



SECTOR UPDATE
SOCIAL BRANCH: LANGUAGES AND LEARNING SECTOR
ISSUE: FIRST NATIONS LANGUAGES

July 2022

What is the history of this issue and how does it impact First Nations?

The Languages and Learning Sector (the Sector) continues to focus on the full implementation of the federal *Indigenous Languages Act* (the Act), which received Royal Assent in June 2019 after decades of advocacy from First Nations across the country.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is a member of the Joint Implementation Steering Committee (JISC) along with representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) Indigenous Languages Branch (ILB), Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) and the Métis National Council (MNC). JISC's recent co-development work has been centred on establishing a new distinctions-based Indigenous Languages Funding Model to ensure there is adequate, sustainable, and long-term funding for all Indigenous-led revitalization efforts.

How has the AFN's recent advocacy affected this area?

Federal Budget 2019 committed \$333.7 million over five years, and \$115.7 million each year after that, and Budget 2021 proposed an additional \$275 million over five years, starting in 2021-2022, to support the reclamation, preservation, and revitalization of Indigenous languages and to implement the Act. While that was a significant increase in funding, those new investments have not been sufficient to meet demand. Further, the funding for 2023-24 and future years is locked. DCH must develop, and obtain Treasury Board approval for, a distinctions-based Indigenous Languages Funding Model to unlock funding for languages beginning in 2023-24 on an ongoing basis.

There is a significant gap between the funding requested by First Nations and the amount available through DCH's limited proposal-based funding. For 2021-22, First Nations requested \$70.9 million. It is estimated that only \$48.3 million was available to First Nations for 2021-22, leaving a shortfall of \$22.6 million. AFN continues to advocate for adequate, sustainable, and long-term funding for First Nations language revitalization.

As mandated by Resolution 10/2021, *Support for the co-development of a new distinctions-based Indigenous Languages Funding Model*, the AFN has worked with the Technical Committee on Languages (TCOL), Chiefs Committee on Languages (CCOL) and First Nations to develop a new First Nations Languages Funding Model to improve the flow of languages funding to First Nations and First Nations organizations. The AFN held regional engagement sessions with First Nations in January-February 2022 to inform the development of the funding model. To further support its success, a new costing analysis was conducted to support an ask for increased funding. The Sector also hosted a Languages Forum on March 2-3, 2022 to seek further input from First Nations.



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Where do we hope to go in the future?

It is the constitutional and inherent right of each First Nation government to direct, maintain and develop their own language and culture. First Nations must lead the recovery, reclamation, revitalization, and maintenance and normalization of First Nations languages. Structures must be designed to support what First Nations need to achieve their vision and goals for language. First Nations rightfully expect to be involved in decisions about all funding allocations. The Sector will continue to advocate for funding that meets the needs of First Nations, First Nations language experts, and language champions who lead language revitalization.

A First Nations Languages Funding Model will be presented to First Nations-in-Assembly at the Annual General Assembly in July 2022 to:

- ensure Budget 2019 funding is unlocked for 2023-24 and future years (\$115.7M annually for all distinctions and the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages) – without approval of the Funding Model, no future funding will be available through the Indigenous Languages Component of the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Program;
- provide a budget ask for greater funding to support First Nations languages at \$14 billion over 10 years and, at maturity in 2032, \$3.6 billion for that year, which will be escalated annually going forward;
- shift the transfer of funding from the current proposal-based funding approach toward ongoing programmatic funding that does not have to be applied for, and funding agreements;
- conduct an initial 3-year review of the Funding Model, with subsequent reviews as determined by First Nations to make adjustments to the Funding Model as needed; and
- recommend new factors that are supported by First Nations to inform the development of a revised regional allocation formula and to ensure equitability in funding allocations across all regions.

The Sector will work diligently with DCH to ensure that the implementation of the Funding Model will reflect the perspectives and priorities of First Nations.