Process:** Planning came from a place of community strengths.

The Luminary Project on Research and Innovation began with a national consultation of indigenous businesses and post-secondary research organizations. Through this consultation, it was determined that a large gap existed in the way these groups have historically worked together. In that historically, post-secondary research has done 'on' Indigenous communities and not so much with them. This a direct contradiction to the widely-adopted sentiment within Indigenous communities of 'nothing about us without us.' This sentiment has become a guiding ethos for policy development in Indigenous-led research collaborations. From this, Luminary determined that new curricula were needed to develop the organizational and management skills for both indigenous communities and post-secondary research institutions to collaboratively work together. Luminary then began to co-develop a new research and innovation cycle mode with project partners.

## Experiences / Present: Program Impacts and Barriers/Gaps

**#Spirit:** the team is flexible and adaptable to meet the needs of each community, there is time built into the processes for reflection from a place of spirit.

**#Relationships:** the team has built relationships with the communities that are grounded in connection and Indigenous-led methods. Relationships are supportive and reflect Indigenous ways of knowing and doing that are specific to the communities.

**#Process:** Planning continues to be done from a place of community strengths, opportunities and sovereignty.

Through the project, Luminary and its project partners have leveraged their collective expertise to identify and develop ways that post-secondary research organizations can work more closely with Indigenous communities on indigenous-led research projects.

Over the project duration from April 2021 to March 2022, Luminary conducted workshops and webinars with 250 individuals, and organized dialogue sessions to engage 150 partners. had

These sessions explored the following key themes within the indigenous research and innovation ecosystem:

1. Growing Indigenous Research Talent;
2. Increasing Innovation Awareness, Education and Skills;
3. Building Indigenous Leadership and Institutional Capacity for Research and Innovation;
4. Identifying and Supporting Indigenous Business Innovation Needs, Priorities and Clusters

From these discussions (one large facilitated discussion, fourteen smaller group sessions and three plenary group sessions) a curriculum on research and innovation was solidified. Luminary and its partners designed a series of plans to resolve key issues and leverage opportunities in each of thematic areas, including an 8-stream strategy in research talent development, and developed models of using a two-eyed seeing approach to inform the different steps of planning.

The team made several advancements in the research ecosystem including beginning to develop:

- a five-year strategy plan,
- a National Indigenous Graduate Student Network to unite students across Canada, providing space for a collective voice about matters that are important to them culturally, academically, and professionally, identifying innovation opportunities, and asserting First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultural identities

The Luminary initiative has brought together 150+ partners from across Canada with the goal to collectively transform the Indigenous economy, closing the innovation gap and advancing the Indigenous research ecosystem. Luminary's strong planning process enabled the team to effectively codesign a strategy and business plan that will develop new greenfield Indigenous skills and systems which will increase research collaborations, improve knowledge mobilization, spur new networks and partnerships, and grow new Indigenous product/service innovations as a catalyst to new economic growth, jobs, and well-being.

**Key Learnings:**

- The need for a Two-Eyed Seeing approach, ensuring that the work undertaken is informed by Indigenous lens and values
- Building strategy takes time
- The importance of strong leadership
- The need to develop a very sound understanding of how and why your project is differentiated. *“Brand your project accordingly so that your design acts as your promotion and calling card.”*

**Future State: Next Steps**

**#Spirit:** Team members are culturally competent and inclusive. These values are reflected into the work they do. They are enthusiastic and have confidence that they can do what they set out to. All of which leads back to spirit

**#Relationships:** the team continues to build relationships with the communities while applying principles of Indigenous position, equity and inclusion.

**#Process:** Planning continues to be done from a place of community strengths, opportunities and sovereignty.

Similarly, to Fleming College, Indigenous Works Luminary work has continued beyond the FSC, implementing the lessons learned and successful products of the FSC-funded project, Luminary.

As a result of the Luminary work, Indigenous Works has been able to advance two key initiatives:

1. Changing the research ecosystem which includes the ways that post-secondary institutions teach and support graduates.
  - a. Indigenous Works is currently working with Edward School of Business to decolonize the Indigenous curriculum. IW has submitted a proposal with Dalhousie on how to strategize and target Indigenous Peoples within research.
2. Advancing Indigenous sustainability.
  - a. IW submitted a proposal to the federal government initiative, Strategic Science Fund to finance a 5-year strategy. They have completed two rounds so far, and were the only Indigenous firm to submit a proposal. If successful, IW will be awarded \$24 million over five years, taking it as proof everything worked. If the proposal is not successful, they will work to deliver patchwork funding.
  - b. Based on the work accomplished around agriculture in the Luminary project, IW has been working towards advancing an Indigenous Seaweed Industry in Nepal

Indigenous Works believes that Indigenous sustainability is defined as *“the process of creating and maintaining communal existence through the management of local natural resources in a way that assures the survival and interconnectedness of the members of both the community*

*and the environment*” and through carrying on this legacy work, they intend to continue to advance graduate research and Indigenous sustainability.