

First Nations Education Steering Committee

First Nations Schools Association

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First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy 2025 - 2026 Skills Link Program Guidelines

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Objectives.....	3
3. Expected Results.....	3
4. Activities.....	3
5. Eligibility Requirements.....	4
5.1 Eligible Recipients.....	4
5.2 Eligible Participants.....	4
6. Proposal Process.....	4
6.1 Submission of Proposal.....	4
6.2 Assessment Criteria.....	5
7. Eligible Expenditures.....	5
7.1 For Mentored Work Placements, including ICT.....	5
7.2 For Career Promotion and Science and Technology Activities.....	6
7.3 For All Activities.....	6
8. Ineligible Expenditures.....	6
9. Maximum Program Contribution.....	6
10. Monitoring and Accountability.....	7
11. Reporting Requirements.....	7
12. Contact Information.....	7

1. Introduction

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) are pleased to manage Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) 2025-2026 Skills Link Program (SKILLS.LINK) for the BC region. The Skills.Link is a component of the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy (FNIYES).

Please note: A call for proposals for Co-operative Education Program funding for on-reserve First Nations schools will be distributed separately – reach out to co-oped@fnesc.ca if you have any questions.

2. Objectives

The Skills.Link has the following objectives:

- to promote the benefits of education as key to labour market participation
- to support the development and enhancement of essential employability skills among First Nation youth, such as communication skills, problem solving and working with others
- to introduce youth to a variety of career options
- to help youth acquire skills by providing wage subsidies for mentored work experience opportunities
- to help First Nation youth overcome barriers to employment

3. Expected Results

Key expected results of the Skills.Link are:

- enhanced employability skills for participating First Nations youth
- increased awareness of the benefits of education
- enhanced ability to make employment-related decisions
- increased appreciation for science and technology as a viable career/education choice
- improved attitudes toward the transition from school to work
- increased ability of First Nation youth to participate in the labour market

4. Activities

The key activities of the Skills.Link are:

- work placements and mentorships for youth who are not in school to enable them to develop employability skills and support their educational and career development
- work experience specifically in the field of Information and Communication Technology
- activities designed to support First Nations youth entrepreneurs gain self-employment
- training experiences to support youth in acquiring skills needed for work placements
- career development information, including awareness and support activities like leadership projects which can be done remotely or in small sessions
- career planning and counseling activities, which can be conducted through zoom sessions
- activities that promote science and technology as an educational and/or career choice, including online and Zoom-based science/computer clubs, and/or activities that connect science and technology to traditional Indigenous knowledge.

5. Eligibility Requirements

5.1 Eligible Recipients

Eligible recipients are First Nations communities and First Nation Schools in BC region. Eligible recipients may enter into agreements with private sector and non-profit sector employers to access employment opportunities for youth. Private organizations are eligible for participation, in partnership with the First Nation organization, provided that the nature and intent of the funded activity is non-commercial, not intended to generate profit, and supports the FNIYES program priorities and objectives.

Note: If entering a partnership with a private organization, for ex. Tim Hortons, proposal must be submitted by the First Nation organization and funding will go directly to the First Nation organization.

5.2 Eligible Participants

Eligible participants are First Nations youth ordinarily resident on reserve, in recognized communities or on community lands. Eligible participants must be legally entitled to work in Canada and must be between the ages of 15 to 30 at the start of the program's activities.

- Mentored work placements are for youth who are not in school, unemployed, or underemployed.
- For career promotion and science and technology activities, youth may be younger than 15 years of age.

6. Proposal Process

Proposals are selected based on meeting program objectives.

Applicants must submit a detailed proposal for the activities to be undertaken over the course of the agreement, clearly stating how the proposed activities will further the objectives and expected results of the program.

Eligible proposals must:

- be in accordance with the FNIYES-Skills.Link guidelines
- outline the activities that will be undertaken and how they will meet the program's objectives
- outline the results to be achieved
- provide an estimate of eligible costs to be incurred, including any portion to be paid by partners

For mentored work placements:

- placements must not exceed 11 months
- participants will be paid a wage at or above the applicable provincial minimum wage of \$17.85 as of June 1, 2025
- work placements and activities must be completed by March 31, 2026.

6.1 Submission of Proposal

Only proposals submitted using the electronic proposal form issued by FNEC will be considered. Please refer to the new online proposal form via provided link and the attached instructions for application details. Incomplete proposals will be ineligible.

2025-2026 Skills Link Program proposals are due by **Friday, July 7th, 2025**. Please submit completed proposals via provided link and click the “submission” button on the last page to complete and submit. A copy will be sent to FNEESC and a PDF version sent to you via email.

6.2 Assessment Criteria

Submitted proposals will be reviewed by a committee constituted for this purpose. This committee will review proposals based on the objectives of the program and the criteria described below.

Every effort will be made to ensure a regional distribution of funds – please note, based on available budget, only one proposal per community will be accepted. If a First Nation and a First Nation School from the same community submit, Funding Programs Officer will reach out to confirm what proposal the community would like to move forward with.

All proposals will be assessed according to the following criteria.

- **Capability:** the experience and capacity of the recipient to manage the implementation of the activities within their proposal successfully and complete their proposed activities in a timely manner.
- **Implementation Activities;** the extent to which the proposal aligns with eligible activities and meets program objectives. The assessment will consider timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and the degree to which the activities will result in expected outcomes.
- **Project Management:** how the initiative/project will be managed, including project governance, human resources, risk management, and project monitoring, control and reporting.
- **Project Costs:** realistic assessment of estimated total costs and a justification of the level of funding requested.
- **Cooperation and Partnership:** with other governments, employers, community-based organizations and interested organizations to encourage strategic partnerships, and minimize overlap or duplication with other related employment, entrepreneurship, economic development and social programs.

Note: Meeting these criteria does not guarantee funding. A written response will be sent to all applicants to confirm whether their proposal has been approved for funding. Furthermore, only one proposal per community will be approved.

7. Eligible Expenditures

7.1 For Mentored Work Placements, including ICT

- Participant wages and mandatory employment-related costs, including the gross employee share of CPP, EI, vacation pay, WCB, and where applicable, health insurance premiums. Wages must meet or exceed the BC minimum wage (\$17.85 as of June 1, 2025)
- Actual costs for special equipment and facilities to accommodate the needs of a disabled participant, up to a maximum of \$3,000 per participant
- Training experiences that support the acquisition of skills required for work placements (First Aid, computer training)
- Other necessary costs directly related to a proposed work placement including, but not limited to, criminal record check, required uniforms, and personal safety gear (e.g. work boots, safety hats, etc.) up to a maximum of \$300 per participant

- Participant costs, such as living expenses, travel, room and board
- Dependent care for participants (documentation is required including a description of the type of arrangement available in the community)

Note for recipients: Travel expenses are to be claimed at actual cost, but cannot exceed Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's guidelines as specified in the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's *Travel Directive* in effect at the time of travel.

7.2 For Career Promotion and Science and Technology Activities

- Facility rental
- Materials produced exclusively for students to promote specific careers and fields of study, such as testimonials, biographies, etc., but not including general program advertising
- Honoraria and speaker fees
- Transportation
- Admission and event fees for students and chaperones

7.3 For All Activities

Administration costs must not exceed 5% of the sub-total amount requested before administration costs.

Eligible administration costs include (but are not limited to):

- office/general expenses
- materials and supplies
- advertising, communication and printing costs
- professional services

8. Ineligible Expenditures

Ineligible expenditures include, but are not limited to:

- for all programs:
 - office infrastructure or equipment purchases such as computers and software
 - capital costs for construction of a building (other than small repairs or renovations to support the participation of persons with disabilities) or the purchase of land or buildings
- for career promotion and awareness and science and technology activities:
 - salaries
 - training

9. Maximum Program Contribution

The initiative is regionally based and proposal driven.

- The non-profit sector is eligible to receive a contribution of up to 100% of the applicable wage, plus mandatory employment related costs (MERC), while the private sector is eligible to receive up to 50% of the applicable wage only.

- Where a participant with disabilities is hired, all employers are eligible to apply for 100% of the wage. A maximum contribution of \$3,000 per participant may be available, on an actual cost basis, for special equipment and facilities to accommodate the student's needs.

10. Monitoring and Accountability

Funding recipients must deliver their programs in accordance with the provisions of their Contribution Agreement and the program delivery requirements outlined in these Program Guidelines. Funding recipients are required to exercise due diligence when approving expenditures and must ensure that such expenditures are in accordance with the eligible expenditures set out in these Program Guidelines.

11. Reporting Requirements

Reporting requirements include not only the overarching program final report, but also the completion of a youth evaluation form for each participating work placement youth. The youth evaluation requirement does not apply to activities related to career planning and promotion or the science and technology activities. The forms will be provided by FNEESC.

2025-2026 Skills Link final reports are due no later than **Tuesday, March 31st, 2026**. Reporting requirements will be listed in each recipient's funding arrangement – if your final report is not submitted that may affect your chances to apply next year. All funds must be expended, and all activities completed by **March 31, 2026**.

12. Contact Information

If you have any questions, please contact Sonia Okogbaa, Officer, Funding Programs, by email to soniao@fnesc.ca or by phone (604) 925-6087.

For further information and where you can find copies of the program guidelines and forms, please visit: www.fnesc.ca or www.fnsa.ca under the 'Funding Programs' tab.

**Proposal Deadline:
July 7, 2025**

**Final Report Deadline:
March 31, 2026**