Chasing Paper: Forms over Function in First Nation Administration

By: Caitlin McAuliffe

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Land Acknowledgement

NPI would like to acknowledge the First Peoples on whose traditional territories we live and work. NPI is grateful for the opportunity to have our offices located on these lands and thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land.

Our main offices:

• Thunder Bay on Robinson-Superior Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg and Fort William First Nation.

• Sudbury is on the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land is the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabeg as well as Wahnapitae First Nation.

• Both are home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

We recognize and appreciate the historic connection that Indigenous people have to these territories. We recognize the contributions that they have made in shaping and strengthening these communities, the province and the country as a whole.

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About the Author

Caitlin McAuliffe

Caitlin is from Sudbury Ontario. She is a graduate from Laurentian University with a B.A., major in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, minor in Indigenous Studies and Sociology, as well as a Social Research Methods Certificate. She also holds an Aboriginal Community and Social Development Diploma from Georgian College and Public Relations Diploma from Humber College.

Caitlin has worked in community development with Innisfil Public Library and township, and as an Undergraduate Research Assistant at Laurentian University. She is dedicated to research, planning and policy in addressing the unique challenges of Northern Ontario.

Caitlin's areas of interest are within Indigenous Affairs, environmental sustainability, gender equity and economic development. Outside of research, she enjoys canoe trips and trail running.
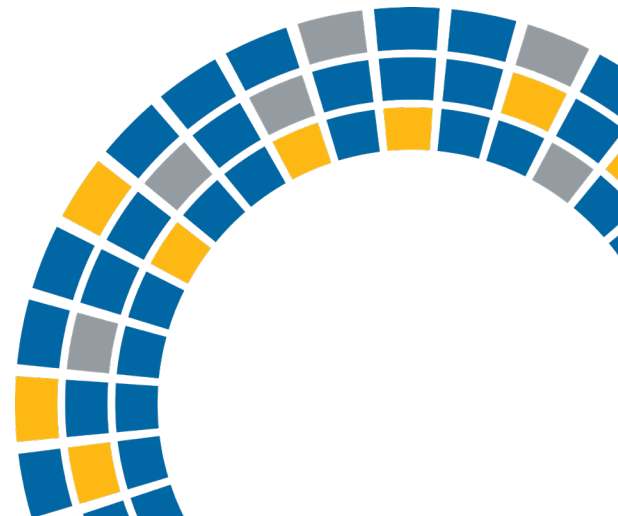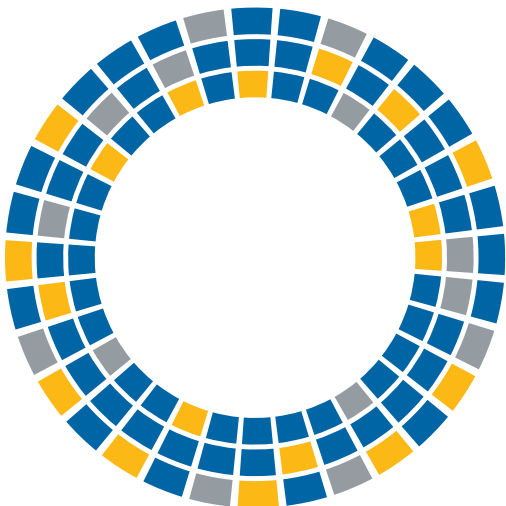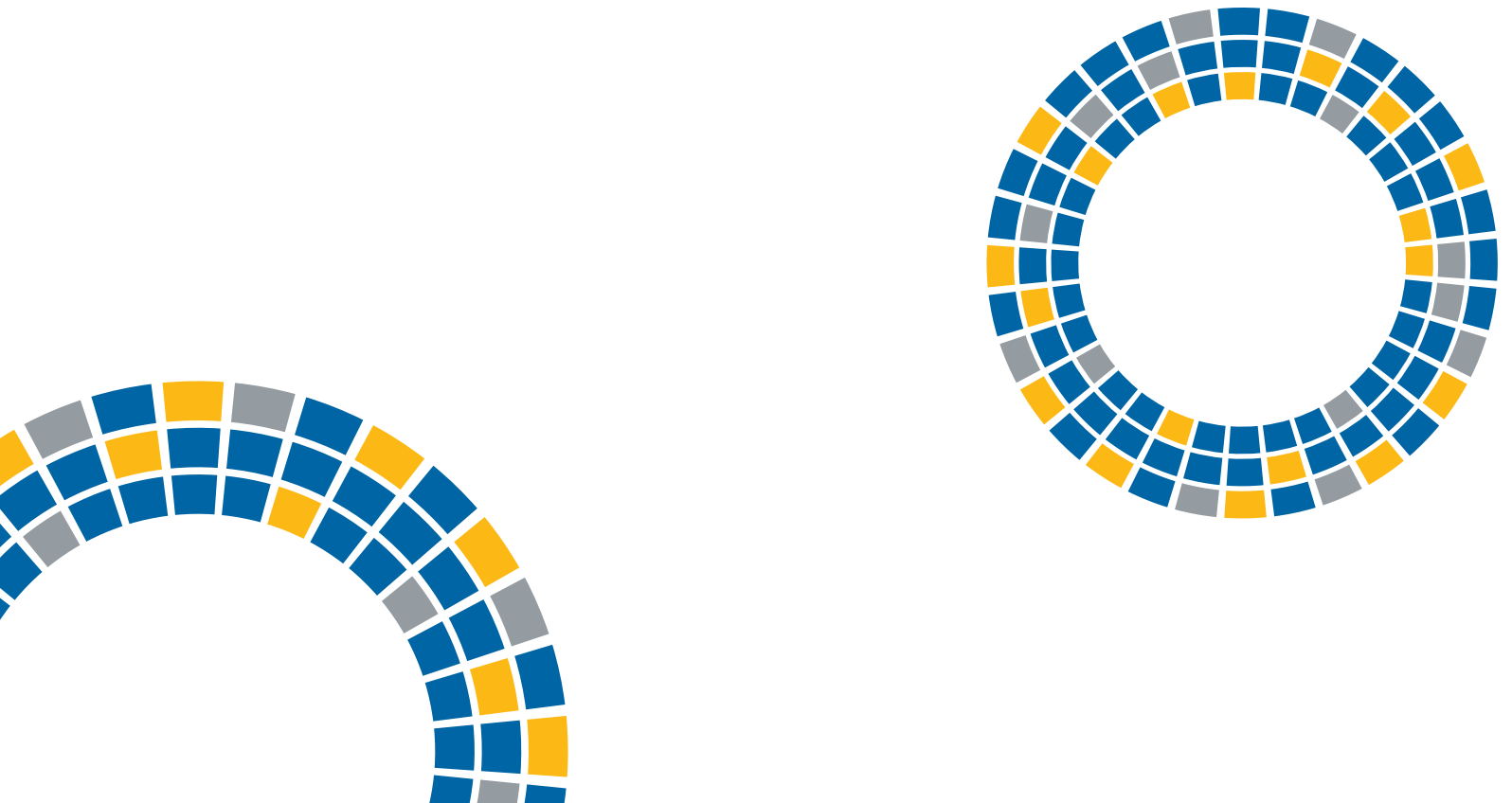
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Executive Summary

Currently, it is required that First Nations report on several criteria after securing financing such as grants, contributions, subsidies and loan guarantees from the federal government. This can include providing financial reports, tracking program outcomes or meeting specific indicators in the guideline or funding contracts outlined by the respective government department or funding agency (FedDev Ontario 2018). This reporting takes time and resources.

Most recently, to shift structures and create a new relationship based on mutual accountability with Indigenous peoples, the government has split the Indigenous Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) into two entities: Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC). However, unrealistic reporting requirements, lack of communication and support for First Nations data collection and self-governance continue to persist (United Nations 2018).

The following paper explores the reporting relationship between First Nations and federal funders. First, it aims to assess what is being done with the data requested by funders and how it is used, by providing a case study analysis on Nipissing First Nation. It outlines discrepancies and challenges faced by the community while examining funders' accountability and transparency. As well, it shows how Nipissing First Nation can use this data for internal planning and decision making. Second, the paper outlines best practices in data governance, partnership agreements as well as data collection models and tools, exploring the theoretical, practical, political and legal issues that many Indigenous communities face. It concludes with brief recommendations, however, it also recommends that a more in-depth analysis on reporting requirements and funding agreements be undertaken.

Introduction

Mutual accountability and transparency between First Nations and different levels of government remains one of today's most onerous and long-standing issues. First Nations, not-for-profits, and municipal entities are required to report on a number of criteria after securing financing such as grants, contributions, subsidies, and loan guarantees. This reporting can include providing financial reports, tracking program outcomes, or meeting specific indicators in guidelines or funding contracts outlined by the relevant government department or funding agency (Canada 2018b).

A survey by the local government professional association AMCTO notes that municipalities submit between 90 and more than 200 reports each year and that 75 per cent of respondents felt that provincial reporting eats up their time (Lobo et al. n.d., 5–6). First Nations face similar reporting requirements due to duplication among required reports and a lack of communication and feedback, which can make things difficult from an administrative perspective, considering that the majority (61 per cent) of First Nations communities have fewer than 500 residents (Canada 2002). Although funding agreements have evolved and Canada has attempted to increase the number of federal programs that provide fiscal support to First Nations, the administrative burden of report writing for First Nations has only increased (Institute on Governance 2017).

In an effort to shift structures and create a new relationship with Indigenous peoples, the federal government has split Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) into two entities: Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC). As outlined below, however, unrealistic reporting requirements and the lack of communication and support for First Nations data collection and self-governance continue to infringe upon Indigenous rights and treaties (United Nations 2018).[1] Accordingly, this study explores the reporting relationship between First Nations and funders, and provides a case study analysis of Nipissing First Nation. Specifically, the study aims to assess what is being done with the data requested by funders, how the data are used, and, finally, how Nipissing First Nation can use these data for internal planning and decision-making.

To help answer these questions, qualitative data on funder accountability and transparency were collected by administering a survey within Nipissing First Nation. A variety of funders were also contacted about reporting requirements, and a questionnaire and/or interviews were conducted with funders regarding their reporting requirements. Finally, a review of the literature reveals best practices and other pathways the community could use for planning and decision-making purposes.

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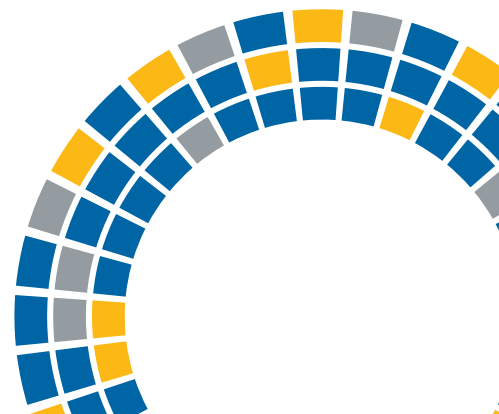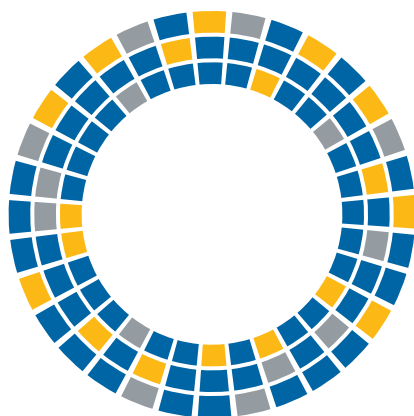
[1] Data collection must be guided by the Human Rights-Based Approach to Data, developed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Thornberry and Feiring 2017).

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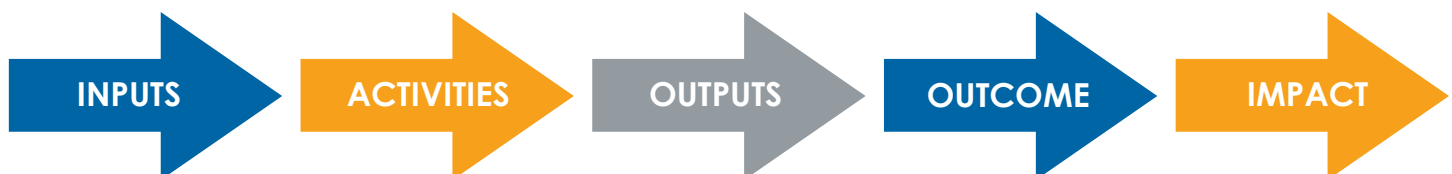
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The Reporting Burden

The average First Nations community generally submits around 130 reports to the federal government annually in order to qualify for funding from departments such as Health Canada, ISC, Employment and Social Development Canada, and so on (Galloway 2017). Similarly, in 2011, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) confirmed that these departments, as well as Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, required at least 168 separate annual reports from First Nations governments — almost two reports every three days (Institute on Governance 2017). As well, it is estimated that then-INAC was receiving over 60,000 reports annually from over 600 First Nations communities. Furthermore, the Auditor General of Canada reported significant overlap and duplication in this reporting, with the exception of some financial documents, and that the recipient departments did little with the reports (Institute on Governance 2017).

The Auditor General also outlined the concerns of many First Nations that reporting requirements were not based on consultation with communities, but rather provided in a top-down manner that did not review pre-existing requirements. This included focusing on outputs rather than on outcomes, a lack of transparency in funding decisions, and concerns that the information being collected was not being used properly by federal bodies (Institute on Governance 2017). Outputs, within project monitoring and evaluation, refer to the direct, immediate result of a program determined by quantifying project activities; outcomes refer to the goals and aims of a project or program. For example, an output might be the number of attendees at a given event, while an outcome might be the percentage of attendees who had acquired the new skill or enhanced knowledge set out in the program — a more principled and long-term projection.

Aside from outputs and outcomes, the other aspects of monitoring and evaluation are inputs, activities, and impact. Inputs refer to the resources that are expended to deliver the intended project, such as personnel and finances. Activities are the actions involved in delivering project goals, based on a particular strategy or framework. Impact refers to the long-term consequence of a project, closely related to the overall mission of the project and tied to the organization's mandate or overall goal; an example is the mission to revitalize Indigenous languages in Northern Ontario and to create an impact (Odhiambo 2013). Figure 1 displays the monitoring and evaluation process.

Figure 1: The Process of Monitoring and Evaluation

INPUTS → ACTIVITIES → OUTPUTS → OUTCOME → IMPACT

Source: Odhiambo 2013

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The Funding Relationship

Community members surveyed noted that some funders place less concern on the final outcomes that the spending achieved, but require narrow accountability for inputs spent, activities undertaken, and outputs produced. The implications of this strict adherence to specific aspects of reporting can limit First Nations in their long-term evaluation of programs, as well as in planning and implementation. Furthermore, community members and related literature noted that such a focus can also limit autonomy and self-governance in the development of programs and performance frameworks that align with community principles or strategic economic development plans (Institute on Governance 2017).

This reliance on a funding perspective can also cause issues because funding allocation is based on new and renewed agreements, meaning that funding is not finalized until INAC (now its successor) confirms that the funds from the previous period have been spent appropriately. This can result in a First Nation's having to reallocate funds from elsewhere in its budget to meet community service needs while awaiting confirmation — although, as noted later, First Nations can qualify for longer-term block funding that could help mitigate this issue. Moreover, the information funders receive is generally not used to determine funding levels. Except for the analysis of audited financial statements, First Nations receive little feedback, leading to a lack of transparency and reciprocal communication (Institute on Governance 2017; Interview A 2018).

This reporting burden reflects a long history of negotiations and debates on governance and the fiscal relationship between entities. Although Canada's system of fiscal federalism has shifted from a tightly centralized model to a more decentralized, multilevel model, the country was criticized in 2015 for the public release of its fiscal approach to self-government arrangements, introducing policy and funding methodologies rather than treating these arrangements as confidential negotiating mandates. Considering that 95 per cent of First Nations in Canada have not entered into full self-government agreements, which generally remain funded by various government departments, issues around the clarity and consistency of federal funding continue to remain adversarial (Canada 2015; Institute on Governance 2017). As discussed later in this study, not until the fiscal relationship between the

federal government and First Nations is redeveloped will both parties be able to rebuild the capacity for a joint-body governing relationship (Institute on Governance 2017).

Of note, however, is a current movement toward reframing accountability relationships and ensuring shared principles. This includes reporting that reflects community priorities, with a focus on a shared performance-based management agenda and objectives. These accountability frameworks also include formal consultations to ensure that dialogue and debate processes are based on mutual consent, common values, and trust, the goal being to move away from a compliance-based model and toward a mutual, reciprocal model based on a nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship (Institute on Governance 2017).

For example, the federal government held Mutual Transparency and Accountability Engagement sessions throughout Canada. The goal of these meetings was to create informed and effective policies and programs in renewing the relationship with Indigenous peoples. The sessions specifically sought input on how best to support mutual transparency and accountability between First Nations and the Government of Canada.[2] During the sessions, the reporting burden was once again brought up. The Sudbury session, which brought together 32 First Nations organizations in Northern Ontario, including Nipissing First Nation, resulted in the following recommendations:

1. Develop a new framework for mutual transparency and accountability that includes existing community-specific First Nations policies and practices;

2. First Nations should develop accountability frameworks that address the unique needs of their communities and that do not result in an increased administrative burden; and

3. Emphasize that First Nations already lack the resources to meet current reporting requirements (Canada 2018f).

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[2] Of note, there has been some criticism of these events, such as whether the number of sessions was enough and whether the AFN should have been the sole negotiator on behalf of various bands and Indigenous groups across Canada (Maglione Desjarlais 2019).

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Case Study: Nipissing First Nation

Nipissing First Nation of the Robinson Huron Treaty (1850) is located between the Municipality of West Nipissing and the City of North Bay (Figure 2). Nipissing First Nation participates in conservation and fisheries management programs, has two daycare centres, an alternative private high school, the Nipissing Education Centre, and bus lines, and offers multiple community health and cultural programs, as well as language classes (Nipissing First Nation 2016).

Figure 2: Nipissing First Nation
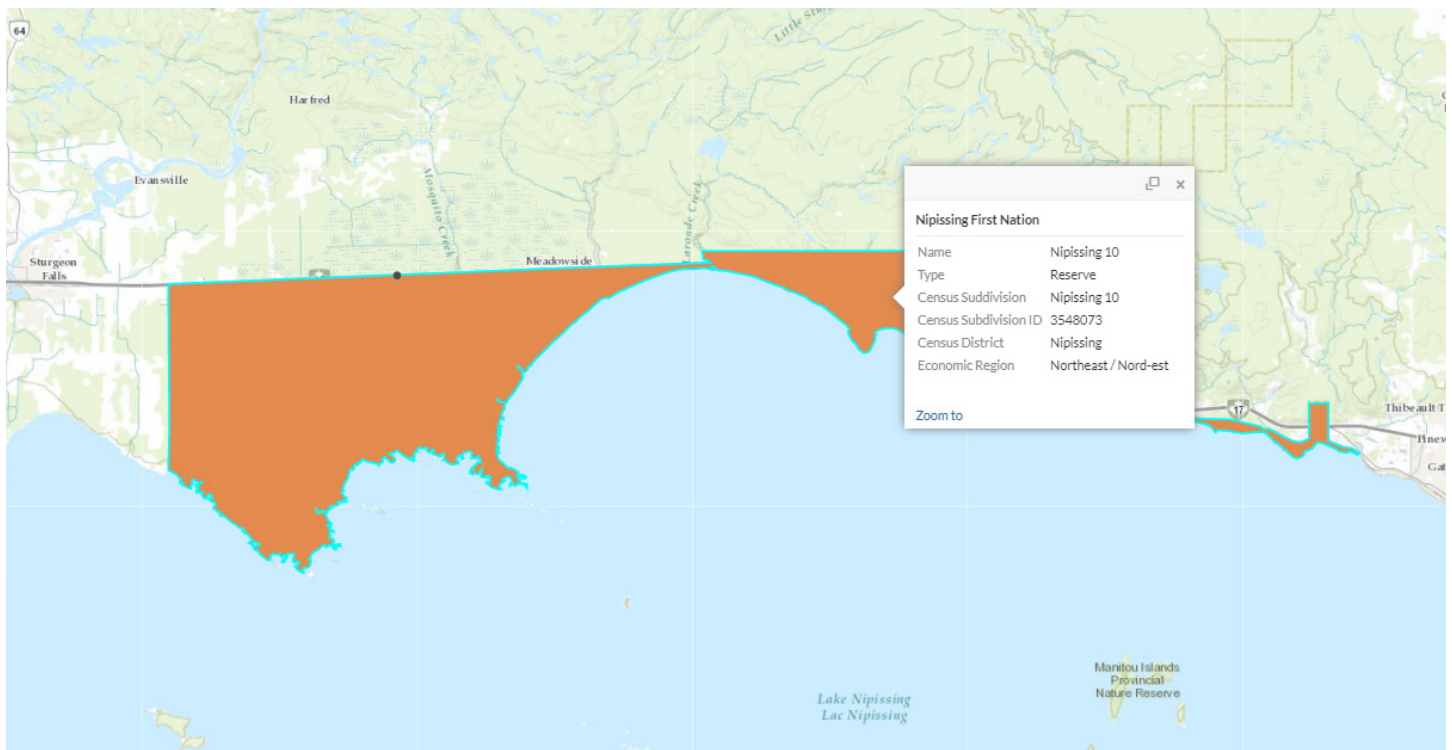
Source: Northern Policy Institute, Northern Ontario Infrastructure Map, 2019.

Nipissing First Nation's economic plan is based on the resources that surround it and its relationship with the land, placing a strong focus on economic development in industries such as renewable energy. The First Nation supports economic development opportunities such as small-scale commercial fishing as a means of income for families and renewable resource projects such as solar, which align with the community's approach to sustainability. Nipissing First Nation also focuses on creating opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship, such as a greenhouse and quarry operations (Interview A 2018). Its economic development plan includes raising the standard of living to exceed the median family income of $80,000, creating own-revenue streams so as to become financially self-sufficient by 2020, and reducing the unemployment rate to be equal to or less than the national average of 7 per cent (Interview A 2018; Nipissing First Nation 2016).

In order to achieve these economic goals, the action plan includes strategies such as creating well-paying jobs, supporting on-reserve businesses, attracting new businesses, developing workforce skills to fill employment opportunities, and creating partnerships (employment/ training/contracts). The plan also includes promoting renewable energy and alternative energy projects to lower the energy costs of Nipissing First Nations facilities as well as the hydro bills of band households (Nipissing First Nation 2016).

The community receives funding from the federal and provincial governments as well as from non-profit and private organizations. Participants in the survey noted, however, that funder timelines and priorities do not always align with those of the First Nation. This causes project delays when waiting for funding approvals. In addition, given the number of programs, participants also reported the administrative burden of the application and reporting processes, which often makes working with funding programs inefficient or not feasible to carry out.

In fiscal year 2017/18, Nipissing First Nation was required to complete 180 reports, most of them (around 70 per cent) related to health and social services. Furthermore, the reports varied in terms of frequency — that is, annual, semi-annual, quarterly, monthly. Finally, in that fiscal year more than 20 different funders were sent reports. Given the frequency and total number of reports, as well as the number of funders, it is reasonable to conclude that Nipissing First Nation has a reporting burden, and that the process could be more effective as well as more efficient — for example, by turning monthly reports into quarterly or semi-annual reports.

Analysis of the Survey

In seeking to understand the depth and breadth of the reporting process for Nipissing First Nation, several key obstacles emerged from discussions as well as through the survey: time, reporting gaps, access to funding, deficiencies in funding, and a number of funding-related issues that add to the First Nation's administrative burden.

Time

Participants all reported they spent considerable amounts of time on report writing and administrative tasks aside from other duties and assignments. Time spent on data collection, data analysis, and report writing differs based on the department or the person's role in the organization. Participants stated, however, that, overall, it takes a week to sixteen weeks to complete a given report. For example, unaudited statements can take up to sixteen weeks to prepare in order to obtain the appropriate approvals, followed by another month to receive approval from another department.
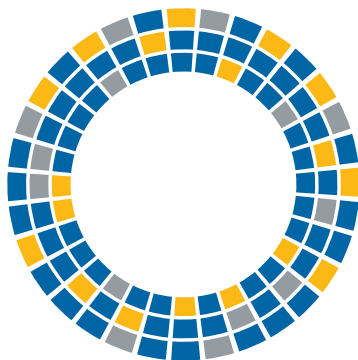
Reporting Gaps

One of the most important administrative challenges facing Nipissing First Nation is "reporting gaps" — operational, systematic, or organizational difficulties in report writing that are underestimated or unrecognized by the funder or institution that requires reports. Such difficulties include having to report for multiple grants for numerous funders, meeting difficult reporting requirements, or navigating formatting discrepancies with forms. Other reporting gaps include, as noted, a focus on outputs, rather than outcomes, in evaluation, and having to fulfil funder requirements that do not align with community priorities or its strategic plan. Although the community adapts as needed, the burden could be reduced if issued funding were better aligned with the First Nation's needs, with fewer restrictions on reporting requirements. Funding agreements involving the federal government are generally inflexible in term of how money may be allocated or spent and how performance must be measured and reported (Baker and Schneider 2015; Canada 2002; Evans 2019; Institute on Governance 2017).

Another reporting gap is the lack of data on certain community indicators, which can affect both the overall picture of how well a First Nations community is doing and appropriate funding. For Nipissing First Nation (and others nationally), fire loss data[3] stopped being tracked at the federal level in 2010 (Canada 2018d, 34). In this respect, participants said that funders should review gaps in any funding models in order to better support First Nations in ensuring transparency and comparable areas of need.

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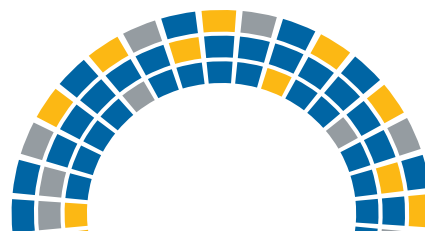
[3] Fire loss data refer to the estimate of fire loss, including contents damaged by fire, smoke, water, and overhaul. The data do not include indirect loss, such as business interruption.

Access to Funding

Barriers to funding access include complex and onerous application processes, systematic challenges, and technical issues. For example, one interviewee noted that private foundations can be challenging to work with, having narrowly prescribed conditions and parameters for support, into which the community's goals and objectives do not necessarily fit. Private or not-for-profit foundations generally set their own agenda for projects they are willing to fund. Understandable as this might be, it can force First Nations into having to decide between leaving money on the table or undergoing the necessary application and reporting requirements for projects that might be of secondary importance to the community. Still, accessing any additional funding could well be worthwhile, especially in an environment of limited funding options.

The private sector in Canada is generally reluctant to partner with government on public infrastructure projects that do not have a long-term financial backdrop and are worth less than $50 million (Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships 2016). These conditions can be prohibitive to First Nations that receive funding annually and/or whose projects are below this threshold, to the point that interested communities might be unable to access valuable private investment. At the same time, some First Nations claim that the amount they receive under the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program has to go further than it used to since they operate and maintain more infrastructure than before (Evans 2019). In short, First Nations often have to meet very specific conditions in order to access funding from private or non-profit bodies, which is becoming increasingly necessary as core funding dollars are being stretched further (Evans 2019).

Initiatives have been developed in response to feedback from and recommendations by First Nations communities, but making changes can be a lengthy and time-consuming process. Take, for example, Canadian Heritage's Indigenous Languages Component,[4] with long-standing program indicators based on a logic model that are slow to update (Interview B 2018). Although the funding model changed in 1998 in collaboration with the AFN to limit a "one-size-fits-all" approach in the selection process and grouping of regions for programming, many of the reforms outlined in a key evaluation of the initiative (Meades 2011) have not been put in place, including shifting to multiyear funding and endowment funds to address social, economic, cultural, and environmental barriers, since "piecemeal programs have little effect" (114).

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[4] The Indigenous Language Component supports the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages through community-based projects and activities (Canada Newswire 2018).

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The Indigenous Languages Component is merit-based and provides funds to both small and large communities within its funding envelope, with funds awarded to proposals that are most likely to succeed. A community must also change its proposal in order to apply again, and the funding can be accessed only once. The final report then becomes the tool that allows the funder to ensure the outputs were produced. According to Meades (2011), however, a community will rarely reapply after a proposal is rejected.

Canadian Heritage also does not necessarily have a profile on the First Nation with which it is working. The evaluation of a program includes forms that ask pre- and post-knowledge questions on language fluency before and after a series of workshops, but the evaluation does not always consider community-specific factors such as literacy rates or language format. It is worth considering whether providing an alternative, collaborative evaluation such as an oral format or use of storytelling could improve reporting, making it both inclusive and accessible (Interview B 2018).

As it stands now, Canadian Heritage uses the data from applicants' final reports for its own annual reporting to request more funds for itself in telling the stories of the projects it has funded. It has also held engagement sessions to support the co-development of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis languages legislation (Interview B 2018), an initiative that might allow communities to become more involved in designing evaluation metrics. In this way, the language practitioners — the Elders, first speakers, knowledge keepers, and learners who create and build the workshops — can establish meaningful indicators to align with community needs and visions.

Another related challenge is that certain funders require that more than one funder be involved in the project prior to participating in grant funding, particularly for capital projects. Although this might appear suitable in terms of additional support and funding, survey participants noted that it can increase complexity when all of the program requirements are not aligned. For example, the Business Expansion Projects funding stream of the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) states that assistance will generally not exceed 50 per cent of total costs and that applicants are expected to apply elsewhere to cover the balance of funding requirements (Canada 2019a). As each funder varies in its mission and program requirements, this can lead Nipissing First Nation to modify its planning, reporting, and execution to match these differing priorities even for the same project. It was further noted that First Nations are also in a precarious position when government

priorities conflict with one another; moreover, they are tied to funding bodies that change with the government, with some governments making Indigenous issues more or less a priority than others (Interview A 2018).

Another barrier highlighted is the range of required report formatting, inasmuch as the community is not allowed to reuse reports for different funders, even if due within the same time frame. In one instance, a funder was asked if the community could submit the information using its own report structure, as it contained all of the same information as the funder's template; the request was denied. Such instances add to duplication and unnecessary time spent reporting.

A further item that emerged from the survey relates to the problem of funding "smaller" initiatives and programs. To explain, Nipissing First Nation is unable to access more funding when it is not working on large-scale projects. Although loans are helpful for core infrastructure, and can be acquired by non-First Nations and First Nations alike, small-scale applications (for less than $10,000) are often not worth the cost and time that the application process and reporting requirements would impose on them. This includes smaller amounts of funding for events such as the community's local pow wow. It was also reported that the community was not able to access Ontario's Aboriginal Loan Guarantee Program for renewable projects, and unless the project had significant scale — in the hundreds of millions of dollars — the program was not worthwhile.

Finally, there are also technical issues, as demonstrated with ISC, which uses an electronic reporting system. When Nipissing First Nation submits reports, the system relies on an ISC employee to acknowledge receipt, but there is evidence of multiple reports deemed unreceived or "overdue." This causes complications at the First Nation, which relies directly on the federal government for funding and cannot afford having payment withheld for the next term (Interview A 2018). Another technical barrier is that new innovative funds often require an incorporation number, which causes a problem since a First Nation is not technically a business, municipality, person, or non-profit organization. For example, Nipissing First Nation was unable to access a rebate program through an agency because the system required an incorporation number. Not being recognized as an entity or corporation viable to take part in the rebate program illustrates how the structures and systems in place have not been designed to include First Nations.
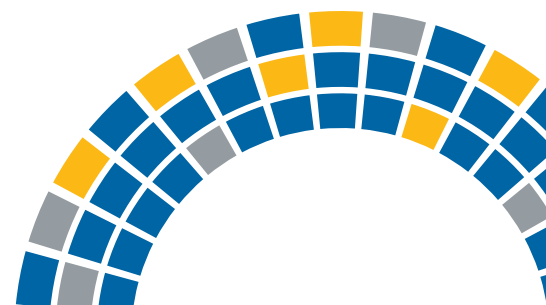
Deficiencies in Funding

An examination of the funding breakdown for Nipissing First Nation for fiscal year 2017/18 (see the Appendix) reveals that the community received funding from a variety of departments and organizations. It was noted in discussions, however, that there are deficiencies in all sectors in grant availability and sufficiency, with lack of capital being the most significant. As well, although the community's own-source revenues are used entirely in accordance with its strategic plan, federal and provincial funding priorities do not always align with those of the community. Moreover, even while working effectively and efficiently using its current resources (and while funders become more flexible in the application of funds and retention of surpluses), inequity still persists due to major administrative burdens.

The fiscal year 2017/18 audit showed that the First Nation's year-over-year funding tended to stay relatively stable, but provincial funding had increased over the previous two years in health and social services (NFN 2020; Interview A 2018). On the other hand, it was reported that there was inadequate funding for language and culture, one of the community's most pressing priorities. Additionally, programs for women and children such as daycare, and a women's shelter were underfunded, while programs for supportive care to seniors, such as home care, had become extremely burdensome, with heavy reporting requirements. Furthermore, it was noted that growth and staff retention were difficult, since economic development was not supported and on-reserve salaries were less than those off-reserve, including for professional positions such as nurses, teachers, and daycare providers. Indeed, Statistics Canada (2016) reports that the average after-tax income on-reserve is only 60 per cent of that off-reserve.

Another funding-related challenge is the resources in time and money spent on project implementation and management. As a result, funding is not always allocated to areas where it would be of most use. It is clear that reporting demands can limit a First Nation's organizational capacity and strategic decision-making. Moreover, the community is left with little expectation of increased funding or support even when criteria are fulfilled and standards met.

Overall, participants said that First Nations need new models for the allocation of capital funding, as there is not nearly enough cash flow in any given year to meet requirements, and capital funds allow the community to acquire fixed assets such as equipment or buildings (Interview A 2018). There was also a call for new mechanisms to permit First Nations and ISC to access capital markets while holding the Crown responsible for its fiduciary duties as necessary (Interview A 2018). It was noted, moreover, that funders should have more trust in Nipissing First Nation as an organization, given its record of transparency and accountability in reporting. Nipissing First Nation was said to ensure that all expenditures are accounted for, in addition to providing supporting documentation to prove it is continually in line with policies and agreements and has never misused any funding it has received. INAC introduced a General Assessment tool designed to lower the reporting burden of First Nations with a history of reporting compliance and good governance, but an internal INAC audit found that many communities with scores that qualified them for the reduced administrative burdens were not moved to the more flexible arrangements (Evans 2019).

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Other Funding-Related Issues

Other noted funding-related issues include having to access multiple grants for one initiative, which involves coordinating among multiple internal departments, such as both health and social services, to complete a funding report. Another issue is having to report to many funders separately, each of which has its own specific reporting requirements. In some cases, departments can collaborate on reports, with staff in each department filling out their respective sections of a report. In other instances, the funder requires reports to be collated, with the increased workload in preparing them having little direct benefit to community members or organizational benefit to Nipissing First Nation. It was said that it was sometimes difficult to meet the requirements of various funders because in some instances, even if there is a common goal, separate funding is needed to achieve it. One specific analogy given was that it was like reporting the ingredients of a single pie to various funders.

Participants also mentioned that, if funding and funding reports were developed to be First Nations–specific, whether through offering larger sums, collaborative block funds, or long-term grants, the reporting issue might be resolved. This would align with the projected ten-year grant available in 2019, a funding mechanism within the new fiscal relationship that seeks increased funding flexibility to address local needs and priorities (Canada 2018a).

Participants also discussed that, while in some cases indicators in the funding reports requested by funding organizations do measure the appropriate items, most departments find the information is repetitive and prolongs the reporting process. And although the federal government has attempted to lessen the reporting burden by requiring First Nations to file just one annual report as opposed to numerous monthly reports, Nipissing First Nation has found that the report asks the same questions as the monthly reports but simply condensed into one very long report once a year, and still requiring an equal amount of time and commitment as the monthly reports. Along these lines, participants said that, although some funders might have changed their reporting requirements to improve efficiency at their end, these changes increased the costs in terms of time at Nipissing First Nation's end. Finally, it was noted that each report also has specific agreements and regulations that continually change from report to report, year to year (Interview A 2018).
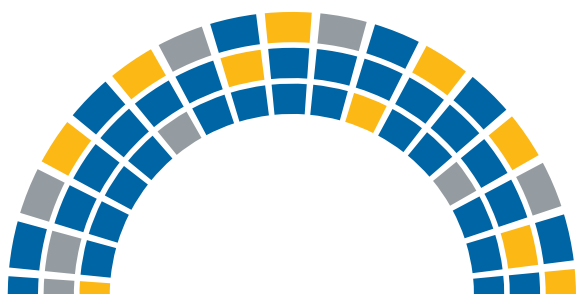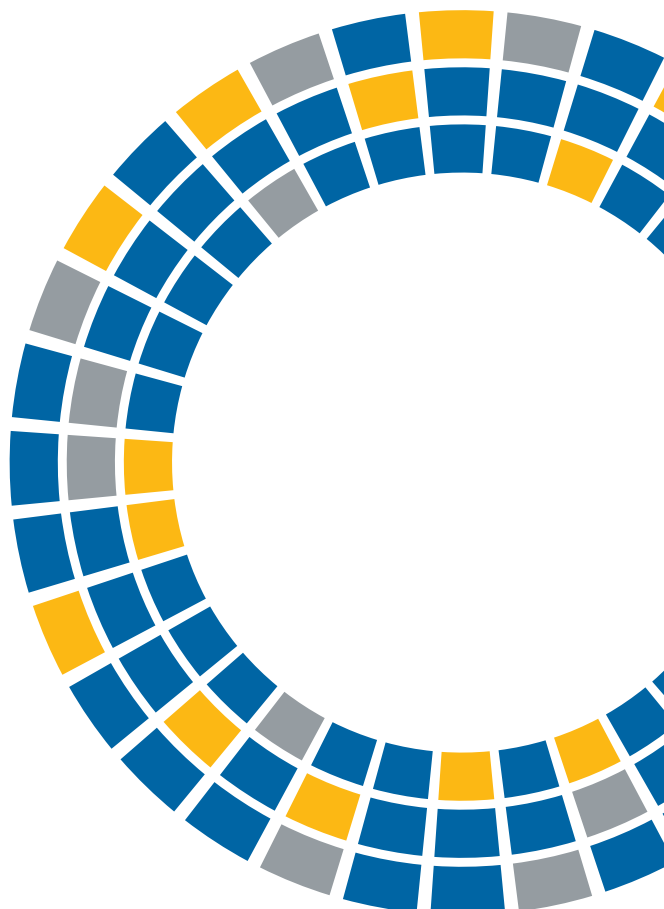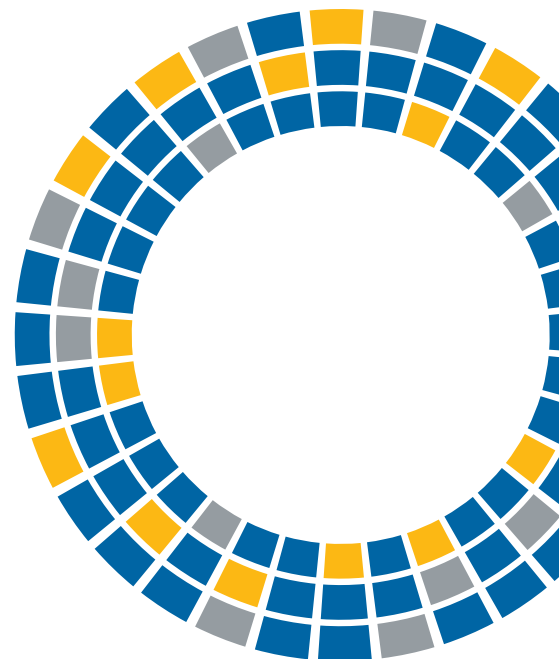
Data Collection and Management

Participants described discrepancies in data collection when fulfilling specific funder requirements — for example, some people did not want to disclose certain details. Another example cited was the challenge in having to provide age-specific programming when there were few participants of the ages requested by the funder. At times, a First Nation might have to fit the reporting requirements even while the funder's program evaluations have little understanding of the community make up or do not use a cultural framework when requesting information. More often, the community has to fit quantitative markers, when qualitative data might be more relevant. This aligns with the Auditor General of Canada's finding that funding agreements are generally uniform and not flexible with respect to community context (Canada 2002), as well as research on how the federal government and First Nations have differing notions of accountability, which can cause tension (Baker and Schneider 2015; Evans 2019).

Although the indicators in funding reports are used to help evaluate and measure progress, funders might not have an understanding of a given First Nation's social and cultural context or its organizational structure, capacity, and resources. As participants reported, some funders can be challenging to deal with, and are generally perceived as having little to no understanding of the First Nation, providing unrealistic reporting requirements and engagement. It was also stated, however, that if funders do have staff that can work closely with a First Nation, there tends to be better understanding of local needs (Interview A 2018). Another participant similarly reported a disconnect between the indicators requested by the funding organization and the items that were being measured. In the case of an employment and training program, for example, although it was noted that there was a need to report on the number of those employed and those returning to school after the program, some indicators, such as lifestyle improvement or reconnecting with family members, were difficult to measure.

These sentiments by Nipissing First Nation certainly are not unique. The Auditor General of Canada found in 2002 that most of the reports government agencies required did not adequately measure the performance of the projects they funded (Canada 2002), and saw little to no substantive progress on reporting burdens nine years later (Canada 2011). Baker and Schneider (2015) concluded that 29 of the 80[5] reports then mandated by the federal government were purely procedural, and served only to ensure the community was complying with applicable by-laws, statutes, and policies. These procedural reports were the most common type, followed by 25 "information" reports that passed along things such as population counts. In other words, 54 of the 80 reports required of First Nations did not measure program performance and were "of no real benefit" (Canada 2002, 30) to the community. Yet, not filing, or filing late, could result in the First Nation's losing access to federal funding (Baker and Schneider 2015).

Although there is nothing stopping a community from implementing its own indicators to measure performance, it would create an additional burden, would not replace the need to report on those unhelpful indicators mandated by the federal government, and likely would not be used in judging whether the community was using the money appropriately. There is some room in proposal-based funding for communities to list which indicators they will use, but such funding generally amounts to a relatively small portion of a First Nation's total, and the indicators ultimately require the government's approval before funding is disbursed (Evans 2019). As the federal department tasked with disbursing funds to First Nations, INAC (and now its successor) is mandated to account for how public funds are spent; thus, "for INAC, funding agreements for First Nations populations become an exercise in mitigating the risk of a poor investments [sic], rather than focusing on positive outcome for recipient groups" (Evans 2019, 104). Efforts to establish a new fiscal relationship between the government and First Nations will, it is hoped, shift this mentality.

Indeed, it was stated that sheer numbers used as indicators do not always reflect success at the community level. The way communities measure health outputs or overall social and economic well-being might differ based on cultural context and locality. And cultural models and frameworks can be developed to include the socio-political context — for example, integrating "distal determinants of health" such as colonialism, racism, social exclusion, and repression of self-determination when measuring the influence of health on the population (Loppie Reading and Wien 2009), or incorporating traditional ties, community resources, capacities, and cultural continuity[6] to create meaningful indicators. Other models include examining vulnerabilities while also incorporating the four dimensions of physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental health across the life course (Loppie Reading and Wien 2009).

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[5] The federal government required 80 distinct reports, but many were required more than once a year, which explains the Auditor General's finding that communities had to produce at least 168 reports yearly.

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The creation and use of models such as these for developing community-minded indicators can be developed to increase the "diversity of local measurements" that are integrated within government performance measures (Warner 2018, 55). As government benchmarking initiatives examine internal government processes and practices to determine their effectiveness, community indicator frameworks tend to focus on community outcomes to determine the success of existing policies (Warner 2018, 53, 55). Indicators must be relevant, meaningful, and collaborative products, that aim to "support the construction of alternative Indigenous statistical portraits and narratives, ones that accord with Indigenous worldviews and interests" (Walter and Anderson 2013, 16).

Some funders focus on specific outputs that meet their overall mandate and vision. The NOHFC, for example, has developed measurement indicators based on the outcomes described in project proposals, and measures success by the project's stated goal. NOHFC investments in economic development in Indigenous communities are meant to align with the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario, which calls for Indigenous communities to be involved in the development of regional and economic plans, and for alternative mechanisms, including working capital and micro-capital, to enable Indigenous enterprises to attain collateral and equity positions (Ontario 2011, 42–3). Further research is encouraged into how NOHFC indicators reflect these commitments aside from job creation and how the indicators are modified when working with First Nations.

Engagement and Dialogue

Increasing engagement and enhancing dialogue between funder and organization are key steps in building a relationship that focuses on transparency and funder accountability. For example, one funder initiated engagement sessions on how to improve their application policies and funding relationship in support of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. The funder later received feedback on its assessment criteria, reporting, and evaluation process. This included being encouraged to make Northern outreach and relationship building a key priority, to offer forms and information in Indigenous languages, and to increase its support of application writing (Interview F 2018).

The engagement sessions also sought feedback on the funder's application format, including such categories on the form as name, goal of fund, applicant criteria, and funding amounts. Recommendations from Indigenous communities included implementing changes related to the self-identification criteria and refining language to use terms such as "support," rather than "empower" or "engage," Indigenous peoples. There was also a call for equal distribution of grants between North and South, and large and small organizations, in addition to providing multiyear grants and increasing application options, such as by preparing a written copy within the community instead of just online. Furthermore, there was a focus on providing more capital to purchase hardware, materials, and transportation for Indigenous urban dwellers to visit family or attend ceremonies in remote communities. It was also requested that childcare be made an eligible expense for tax purposes to support families in the community (Interview F 2018).

[6] Cultural continuity is the degree of social and cultural cohesion within a community, and involves intergenerational connectedness that should not be underestimated (Loppie and Wein 2009, 18).

Data Analysis and Information Access

Another issue identified in the survey was data analysis and access to information for self-governance. For example, with employment training, a First Nation might generate an extensive amount of data on the number of people who have received new training and skills, which is then reported to the funder. However, the data are not further used in a data bank that could service the community's strategic plan. It would be more useful if this information, such as the number of people currently seeking employment with construction training, could also be used to supply a new development project, for example. This would align with the economic development plan and further enhance access to jobs in the community.

The survey revealed that Nipissing First Nation did not have the data collected for analysis related to its strategic plan and community development goals. It also lacked the capacity to extract data from the reports it generated or to employ internal analysts to gather, interpret, and format the data into useful support for decision-making (Interview A 2018). From this example, it is clear that an increased focus on how First Nations could be supported in collecting and storing data would be beneficial.

Despite the products of mainstream developers (Gilpin 2019), the Indigenous community itself has the most insight into its internal requirements. In this vein, it was noted that there would be significant value in organizing and capturing data in local databases so that staff were able to reformat reports and access data to meet the needs of both the First Nation and the funder. Further, it was suggested that each department could have its own

database, and an internal data tool that could be used to create an overall inventory of reporting requirements. This complements comments made by others that an electronic tool could encourage efficiency through the creation of consistent data for informatics and analysis. It was noted, however, that, for efficiency's sake, picking several key indicators would help to determine whether Nipissing First Nation was meeting the goals set out by the community leadership.

Who, however, would have access to such a tool? Many First Nations are interested in selecting, storing, and using their own data. Although Nipissing First Nation has worked with database developers in the health area to capture data more effectively and improve accessibility, it is exploring methods to better capture education, training, and workforce data. One participant noted that the First Nation collects an extensive amount data for funder reports, but the data are not always the most useful for its own decision-making and self-governance. Moreover, although funding models and funding approaches could be improved, there should also be changes at the policy level (Interview A 2018). Finally, participants mentioned as important elements how this data collection and use might affect the community and what regulations would be required.

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Post-Reporting: Transparency, Accountability, Confidentiality

According to the survey, Nipissing First Nation was unclear about what funders were doing with the data collected. One participant noted that, as part of one funder's post-reporting process, when a funding announcement is made, the recipient is invited to attend the announcement (Interview C 2018). Furthermore, while the information is still subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1990), a funder may redact some information obtained working with specialists if asked to do so. If the funder receives a request for information under the Act, the recipient organization is not involved in the response.

Another participant stated that, although Nipissing First Nation had not been involved in the post-reporting activities of one program it helped fund, reports or publications that reference this specific program and results could be shared with Nipissing First Nation (Interview D 2018).

Overall, the survey revealed that Nipissing First Nation felt that funders were not transparent with the data collected or what the data were used for after it files funding-related reports. When disclosing data and other information to funders in reports, some staff felt that confidentiality was at risk. It was stated that reporting to funding agencies could also be reduced to lower the amount of stress on staff, especially in the finance department, who are overwhelmed by these requirements. Some departments felt that their confidentiality was being protected, but they were unsure of who was viewing the reports or even if the reports were being viewed at all. In an effort to increase its governance capacity and streamline reporting practices, Nipissing First Nation Chief and Council passed a Financial Administration Law in 2013. The new law provided the community with "a set of governance and finance practices that helps Councils and staff make informed decisions" (First Nations Financial Management Board n.d.).

Nipissing First Nation is supportive of ISC creating a ten-year grant program so that funding is more predictable and flexible and has been participating in program since 2019. However, one participant noted that the First Nation had demonstrated its fiscal and management capacity over a long period (Interview A 2018), which raises the issue of a lack of trust and accountability, particularly as First Nations face increased administrative burdens.
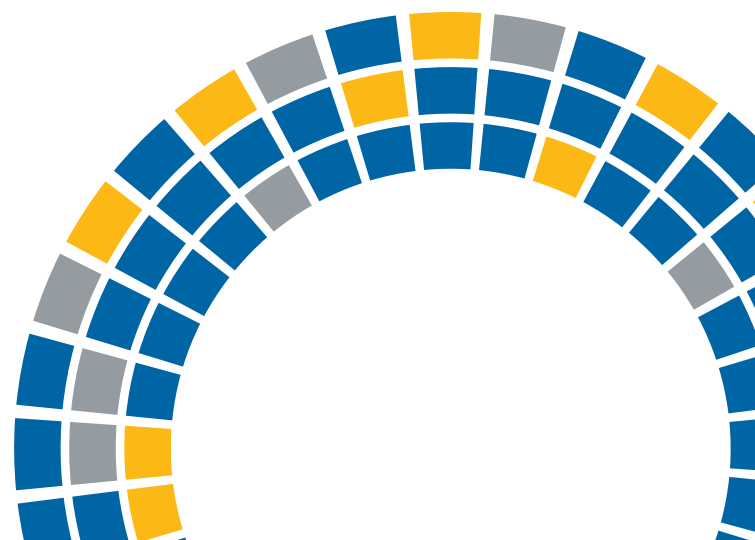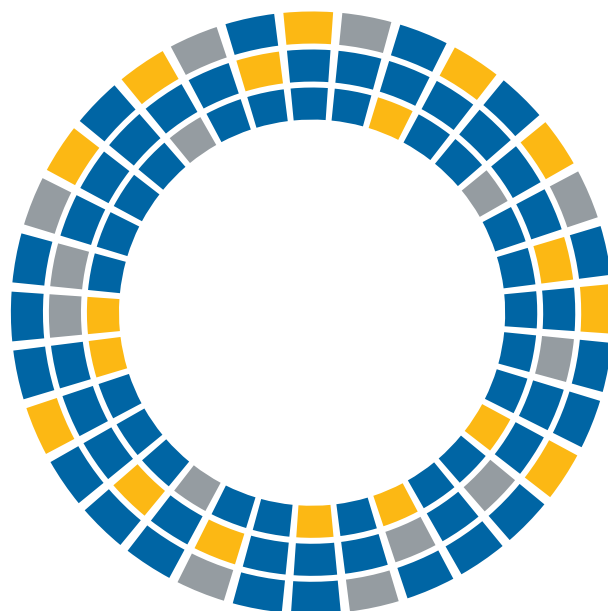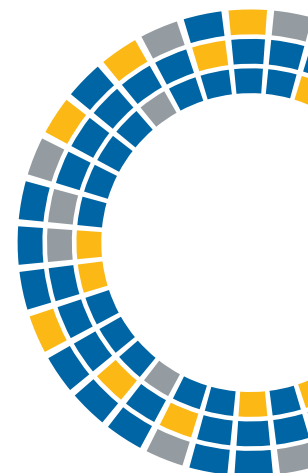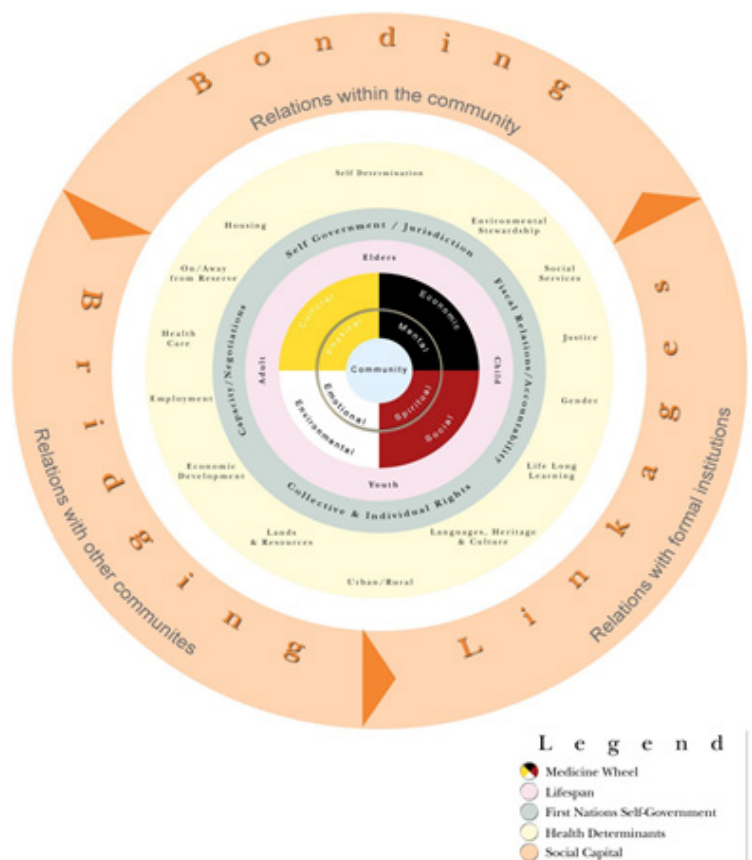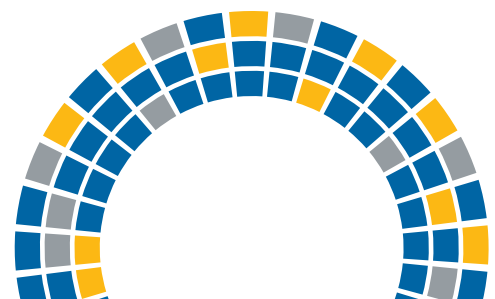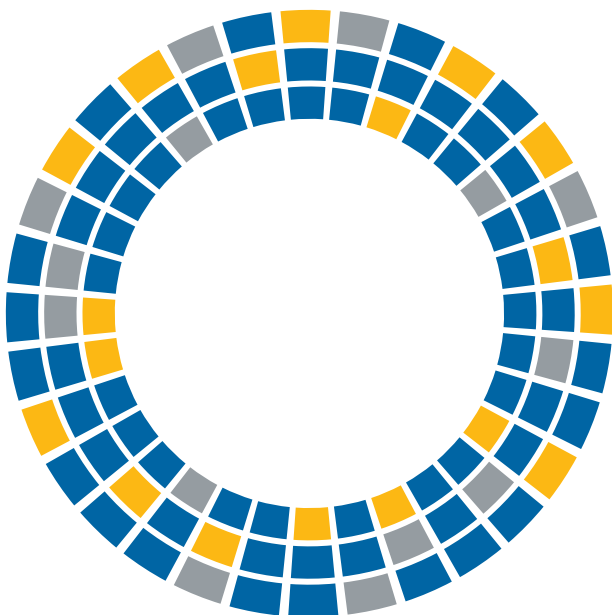
Indicator Frameworks

Another key aspect of reporting is the collection of data and the ways that indicators are measured using an indicator framework. While an indicator is a single element of data, an indicator framework is the structure, system, or concept — an organized way to view the data and their relevance, showing connections between indicators, grouping or categorizing data with measures and methods of calculation (Public Health Agency of Canada 2017). The indicator framework determines the most appropriate items in evaluation, whether objectives, outcomes, or determinants. How meaningful and effective the indicators are depend on both the framework and the measurement index.

An example is the Positive Mental Health Surveillance Indicator Framework, which generates useful measurements to determine Canada's positive mental health rating using levels of indicators ranging from individual determinants to community determinants. Determinants are factors that affect the nature or outcome of something. Models can also be developed to inform or direct the creation of a framework; one example is the Policy and Planning Model used by the AFN (Figure 3), which is a holistic model "to structure policy interventions and associated performance indicators." This emphasizes how models can be updated to apply better to First Nations and to shift indicators. In this case, the model includes aspects that define factors intrinsic to the notion of cultural continuity, such as social capital (United Nations 2006).

Figure 3: Policy and Planning Model

Source: Assembly of First Nations 2006.

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In the various reports that Nipissing First Nation files, indicators are used for a wide range of programs. In most cases, the community is responsible for filling out an application that fits the criteria and, depending on the project or funding, either determining and inserting its own indicators in the application or aligning its targets with those set out by the funder. When the funding agreement is made, the funder and grantee have set out a contract. The funder may set out criteria and create indicators using a framework generated from research, policy, or practice, or the organization's mandate, vision, or mission. For example, many of then-INAC's proposals, applications, and work plans for non-core funding included space for the applicant to insert indicators of how the project will be tracked (Canada 2019c). INAC's fiscal year 2017/18 Departmental Plan stressed the importance of partnerships with Indigenous peoples in developing common and meaningful indicators (Canada 2017a), and the new fiscal relationship outlined below points to a more iterative process in developing an appropriate indicator framework.

These ideals seem not to have permeated all funding decisions, however. Evans (2019), Baker and Schneider (2015), and the Auditor General of Canada (Canada 2002) all find that reporting requirements are dictated to First Nations, rather than developed in a collaborative manner. And, as mentioned previously, nearly two-fifths of the reports First Nations must complete for the federal government only measure if they are compliant with best practices, as decided by the government as funder (Baker and Schneider 2015). In this respect, it is important that the indicators are appropriate and can assist in achieving the First Nation's vision for the community, as well as meeting the grantor's requirements for evaluation and verification of successful completion.

Whose Indicators?

"Good indicators are statistics with direction," designed not to justify a course of action but to identify one (Warner 2018, 44, 48). Indicators are a measurement index of results or evidence that is used to evaluate projects or programs and to ensure they are reaching their objectives. These can be expressed as qualitative or quantitative, and should be specific, observable, or measurable. For example, the indicators might be a list of activities performed that places emphasis on action, a change in attitudes/behaviours, or a required participation rate set out by the funder.
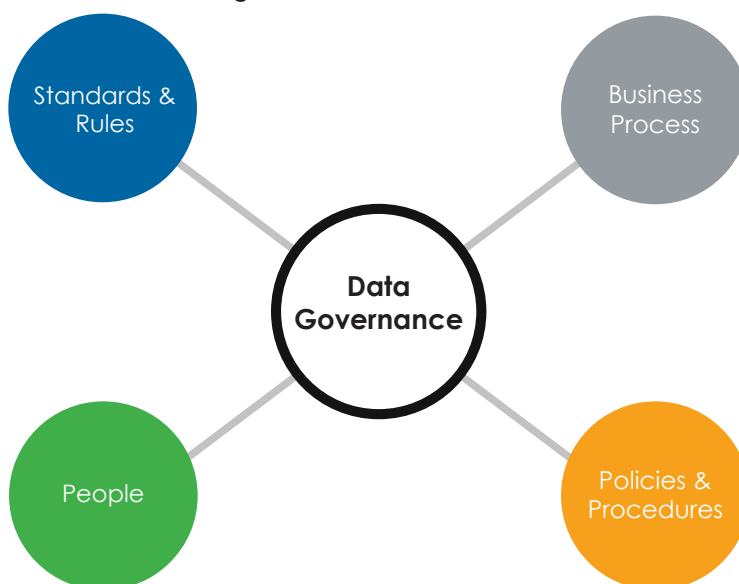
Indicator frameworks, however, are designed by people — academics, activists, community members — who might have different biases. Which indicators to use and how becomes the methodological dilemma. At times, indicators selected for reporting might reinforce an existing course of action – sometimes referred to as "decision-driven data-making." Therefore, the political implications of data reporting are that it can determine data selection, ultimately deciding what has value for analysis and which outputs and outcomes are sought (Warner 2018, 49). In the case of First Nations report writing, whose indicators and what outcomes become key questions regarding the governance of data. The practicalities are that indicators need to be agreed upon by the funder and the community before the project begins, and both funder and community must be aware of the design of the indicator framework and method for the final evaluation. Although the federal government appears to acknowledge this and has stated a desire to move in this direction (Canada 2018a), as of the time

of writing the relationship between First Nations and the government remains fairly one-sided when it comes to the creation of this indicator framework (Baker and Schneider 2015; Evans 2019). Fixing this dynamic would go a long way toward improving First Nations data governance.

Data governance is defined as "the practice of organizing and implementing policies, procedures and standards for the effective use of an organization's structured/unstructured information assets" (Phanse 2008, 3). Further, it is concerned with a framework for decision rights, accountabilities, and overall management of the availability, usability, integrity, and security of data (Walter and Anderson 2013, 12, 16).

Indigenous peoples, however, have been left out of the control, ownership, and governance of their own data. This includes being involved in developing the frameworks, reflecting the times they were constructed in and thus the "classifying mind of the colonial state," which has "little to do with the highly contextual collective self-understandings of Indigenous peoples themselves" (Walter and Anderson 2013, 12, 16). To address these concerns, models such as those incorporating the principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession (OCAP) have been established to set standards for the collection, protection, and use of First Nations data (FNIGC 2018, 2019b). These principles are inherently tied to self-determination and the preservation of culture, as data are what serve for effective governance in supporting an Indigenous community's priorities and strategies (Bruhn 2014, 2).

Figure 4: Data Governance

Source: Phanse 2008, 3.

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Legislation

The First Nations Financial Transparency Act

As noted in the previous section, transparency is a long-standing issue. In particular, despite objections by the AFN, the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, passed in 2013, requires all registered bands to prepare financial statements (Greschner 2018). Indeed, prior to the law's passing, the AFN, at a Special Chiefs Assembly in 2010, passed a resolution deeming the proposed legislation both "unnecessary and heavy handed," and stating that not only did it duplicate existing reporting requirements, but it concentrated authority with the minister, thus serving "to only further exacerbate an already adversarial relationship" (Canada 2011). Former national chief Shawn Atleo of the AFN was in favour of a First Nations auditor general and "a system of accountability that would track band leaders' salaries as well as all of Ottawa's spending on aboriginal affairs" (Scoffield 2011).

On the other hand, it was also argued that, although First Nations have an interest in improving transparency, reform need not be imposed, but rather should seek to empower First Nations to build capacity by developing accountability mechanisms (Canada 2018a; Evans 2019; Institute on Governance 2017; Jones 2018). Indeed, Jones (2018) goes on to say that:

> "First Nations don't object to financial accountability. They objected to the Act being passed without consultation. They objected to posting their consolidated financial statements on the Internet. First Nations function as governments, but also have businesses that compete in the commercial mainstream. Many believe those businesses could face a competitive disadvantage if their financial information is disclosed. In the most recent case, the court found there wasn't evidence of financial harm, but did not rule out the possibility in other instances."

The Act has been criticized for placing uneven accountability and transparency expectations on First Nations (Canada 2018a, 2018e). Before its enactment, many First Nations already complied with local and federal laws regarding financial disclosure to band members, while some had adopted their own laws. Other First Nations, however, were not transparent in sharing their finances with band members (Canada 2011; Greschner 2018). A similar practice is the Ontario Sunshine List,[7] which requires all agencies that receive public funding from the province to disclose the names, positions, and salaries of each employee paid $100,000 or more in a calendar year (Ontario 2019).

The First Nations Financial Transparency Act also requires that a First Nation maintain its accounts and prepare financial statements annually, showing information including assets, liabilities, equity, income, expenses, and cash flows, presented as a government reporting on its financial information. Finally, the financial statements must be audited by an independent auditor, and the First Nation must prepare an annual document called a "Schedule of Remuneration and Expenses" that lists remuneration paid and expenses reimbursed to its chief and councillors (Crawley 2017; Greschner 2018). In 2015, however, the federal government suspended a provision that allowed Ottawa to withhold funds from any band that failed to provide public audited financial statements or the salaries of chiefs and band councillors (Akin 2017).

Most recently, in the Sudbury Mutual Transparency and Accountability Engagement Sessions, the First Nations involved said there should be clear communication with the general public on how the federal government funds First Nations' programs and services so as to mitigate any negative perceptions (Canada 2018f). It was also stated that information on the federal government's financial activities, such as salaries of federal public servants, should also be made publicly available. To increase self-governance, it was recommended that reporting practices should be agreed upon by First Nations and that First Nations should have the freedom to choose their own practices for internal reporting, as well as whether or not they want the general public to have this information. Prior to the 2013 Act, information had been communicated through audit reports, regular updates to community members, community meetings, and webpages (Canada 2018a, 2018f).

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[7] The Sunshine List is public sector salary disclosure that captures municipalities, school boards, hospitals, universities, colleges, many charities, and the Ontario public service.

Mutual Accountability Frameworks

At the international level, Indigenous self-government is supported by the United Nations. Harold Calla, head of the First Nations Financial Management Board, states that First Nations must move away from "relying on the parliamentary appropriations process to provide programs and services and that we need to become more self-sufficient, we need to be able to raise revenues the way other levels of government do...and become a government like every other government" (Schwartz 2013).

One step toward building a mutual accountability framework between the federal government and First Nations has been the creation of ten-year grants, as jointly recommended by the AFN and ISC (Galloway 2017). These are available to First Nations that make a written request to ISC and that meet stringent requirements on financial performance and good governance over the previous five years (Canada 2019a). The agreement was hailed as reducing First Nations' administrative burdens, enabling long-term strategic planning, and making First Nations' governments accountable primarily to their people, rather than to the federal government (Galloway 2017). There appears to be some flexibility built into when Ottawa will release funds to the communities (Canada 2018f), with one chief praising monthly transfers, while another spoke of plans with the lump sum received (Canada 2019d).

The goal of the grant, stated the minister, "is that it would be a move from an overly burdensome reporting mechanism that would come back to the federal government" to a "mutual accountability framework, from a range that we would agree on in advance, in terms of what kind of reporting the nations would do for their citizens" (Galloway 2017). This reporting could mean that First Nations are required to set sustainable development goals, such as how many students graduate from high school, and then prove to their own members that they have achieved them.

The report, Review of Accountability and Mutual Accountability Frameworks, was compiled to inform the AFN and then-INAC as they moved toward transforming the fiscal relationship between First Nations and the Crown. It outlines shared principles (accountability, reciprocity, and transparency), and goes into some detail on the importance of creating a supportive structure for the data needs of First Nation governments. The report also suggests that the First Nations Information Governance Centre might be well placed to take on the role "to support the production and delivery of timely, relevant and accessible data on First Nations

in Canada" in order to improve outcomes (Institute on Governance 2017, 24). The First Nations Information Governance Centre is an established entity that exists to support the development of information governance and to assert data sovereignty through regional and national partnerships (FNIGC 2019a). Under OCAP[8] principles, this includes information (records, reports, data) that identifies any First Nation or group of First Nations and that should not be used or disclosed without consent of the affected First Nation – regardless of where that information is held (FNIGC 2018). This is why, in the use of data-sharing agreements, First Nations should ensure that non–First Nations data stewards do not have legal barriers that prevent them from stewarding First Nations data in accordance with OCAP principles, which usually means that neither the Canadian government nor any institution thereof should be considered as a steward of First Nations data (FNIGC 2018).
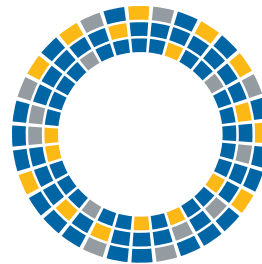
"relying on the parliamentary appropriations process to provide programs and services and that we need to become more self-sufficient, we need to be able to raise revenues the way other levels of government do...and become a government like every other government"

(Schwartz 2013).

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The First Nations Governance Act

The 1876 Indian Act was intended to provide clear Canadian governmental control over First Nations peoples and their internal affairs and to eliminate traditional forms of First Nations government and replace them with Western forms and rules. These non-Indigenous forms created a direct line of accountability from elected, council-style governments to the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, but they also removed accountability to local citizens. This created internal divisions among some communities, and diminished the trust Indigenous peoples had in political systems (Canada 2011). In October 2002, then-INAC minister Bob Nault brought in Bill C-7, the First Nations Governance Act, in an attempt to improve democratic governance and accountability principles on-reserve. The Act outlined new electoral processes and financial management practices for First Nations bands, and sought to bring First Nations under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Many First Nations, however, were critical of Bill C-7, suggesting there was limited consultation with them in proposing its development. Former Auditor General of Canada Sheila Fraser argued "that it sought to redesign accountability mechanisms and reporting requirements of band councils to their members, but did not propose any reforms to existing reporting requirements of First Nations to federal departments, nor did it account for capacity constraints on smaller First Nations" (Canada 2011).

Chiefs and councils have had to shoulder the responsibility for program delivery. Communities deliver programs and administer annual budgets that can be in the millions of dollars, while national concerns over "the adequacy of controls over public expenditures, particularly grants and contributions" have increased reporting requirements at the community level. Moreover, the 2002 audit was critical of how this reporting relationship did not reflect the interests of First Nations or integrate reporting requirements into local reporting practices and existing governance structures (Canada 2002).

Treaty 9 Indigenous men at Fort Hope in Ontario, 1905. (Dept. of Indian and Northern Affairs / Library and Archives Canada)

The Federal Accountability Act

In 2006, Ottawa made accountability a priority, and introduced the Federal Accountability Act. The Act extended the lobbying ban on former ministers, aides, and public servants, enhanced protection for whistleblowers, and expanded the mandate of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG). Former Auditor General Sheila Fraser stated: "we do not believe it is our role to routinely audit recipients of grants and contributions…this is the responsibility of the managers of those programs" (Canada 2011; Institute on Governance 2017). Although the Act gave the OAG "the right to audit funding to most First Nations," Fraser suggests that building "institutional capacity" among First Nations would more appropriately encourage the development of accountability mechanisms. In January 2008, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples released a report entitled "Where Does the Money Go?" that followed federal grants and contributions to 2,054 recipients across 30 federal departments and agencies (Government of Canada 2011).
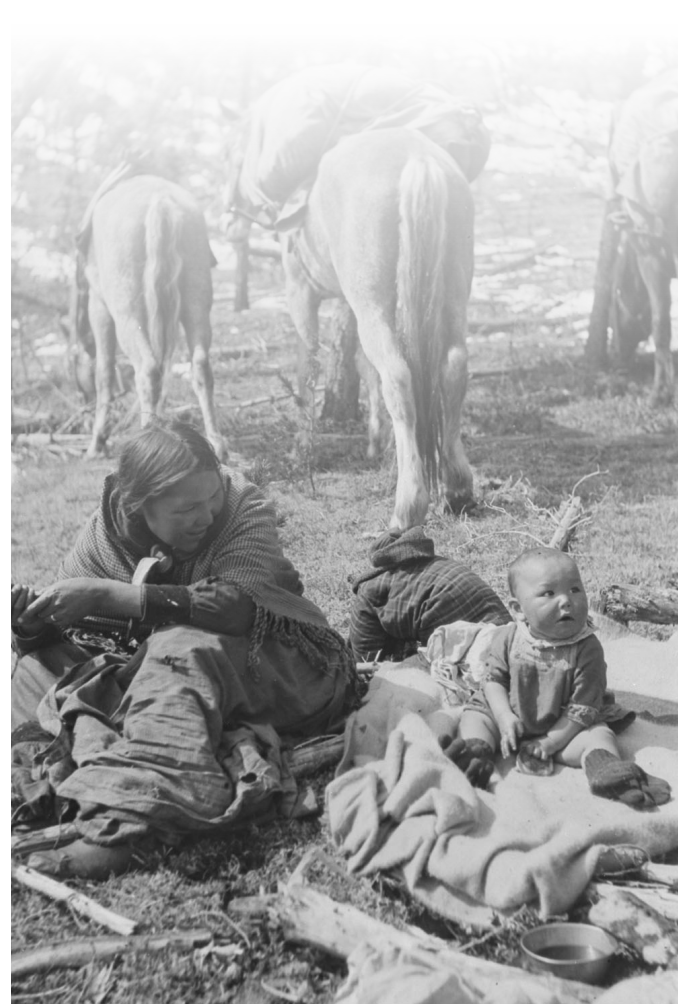
First Nation woman and her infant (Dept. of Indian and Northern Affairs / Library and Archives Canada)

Best Practices

A key underlying theme revealed in the survey is the need for First Nations to gain control, ownership, and use of their own information, data, financial management, and reporting practices. In order to encourage a sound relationship between funders and First Nations, as well as build capacity for internal community governance, it is critical to look to best practices and ways forward. Below are several cases that First Nations communities and funders alike might consider as they gain a greater understanding of their functions and roles in building relationships and improving planning in fund distribution and tracking.
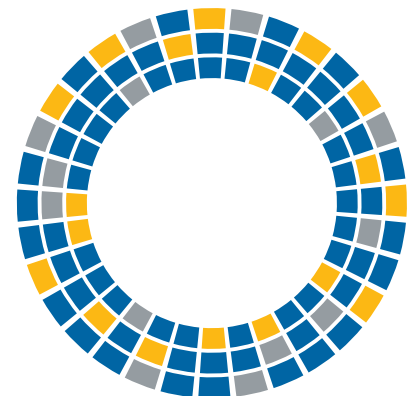
The Wise Practice Approach

In deconstructing the Indigenous/Western epistemic divide, Horsethief (2015) notes that Elders are uneasy about research projects performed in Indigenous communities, citing them as stating: "we already know what answers they are looking for, but they don't address our needs. They take the information and give it back to us as binders and books. We already have names for our world…we don't need genus and species. We don't need to know what you need to know." In what is referred to as a "deficit paradigm," the media focus on an image of dysfunctional Indigenous communities, while the effects of "colonization, dispossession from lands and resources, and residential schools" are removed in understanding poverty, cultural loss, and the few economic development opportunities available (Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010, 3).

The OCAP principles, in contrast, have been described as a political response to colonialism, and are important for First Nations and regional organizations seeking to access and use administrative data held by other governments (Bruhn 2013, 4). The establishment of OCAP is an example of a wise practice approach, defined as "using locally-appropriate actions, tools, principles or decisions that contribute significantly to the development of sustainable and equitable conditions," and that challenge Western "best practices" that have been used thus far in community development and for economic growth (Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010, 19).

A wise practice approach in community development focuses on the strengths of the community, its core values, and a deep understanding of the available resources determined by the community itself (Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010, 2). According to the Harvard Project on American Indian Development, the four main factors that must be in place for successful economic development: sovereignty; institutions that match culture; strategic direction; and strong, action-oriented leadership (Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010, 7).

This approach becomes difficult, however, when relying on government funds and with areas of need and measurements already in place by an overseer. For example, policymakers often implement strategies that seek to integrate individuals into the labour force or offer loans and grants for entrepreneurs, but disregard the importance of recognizing collectivity and diversity in Indigenous economies. This approach undermines the intrinsic values attached to self-governance, culture, and identity as many Indigenous economies continue to rely on traditional pursuits or social economy frameworks (Canada 1996, 750; Wutunee 2009).

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Data Collection: Tools, Models, and Partnerships

Due to fundamental methodological issues in research and data collection, new models reflect a strength- and assets-based way of planning (Wesley-Esquimaux and Calliou 2010). Indicator projects have aimed to "democratize data," whether by creating open data portals or advancing "decision making, public accountability, and community dialogue" (Warner 2018, 54–5). Relevant tools have been developed for and by First Nations in data collection, data governance, and community planning. Guidebooks on performance measurements, planning, and reporting standards, and resources for partner organizations can be found. Many incorporate "appreciative inquiry" approaches, and attempt to incorporate heritage into information management systems and/or create an inventory of cultural assets. Others create an index that can "accurately reflect complex aspects of communal life," incorporating quantitative research and indicators into an Indigenous methodological framework (Warner 2018, 54–5; Walter and Anderson 2013, 16). These resources should be shared, explored, and brought to the forefront for funders.

Data literacy is also growing, with easier-to-use tools and clearer data visualization opportunities as people become more familiar with using data in their own organizational decision-making. There are opportunities for creative data-creation strategies and the sourcing of effective data solutions by using local data to respond to local and national issues. Projects that report only information, however, risk irrelevancy. Therefore, strategic data partnerships and initiatives have been used. An example is the Tui'kn Partnership, developed from the Primary Health Care Transition Fund project (or "Tui'kn Initiative") that ran from 2004 to 2006. The purpose of the project was to create a way for five First Nations on Cape Breton Island to work together on similar issue areas. Since then, the communities have collaborated on more than 30 initiatives. The current partnership has created a data-sharing agreement that led to the development of the Unama'ki Client Registry, a platform on which the communities can collect and extrapolate population health data for planning purposes. The registry is also used by the Reproductive Care Program of Nova Scotia, Cancer Care Nova Scotia, and Cardiovascular Health Nova Scotia to create reports based on indicators that the communities have highlighted as important (Bruhn 2014, 21–2).

Innovative data collection and management systems have also been created. In the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, located in Quebec, there is a focus on digital data management as "Indigenous resurgence" by using programs such as CANO (a data management platform) and shifting information-sharing protocols based on whether a First Nation is sharing with community organizations or third-party entities such as the federal government (McMahon, LaHache, and Whiteduck 2015).

Another example on an ecological level is Mikisew Cree First Nation in Alberta, which uses a unique data collection and management system that includes "[c]ustom field data collection sheets [which] have quality control built in and link directly to a secure data storage system that incorporates tools for online reporting and data manipulation. The database system also links seamlessly with their land use planning and regulatory management software called Community Knowledge Keeper" (Nature United 2019). Moreover, Mikisew First Nation has engaged community members in roles such as data guardians or land guardians, and monitors the effects of large-scale development projects that threaten traditional lands and waters using a community-based monitoring program that integrates both Western science and Indigenous knowledge indicators. The First Nation also has a Community Based Monitoring Program, and is looking into developing a custom system that can be used on Android and iOS devices, building apps that will be available for community members to download and use (Interview E 2018).

The Coastal Stewardship Network and the Great Bear Initiative, an alliance of seven First Nations that work together on stewardship issues on the Pacific coast, have recently developed their own custom data collection app and data management system after moving from using CyberTracker software for data collection. Coastal Guardian Watchmen and First Nation Stewardship Offices along the coast use a Regional Monitoring System, and the Watchmen and Stewardship Technicians collect information with a customized app that is later uploaded to a central database and used by the First Nations for internal and external reporting and management (Interview E 2018).
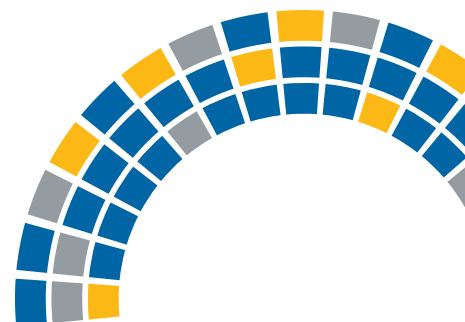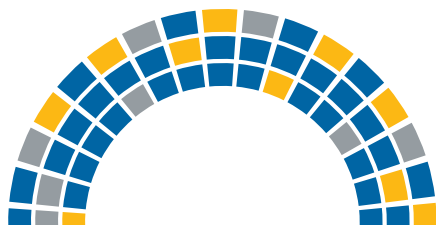
Data Stewards and Data-Sharing Agreements

A representative of the Coastal Stewardship Network indicated that the arrangement with Coastal First Nations was developed by bringing in all the First Nations, together with external consultants. By visiting each community and collecting an inventory of data, they identified what was being funded, who was currently using the data, and why. In workshops, consultants worked with First Nations to get a sense of the barriers and tools required to identify and target priorities.

Indeed, data must be usable. The Regional Monitoring System provides a way to engage with the data that is user friendly and responsive to changes that need to be made. Further, data-sharing agreements with funders should state explicitly that the First Nation owns the data and should outline what the funder may access. On the technical side, data security is also important – in the case of the Regional Monitoring System, the server is kept in Canada so that information is under Canadian information laws and cannot be distributed (Interview E 2018). Moreover, in managing access, although the regional body (Coastal First Nations) has all the data, only certain people have access to these data at the level of individual First Nations. This system provides a useable platform and a common monitoring system with similar protocols and priorities, allowing First Nations to work together on initiatives.

Overall, many of the above approaches focus on taking a closer look at what data stories are being told and what should be told, and on ensuring that data collection is driven by the strategic priorities of First Nations communities, rather than by top-down federal policies. Further, to meet the "need for relevant, citizen-focused data as part of nation building efforts," it is necessary to integrate storytelling into data creation and ensure that final funding indicators are relevant and meaningful to communities (Bruhn 2014).
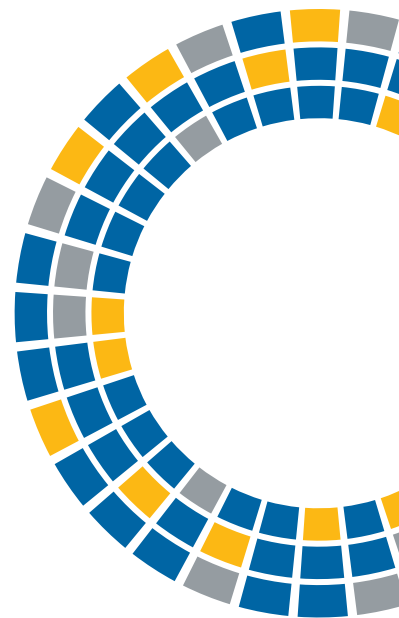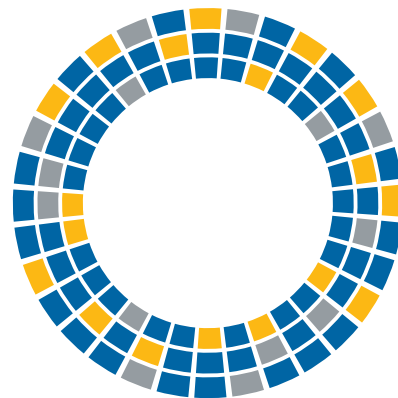
Conclusion and Recommendations

A reporting burden continues to exist for First Nations, as exemplified by a case study of Nipissing First Nation as well as in the larger discussion on the funding relationship between First Nations and the federal government. To lessen the reporting burden, however, the relationship requires changes at the policy level. By enhancing data governance and improving decision-making for First Nations through the use of locally appropriate indicators, funders and First Nations can incorporate meaningful tools, models, and privacy frameworks to support First Nations based on their inherent right to self-government.

Recommendations

Any recommendations to address the reporting burden experienced by First Nations should respect and be built upon the ten principles outlined by the federal government in its Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples (Canada 2018c). These principles aim to guide the nation-to-nation relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples, and is a reflection of section 35 of the Constitution, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. This study has four recommendations; the first reflects Principle 1, the second and third recommendations reflect Principle 6, and the fourth recommendation reflects Principle 10, as follows.

1. Strengthen relationships and mutual accountability frameworks by creating a joint body governing relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown, driven by self-determination.
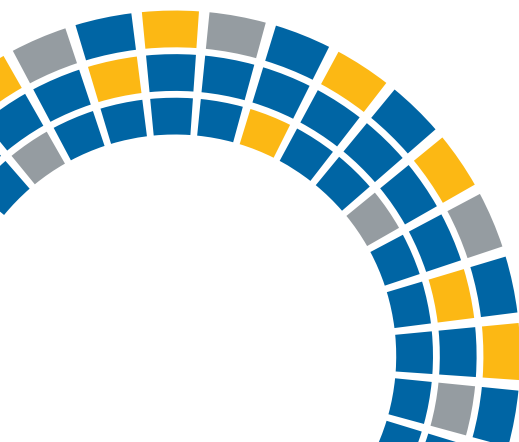
In 2018, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada stated that the co-development of a new fiscal relationship aimed to close the socio-economic gap between First Nations and other Canadians (Canada 2018a). Still lacking, however, are formal structures between Indigenous peoples and the federal government that safeguard the relationship beyond the ministerial leadership and political commitments of the current day (Institute on Governance 2017, 24–5).

To that end, a joint body governing relationship should be introduced that is committed to a "rights-based approach" and collaborative processes, as well as to developing policies with a shared vision. This includes limiting the administrative burden at the federal level and within current systems and structures, and implementing data governance and privacy frameworks for First Nations communities to ensure accountability on both sides. As well, a permanent advisory committee should be created to better represent the range of regional interests, and the General Assessment and Default Management systems should be reworked with reforms such as assisting First Nations "through First Nation-led targeted capacity enhancement assistance" (Canada 2018a). Another key aspect of a joint body governing relationship is transparency — specifically, creating mechanisms that allow First Nations to know how their information is being handled and what the outcomes are of their reporting.

2. Implement a data governance and privacy framework with funding bodies.

The implementation of a data governance framework, as well as data governance policy, privacy and security policies, would enhance the data governance capacities of First Nations. Such a framework should include data-sharing protocols and the enforcement of regulations that safeguard First Nations data and improve workflow so that First Nations can meet their targets. First Nations should also be able to access resources such as templates that support the development of customized information-sharing agreements between funders and First Nations, use data stewards, and deploy cost-effective information management systems that measure the investments being made in well-being (Mustimuhw Information Solutions Inc. 2015). Such a recommendation has been discussed by the British Columbia First Nations' Data Governance Initiative, which has identified four focused work streams to support the acquisition by First Nations of local, timely, and accurate data upon which to base decisions. Most important, the initiative provides an outline of estimated costs associated with taking these steps, which can be used in federal and provincial discussions to reduce administrative burdens, as well as between funding bodies and First Nations at a local level (BC First Nations Data Governance 2018).

Another template that Nipissing First Nation and other First Nation communities could look to when developing a system is the framework for a data-sharing agreement developed for the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre. The template outlines various factors that need to be considered when developing such an agreement (Yao n.d., 2–3). On the point about legislation, the Centre's template outlines several changes that could be useful for First Nations when implementing OCAP. The first is revising the Access to Information Act and the Library and Archives of Canada Act. The second is the creation of legislation — for example, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne has created its own privacy law. Other non-legal options for First Nations include information dispersion about OCAP to a variety of parties that use First Nation data, as well as creating more First Nation data stewards (FNIGC 2014, 7, 9–10).

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## 3. Culturally Relevant Data Collection and Management Tools.

As evident from the jurisdictional scan, many First Nations communities and organizations are working in collaboration to create innovative data collection and management tools (BC First Nations Data Governance 2018). By forming alliances, tapping into smartphones, or designing data-monitoring software, they recognize the importance of cultural continuity and giving it value by integrating it into software and measurement tools so that the most appropriate and meaningful results can be found. By enhancing data literacy and embracing collaborative efforts, they ensure cultural relevancy and follow OCAP principles and standards (Fennario 2017).

Training for First Nations community staff on how to carry out culturally relevant data collection and use management tools is essential. Training could involve experts sharing their practices and involving the community in identifying key priorities and issue areas. For Nipissing First Nation, looking to its economic development and community plans is a way to start outlining not only what it wants to measure, but also what assets and tools it has in place (or will need) in order to develop these management programs.
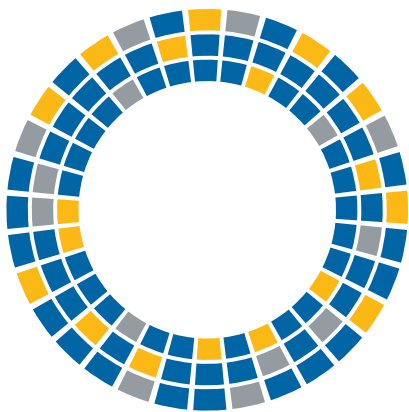
4. Impact Reports and Data Stories

As noted repeatedly throughout this study, data should be in the hands of the community. If funders hold a genuine commitment to open, transparent processes, and outreach with First Nations, the opportunity to develop local indicators and shift focus from outputs to outcomes may be realized. Aligning with the main priorities and concerns of the community should be the next step after the current engagement sessions. This could be accomplished through integrating distal determinants of health,[9] and using a local diversity of measurements. As well, communities could provide impact reports that can be aligned with their long-term strategy and planning, with a deep understanding of the local and national contexts. The format also might improve cultural relevancy by integrating the use of data stories, whether through visual tools and technologies, storytelling methods, or the implementation of local indicators in data collection frameworks and management (FNIGC 2018; Ober 2017).

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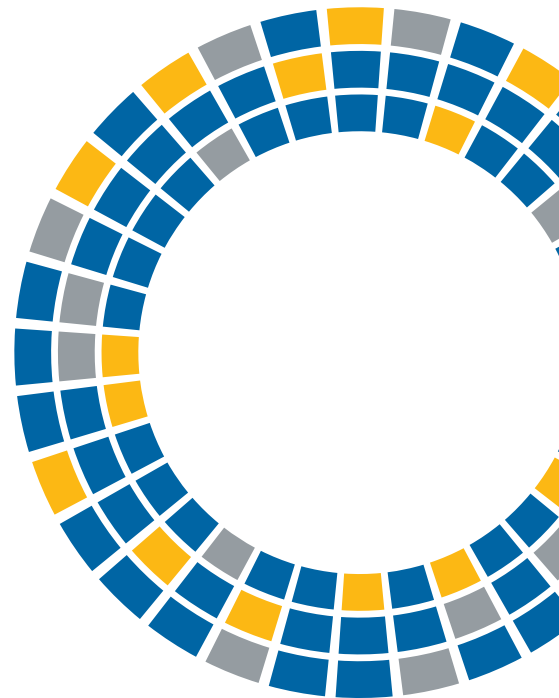
[9] Distal determinants of health include colonialism, racism, social exclusion, and repression of self-determination (Loppie Reading and Wien 2009).

Appendix A: Funding Sources and Allocation of Funding for Nipissing First Nation, fiscal year 2017/18

Funding Source	Allocation of Funding
Indigenous Services Canada (formerly INAC)	• $9,070,715, broken down as follows: – community operations: $2,125,165 – education: $5,541,545 – Nipissing First Nation High School, tuition agreements with area boards, post-secondary funding, special education funds – capital: $487,614 – social services: $185,405 – health: $34,934 – housing: $200,000 – other: $496,052
Ontario First Nations Limited Partnership	• Nipissing First Nation's share of gaming agreement with Ontario: $1,170,239
Ontario Ministry of Education	• Reverse tuition: $680,569; payments received by Nipissing First Nation for students attending the community's high school from off-reserve
Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services	• $1,808,433 • Ontario Works, child welfare, daycare funding
Health Canada (combined with ISC in 2018)	• $1,572,883 • various health services and administration of Nipissing First Nation Health Clinic.
Other provincial	• $1,319,126 • community operations, capital, health (about 50% of these funds are for home and community care and health prevention activities)
Funds received through contracts administered by First Nations organizations	• $900,332 • social services, health services, etc.
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	• $196,863 • housing
Other (mainly own-source revenue with some miscellaneous funding applications)	• $6,150,272

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