Thriving Indigenous Systems Fund | 2023 Application Guide

Contents

Key Dates

August 14th, 2023	Public Launch & Eligibility Quiz open online
September 6th, 2023	Stage 1 Online Application Opens
October 4th, 2023	Stage 1 Online Application Closes (4:30 pm PT)
November 9th, 2023	Invitations via email to submit Stage 2 Full Application (oral or written submission). Declined decisions will also be communicated via email.
December 11th, 2023	Stage 2 Full Application Closes (4:30 pm PT)
January/February 2024	Full Application Review & Final Funding Decisions by Indigenous Priorities Advisory Committee (IPAC)
Early March 2024	Final funding decisions communicated via email (decision date TBD).

Purpose of the TISF

Vancouver Foundation is excited to introduce the **Thriving Indigenous Systems Fund (TISF) to provide flexible, multi-year grants to land-based First Nations, and Indigenous-led organizations serving land-based First Nations*** in the territories now known as British Columbia (BC).

Funding **up to $100,000 per year[1], over three years** is available for Indigenous-led initiatives focused on healing, land, rights, and culture. The TISF will support work that creates the conditions for **systemic transformation** by preserving, evolving, and transforming the social, political, economic and cultural systems of Indigenous communities in BC.

* **Indigenous-led organizations that serve land-based First Nations deliver programming and initiatives that partner with, and directly benefit one or more First Nation communities in BC**. These organizations and/or initiatives use Indigenous knowledge, wisdom, and solutions to address issues impacting First Nation communities and their territories.

Defining systemic transformation:
In an Indigenous context, work that is considered disruptive is often work that asserts the basic human rights of Indigenous people. Indigenous systems, both historic and current day, have been deeply influenced by colonization. Indigenous-led work that identifies, addresses, or disrupts colonial influences can be viewed as a reconstruction of our cultural systems, and is not disruptive from an Indigenous worldview.

Eligibility- Who Can Apply

1.   Applicant Organizations must be either land-based First Nations or Indigenous-led not-for-profit organizations serving land-based First Nations* and be a registered qualified donee by the Canada Revenue Agency.

- If you are a land based First Nation and unsure if you are a qualified donee, please search the CRA list of other qualified donees.
- If you are an Indigenous-led not-for-profit organization and unsure if you are a qualified done, please search the CRA list of registered qualified donees.

2.   Land-based First Nations and Indigenous-led organizations that are not listed as qualified donees can still apply for funding but must enter into an Intermediary relationship with a qualified donee. It is the responsibility of the two organizations to choose to do this, and to determine whether they meet the CRA's definition and requirements for intermediary relationships.

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[1] Please note that following the announcement of the TISF fund, the amount per year was increased from $80,000 to $100,000 per year. All corresponding documents have been updated to reflect this change, however some communications prior to August 24, 2023, may still state $80,000/year.

The Applicant Organization (qualified donee) and/or Intermediary Organization (non-qualified donee), must still be either a land-based First Nation or an Indigenous-led organization serving land-based First Nations. This includes hereditary groups.

3. Land-based First Nations must be in the lands now known as BC and Indigenous-led organizations must be serving First Nations located in BC.

Defining Indigenous-led organizations

To be eligible for this grant, organizations identifying as "Indigenous led" must ensure **the following criteria is met:**

- Have at least two thirds senior leadership, and/or Board of Directors identify as First Nations, Métis and or Inuit*,
- The ability to define how you verify Indigenous ancestry,
- Have agreements in place with the land based First Nations your organization is serving,
- Engage the First Nations you serve in a way that honours their self-determination,
- Be rooted in Indigenous history and values,
- Have programs that are delivered by Indigenous people and,
- Follow formal protocols with Indigenous communities.

*Indigenous leadership composition is defined by those who are in positions of leadership, whose titles might include: CEO, Executive Director, and/or Manager roles who identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. The size and type of organization will determine what titles describe leadership positions; however, the expectation is that Indigenous employees have influence in decision making.

Examples:

1. An organization serving Indigenous people that has 2 senior staff: the CEO is non-Indigenous, and the Finance Manager is Métis. This organization is ineligible as it does not meet the two-thirds of senior leadership being of First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry.

2. An organization that has a Board of Directors and senior staff: two-thirds of both the Board of Directors and senior staff combined would need to identify as either First Nations, Métis or Inuit. If none of the senior staff identify as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit, they are ineligible for this grant.

Indigenous identity fraud is an increasingly emerging issue and a harmful result of colonization. When organizations rely on self-identification only, it can invite identity fraud in the following ways:

- Complete dishonesty (no Indigenous ancestry.)
- Claiming identity based on distant archival ancestors.

- The person involved has no ongoing extended familial connection to an Indigenous community, and no reason for being disconnected (60's scoop, millennial scoop, foster care, etc.)

We recognize the complexity of Indigenous identity and want to work alongside community to ensure that the intent of this grant stream, to center Indigenous voices, is upheld.

TISF does not fund (ineligible applicants):

- Non-Indigenous-led organizations, including:
  - academic institutions,
  - school districts,
  - religious organizations,
  - government agencies,
  - or any other organization that may serve Indigenous and/or Métis communities, but do not meet our definition of being an Indigenous-led organization
- Organizations or projects that unlawfully discriminate employees, volunteers, delivery of programs or services, or clients served based on age, sex, religion/creed, race, color, National or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, marital status, military or veterans' status, pregnancy, or genetic information
- Individuals

Funding Priorities- What TISF Funds

Based on the learnings from our year of engagement with community, and through research with the Indigenous Priorities Advisory Council, **TISF grant applications will be assessed and prioritized for funding based on their alignment to the following five attributes:**

1. **Initiatives that centre at least 1 of the 4 focus areas of Healing, Land, Rights & Responsibilities and Culture:**

These focus areas have been developed in collaboration with the Indigenous Priorities Advisory Council and through research into pressing and systemic needs in Indigenous communities across the lands now known as BC.

Healing

- Repairing, restoring, and nurturing kinship systems
- Addressing inequities in the social determinants of health in Indigenous communities
- Healing and reconnection to culture, community, and all our relations
- Internal staff or group healing, and conflict resolution including addressing lateral violence using Indigenous methods and perspectives

Land

- Community connection to land
- Protecting sacred homelands
- Climate change adaptation & mitigation
- Environmental protection
- Indigenous sovereignty over lands and resources
- Food security and sovereignty
- Sustainable economic development

Rights & Responsibilities

- Asserting inherent and human rights
- Strengthening our ancestral roles and responsibilities
- Policy change
- Advocacy
- Traditional governance
- Governance capacity through research
- Policy development and staffing

Culture

- Language and cultural revitalization programs as the foundation for Indigenous solution building
- Revitalizing cultural practices that are inclusive of all community members who identify as:
  - LGTBQIA+ and/or two spirit
  - Gender-diverse
  - Disabled
  - Neurodiverse, and
  - On-reserve or off-reserve

2. **Work that uses or is revitalizing culturally specific Indigenous governance systems and/or implementing Indigenous led, decolonial practices.**

   Indigenous Priorities defines culturally specific Indigenous governance as work that does one or more of the following:

   - Centering Indigenous cultural practices at the heart of their activities
   - Revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives in their daily practices
   - Addressing your First Nation's inherent right to self-government
   - Supporting hereditary groups including Clans, Wilps, and other forms of hereditary governments
   - Developing traditional governance structures including houses, groups and or organizations
   - Uplifting your First Nation's work that asserts self-determination

   Indigenous Priorities defines decolonized approaches as:

- o Processes that center the cultural worldviews of the communities you serve
- o Approaches that move away from dominant Western worldviews that have limited Indigenous self-determination

3. **Work that has historically been denied and continues to experience barriers to reliable funding.**
   - Work that cannot be funded through established and existing channels of support (i.e., Government funding programs)
   - Initiatives that uphold and assert a First Nation's rights through section 35 of the Canadian Constitution

4. **Initiatives that identify, influence and/or disrupt the barriers, behaviors and systems rooted in colonization, to heal the injustices of, including but not limited to:**
   - The overrepresentation of Indigenous children in foster care, Indigenous people in the justice system
   - Social determinants of health
   - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)
   - Underfunding of infrastructure and programming in land-based communities
   - The separation of funding for on-reserve and off-reserve populations that impact community services and engagement

5. **Communities or organizations that can clearly define the work they are doing, their markers of success, and the values that guide their work.**
   - To honour self-determination, applicants will define their own markers of success. This moves away from traditional grantmaking processes, where the determinants the of success are prescribed by the funder
   - Values-based organizations are culturally shaped by a clear set of guiding principles for decision-making, actions, and a sense of community

TISF does not fund (ineligible expenses):
- Funded activities and/or initiatives that do not benefit the populations of First Nation communities in BC.
- Endowments
- Operating deficits or after-the-fact support
- Debt retirement,
- Monetary reserves
- Mortgage pay-downs
- Large public infrastructure projects

Steps to Apply

1) Read this guide (you are off to a great start!)
2) Complete the online [Eligibility Quiz](#)
3) If you have successfully answered the Eligibility Quiz, then register or log into the online Grant Management System .
4) Complete and submit the Stage 1 online application (open Sept. 6th, 2023).
5) Wait for either an invitation to complete a Stage 2 online application or a decline decision, both communicated via email (Nov. 9th, 2023).
6) Stage 2: Choose oral or written online application.
   - If you choose to complete an oral application, you will be contacted via email with further instructions on how to schedule a time to meet with us.
   - Please note: Final approvals of oral transcripts will be Dec. 11th, 2023.

7) Complete and submit Stage 2 oral or written online application (December 11th, 2023).

8) Wait for the Final Decision Email (early March 2024).

Navigating the online Grant Management System

Vancouver Foundation uses an online Grant Management System specifically designed for our granting programs.

For detailed instructions on how to create a user account, and how to start, complete and submit a TISF online application, check out our how-to videos on the Vancouver Foundation YouTube page (available soon).

If you require assistance with the online application, please email [application-techsupport@vancouverfoundation.ca.](mailto:application-techsupport@vancouverfoundation.ca) This inbox is regularly monitored during open grant calls and a member of the Indigenous Priorities team will reply within 24hrs.

If your community or organization does not have reliable internet access, please contact 604-688-2204 or indigenous.priorities@vancouverfoundation.ca.

Online Application Questions (Stage 1):

1. Please select the option that best describes your community or organization:

- Indigenous School
- Band Council
- Hereditary Government including Clans
- Indigenous-Led Non-Profit Organization serving land-based First Nations

2. If you are an Indigenous school, or Indigenous-led organization please read the following and answer questions 2a and 2b.

> *Indigenous Priorities defines "Indigenous-led" as groups where at least two-thirds of senior staff and/or board leadership positions are held by those who identify as First Nations, Metis or Inuit.*
> *For instance, if your organization serves Indigenous people and has 2 senior staff where the CEO is non-Indigenous and the Finance Manager is Métis, you will not qualify as only 50% of senior leadership is either First Nations, Métis or Inuit. If you are an organization where you have a Board of Directors and Senior staff people, two-thirds of both the Board of Directors and Senior staff combined would have to identify as either First Nations, Métis or Inuit.*

2a. You will be asked to confirm that under this definition, your organization or group is Indigenous led.

2b. **Please share your leadership composition and how they identify:**

Title	Name	First Nation, Métis or Inuit Community

 [max 10 rows]

3. Please briefly share what your community or organization does, and the community it serves. [max 300 words]

4. What does success look like for your work and how will you celebrate successes?
[max 200 words]

5. Who are you accountable to? Do you have a culturally specific way of practicing accountability? If so, please explain.
[max 300 words]

6. Please tell us about the values that your organization/community has defined to guide your work.

Value	Please briefly describe how this value is practiced in your community or organization.
(ex. Reciprocity)	**Max 100 words**
	Max 100 words
	Max 100 words

	Max 100 words
	Max 100 words
	Max 100 words
	Max 100 words

[max 10 rows]

7. How is your organization, community or project addressing one or more of the following focus areas?

Focus Area	What work are you doing in this focus area?
Healing	**Max 150 words**
Land	**Max 150 words**
Inherent Rights	**Max 150 words**
Culture	**Max 150 words**
Interconnection	*If your work is interconnected between the focus areas, please explain.* **Max 150 words**

8. What is the governance model overseeing this work, and how are you approaching governance?

[max 300 words]

9. Where are you in your journey to identify, influence, or disrupt colonial structures, barriers and behaviors that impact your work and community?

[max 300 words]

10. How much of this work is funded through other existing sources? What are the challenges you are experiencing trying to secure all the funding you need?

[max 300 words]

FUNDING REQUEST:

1. **Complete the below table to confirm how much funding are you requesting and over how many years:**

Year 1:	$
Year 2:	$
Year 3:	$

2. **Briefly describe how the funds will be allocated.**
   [word max 250 words]

Stage 2 Application Questions (both oral and written) will elaborate on the above questions and will be shared with applicants who are invited forward to submit a full application in November 2023.

Community-building conversations

We will not require any formal final report for the Thriving Indigenous Systems Fund. Instead, we've created an optional opportunity for grantees to connect with us and have conversations about their work. We want to learn how we can walk alongside community to advance their priorities and hear about your experience to discuss any outcomes, challenges, and learnings. These conversations will help inform long-term granting strategies and determine how Vancouver Foundation can intentionally support and uplift your organization and community.

We're also exploring what data is most useful to advance your work as funded communities and organizations. In future years, Indigenous Priorities hopes to offer research support to contribute to systems level work, including advocacy.

Contact Information:

For general TISF inquiries please email indigenous.priorities@vancouverfoundation.ca

For technical support with the online application, please contact application-techsupport@vancouverfoundation.ca

Key Terms (Glossary):

Colonize (v.), Colonization (n.): Colonization occurs when a new group exercises control over an Indigenous group. The colonizers impose their own cultural values, religions, and laws, and make policies that exclusively benefit themselves and are against the Indigenous peoples. They seize land and control access to resources and trade. Today many Indigenous groups are living with the impacts of colonization and are fighting for self-determination (Wilson, 2018).

Colonial Structures: Since European contact, the colonial systems imposed on Indigenous people were based on interconnected aspects of control over the economy, knowledge systems and individual subjectivity, gender and sexuality norms, and systems of authority. The enduring impacts of historical events and policies, such as the Indian Residential School experience, the Sixties Scoop, and the persistently high rates of Indigenous children in care, continue to deprive Indigenous people of positive relationships with each other, their cultural heritage, and with their ancestral territories (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2015).

Elder(s): In Indigenous cultures, Elders are cherished and respected. An Elder is not simply an older or elderly person, but rather, they are usually someone who is deeply knowledgeable about the history, values and teachings of their culture. They live their life according to these values and teachings. For their knowledge, wisdom and behaviour, Elders are valuable role models and teachers to all members of the community. Elders play a key role in maintaining the tradition of passing along oral histories.

First Nations: In Canada, First Nations is the term used to refer to people who are Indigenous and who do not identify as Inuit or Métis. In the past, First Nations people used to be referred to as "Indians". There are 634 First Nations across Canada and over 60 distinct Nations. First Nations is the accepted term today instead of the term "Indian" which is considered an offensive colonial term. In British Columbia, there are over 200 distinct First Nations, with a population of approximately 170,000 people. Besides, First Nations, The Métis, who are of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry, number around 90,000 in BC and the Inuit, traditionally residing in the Arctic regions of Canada, Greenland, and Alaska, have a smaller presence in BC, with a population of approximately 1,500 (Statistics Canada, 2017). These diverse groups each have unique cultures, languages, and traditions, and they continue to strive for recognition of their rights, preservation of their cultures, and self-determination in the face of the ongoing impacts of colonization.

Indigenous: Indigenous is being used synonymously with Aboriginal in Canada and is the preferred term. Both Indigenous and Aboriginal are collective nouns for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. It is important to note that there are often regional and personal preferences for terms.

Indigenous Sovereignty: "Indigenous Sovereignty arises from unique traditional Indigenous knowledge, that belongs to each Nation and community. It consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters, and all upon them. Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of what the governing Nation-state does or does not do" (Karin, n.d.).

Inuit: The Inuit are a group of Indigenous peoples living in the Northern regions of Canada, Greenland and Alaska. Inuit have lived and thrived in the Arctic for thousands of years. Traditionally, they lived off the resources of the land by hunting whales, seals, caribou, fish and birds. Many Inuit continue to harvest these resources today.

Kinship: Kinship refers to the relational networks among individuals, including families, clans, and broader affiliations. In contemporary society, it extends to chosen families and communities that share mutual experiences and support. According to [Tanya Talaga,](#) kinship constructs our identity, provides a sense of belonging, and extends beyond nuclear families in indigenous cultures to encompass entire communities.communities.

Kinship systems, complex and diverse, maintain traditional lifestyles and societal values within a land-oriented framework, providing care for all ages and distributing resources. Our kinship systems were intentionally targeted and dismantled through colonization, so revitalizing kinship systems can connect to repairing communities' relationships with each other, the natural world around us, and the spiritual values that guide our work.

Land-Based Nations: These entities, deeply rooted in specific territories or regions, include land-based First Nations, as well as Indigenous Governing Bodies, such as Indian bands, reserves, elected bodies, and traditional or hereditary groups.

LGTBQIA2S: Lesbian, Gay, Trans, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual & Aromantic, Two-Spirit.

Métis: In French, the word métis is an adjective referring to someone of mixed ancestry. Since the 18th century, the word has been used to describe individuals with mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. It's generally recognized that being Métis is more than having mixed Indigenous and European heritage. Métis have a distinct collective identity, customs and way of life, unique from Indigenous or European roots.

Privilege: Is a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group. Society grants privilege to people because of certain aspects of their identity. Aspects of a person's identity can include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographical location, migration status, ability, and religion, to name a few.

Self-determination: The United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes the right to self-determination. The Assembly of First Nations describes self-determination as a Nation's right to choose its own government and decide its own economic, social and cultural development. Today, Indigenous people are trying to exercise what the Canadian government calls Aboriginal Rights and Title for self-determination to benefit from the wealth and resources of this land that is now called Canada.

Settler: Used to refer to those who are not Indigenous to a place and who either chose or had ancestors who chose to settle there. The term references the concept of settler colonialism. Because settler colonialism implies choice on the part of the individual settler (acknowledging that choices are often limited by a variety of socio-political and economic factors), the term is problematized in the case of those who are not Indigenous to a place, but whose ancestors were brought there forcibly.

Traditional Governance: The culturally specific structures, systems and processes an Indigenous community uses to make decisions, engage in economic and social activities, and define the roles and responsibilities of its leaders. First Nations were sovereign Nations with legal, political, economic and social systems, and a spiritual way of life prior to European contact. First Nations relationships with the land influenced how they governed themselves. "Our people have an inherent right to govern ourselves and decision-making authority over our title lands. We are free to create our own form of governance to preserve our culture, foster healthy families, build vibrant communities, develop our economies and restore our Nations." (CFNG, n.d.). Indigenous specific forms of governance vary from Nation to Nation. They can be both traditional and contemporary

Trust-Based Philanthropy: An approach to giving that addresses the inherent power imbalances between funders, nonprofits, and the communities they serve. At its core, trust-based philanthropy is about redistributing power—systemically, organizationally, and interpersonally—in service of a healthier and more equitable nonprofit ecosystem. There is a commitment to building relationships based on transparency, dialogue, and mutual learning. In the future,

granting could include multi-year unrestricted giving, streamlined applications and reduced reporting requirements.

Unrestricted Funds: The provision of unrestricted funds and taking a trust-based philanthropy approach supports the implementation of UNDRIP through enabling community self-determination. Unrestricted funding supports the lived expertise of Indigenous communities, allowing communities to freely decide how to fund needs that are most pressing and ultimately most impactful (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2021). Trust-based philanthropy supports Indigenous self-determination through addressing power imbalances between funders and grantees (Imagine Canada, 2022). Good practices in the provision of equitable funding include the following:

1. Reduce funding restrictions (Phylicia Davis Wesseling, 2021)
2. Provide of multi-year funding (Trust-Based Philanthropy, 2021)
3. Support capacity building (Insipirit Foundation, 2021)
4. Invest in governance (Insipirit Foundation, 2021)
5. Take an equity and social justice lens to the distribution of grants (Imagine Canada, 2022)
6. Share power with communities through participatory grant making (Phylicia Davis Wesseling, 2021)
7. Fund systemic change (Imagine Canada, 2022)
8. Support advocacy (Imagine Canada, 2022)

Links & References

Please visit the Thriving Indigenous Systems Fund page to access the links in this guide.