



**Future
Skills**
Centre

Centre des
Compétences
futures

2025

ISET Event Report

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Overview

From May 22-23, 2025, the Future Skills Centre, in partnership with [Jelly Academy Inc.](#) co-hosted an in-person, two-day Innovative Indigenous Career and Future Skills Symposium. The event took place in Vancouver, British Columbia and 35 people attended, including the Director General of the Indigenous Affairs Directorate at ESDC, Indigenous service delivery organizations and several philanthropic foundations.

Day 1 of the symposium brought together funded entities representing Inuit, First Nation, Métis and urban Indigenous peoples funded through the [Indigenous Skills, and Employment Training \(ISET\) program](#). Attendees first participated in connection-based activities to build relationships and community by sharing both personal and professional experiences. Later, attendees collaborated to identify enduring barriers to skills, training and employment for Indigenous peoples and proposed project-based solutions.

Day 2 of the symposium brought together funders of Indigenous skills and training projects across Canada, including RBC, Mastercard Foundation, Indigenous Affairs Directorate, Service Canada, Future Generations Foundation, Indigenous Prosperity Institute, Martin Family Initiative and the Future Skills Centre. Funders engaged with the ISET holders from Day 1, sharing priorities, building relationships and discussing how funders can coordinate efforts to invest in Indigenous-led projects.

Attendance

Day 1 of the event included 16 ISET holders, 5 Jelly Academy Inc. team members, 3 FSC team members, and 3 federal government team members (including Gerald Gosselin, Director General of the Indigenous Affairs Directorate), totalling 27 attendees. On Day 2, a total of 10 funders attended, as well as the majority of ISET holders listed above.

For a full list of attendees over the two day event, [see Appendix A.](#)

Event Summary

Day 1

The first day of the event focused on building relationships, trust and understanding among attendees. Throughout both days of the event, Indigenous cultural protocols and traditional knowledge guided activities.

To start the day, a land acknowledgment and an opening song was given by Elder Deborah Baker. Afterwards, attendees participated in a medicine wheel activity. Attendees split into groups of two, shared experiences that aligned with each component of the medicine wheel, and then shared their partner's insight with the larger group. This not only served as introductions to one another, but also built connections and developed a trusting relationship among attendees.

Using the digital learning platform Kahoot, attendees identified enduring challenges experienced in the First Nations, Métis and Inuit employment and skills development ecosystem. Through a process of voting, attendees narrowed the challenges down to the following priorities:

1. Need for more intergovernmental collaboration

The ISET program is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), however, many of the organizations are place-based and operate within local communities and regions. For programs and services to be delivered more successfully, Indigenous

organizations are in need of more coordinated support from provincial and territorial governments and their adjacent organizations. Currently, there is a significant disconnect between federal, provincial/territorial and Indigenous labour force and funding needs.

2. Difficulty serving remote and rural communities

Serving remote and rural Indigenous communities involves complex, interconnected challenges, including geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, constrained access to resources and services, and cultural and communication barriers. These factors create significant barriers in providing skills, employment and training support. Digital infrastructure in particular is a major challenge unique to remote and rural communities, since many programs and services require broadband access to participate.

3. Wraparound supports are essential

Wraparound supports for Indigenous peoples seeking skills, training and employment are critical to overcoming systemic barriers and ensuring long-term career success. These supports go beyond standard employment services, aiming to address interrelated challenges that can affect job readiness and retention. Throughout the day, ISET holders shared the difficulties in accessing targeted funding for wraparound supports. Some of the wrap around supports needed include cultural competency, addictions and mental health services, housing and transportation, childcare and community-based programs. Too few Indigenous environments for learning Many of the ISET holders shared insights on the importance of integrating land-based practices or language learning alongside employment and skills training. Land-based Indigenous learning environments are important because they serve as foundational spaces where Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and relationships to the natural world are honored and revitalized. These environments offer far more than alternative education settings, they are core to Indigenous worldviews and holistic approaches to wellness, identity, and community healing. These environments empower learners, communities, and future generations by re-centering Indigenous values and restoring relationships disrupted by colonialism.



4. Too few Indigenous environments for learning

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Day 2:

The second day of the event focused on building relationships with major funders. The day began with a networking activity to facilitate connections and align shared goals between funders and ISET holders.

Following the networking activity, representatives from Jelly Academy and the Future Skills Centre presented a summary of Day 1, sharing what was heard regarding

the enduring challenges experienced by First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples in the employment and skills development ecosystem. ISET holders had the opportunity to share additional thoughts about what they discussed from Day 1 with funders at the table.

Each funder then shared their organizational priorities. ISET holders had the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the foundation's mandates, and funding processes and opportunities.

Learning & Reflection

What worked well? What didn't?

The intended goals of the event were:

- Identify the persistent barriers to skills, training and employment for Indigenous peoples
- Facilitate relationship building between ISET holders and funders
- Support ISET holders to develop project proposals and present to funders

The focus on shared connections and relationship-building during the two-day event fostered open and honest communication. Attendees shared experiences on the successes and shortcomings of their work and exchanged contact information to continue conversations.

The project proposal brainstorming and writing was more challenging than expected. While there were good ideas generated among groups, formulating a project proposal in the short timeframe was difficult. Time was a limiting factor, and groups would have benefited from more concrete guidance, instruction and preparation in advance of the event. Although the original goal of presenting project proposals to funders did not occur, the larger focus of building relationships and generating consensus on the shared and enduring barriers kicked off longer-term engagement among ISET holders and funders.

Outcomes

In the months following the event, project ideas have developed to address the identified challenges.

Jelly Academy Inc. met with the ISET leadership group to debrief the Vancouver event and begin planning for the National Gathering in January 2026. Jelly Academy Inc. also met with senior leaders from the RBC Foundation and Mastercard Foundation, who shared positive feedback and expressed strong interest in future opportunities. Every stakeholder group has consistently shared a similar message in feedback: it is worthwhile to build relationships and dialogue, and we want to build on this momentum. While the specific opportunities are still emerging (see below), everyone sees value in continuing this engagement and dialogue. Post-event engagement communications with both ISET holders and funders is ongoing.

Provincial, federal, ISET and work-force convening project

Jelly Marketing has secured funding from ESDC to convene organizations operating in other provinces and territories. The aim of this project is to ensure ISET, Canada's largest Indigenous employment and skills training provider, is aligned with provincial/territorial workforce needs.

The convening project will be modelled after the [Saskatchewan Indian Training Assessment Group Inc. \(SITAG\)](#). The project is still in its early stages, but has a longer-term vision to be replicated across the country. This is part of a larger effort to crystallize learnings of successful internal practices across ISET offices.

The Indigenous Affairs Directorate at ESDC is providing funding and is playing a leadership role in the project.

LinkedIn training & digital capacity

Many ISET holders' frontline staff are not fully using technology platforms for skills and employment services, specifically LinkedIn. The ESDC ISET Office is providing funding to address this challenge. Jelly Academy Inc., has a LinkedIn training program that is

Indigenous-led and culturally informed. For the pilot phase of this work, one staff person per ISET office will be able to access the training at no cost. It is expected that trained staff will be better equipped to support and teach their clients, improving digital skills.

In addition, a significant knowledge sharing gap was identified following engagement with ISET office holders. Currently, there is no digital platform for ISET offices to share and streamline resources across Canada. As a response, Jelly Academy Inc. is spearheading an initiative to create a one-stop-shop digital platform for ISET offices to share their resources. This digital platform is in development.

ISET National Gathering 2026 at Cannexus Conference

The second annual ISET National Gathering will take place in January 2026 alongside the [Cannexus Conference](#) in Ottawa. FSC has identified opportunities for funders to host and sponsor two connection events on Friday January 23.

- Lunch: Includes all [ISET holders](#) across the country (two senior representatives per office for ~120 people), plus non-Indigenous workforce associations and sector leads. There is an opportunity for speakers and other connection activities.
- Dinner: A smaller, intimate event in the evening. The dinner will bring together funders and ISET advisory board members, for ~50 attendees.

Following the success of the event held in Vancouver in May 2025, as well as the positive post-event communication with funders and Jelly Academy Inc., the event is an opportunity to share best practices, deepen relationships and drive alignment in skills training and employment support for Indigenous peoples.

Next Steps

Attendees agreed that there was significant value for ongoing coordination to address the identified challenges within the Indigenous skills and training ecosystem. FSC is in contact with the funders that attended the event. Funders expressed a strong interest in receiving a summary report from the event and collaborating in future similar conversations. FSC will engage with funders one-on-one to explore interest in the sponsorship opportunities presented above, to better understand where they see opportunities to collaborate and be involved in the project ideas, or future gatherings to network further.

One of the most significant takeaways from the event is that building relationships between ISET holders, funders and other stakeholders in the space is key to fostering trust, accountability, and the conditions for long-term success for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders.



Appendix A

Day 1 list of attendees

Name	Title
Bryana Couture	Strategic Writing & Support Specialist, Saskatchewan Indian institute of Technology
Allison Bear	Interim Vice-President, Saskatchewan Indian Training Assessment Group, Inc.
John DeGiacomo	Executive Director for Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS)
Megan Ginnish	Indigenous Skills & Employment Training Program Manager, Wolastoqey Tribal Council
Julie Cyr	Program Project Manager, Wabun Tribal Council
Noel Baldwin	Executive Director, Future Skills Centre
Laura McDonough	Associate Director, Future Skills Centre
Sonia Boskov	Research and Evaluation Associate, Future Skills Centre
Shannon Pestun	Senior Advisor, Diversity Institute
Cameron Aitken	Policy Advisor, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Merlyn Rogers	Program Specialist, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
Sandra Elanik	Manager, Inuvialuit Education Foundation
Katherine Ciboci	Capacity Manager, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
Caitlin Sommer	Senior Policy Advisor, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
Darian Kovacs	Founding Partner, Jelly Marketing
Marrissa Mok	Operations Specialist, Jelly Academy Inc.
Lisa Savill	Director, Rupertsland Institute
Anca McHollister	Director, Programs and Operations, STEPS at Métis Nation British Columbia
Kerry Smith	Program Director, Manitoba Metis Federation
Audrey Hestand	Director of Training & Employment, Gabriel Dumont Institute
Shelley Stacey	Senior Manager, Native Women's Association of Canada
Lynn White	President & CEO, ACCESS (Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society)
Edgard Villanueva-Cruz	Co-Founder, Turtle Island Connection
Gerald Gosselin	Director General, Employment and Social Development Canada
Athena Mackenzie	Senior Policy Analyst, Employment and Social Development Canada
Charan Bhuller	Director, Indigenous Programs Community Development, Service Canada

Day 2 list of attendees

Name	Title
Riley Bonshor	Commercial Banking Adviser, Indigenous Markets, RBC
Keira LaPierre	Program Partner, Mastercard Foundation
Joy William	Manager, Indigenous Programs, Mastercard Foundation
Gerald Gosselin	Director General, Employment and Social Development Canada
Athena Mackenzie	Senior Policy Analyst, Employment and Social Development Canada
Charan Bhuller	Director, Indigenous Programs Community Development, Service Canada
Dwight Bero Jr.	Program Manager, Future Generations Foundations
Michelle Okere	Executive Director, Indigenous Prosperity Foundation
Jessica Hayden	Chief Operating Officer, Martin Family Initiative
Mark Patterson	Executive Director, Magnet
Noel Baldwin	Executive Director, Future Skills Centre
Tricia Williams	Director, Research, Evaluation and Knowledge Mobilization, Future Skills Centre
Laura McDonough	Associate Director, Future Skills Centre
Sonia Boskov	Research and Evaluation Associate, Future Skills Centre



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