

Thunderbird Collective Grant Application Overview

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Indigenous Fire Stewardship	2
The Thunderbird Collective	2
Fire Stewardship Grant Program.....	2
Program Timeline	3
Program Objectives	3
Eligible Recipients	4
Budget & Eligible Expenditures.....	4
The Four Funding Pillars	5
1. Knowledge Sharing.....	5
2. Land-Based Learning.....	5
3. Advocacy.....	6
4. Sovereignty	6
Reporting	6
Community / Leadership Letter of Support	7
<i>Indigenous Fire Stewardship Grant Application Assessment Scorecard</i>	<i>11</i>
Proposal Indicators	11
Project Plan.....	12
Budget	12
Alignment to Four Pillars	12

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: Funding, project 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

During this 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 April 2026 until funding is depleted, with priority given to applications submitted **by June 5th, 2026**.
- **Review & Selection:** Starting in June 2026, a working group established by the Thunderbird Collective Steering Committee will review and select projects for funding.
- **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 projects and activities occurring between **June 2026 and March 2027**.
- **Final Reporting:** A financial report must be submitted **by March 15, 2027**, along with a narrative report due **by April 30, 2027**.

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**
 - 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**
 - 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**
 - Support projects that restore and strengthen traditional fire governance, protocols, and cultural responsibilities.
4. **Advance Community Well-being and Safety**
 - 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 projects 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.

Budget & Eligible Expenditures

To be eligible for funding, total proposed projects must not exceed \$70,000. 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 projects, **up to 10% of total.**

FireSmart-related work and associated equipment purchases is not eligible under this program (for more information on FireSmart initiatives, please visit [FireSmart Canada](#)).

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.

Note: Equipment funding is available to communities only, with a maximum budget of \$12,000 or 20% of the total project budget, whichever amount is greater. Proposals focused solely on equipment purchases are not eligible. All projects must demonstrate broader impact beyond equipment and must align with at least one of the Four Funding Pillars.

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

A financial report must be submitted by March 15, 2027, along with a narrative report due by April 30, 2027.

The narrative report may be submitted in writing or **option to submit orally through a meeting with a member of the Thunderbird Collective.** A reporting template will be provided aligned with the Four Funding Pillars for easy completion. **Applicants are encouraged to include photos, videos, stories or participant feedback where appropriate.**

Reporting will include:

- Summary of activities completed
- Outcomes and results achieved
- A description of how funds were used

In addition to formal reporting, which is for accountability purposes, communities are encouraged to share learnings with the broader Indigenous fire stewardship community where appropriate. Thunderbird Collective recognizes reporting as an opportunity for storytelling, reflection, and knowledge sharing that reflects Indigenous approaches and values.

We will be looking for answers to questions like:

1. 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)?
2. Did your project create or share any new knowledge products 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

Community / Leadership Letter of Support

Projects must include a letter of support to be eligible for funding. The letter should demonstrate that the community is aware of and supports the proposed project activities and intended outcomes and should help ensure that initiatives are community-informed, respectful, and aligned with local priorities.

Please ensure that you include a signed letter of support and indicate who this letter of support is from. If you plan to submit a letter of support after proposal submission, please clearly indicate on your application when we should expect to receive the letter of support.

Guide for Completing a Letter of Support

- The letter should be on official letterhead of the supporting band, Nation or organization.
- The letter must be dated with the **current date** to confirm its current nature.
- The name of the applicant/project.
- Describe how the organization or leadership supports the application.
- Describe how the project aligns with community priorities and benefits, including cultural, environmental, and training.
- The supporting Nation or organization, including who they represent and their governance structure (if signing on behalf of multiple communities).

- If needed, clarify that authorization to sign has been provided by Band Council Resolution.

A Statement by Leadership:

- Confirm support of the application, referencing the applicant and project title.
- Explain why the project is important to the community
- Outline how the funding will be used, including areas such as:
 - Cultural burning participation
 - Traditional ecological knowledge sharing
 - Training and partnerships
 - Policy development or advocacy

******(e.g., Our leadership is committed to advancing Indigenous fire stewardship through culturally grounded training programs. We recognize that building community capacity is essential to restoring traditional fire practices and ensuring long-term environmental resilience.”)

Representation and Signing Authority

If the organization is not a First Nation band:

- Clarify who the organization represents – list the communities, Nations or group
- Explain governance structure. How are decisions made? If only one community signs the letter, clarify whether other Nations have been consulted or are aware.

(e.g., “We represent seven Indigenous communities in the (area/region)..”

Signing Authorization (“Who can be authorized representative?”)

1. For First Nation Bands
 - Chief or Council Member
 - Band Manager
 - Fire Stewardship Coordinator or Cultural Fire Lead
2. For Organizations representing multiple communities
 - Senior Leadership (not department head), Director, CAO
 - Executive
 - Board Chair
3. Key Criteria
 - Must have formal authority to speak on behalf of the community or organization.

(e.g., “This letter is signed by (community A), it reflects the shared priorities discussed and approval among the seven communities during our regional fire stewardship meeting dated, April 15, 2026”.)

Benefits to the Community

- Describe how the project will benefit the community (use specific examples, if possible)
 - o Cultural revitalization,
 - o environmental protection,
 - o capacity building,
 - o youth engagement,
 - o emergency preparedness.

(e.g., “This initiative will bring meaningful benefits to our communities by restoring traditional fire practices, strengthening cultural identity and building local capacity.”)

Closing and signature

- Reaffirm support
- Provide contact information for follow-up
- Include name title, signature or authorized representative.

(e.g., “The leadership of all seven member bands support this application and look forward to the positive impact it will bring to our communities.”)

Sincerely, Chief [Full Name], [First Nation Name]

Authorised Representative for the [Alliance Name]

On behalf of the following member bands: [Nation 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]

Sample Letter of Support (multiple bands)

[Letterhead or Logo] [Address] [Phone Number] [Email Address]
[Date]

To Grant Reviewer Committee,

Re: Letter of Support for Thunderbird Collective Fire Stewardship Grant Funding

On behalf of the [**Name of First Nation / Alliance**], I am writing to express our full support for the funding application to support [**cultural burning events and associated training**] initiatives. The [**FN / Alliance Name**] is a collective of seven First Nation communities: [List all seven bands]. Through formal Band Council Resolutions and documented decisions at our alliance table, the leadership of all seven Nations have authorized me, Chief [**Full Name**] of [**Your Nation**], to sign this letter on their behalf.

Our communities have long recognized the importance of cultural fire as a tool for land stewardship, cultural revitalization, and community resilience. This initiative aligns with our shared vision of restoring traditional fire practices, enhancing land-based knowledge, and building capacity among our youth and fire practitioners. [Importance]

Leadership across our Nations have demonstrated their commitment to fire stewardship through: [Leadership Support for Fire Stewardship]

- Supporting community-led cultural burns.
- Participating in regional fire stewardship planning tables.
- Advocating for Indigenous-led fire governance and training opportunities.
- Integrating traditional ecological knowledge into land management strategies.

This funding will directly support our collective efforts to revitalize cultural fire practices, train new fire stewards, and strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer. It will also help us build safer, healthier landscapes in the face of increasing wildfire risks. [Benefits]

We thank you for considering this application and stand ready to collaborate in the successful delivery of this important work.

Sincerely,

[Signature] Chief [Full Name] [First Nation Name] On behalf of the [Alliance Name]
representing [List of 7 Nations]

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 = 40 points).

Readiness and Assessment Criteria	Score (1–5)
Community-led Initiatives	___ / 5
Reports and tools produced	___ / 5
Gathering supported	___ / 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
Total Score	___ / 40

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 project.
- 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.