

# Thunderbird Collective Grant Application Overview

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# Introduction

## Indigenous Fire Stewardship

For generations, Indigenous Peoples have carried teachings about how fire can restore balance on the land, nurture ecosystems, and keep communities safe. These practices have been disrupted by colonial policies and fire suppression, yet the knowledge has never been lost..

**Indigenous fire stewardship** is [defined](#) as any activity related to fire where Indigenous Peoples are asserting their rights and jurisdiction. Rooted in time immemorial knowledge systems, Indigenous fire stewardship is both a traditional practice and a contemporary response to increasing wildfire risks which strengthens land stewardship, food security, and community resilience. While colonial policies disrupted these practices, they are being restored and recognized as essential complements to government-led wildfire science. As more frequent and intense wildfires occur each year and more Canadians are placed at risk, it is increasingly recognized that Indigenous fire stewardship represents a vital knowledge system that informs and improves how landscapes are managed to be fire-adaptive.

**Important Note:** This is the first funding opportunity for the Fire Stewardship Grant Program and will serve as a pilot. Funding, program framework, eligibility, and processes may be revised in future years based on lessons learned and feedback received. The funding runs until March 2028.

## The Thunderbird Collective

The **Thunderbird Collective** provides a safe, ethical space for Indigenous Peoples to work together: supporting and advocating for Indigenous involvement and leadership in wildland fire management. The Thunderbird Collective provides leadership and guidance in advancing Indigenous-led approaches to fire stewardship, ensuring that Indigenous knowledge, governance, and decision-making remain at the core of this work. This leadership is carried forward through the Thunderbird Collective Steering Committee (TCSC), a body Indigenous fire practitioners with specialized experience directly in Indigenous-led fire stewardship and practices, representing diverse regions across Canada, to ensure Indigenous knowledge holders guide priorities, strengthen collaboration, and shape the future of fire stewardship in Canada.

## Fire Stewardship Grant Program

The **Fire Stewardship Grant Program** was created to support Indigenous-led approaches to fire, land, and knowledge. This program recognizes the deep relationship that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples have with fire as a source of renewal, protection, teaching, and connection to the land. This program is guided by the understanding that fire is more than a tool for land management — it is part of cultural identity, ceremony, and governance. Supporting Indigenous-led fire stewardship strengthens community well-being, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and sovereignty.

By providing funding to Indigenous Nations and community organizations, the program seeks to strengthen Indigenous-led fire stewardship practices that pertain to land-based learning, knowledge sharing, and advocacy that uphold Indigenous sovereignty and support healthier relationships with fire.

## Program Timeline

In this pilot year, all projects must occur between October 2025 and March 2026. Future intake processes will strive to provide longer proposal and activity timelines for applicants.

During the first year of the Fire Stewardship Grant Program:

- **Application Period:** Eligible applicants will be welcome to submit an **Application Form** to the Thunderbird Collective for consideration, starting in November 2025 until funding is depleted, with priority given to applications submitted by November 21, 2025.
- **Review & Selection:** Starting in November 2025, a working group established by the Thunderbird Collective Steering Committee will review and select projects for funding.
- **Announcement:** Successful applicants will be notified the week of December 8th 2025.
- **Funding Agreements:** As projects are approved, funding agreements will be developed and sent to selected applicants for review and signature.
- **Projects Timelines:** Funding will be considered for programs and activities occurring between December 15, 2025 and March 31, 2026.
- **Final Reporting:** All final reports will be due by Thursday **April 30, 2026**.

The Thunderbird Collective is currently housed within and supported by the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) and the Centre for Northern Conservation (CNC). All funding agreements through the Fire Stewardship Grant Program will be administered by CNC.

If an agreement is not executed within 30 days of being sent to an application for signature, the Thunderbird Collective may void the agreement and redistribute the funds.

Upfront payments will be distributed **within 15 business days** after a signed agreement and associated invoice is received. Funding agreements will include a **10% funding holdback** predicated on the completion of the reporting requirements.

## Program Objectives

The Fire Stewardship Grant Program is designed to:

1. **Support Indigenous Leadership in Fire Stewardship**
  - o Provide resources for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals, groups, and Nations to lead fire-related projects in ways that reflect their own knowledge systems, teachings, and governance.
2. **Strengthen Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer**
  - o Create opportunities for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Youth, and community members to share and learn together about fire, how fire relates to land, and culture.

### 3. Revitalize and Uphold Indigenous Laws and Practices

- o Support projects that restore and strengthen traditional fire governance, protocols, and cultural responsibilities.

### 4. Advance Community Well-being and Safety

- o Reduce wildfire risks through cultural burning and related Indigenous-led fire stewardship practices, while strengthening cultural identity, resilience, and healing.

## Eligible Recipients

Applicants should be actively engaged in work that supports Indigenous fire stewardship in their communities. This may include early-stage initiatives, emerging programs or ongoing efforts.

The Indigenous Fire Stewardship Grant Program is open to:

- **Indigenous Nations** (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments, communities, councils, tribal and regional organizations).
- **Indigenous organization** a community, registered not-for-profit organization, registered charity, First Nation band, Métis or Inuit Council.
- **Indigenous-led groups** (51% or more Indigenous governance) guiding and advancing Indigenous fire stewardship in collaboration with schools, local fire departments, or non-Indigenous partners, as determined by the Steering Committee.

*Note: For-Profit companies, non-indigenous-led organizations, government and non-Canadian organizations are not eligible to apply.*

## Eligible Expenditures

All budget items must be project related. Eligible budget items include, but are not limited to:

- **Wages and employment related costs** for existing or additional staff for reporting, monitoring or evaluation works (e.g., knowledge sharing development activities).
- **Professional fees** for professional services for data collection, evaluation, technical experts (e.g., Indigenous facilitators, or fire specialists).
- **Honoraria** for Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural practitioners.
- **Training and capacity building** for workshops, certification, safety training.
- **Travel and Transportation** for mileage for privately owned vehicles, transportation, fuel costs, accommodation, using Government of Canada rates (CRA Travel Directive).
- **Meals** during travels, using Government of Canada rates (CRA Travel Directive).
- **Equipment and Supplies** for PPE, tools, radios and monitoring gear and equipment rentals (e.g., fire stewardship tools, safety gear, teaching materials).
- **Community Engagement and Meeting Expenses** for gatherings, knowledge sharing events or exchanges, space rental, ceremony supplies, communication expenses, printing, recording, translation, digital tools, etc..
- **Administration** for clerical and financial support of the program, **up to 10% of total**.

**Note:** Capital purchases (e.g., vehicles, buildings) and activities unrelated to Indigenous fire stewardship are not eligible. Funding cannot be used for lobbying or political activities.

## The Four Funding Pillars

Grants are available for projects that are Indigenous-led, serve Indigenous Peoples in Canada (First Nations, Inuit, Metis), and aligned with at least one of the Four Funding Pillars.

Each Funding Pillar reflects an essential part of Indigenous fire stewardship and can be adapted to fit local teachings, community priorities, and governance systems. The purpose and examples of activities related to each Pillar are detailed below.

### 1. Knowledge Sharing

**Purpose:** Gather, exchange, and share experiences, lessons learned, best practices, and research findings with the community and Nation members to expand on cultural burnings and fire stewardship projects and strengthen the transfer of Indigenous fire-related teachings, skills, and cultural practices across generations.

**Examples of Eligible Activities:**

- Gatherings, community events, and exchanges.
- Workshops, storytelling circles, or seasonal gatherings.
- Recording and documenting traditional fire knowledge (with consent).
- Developing teaching resources or toolkits for communities.
- Bringing together Elders, youth, and fire practitioners to share practices

### 2. Land-Based Learning

**Purpose:** Provide hands-on experiences with Indigenous fire stewardship on the land, rooted in cultural teachings and ecological knowledge.

**Examples of Eligible Activities:**

- Host a demonstration of cultural burning practices.
- Youth or Elder land-based camps focused on fire practices.
- Training sessions or mentorship with Knowledge Keepers.
- Exchanges to learn from other Communities.
- Indigenous and fire ecology education sessions.
- Ecological monitoring before and after burns.

### 3. Advocacy

**Purpose:** Build public understanding of Indigenous fire stewardship, land rights and decision-making, in order to increase awareness, strengthen Indigenous voices, and influence changes in behaviors, policies, practices, and law related to fire.

**Examples of Eligible Activities:**

- Community engagement and awareness campaigns.

- Presentations to governments, schools, or regional organizations.
- Policy development or consultation processes.
- Creating educational materials, films, or media projects.

## 4. Sovereignty

**Purpose:** Revitalize and exercise Indigenous governance, rights, and responsibilities in fire stewardship and management.

### Examples of Eligible Activities:

- Developing and revitalizing community-specific fire laws or protocols.
- Asserting jurisdiction over fire management on Indigenous lands.
- Nation-to-Nation knowledge exchanges on fire governance.
- Building internal governance structures for fire stewardship.
- Nation-to-Nation governance and Indigenous Laws.
- Career development for Indigenous fire practitioners, including funding for training or school related to Indigenous fire stewardship.

## Reporting

All funded groups will be required to provide financial and narrative reports no later than April 30, 2026. While this reporting is required, the Thunderbird Collective recognizes that reporting should reflect both accountability and cultural respect. Reporting is about storytelling, reflection, and knowledge sharing in ways that honour Indigenous approaches.

To simplify narrative reporting, a reporting template aligned to the Four Pillars will be provided. Each grantee will also be given the **option to submit narrative reports in writing or orally** through a meeting with a member of the Thunderbird Collective. Grantees will also be encouraged to **include photos, videos, stories, or participant feedback**.

We will be looking for answers to questions like:

- How many communities, groups, or organizations did you work with or engage through this project? Who was involved (e.g., Elders, Fire Guardians, youth, other partners)?
- Did your project create or share any new knowledge or resources? (e.g., maps, guides, training materials, stories, reports, videos, or other tools) Who are these resources for, and how will they be used?
- What activities did your project lead or support in the community? (e.g., training, on-the-land work, planning, research, youth engagement, cultural burns, etc.) What changes or benefits came from this work?
- Did your project bring people together? (e.g., community meetings, cultural gatherings, learning exchanges, workshops, or ceremonies) If so, how many people took part, and what came out of these gatherings?

# Indigenous Fire Stewardship Grant Application Assessment Scorecard

*Completed Application Forms submitted by applicants to the Fire Stewardship Grant Program will be reviewed by a working group established by the Thunderbird Collective, using this Assessment Scorecard as the basis for equitable review and decision-making.*

## Proposal Indicators

- Proposed activities clearly advance one or more of the four pillars.
- Proposed activities are deeply rooted in community knowledge, values and participation. It is shaped by the voices and lived experiences of community members.
- Proposed activities have a clear, realistic, and achievable timeframe, plan and budget.
- Proposed activities strengthen community capacity or share knowledge.

Each application is scored 1–5 for each criteria (max = 45 points).

Readiness and Assessment Criteria	Score (1–5)
Collaboration	___ / 5
Knowledge Products Created	___ / 5
Indigenous-led Activities	___ / 5
Knowledge Exchange	___ / 5
Need	___ / 5
Impact/Benefit	___ / 5
Project Plan: Objectives and Activities	___ / 5
Aligned to Four Pillars (Knowledge Sharing, Land-Based Learning, Sovereignty, Advocacy)	___ / 5
Budget	___ / 5
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>___ / 45</b>

## Project Plan

### Criteria

- Objectives and activities overview
- Timeline or schedule of key activities
- Roles and responsibilities
- Budget and plan align
- Community or partner engagement
- Evaluation of changes and benefits

### Strong Proposal Indicators

- Applicants provided a project plan that demonstrates readiness and feasibility.

## Budget

### *Strong Proposal Indicators*

- It is complete, detailed and broken down.
- The request is realistic for the program.
- The funding requested aligns with the activities and outcomes.
- All costs are justified and eligible.

## Alignment to Four Pillars

## Knowledge Sharing

### *Criteria*

- Involve community knowledge holders. ie. Elders, firekeepers, cultural leaders
- Incorporate Indigenous-led knowledge, in addition to western science approaches.
- Includes methods of sharing (oral storytelling, video, documentation, events)

### *Strong Proposal Indicators*

- Inclusion of Elders and traditional practitioners as lead or co-applicants
- Clear plan for how knowledge is protected, shared and retained
- Addresses cultural protocols, consents, data sovereignty, and Indigenous language)
- Output may include storybooks, videos, teaching tools, workshops)

### *Outcomes May Include:*

- Increased intergenerational knowledge exchange.
- Greater awareness and knowledge in cultural fire practices.
- Stronger community connection to fire teachings.

## Land-Based Learning

### *Criteria*

- Guided by place-based and cultural teachings
- Involves hands-on experiences on the land (not just classroom or digital format)
- Engage youth and community members with leadership from Indigenous educators.
- Include safety, accessibility, and land stewardship planning.

### *Strong Proposal Indicators*

- Activities like fire camps, field days or seasonal land-based teachings
- Collaboration with Indigenous educators, land guardians or language speakers
- Integrates Indigenous knowledge of fire, land and climate stewardship to strengthen ecological balance and community well-being.

### *Outcomes May Include:*

- Increased community members with direct land-based fire knowledge.
- Reintroduction of traditional fire practices on Indigenous lands.
- Improved ecological health and safety through cultural burning.

## Advocacy



### *Criteria*

- Focus on systematic change at local, regional, territorial, provincial or federal levels.
- Strengthen Indigenous led decision-making and land use planning capacity.
- Uses culturally appropriate strategies (storytelling, testimonies, or legal tools).
- Facilitates community-led advocacy and engagement through alliances, partnerships and targeted skill building and knowledge exchange for leaders and community members.

### *Strong Proposal Indicators*

- Campaigns to recognize fire rights or jurisdiction.
- Policy recommendations, community briefs or leadership roundtables.
- Creation of advocacy toolkits, community strategies or Indigenous media
- Strong connection to community voice and priorities.

### *Outcomes May Include:*

- Increased recognition of Indigenous fire stewardship in decision-making.
- Improved relationships with external partners (e.g., municipalities, forestry companies, fire services, Parks Canada, academic and research institutes).
- Broader public understanding of cultural fire practices.

## Sovereignty

### *Criteria*

- Led or co-led by Nations, Tribal Council or Indigenous governance bodies
- Focus on fire and land governance, planning or stewardship
- Builds capacity for long-term self-determination in fire and land management
- Honors Indigenous culture and traditions, protocols and land relationships.

### *Strong Proposal Indicators*

- Development of Indigenous fire stewardship plan or protocols
- Nation-to-Nation collaboration or engagement with territorial, provincial or federal agencies
- Training programs for fire practitioners embedded in Nation-led governance.
- Clear pathway to long-term jurisdiction or decision-making authority.

### *Outcomes May Include:*

- Stronger Indigenous sovereignty and decision-making authority over fire.
- Revitalized governance systems grounded in traditional (Indigenous) laws.
- Increased capacity to assert rights and responsibilities with external governments.