



Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program

July 2025



Evaluation of the Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program, 2025

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List of acronyms

ESDC Employment and Social Development Canada

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

2SLGBTQI+ This acronym represents Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities

Executive summary

In 2015, all United Nations Member States, including Canada, adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). The goal of the 2030 Agenda was to provide a common plan for peace and prosperity for all people and the planet. As part of 2030 Agenda, 17 [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) were identified, to act as a global call to action to address today's most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges. These 17 SDGs are the following:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. No Poverty | 10. Reduced Inequality |
| 2. Zero Hunger | 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities |
| 3. Good Health and Well-being | 12. Responsible Consumption and Production |
| 4. Quality Education | 13. Climate Action |
| 5. Gender Equality | 14. Life Below Water |
| 6. Clean Water and Sanitation | 15. Life on Land |
| 7. Affordable and Clean Energy | 16. Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions |
| 8. Decent Work and Economic Growth | 17. Partnerships for the Goals |
| 9. Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure | |

In 2018, the Government of Canada created the SDG Unit, within Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), to be responsible for reporting on SDG progress within Canada and to administer the accompanying SDG Funding Program (hereafter referred to as the Program). The Program is designed to complement the Government of Canada's existing SDG efforts by supporting priorities and initiatives that are not covered by other federal programs. The aim of the Program is to:

- enhance public awareness of the 17 SDGs
- foster new partnerships to promote action
- identify and implement innovative initiatives to advance progress on the SDGs

The Program launched 4 different intake processes since its inauguration in 2018. As of May 2025, 162 total grants and contribution projects have been funded with the aim to support the Program's objectives of:

- promoting engagement and SDG awareness
- supporting innovation, knowledge sharing and addressing data/research gaps in Canada

Budget 2018 provided \$59.8 million over 13 years (\$4.6 annually) to establish the Program. Between fiscal years 2018 to 2019 and 2023 to 2024, the Program has allocated approximately \$22 million in funding to support 131 projects (118 grants and 13 contributions) selected through the first 3 intake processes.¹

Evaluation scope and objectives

The evaluation examines the 131 funded projects selected through the first 3 intake processes, and whose funding and activities have been completed at the time of the evaluation. The period of examination is from the start of the Program (fiscal year 2018 to 2019) to fiscal year 2023 to 2024.

The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- determine the relevance of the role the Program plays in the Government of Canada's commitment to Agenda 2030
- identify the degree to which the Program has supported its short-term objectives
- contextualize the effect grants and contributions have had in supporting Agenda 2030, including with equity-deserving groups and vulnerable populations, and with respect to integrating Indigenous peoples as key partners in its implementation
- provide insight into the utility of the data collection efforts of the Program

Using a rapid evaluation format, the evaluation relies on 2 lines of evidence, a document review and a series of semi-structured key informant interviews. All 131 projects (118 grant and 13 contribution projects) funded during the reference period have been examined.² In the case of the 118 grants, the evaluation reviewed the 118 grant project descriptions, but only 113 grant project final reports were available at the time of the evaluation.

Key findings

The evaluation found that the Program plays a role commensurate with its small size in supporting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach in SDG implementation. The Program's broad flexibility enables

¹ Through the most recent intake launched (fourth intake process) in November 2023, the Program added 31 new projects for a total of 162 projects, and a total funding allocation of approximately \$32 million since fiscal year 2018 to 2019. The 31 new projects started in fiscal year 2024 to 2025 are not included in this evaluation as they are still ongoing, and results are not yet available.

² Outside of the 4 Calls for Proposals, since 2020 the Program has allocated \$900,000 annually to 3 distinction based National Indigenous Organizations under Engagement Protocol Agreements. These Agreements are separate from the SDG Funding Program agreements. The 3 Engagement Protocol Agreements with the National Indigenous Organizations are also outside the scope of the evaluation.

organizations to carry out multi-faceted initiatives, effectively reaching new audiences and engaging stakeholders across various sectors and platforms. To varying extents, funded projects contributed to awareness raising, the promotion of partnerships, and the development of innovative approaches to advance the SDGs.

APPLICATION PROCESS

SDG grant funding recipients generally identified that the application process was straightforward. However, most raised concerns about the length of time it took from time of application to funding decision, as well as limited communication while waiting to hear about funding decisions, which made it challenging to plan and hire the needed staff in advance of project funding approval.

Experiences of SDG contribution funding recipients are generally aligned with ESDC's Year 3 Grants and Contributions Applicants Client Experience Research (2022 to 2023) report. Overall, most of the SDG contribution funding recipients (76%) were satisfied with their application experience, which is above ESDC's Year 3 report findings at 68%.³ SDG contribution recipients generally expressed satisfaction with the support and responsiveness from ESDC officials.

TARGETING OF SDGs

According to the contribution Call for Proposals launched in fiscal year 2019 to 2020, funding prioritized projects that "indicated how projects were advancing the 2030 Agenda as a whole, or multiple SDGs." Most funded projects were found to be broadly focused (for example 61% of grant projects and 62% of contribution projects attempted to address all 17 SDGs) rather than targeting specific areas. Overall, the most targeted SDG was SDG 13 (Climate action) which was included as part of 79% (103 of 131) of all funded projects, while the least targeted SDG was SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) included as part of 64% (84 of 131) of projects.

AWARENESS RAISING AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Most grant projects, 84% (95 of 113), and all 13 contribution projects identified "awareness raising" as a key activity supported by Program funding, but few tracked changes in awareness levels. Project activities identified to raise awareness included: national and local events; conferences and workshops; the development of training and educational materials; and, the use of web-platforms and social media.

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS

³ In comparison, Year 2 was 77%, Year 1 was 70%. Source: [Grants and contributions applicant's client experience research \(year 3\): Em20-148/2024E-PDF - Government of Canada Publications - Canada.ca](#)

Most grant projects, 79% (89 of 113) and all 13 contribution projects developed new partnerships, often with community organizations, municipalities, or sectoral stakeholders. However, it was found that most partnerships concluded at the end of the funding period, limiting long-term collaboration.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Almost half of all grant projects, 46% (52 of 113) and almost all contribution projects, 92% (12 of 13) reported exploring or promoting innovative approaches for responding to sustainable development issues.

Most grant projects focused on identifying or mapping existing approaches rather than testing new solutions for sustainability. Key informants noted that the short-term nature of the grants (up to a year long during the reference period), as well as financial constraints, limited the amount of innovative approaches that could be developed and tested.

INCLUSION OF EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Approximately 56% (70 of 126) of all grants and contribution projects targeted equity-deserving and vulnerable groups. Among these projects, there was generally good alignment between stated objectives and described outcomes.

The involvement of equity-deserving and vulnerable groups as key stakeholders in funded projects was often directly influenced by the specific SDGs each project targeted. Certain SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), are inherently more aligned with the needs and realities of equity-deserving and vulnerable populations. As a result, projects focusing on these SDGs tended to prioritize the engagement of equity-deserving and vulnerable groups, ensuring their voices, experiences, and needs were considered in efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AS KEY PARTNERS

Over one-third of grant projects, 35% (40 of 113) identified Indigenous peoples as collaborators, either in planning or in knowledge-sharing roles. Further, almost 30% (33 of 113) of grant project final reports described the inclusion of Indigenous priorities and cultural values into the projects, such as the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and respect, reciprocity and community support. However, it was not always clear from reviewing grants project final reports the depth of Indigenous involvement.

Most contribution projects, over 80% (11 of 13) identified integrating Indigenous peoples and organizations in activity implementation, involving Indigenous groups as beneficiaries, and/or consulting with Indigenous groups to reflect local knowledge.

COVID-19 DISRUPTIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

Funding recipients reported being able to adapt to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and made project modifications as required. For example, projects that had originally been planned as in-person events, were often moved to an online platform.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

At the time of the evaluation, the draft program logic model in the Program's Performance Information Profile (date 2018) focused on 2 outcomes, both of which were ultimate in nature, and pertained to commitments for the 2030 Agenda. The Performance Information Profile would benefit from better aligning the Program's expected outcomes with its funded activities rather than the outcomes sought from 2030 Agenda.

From a performance measurement perspective, there are inherent challenges associated with informing the performance of programs that aim to support a broad range of activities seeking to influence a framework like the SDGs. In part, the Program's influence is commensurate with its small size and stated objectives, which is meant to provide an enabling environment, rather than directly advancing the 17 SDGs.

Lessons learned

The report identifies 3 lessons learned:

1. Strategic selection of funded projects along the 17 SDGs is key to the Program's ability to reach its objectives and bring change. Within the mandate of the SDG Funding Program, the selection of complementary projects targeting specific SDGs are a promising approach to support Program's reach and reduce duplication of efforts.
2. Adapting SDG messaging to make it more relatable and engaging helps develop greater community acceptance. When funding recipients adapt SDG language to better reflect lived experiences, cultures, and everyday realities of the groups and communities that projects are trying to reach, community understanding and engagement is increased.
3. Building trust and strong relationships requires time and dedicated project resources. When funding recipients engage with Indigenous communities early and often during project development, it allows for deeper community involvement, leadership opportunities, and more meaningful integration of knowledge and teachings into SDG projects.

Observation

The evaluation issues the following observation that may benefit the Program and funding recipients in the future:

FOSTER KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND COLLABORATION AMONG FUNDING RECIPIENTS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The program has supported the development of partnerships within individual projects, with further potential to strengthen connections among funding recipients working on related themes. However, funding recipients identified limited opportunities to collaborate and share insights into each other's activities. There is an opportunity for ESDC's SDG Unit to take a leadership role in organizing information sharing activities among funding recipients to better document best practices and lessons learned.

1 Introduction

This report is the first evaluation of the SDG Funding Program. The evaluation addresses a departmental priority by providing results about the SDG Funding Program's short-term outcomes⁴ and lessons learned to date.

This is a "rapid evaluation"⁵ based on 2 lines of qualitative evidence providing contextual insights into the Program's early results:

- key informant interviews with ESDC officials, federal partners from other Government of Canada departments and agencies, and grant and contribution funding recipients
- a document review of all 131 projects (118 grants and 13 contributions) whose funding and activities were completed by the end of the fiscal year 2023 to 2024⁶

The evaluation examines the period from the start of the SDG Funding Program in fiscal year 2018 to 2019 until the end of fiscal year 2023 to 2024.

⁴ For the purposes of this report, short-term outcomes refer to immediate and intermediate outcomes.

⁵ Rapid evaluations are conducted when time for fieldwork and analysis is limited, but information and key insights about programs are required. A key feature of a rapid evaluation is a focused scope, which targets a narrow set of questions or aspects about a program.

⁶ In the case of the 118 grants, the evaluation reviewed the 118 grant project descriptions, but only 113 grant project final reports were available at the time of the evaluation.

2 The SDG Funding Program overview

2.1 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by all United Nations member states (including Canada) in 2015. It aims to address critical challenges facing humanity and the planet by promoting peace, prosperity, and sustainability. The agenda is built around the following [17 SDGs](#), as presented in Figure 1 (below).

Figure 1: The 17 SDGs as part of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁷



The Government of Canada is committed to supporting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to Canada's implementation of the 2030 Agenda by working in partnership with very diverse organizations (for example, not-for-profit organizations, provincial or territorial governments, municipalities, academia, for-profit organizations) to accelerate progress on the SDGs.

⁷ For further information, please refer to: [Canada and the Sustainable Development Goals - Canada.ca](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publications/canada-and-the-sustainable-development-goals/canada-and-the-sustainable-development-goals.html)

Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy, entitled "Moving Forward Together" was released in 2021. The Strategy was developed to create and foster an enabling environment for whole-of-society's participation to advance progress on the 17 SDGs.

2.2 Program description

In 2018 the Government of Canada created the SDG Unit (within ESDC) to be responsible for reporting on SDG progress within Canada and to administer the accompanying SDG Funding Program (hereafter referred to as the Program).⁸ The 17 SDGs are addressed by various programs within ESDC and other federal departments and agencies, as well as other levels of government in Canada. The Program aims to create an enabling environment to increase public awareness of the SDGs, support new partnerships to advance action, and identify and implement innovative initiatives to drive progress on the SDGs.⁹

The Program is intended to complement existing Government of Canada efforts by supporting priorities and initiatives related to the 2030 Agenda that do not fall under existing federal programs.¹⁰

2.3 SDG Funding Program objectives and expected outcomes

The objective of the Program is to fund sustainable development projects that:

- support the development and utilization of effective approaches to address sustainable development and the social, economic and environmental issues and challenges¹¹
- develop, exchange and apply knowledge, tools and resources that address sustainable development needs of individuals, families and communities
- foster partnerships and networks to address sustainable development and the existing and emerging social, economic and environmental issues

⁸ ESDC reports on the progress of SDGs in close collaboration with other core federal departments (including, Global Affairs Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Women and Gender Equality Canada, and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada) and is supported by Statistics Canada and the Privy Council Office. Core federal Canada's Federal Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda (released in 2021) outlines SDG vertical leads and co-leads for each SDG. Each Federal Department/Agency place emphasizes SDGs that align closest with their respective mandates.

⁹ [About the Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program - Canada.ca](#)

¹⁰ [GC InfoBase - Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program](#)

¹¹ The 2023 Call for Proposals – Grants Stream defines in the Glossary, the following key terms: social, economic, and environmental issues and challenges. Please see: [Sustainable Development Goals Program – Grants Stream – What this program offers - Canada.ca](#)

- recognize and support the ability of organizations to identify and address sustainable development priorities
- recognize and promote engagement initiatives at the international, national, subnational, and/or local level that mobilize assets and develop capacities and resources for action; and/or
- foster Indigenous traditional knowledge on sustainable development

According to the Program's Terms and Conditions, the short-term¹² expected outcomes are:

1. **INCREASED PUBLIC AWARENESS OF SDGs:** through the funding of engagement activities, Canadians' awareness of the 2030 Agenda will be broadened
2. **NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS:** the development of partnerships and networks between organizations will lead to a better understanding of issues, challenges and opportunities, and identify solutions to advance the SDGs in Canada and abroad
3. **IMPROVED AND MORE BROADLY AVAILABLE KNOWLEDGE OF EMERGING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES RELATED TO LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND:** partnerships will help identify gaps in Canada's efforts to meet the SDGs and improve understanding of the social, economic and environmental needs of under-represented populations who are at risk of being left behind
4. **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES:** the Program will support organizations implementing innovative initiatives that seek to drive progress on multiple SDGs
5. **CONTRIBUTE TO RECONCILIATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:** engagement activities contribute to the Government of Canada's commitment to a renewed relationship with First Nations, Inuit and Métis by establishing Indigenous peoples as key partners in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda

2.4 Program funding

Budget 2018 provided \$59.8 million over 13 years (\$4.6 million annually) to establish the SDG Funding Program. The annual funding of \$4.6 million comes from 6 core federal departments:

- Indigenous Services Canada: \$2,051,687
- Global Affairs Canada: \$1,120,605
- ESDC: \$647,878

¹² For the purposes of this report, immediate and intermediate outcomes are referred to as short-term outcomes.

- Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada: \$614,307
- Environment and Climate Change Canada: \$159,500
- Women and Gender Equality Canada: \$6,023

Table 1 below provides details about the number of projects in which funding begins each fiscal year. The average duration of funded projects is 1.0 year for grants and 3.5 years for contributions. Originally, the first 2 intakes (solicited intake and continuous intake) focused exclusively on grants, as these are typically smaller projects that are faster to approve, have a shorter duration, and fewer reporting requirements. Once the National Strategy was developed, contribution projects, which are typically multi-year and have additional reporting requirements, were included in a third and separate Call for Proposals to support and implement key aspects of the National Strategy. Starting in fiscal year 2021 to 2022, the annual funding envelope was almost exclusively used for contributions.

Table 1: Number of new SDG projects in which funding begins each fiscal year¹³

SDG Project Type	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024	Total number of projects
# of new grant projects	19	50	46	2	1	0	118
# of new contribution projects	0	0	5	8	0	0	13
Total number of projects	19	50	51	10	1	0	131

Source: SDG Funding Program administrative data (between fiscal years 2018 to 2019 and 2023 to 2024). Note that the table does not include the 31 projects that were approved as part of the fourth Call for Proposals (November 2023), as it is outside the reference period for the evaluation.¹⁴

Table 2 presents the amount of funding allocated by fiscal year. It demonstrates an initial emphasis on grants and a move to multi-year contribution projects.

Table 2: Funding disbursements of SDG projects (\$ million)

Program stream	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	2023 to 2024	Total funding
Grant projects	1.50	4.58	4.46	0.28	0.10	0.10	10.87
Contribution projects	0	0	0.14	3.42	3.60	3.71	11.02
Total funding	1.50	4.58	4.60	3.70	3.70	3.81	21.89

Source: SDG Funding Program administrative data (between fiscal years 2018 to 2019 and 2023 to 2024).

¹³Some projects were funded over multiple years.

¹⁴ [List of projects funded by the Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program - Canada.ca](#)

3 Evaluation approach

3.1 Evaluation objectives and scope

This evaluation covers the period from fiscal year 2018 to 2019 until fiscal year 2023 to 2024. The evaluation assesses the Program's relevance and examines the extent to which the Program achieved its expected short-term outcomes to date. In addition, the evaluation seeks to identify lessons learned and actionable insights from initiatives funded by the Program. The evaluation questions can be found in Appendix A.

The Program launched 4 different intake processes since its creation in 2018. The evaluation examines the 131 funded grant and contribution projects selected through the first 3 intake processes, and whose funding and activities have been completed at the time of the evaluation.^{15, 16}

3.2 Evaluation methods

The evaluation utilized a rapid format and focused on a narrow set of questions and aspects of the Program. The evaluation relies on 2 lines of evidence, a document review, and a series of semi-structured key informant interviews to answer the evaluation questions.

3.2.1 Document review

As part of the document review, 131 project descriptions were reviewed (118 grant and 13 contribution projects), however, only 126 of 131 final project reports (113 grant projects and 13 contribution projects) were available at the time of the evaluation.¹⁷ These final project reports, in addition to project completion reports, and other reports published by the SDG Unit provide a thorough overview of program relevance, lessons learned, and insights into the Program's intended outcomes.

¹⁵ Through the most recent intake launched (fourth intake process) in November 2023, the Program added 31 new projects for a total of 162 projects, and a total funding allocation of approximately \$32 million since 2018-2019. The 31 new projects started in fiscal year 2024 to 2025 are not included in this evaluation as they are still ongoing, and results are not yet available.

¹⁶ Outside of the 4 Calls for Proposals, since 2020 the Program has allocated \$900,000 annually to 3 distinction based National Indigenous Organizations under Engagement Protocol Agreements. These Agreements are separate from the SDG Funding Program agreements. The 3 Engagement Protocol Agreements with the National Indigenous Organizations are also outside the scope of the evaluation.

¹⁷ 5 final grant project reports were not provided to ESDC. Reasons reported for recipients not submitting the report include organizations that ceased operations during the funding period and capacity issues. An escalation process exists within ESDC to ensure all efforts are made to obtain the final reports.

3.2.2 Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews with ESDC program officials, partners from other federal departments and agencies, and grant and contribution funding recipient organizations provided additional insight into the Program's design and delivery, governance, outcomes, innovative practices, and partnerships. The interviews also captured interviewees' perspective on challenges, opportunities, and lessons learned. In total, 29 interviews were completed with the following categories of interviewees:

- 3 ESDC program officials
- 3 federal government partner departments/agencies
- 23 funding recipients: grants (12) and contributions (11)

Scale of significance for document and key informant interview reporting

The scale below was used to indicate the significance of the interview findings. These percentages correspond to the relative weight of responses from key informants who held similar views.

- "All/almost all" – findings reflect the views and opinions of 90% or more of the key informants in the group.
- "Most" – findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 75% but less than 90% of key informants in the group.
- "Majority" - findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 51% but less than 75% of key informants in the group.
- "Some" – findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 25% but less than 50% of key informants in the group.
- "A few" – findings reflect the views and opinions of at least 2, but less than 25% of key informants in the group.

3.3 Evaluation limitations

The evaluation of the Program is susceptible to several limitations. These can be summarized at a high-level as follows:

- There are challenges inherent in evaluating programs designed to bring change in an ecosystem or to indirectly support communities or organizations. As a result, this places limits on the extent to which the Program can meet its ultimate outcomes identified in the logic model.¹⁸
- A fourth Call for Proposals was launched in November 2023 with different parameters than the first 3 intake processes. Projects funded through this fourth Call for Proposals are outside the scope of this evaluation as projects were not completed at the time of the evaluation.
- Limited generalizability of interview findings: organizations were selected to reflect a range of intended program outcomes, geographic regions, and funding cycles. Ultimately, however, the organizations that were willing and able to participate, and the projects they discussed, differ in important ways from the full set of funded projects (that is, the 131 funded projects). For example, 50% of grant funding recipient interviewees have had multiple projects funded through the SDG Funding Program (received more than 1 grant). In comparison, overall, among all the organizations that received grant funding from the Program, only 13% have had multiple projects funded through the Program. These differences may have shaped their experiences, the outcomes of their projects, and the perspectives they shared in interviews.

¹⁸ At the time of the evaluation, the logic model for the Program was still considered a draft document and only ultimate outcomes associated with meeting the commitments towards Agenda 2030 were identified.

4 Evaluation findings

4.1 Program design and delivery

The Program was launched in fiscal year 2018 to 2019, with a first solicited intake process that resulted in 19 organizations receiving grants of up to \$100,000 to undertake activities that addressed one or more of the following:

- raise public awareness of the 2030 Agenda in Canada
- build partnerships and networks
- convene stakeholders to help inform the development of the National Strategy

In February 2019, a funding approach for fiscal year 2019 to 2020 was approved which included 2 additional intake processes:

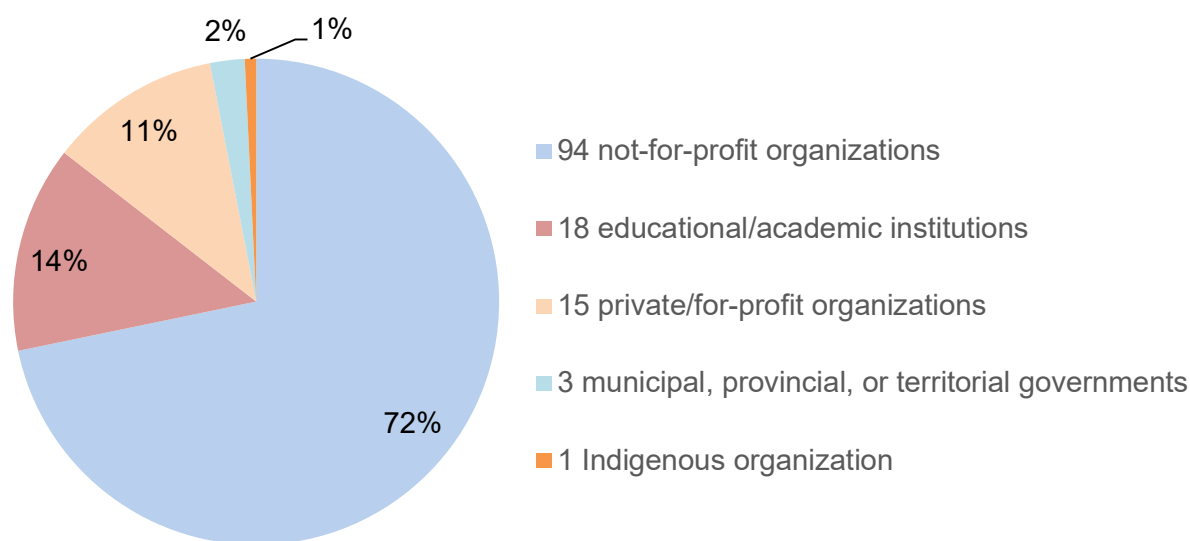
- Part 1: Continuous intake process exclusively for grants with a maximum of \$100,000 per project, up to 1 year in duration (launched in spring 2019)¹⁹
- Part 2: Open Call for Proposals for contributions funding with a maximum of \$300,000 per year, for a duration of up to 3 years (launched late in fiscal year 2019 to 2020)

While the continuous intake process for grants (Part 1) focused on engagement and SDG awareness, the objectives of the open Call for Proposals (Part 2) for contributions focused on innovation, knowledge sharing and addressing data/research gaps in Canada.

Between fiscal year 2018 to 2019 and 2023 to 2024, a total of 131 projects were funded (118 grant and 13 contribution projects) through these 3 intakes.

Figure 2 (below) illustrates the types of funding recipients associated with grants and contributions projects. Funding recipients included a variety of partners in the public, not-for-profit, and private sectors. The vast majority (72%) of funding recipients were not-for-profit organizations.

¹⁹ The new Call for Proposals – Grant Stream have increased the funding up to \$200,000 (maximum of \$100,000 per fiscal year), for projects that are to 24 months in duration. These modifications are not reported on in this evaluation, as they are outside of the reference period examined.

Figure 2: Number and percentage breakdown of funding recipient types

Source: SDG Funding Program administrative data.

The nature and frequency of progress and financial reporting is specified in each funding agreement. Contribution funding recipients are required to submit progress reports that outline activities completed and demonstrate progress towards achievement of results. All contribution and grant recipients are required to submit final reports containing information on results achieved.

Although only 1 Indigenous organization was funded under the 131 projects included in this evaluation, since 2020 the Program has allocated \$900,000 annually to 3 distinction based National indigenous Organizations. These are the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council. The funding allocation to the 3 National Indigenous Organizations helps to ensure Indigenous voices, views and traditional knowledge are reflected in Canada's work to advance the SDGs. National Indigenous Organizations funding is excluded from the scope of this evaluation as it is administered and transferred through dedicated Indigenous Engagement Protocol Agreements, which have separate Terms and Conditions from the grants and contributions of the SDG Funding Program.

Table 3 (below) shows the expected reach by province or territory of funded grant and contribution projects. For example, 72 grant projects were expected to have a national reach.²⁰

²⁰ In the 2023 Call for Proposals, “national in scope” is defined as: organization must demonstrate that its benefits will be effectively extended nationwide, extending beyond more than 1 province, territory, or region. [Sustainable Development Goals Program – Contributions Stream – What this program offers - Canada.ca](#)

Table 3: The Program grant and contribution funding amounts (\$ millions) by region targeted²¹

PROVINCE/ TERRITORY	NATIONAL	MULTIPLE REGIONS ²²	BRITISH COLUMBIA	ALBERTA	SASKATCHEWAN	MANITOBA	ONTARIO	QUEBEC	NEW BRUNSWICK	NOVA SCOTIA	YUKON	NORTHWEST TERRITORIES	TOTAL
Grant projects	6.8	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.1	0.2	1.2	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	11.0
Contribution projects	5.8	1.7	0	0	0	0	3.4	0	0	0	0	0	10.9
Total	12.6	2.0	0.4	0.7	0.1	0.2	4.6	0.9	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1	21.9

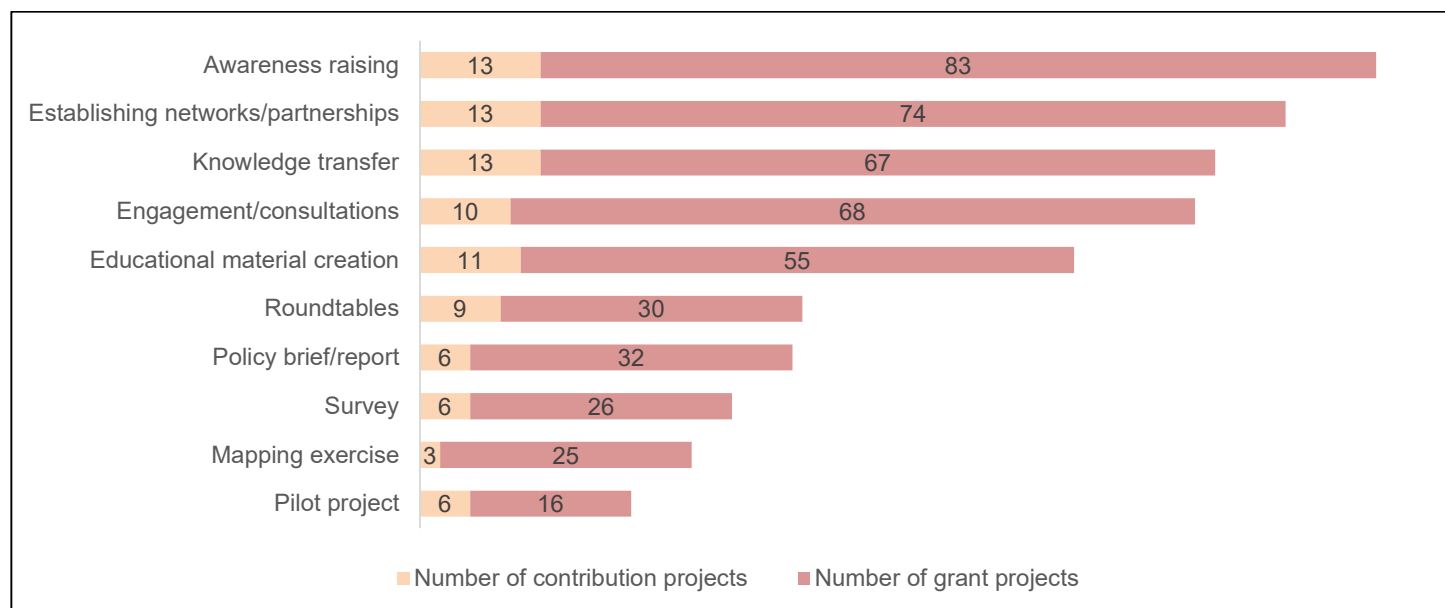
Source: SDG Funding Program administrative data (between fiscal year 2018 to 2019 and fiscal year 2023 to 2024).

Figure 3 (below) presents the types of activities that grant and contribution projects reported conducting (note, projects can report conducting multiple activities). For example, awareness raising was the most commonly reported activity, identified by 83 grant projects and all 13 contribution projects, followed by establishing networks and partnerships.

²¹ Regions without projects dedicated exclusively to their jurisdiction include Newfoundland and Labrador, Nunavut, and Prince Edward Island.

²² Regions included in the “multiple regions” category (composing of 4 projects) includes British Columbia (2 projects), Alberta (3 projects), Saskatchewan (2 projects), Manitoba (1 project), Ontario (1 project), Quebec (2 projects), Nova Scotia (3 projects), New Brunswick (3 projects), Prince Edward Island (2 projects), and Newfoundland and Labrador (3 projects).

Figure 3: Number of projects by self-reported activity type²³²⁴



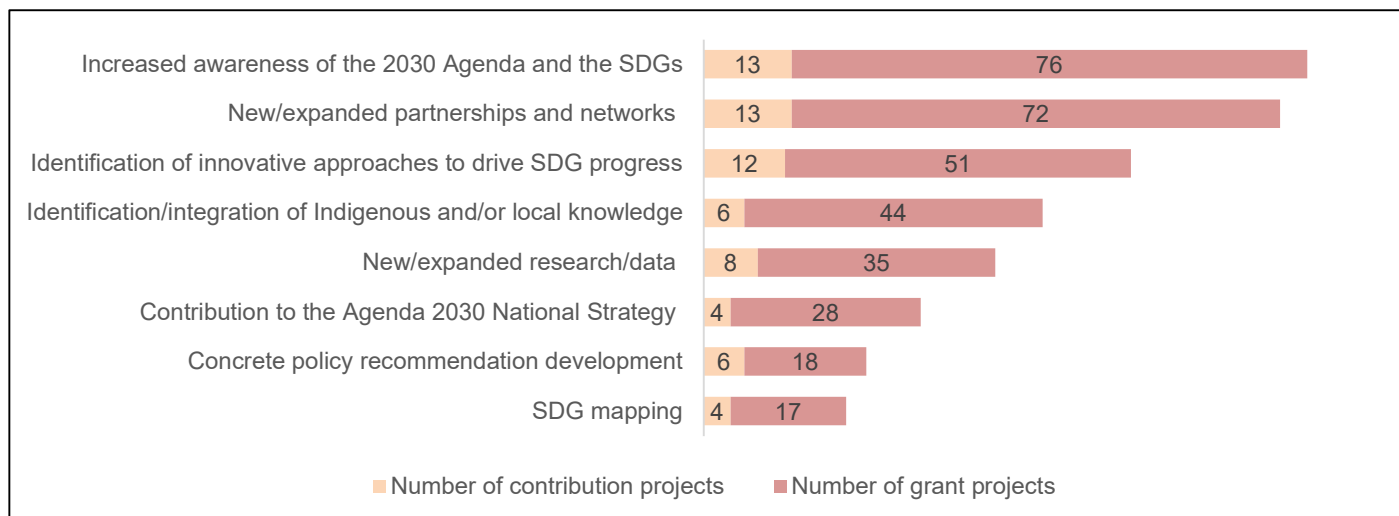
Source: SDG Funding Program Project Completion Reports

²³ Note that multiple activity types could be addressed by a project. This figure includes all 13 funded contribution projects. However, data is unavailable for 28 out of 118 grant projects as these project organizations either did not provide project completion reports or did not complete these sections of the reporting template.

²⁴ Note that pilot projects refer to small-scale tests of larger projects to assess feasibility, duration, and potential success before full implementation.

Figure 4 (below) illustrates the most reported expected project outcomes to support the 2030 Agenda.

Figure 4: Number of projects by outcomes to support the 2030 Agenda²⁵



Source: SDG Funding Program Project Completion Reports

Increased awareness of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was the most reported intended outcomes among 76 grant and 13 contribution projects, closely followed by new or expanded partnerships and networks (72 grant and 13 contribution projects).

4.2 Program relevance

The evaluation found that the Program plays a role commensurate with its small size and activities funded in supporting Government of Canada's priorities to advance the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. The 2021 mandate letter to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development directed the Minister to continue leading the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Canada.²⁶ In addition to mandated commitments, the broad nature of the Program also enables it to contribute, in limited capacities, towards a wide variety of related government commitments.²⁷

²⁵ Note that multiple project outcomes could be addressed by a project. This figure includes all 13 funded contribution projects. However, data is unavailable for 28 out of 118 grant projects as these project organizations either did not provide project completion reports or did not complete these sections of the reporting template.

²⁶ [Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Mandate Letter | Prime Minister of Canada](#)

²⁷ These include but are not limited to the Federal Sustainable Development Strategy, Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The relevance component of this evaluation is primarily focused on the relationship to Agenda 2030.

To assess the relevance of the Program within Canada's SDG framework, the evaluation reviewed key Government of Canada documents outlining federal activities and commitments to advancing the SDGs, including:

- Canada's Federal Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda²⁸
- Towards Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy²⁹

A review of key program documents identified 8 cross-cutting objectives as key drivers of Canada's implementation of the SDGs.³⁰ These objectives are:

- Leaving no one behind by advancing gender equality and diversity
- Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through partnerships and self-determination
- Aligning domestic and international efforts to achieve the SDGs
- Fostering leadership, governance, and policy coherence
- Raising awareness, engagement, and partnerships
- Ensuring accountability, transparency, measurement, and reporting
- Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in the context of the 2030 Agenda
- Investing in the SDGs

The evaluation compared these 8 overarching federal objectives for Agenda 2030 to those of the Program. It is important to reiterate that the Program is intended to create an enabling environment to support the SDGs, rather than directly advancing the 17 SDGs. The evaluation found that there is a connection between the Program and the overarching federal objectives for Agenda 2030. For a detailed comparison of the Government of Canada's 2030 Agenda objectives and the Program's objectives, please refer to [Appendix B](#).

The objectives of the Program's Terms and Conditions are broad and provide flexibility to select projects that can best address Government of Canada priorities and areas identified for concentrated efforts. For example, key informant interviews with ESDC program officials revealed that the Program initially supported awareness raising projects since the SDGs were not considered prominent nationally during the first 2 Calls for Proposals. The focus later evolved to fostering partnerships and developing innovative approaches. Since the initial 2

²⁸ [Canada's Federal Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda - Canada.ca](#)

²⁹ [Towards Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy - Canada.ca](#)

³⁰ As outlined in both *Towards Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy* and *Canada's Federal Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda*.

Calls for Proposals, program officials identified that funding periods and amounts have increased to respond to feedback obtained from funding recipients.

Additional program priorities highlighted by program officials and program webpages³¹ include funding projects that target the greatest number of SDGs, and an emphasis on projects that advance SDGs in equity-deserving groups and vulnerable populations. However, key informant interviews with partners and funding recipients highlighted limited capacity of projects, which are often locally focused, to make widespread societal changes given limited funding for projects both in terms of amounts available and duration.

4.3 Application process

Interviews with ESDC program officials revealed that the application process for the Program aligns with the standards of other Government of Canada grants and contributions programs. This includes a reliance on the Grants and Contributions Online Services portal for most proposal submissions. To improve user experience, as part of the fourth intake launched in November 2023, 2 information sessions were open for potential applicants in December 2023.

Grant recipient key informants generally identified that the application process was straightforward. However, most (8 out of 12) raised concerns about short timelines, limited communication, and long delays (up to 20 months between submission and approval), which made it challenging to plan and hire the needed staff in advance of project funding approval.

Just over half of contribution funding recipients (5) interviewed also noted that the response time to hear back about applications was very long. In contrast, contribution funding recipients generally expressed satisfaction with the support and responsiveness provided by the Program area in response to proposed project modifications, particularly considering the COVID-19 pandemic.

ESDC releases an annual Grants and Contributions Applicants Client Experience Research report which provides insights into the satisfaction and experience of applicants with grants and contribution findings. As part of ESDC's Year 3 (2022 to 2023) report, it was found that 68% of applicants expressed satisfaction with their overall experience.³² Similar results were found for the SDG Program. Contribution recipient key informants were asked to rate their experiences applying for Program funding based on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very

³¹ [Sustainable Development Goals Program – Contributions Stream – What this program offers - Canada.ca](#)

³² In comparison, Year 2 was 77%, Year 1 was 70%. Source: [Grants and contributions applicant's client experience research \(year 3\): Em20-148/2024E-PDF - Government of Canada Publications - Canada.ca](#)

difficult and 5 being very easy. Out of the 11 key informants, 8 provided a response, resulting in an average of 3.8 out of 5 (76%).

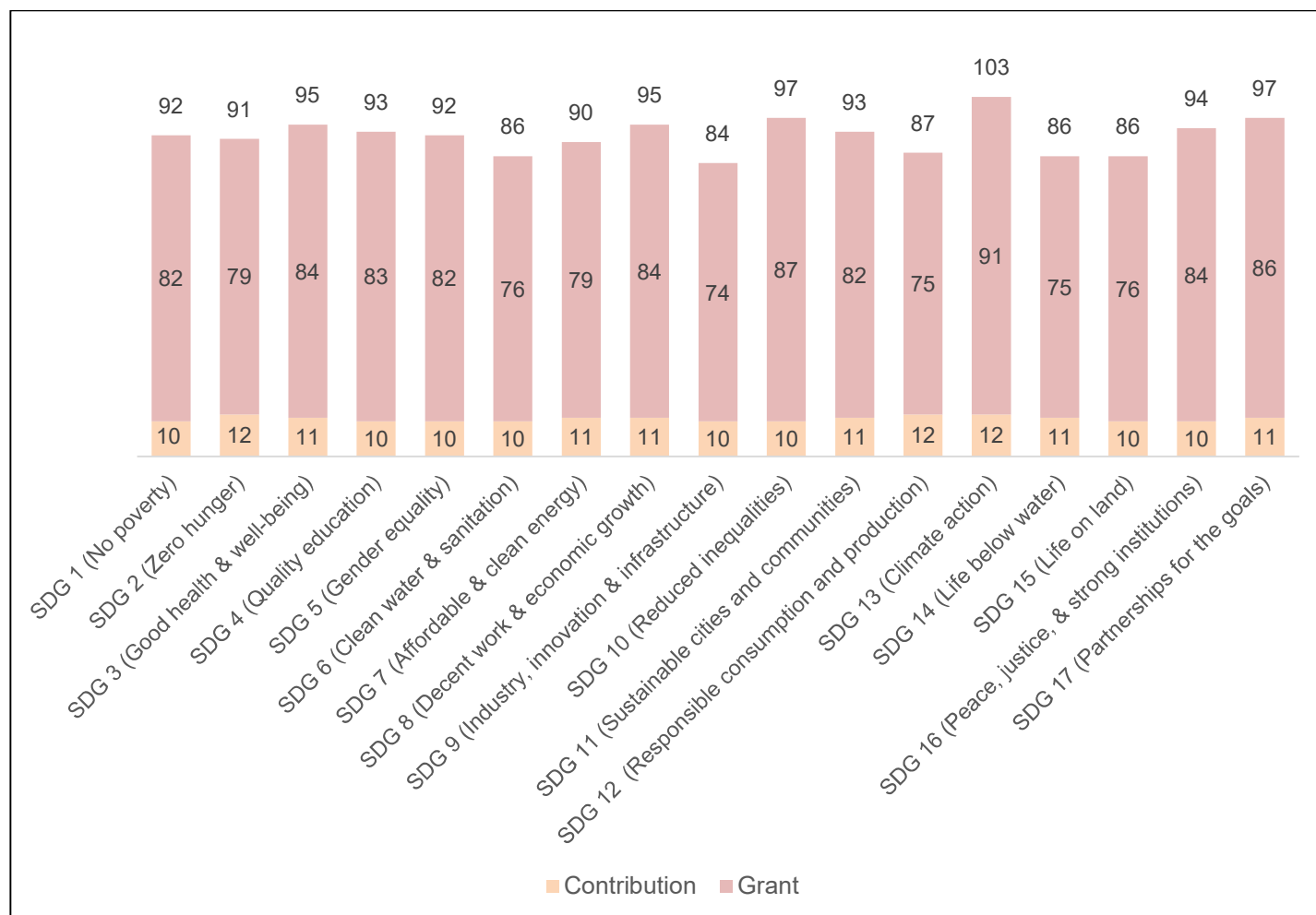
Key informant interviews revealed that holidays are taken into consideration for Call for Proposals periods. However, several key informants mentioned that the Call for Proposals period can be a challenge if cultural events are not taken into consideration. For example, some Indigenous communities often have scheduling conflicts that may need to be considered when Call for Proposals are launched (for example, hunting seasons).

4.4 Targeting of SDGs

All funded projects identified 1 or more SDGs as a primary focus of their work. According to the contribution Call for Proposals launched in 2019 to 2020, funding prioritized projects that “indicated how projects were advancing the 2030 Agenda as a whole, or multiple SDGs.” Most funded projects were found to be broadly focused (for example 61% of grant projects and 62% of contribution projects attempted to address all 17 SDGs) rather than targeting specific areas.

ESDC officials clarified that projects from the first intake focused predominately on awareness raising about the SDGs, but with the second and third Calls for Proposals the focus shifted to partnership building and developing innovative approaches.

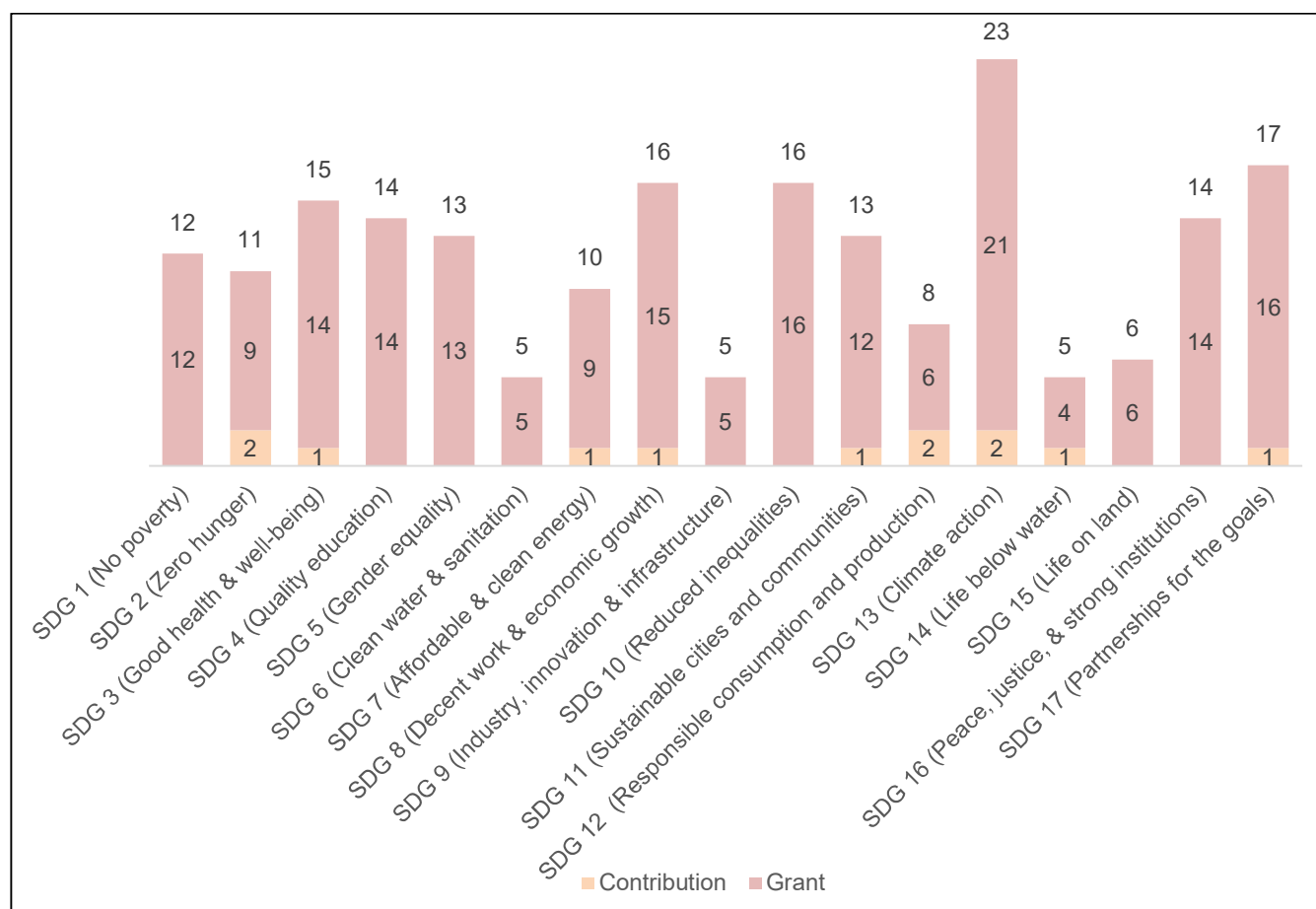
Figure 5 (below) outlines the distribution of SDGs targeted by all 131 funded projects. Overall, the most targeted SDG was SDG 13 (Climate action), with 103 projects. The least targeted SDG was SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure) with 84 projects.

Figure 5: Number of projects targeting each of the 17 SDGs³³

Source: SDG Funding Program administrative data.

In general, the difference between the number of SDGs targeted overall is minimal. However, as displayed in Figure 6 (below), when the projects targeting “all SDGs” are removed, the difference in targeted SDGs becomes more apparent. It is important to note that while projects were able to identify targetting multiple SDGs, they may have placed greater emphasis on specific SDGs (particularly if the SDG aligned better with the mandate of the funded organization). For the first 3 intakes, the Project Completion Report template did not ask funding recipients to identify the “top” or “prioritized” SDGs addressed by a project that targets multiple SDGs. Program officials clarified that as part of the fourth intake process (outside of the scope of the evaluation), ESDC has since developed a program specific template that captures this information.

³³ Most projects targeted “all SDGs”, some projects targeted multiple but not all SDGs, and a few projects targeted only one SDG.

Figure 6: Number of projects targeting each of the 17 SDGs excluding projects that targeted all SDGs

Source: SDG Funding Program administrative data.

It was not clear whether projects that targeted a greater number of SDGs had better outcomes than projects that focused on specific SDGs. Focusing on specific SDGs could allow projects to be more targeted in their approach, particularly for projects that leverage existing networks, and organizational knowledge and expertise. The SDG Unit may wish to further examine the benefits of broad themed projects versus targeted projects in meeting the objectives of the Program.

4.5 Awareness raising and knowledge sharing

A key objective of the Program is to support projects that raise public awareness on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. It was found that 108 grant and contribution projects delivered awareness-raising activities, such as conferences, webinars, and digital campaigns, but few tracked changes in awareness levels. The emphasis and focus of awareness raising activities varied, with some projects tailoring SDG messaging to local issues, while others focused primarily on introducing the framework.

Most grant projects (95 of 113) and all 13 contribution projects identified “awareness raising” as a key activity supported by Program funding. For example, among grant projects, 1,462 engagement activities were documented.

Key findings from the document review and key informant interviews include:

- The majority of grant recipient organizations (77 of 113) chose to focus their outreach on local priorities and community concerns, connecting these issues to the SDG principles more subtly or behind the scenes.
- While grant recipient interviewees recognized the value of raising public awareness of the SDGs, the majority (8 out of 12) felt the program could do more to highlight innovative or evidence-based approaches to addressing them. They drew a distinction between raising awareness of what the SDGs are versus raising awareness about new, innovative, and evidence-based approaches for making meaningful progress towards achieving the SDGs. They also saw an opportunity for funding more strategic, targeted, and purposeful awareness-raising efforts at the local level and to mobilize community members. They also noted that there may be opportunities for the federal government to be more proactive in raising public awareness about the concrete steps that are already being taken and investments that are being made to achieve the SDGs.
- Contribution recipient key informants (7 of 11) emphasized the importance of engaging with local communities and grassroots organizations to raise awareness of the SDG framework. This included organizing educational programs, workshops, and discussions across various regions to focus on making the SDGs relevant to local contexts.
- All contribution projects engaged in “knowledge transfer”, which included activities associated with developing training and educational materials such as publications, tools, guides, online sessions and workshops. For example, 1 funded project developed a variety of multi-media resources to raise awareness and educate people on the SDGs. This project’s reported activities included: 28 workshops across Canada, training 825 community members, an online course which hosted between 300 to 400 participants and focused on specific targets across 5 SDGs; and 3 multimedia documentaries focusing on community-created strategies to promote social pedagogy and resilience against discrimination.

Key activities carried out for awareness raising and knowledge sharing are highlighted below.

4.5.1 National and local events, conferences, and workshops

The evaluation found that 42 grant and contribution projects took part in offering events, conferences, and workshops to help raise awareness about the SDGs. A review of project final reports found:

- 31 grant projects organized large-scale national or regional conferences to raise awareness of the SDGs and increase public discourse around sustainable development.
- 11 contribution projects hosted or supported various local and national events to raise awareness and share knowledge around the 2030 Agenda. These spanned from local engagement activities such as workshops with dozens of participants to nation-wide conferences with hundreds of attendees and a wide variety of stakeholders.

4.5.2 Knowledge transfer through development of training and educational materials

The majority of grant and contribution projects identified taking part in knowledge transfer through the development of training and educational materials. Overall, it was found that 83 grant projects employed a variety of methods to develop and disseminate knowledge, including workshops, training sessions, and webinars. These efforts were identified as helping to raise awareness of sustainable development issues and build capacity among communities to work towards advancing SDGs.

Among contribution recipient interviewees, 7 indicated that their projects produced a variety of educational resources, including blogs, webinars, publications, and newsletters, aimed at increasing understanding of the SDGs. These materials were identified as helping to share success stories and best practices and contributing to a broader conversation about the goals. Final reports showed that almost all (11) contribution projects identified the development of educational materials and training guides as a key project activity and avenue for knowledge sharing around the SDGs. Specific examples include:

- creation of learning products, publications, blogs, studies, tools, guides, and newsletters among others around localization of SDGs
- organized numerous online sessions and workshops centered on community-specific interests and engaged a range of organizations and youth participants through these programs

4.5.3 Leveraging web-platforms and social media

While only 20% of grant funding recipients identified leveraging web-platforms and social media for their projects, all contribution recipients identified their use in their projects. For example:

- A few grant projects (23) produced innovative digital platforms and tools to map existing SDG initiatives, track progress, and identify gaps, contributing to an understanding of the current SDG landscape in Canada.
- All contribution projects demonstrated the use of web-platforms and social media to engage with stakeholders and the public to disseminate knowledge and expand their networks. Key informants

indicated that online engagement and outreach through social media posts, along with virtual events, played a significant role in spreading the message.

4.6 Fostering partnerships and networks

Among key objectives of the SDG Funding Program are to support projects that foster partnerships and networks to address sustainable development and the existing and emerging social, economic and environmental issues.

Most grant projects developed new partnerships, often with community organizations, municipalities, or sectoral stakeholders. These collaborations were largely tied to specific deliverables. However, it was found that most partnerships concluded at the end of the funding period, limiting long-term collaboration. Additional insights include:

- Most grant projects (89 of 113) involved the development of partnerships or networks. A total of 453 new partnerships or networks developed were documented across the projects.
- Most grant projects (85 of 113) identified that partnerships concluded with the end of project funding. Interviewees pointed to the value of these partnerships and noted that more sustained collaboration would be valuable. Some interviewees (4 out of 12) also suggested that ESDC could play an increased role in facilitating strategic partnerships across the portfolio and that this would enhance long-term outcomes.

The creation and expansion of partnerships and networks as a key project activity was identified in all 13 contribution final reports, as well as by all 11 contribution funding recipients interviewed. In addition, 4 of the 11 interviewees noted that their projects also acted as intermediaries in connecting other organizations to carry out work under the Canadian SDG framework using a larger network. This was done through various initiatives, such as:

- hosting conferences
- establishing a community of practice
- creating tools to map and connect organizations working on SDGs

Key informants identified the above activities as helping facilitate collaboration, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange between a diverse range of stakeholders.

4.7 Innovative approaches

Identifying and implementing innovative approaches for advancing Canada's progress on the 2030 Agenda is a key objective of the Program. Innovative approaches are defined by the Program as "an approach that will introduce a new product, idea, process, or technology, or complement, rethink, and/or adapt existing activities that support Canada's implementation of the 2030 Agenda".³⁴

Out of 113 grant projects, some (52) reported exploring or promoting innovative approaches for responding to sustainable development issues. Most of these projects focused on identifying or mapping existing approaches rather than testing new solutions for sustainability. A smaller number of projects piloted novel methods for engaging equity-deserving and vulnerable populations or advancing data tracking. Key informants noted that the short-term nature of the grants, combined with time, and resource constraints limits the number of innovative approaches that can be developed and tested.

Additional insights about grant projects include:

- 40 of 52 (77%) innovation-related projects focused on identifying, sharing knowledge about, and/or mapping existing initiatives, rather than generating or testing new solutions (for example, mapping of SDG-related initiatives to identify gaps in implementation or exploring new methods for tracking SDG progress)
- 21 of 52 (40%) innovation-related projects focused on innovative approaches to data collection and measurement to support tracking progress on the SDGs. These projects developed tools, platforms, and methodologies aimed at improving how sustainable development efforts are understood and evaluated.
- 10 of 52 (19%) of innovation-related projects aimed to pilot or test new sustainability approaches.

According to project final reports, most innovation-related grant projects (42 of 52) shared their work through the following public forums: workshops, training sessions, public presentations, reports, and guides and toolkits. A stated goal of many of these projects' dissemination activities was to help build capacity among specific audiences such as educators or community leaders.

In terms of contribution projects, it was found that almost all projects (12 of 13) reported the identification of innovative approaches to drive progress on the SDGs as a key outcome generated by their activities. While some project activities aligned with the Program's objective to find novel ways of responding to existing and emerging sustainable development issues and addressing gaps through innovation, others focused on

³⁴ [Sustainable Development Goals Program – Contributions Stream – What this program offers - Canada.ca](#)

increasing dialogue and awareness around success stories using innovative approaches for SDG advancement. This involved creating digital resources for mapping SDGs, organizing dialogue series for knowledge sharing, disseminating best practices among stakeholders, and developing technology.

4.8 Objectives and outcomes related to equity-deserving and vulnerable groups

Almost 56% of all grant and contribution projects (57 grants and 13 contribution projects out of 126 final project reports) reported targeting equity-deserving and vulnerable groups. Among these projects, there was generally good alignment between stated objectives and described outcomes from final reports. The types of objectives and outcomes reported by these 126 projects are described below:

- **GENERAL EQUITY-DESERVING GROUPS:** 50 projects (37 grant projects and 13 contribution projects) final reports used inclusive language such as “underserved,” “marginalized,” or “equity-deserving” to describe their target audiences. These projects reported outcomes associated with increased awareness of the SDGs, expanded access to educational tools, and strengthened networks among diverse community actors. These results suggest progress in achieving broader inclusion goals and are aligned with the principle of “leaving no one behind”.
- **YOUTH:** 28 youth-centered projects (22 grant projects and 6 contribution projects) sought to foster leadership, raise awareness of SDGs, and build capacity for future engagement. Reported outcomes included the formation of youth advisory committees, skill-building in participatory planning, and youth-led contributions to sustainability initiatives. These outcomes demonstrate clear alignment with objectives centered on developing the next generation of SDG champions.
- **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:** 28 projects (19 grant projects and 9 contribution projects) involved Indigenous communities and were aimed at supporting cultural inclusion, reconciliation, and leadership in sustainability work. These projects reported outcomes such as increased awareness of the 2030 Agenda within Indigenous communities, development of leadership skills, and empowerment. For example, some projects recognized that Indigenous peoples may have different perceptions and priorities, and so advocated for community-driven measurement systems. This method allows communities to define and measure well-being indicators that are most relevant to them, leading to more culturally relevant and tailored sustainable development strategies. Though many projects referenced Indigenous groups in their objectives, outcome data varied in detail available. For example, some projects provided general descriptions of increased knowledge or awareness, while others described network-building and the development of culturally relevant learning tools.

- **WOMEN AND GIRLS:** 14 projects (8 grant projects and 6 contribution projects) aimed to reduce gender disparities by encouraging women's participation in sustainability solutions and sectors. 1 project, for example, set out to encourage women to pursue clean energy careers, and reported outcomes such as improved education, increased awareness, and engagement of women and girls in sustainability-focused learning activities. Another project that targeted diverse groups of women, including newcomers and racialized individuals, reported outcomes associated with increases in knowledge and skills development in participatory planning and inclusive design, as well as supporting the goal of empowering underrepresented women to contribute to sustainability solutions. This included hosting workshops on pay equity and the gender wage gap and highlighting the consequences of these aspects for women pursuing post-secondary education.
- **FRANCOPHONES:** 13 projects (8 grant projects and 5 contribution projects) aimed to ensure that French-speaking communities could access SDG-related programming through bilingual delivery and targeted outreach. Their objectives included engaging Francophones alongside other equity-deserving groups such as women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, as well as fostering more inclusive participation in sustainability efforts. However, only 2 projects provided outcome information, making it difficult to report on results achieved. For example, 1 project described positive outcomes across multiple regions, highlighting the role of inclusive and bilingual programming in fostering broader engagement and strengthening partnerships. The deliberate use of French-language materials and programming was identified as contributing to more equitable participation.
- **POVERTY REDUCTION:** 12 projects (7 grant projects and 5 contribution projects) focused on addressing poverty and supporting low-income communities through policy engagement, research, and community-based approaches. These initiatives explored sustainable solutions to food insecurity, raised awareness of income inequality, and advocated for improved social supports.
- **PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:** 7 projects (4 grant projects and 3 contribution projects) included a focus on persons with disabilities aimed to promote inclusion and accessibility in education, employment, and civic engagement. These efforts worked to advance human rights, remove barriers, and ensure that disability perspectives were integrated into broader SDG-related activities. Projects identified that they contributed to more inclusive practices and helped build awareness around the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. For example, 1 project established support networks in 4 cities, which included people living with intellectual, cognitive and psychosocial disabilities as well as representatives from front-line agencies that support them. This project also held a national community awareness forum that featured disability rights speakers.

- **NEWCOMERS, IMMIGRANTS, REFUGEES:** 5 projects (2 grant projects and 3 contribution projects) focused on newcomer communities aimed to address systemic exclusion and promote cross-cultural learning. These objectives were reflected in outcomes such as empowerment of marginalized populations, strengthened cultural inclusion, and the creation of accessible entry points for SDG engagement among immigrant and refugee groups.
- **2SLGBTQI+ AND RACIALIZED COMMUNITIES:** 4 grant projects in total emphasized representation and inclusion of racialized communities (3) and 2SLGBTQI+ communities (1) in the SDGs, while 3 contribution projects focused on 2SLGBTQI+ and non-binary individuals. Outcomes included increased visibility of intersectional identities in SDG initiatives and enhanced leadership opportunities for marginalized groups, supporting their stated aims to reduce exclusion and foster equitable participation.

4.9 Distribution of equity-deserving and vulnerable groups

The involvement of equity-deserving and vulnerable groups as key stakeholders in funded projects was often directly influenced by the specific SDGs each project targeted. Certain SDGs, such as SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), are inherently more aligned with the needs and realities of equity-deserving and vulnerable populations. These groups often face systemic barriers and are disproportionately affected by challenges such as limited access to essential services, economic insecurity, and social exclusion. As a result, projects focusing on these SDGs tended to prioritize the engagement of equity-deserving and vulnerable groups, ensuring their voices, experiences, and needs were considered in efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda.

Interviews with grant funding recipients revealed that the short-term nature of funding often impeded the viability of continued progress, specifically with respect to equity-deserving groups. Approximately half (57) of all grant projects identified included at least 1 equity-deserving or vulnerable group for participation in, or as a beneficiary of, their project. Among these projects children and youth (22 projects), racialized and low-income groups (13 projects) and Indigenous Peoples (19 projects) were most likely to be included.³⁵ Dissemination methods included workshops, toolkits, webinars, and bilingual resources, though detailed data on reach and uptake was inconsistently reported. Projects reported outcomes such as increased awareness, community engagement, capacity building, and cultural empowerment. Several population groups, including newcomers and 2SLGBTQI+ communities, were less frequently engaged, suggesting gaps in inclusivity.

³⁵ Project numbers do not add to 57, as projects can target more than one type of equity-deserving or vulnerable group.

All 13 contribution projects reported engaging 1 or more equity-deserving or vulnerable groups in their activities, with 7 projects reaching 3 or more targeted populations. Projects most frequently focused on Indigenous Peoples (9 projects), rural or remote communities (8 projects), children and youth (6 projects) and women and girls (6 projects).

Table 4 provides a full list of the equity-deserving and vulnerable groups targeted by grant and contribution projects.

Table 4: Equity-deserving and vulnerable groups targeted by grant and contribution projects

Targeted equity-deserving and/or vulnerable group	Number of projects targeting this group	
	Of the 57 grant projects	Of the 13 contribution projects
Children/youth	22	6
Racialized and low-income groups (including racialized groups /communities, low-income persons)	13	3
Indigenous peoples	19	9
Women/girls	8	6
Official language minorities	8	5
Persons with disabilities	4	3
Newly-landed immigrants/refugees	2	3
2SLGBTQI+/non-binary	1	3
Rural and remote communities /individuals from northern communities	n/a	8
Seniors	n/a	2

Source: Project Completion Reports self-reported by funding recipients. Note, several projects targeted multiple equity-deserving and vulnerable groups, therefore, the totals will be greater than the total number of projects.

4.10 Indigenous peoples as key partners

A key outcome of the Program is to contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Specifically, engagement activities are identified as contributing to the Government of Canada's commitment to a renewed relationship with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis by establishing Indigenous people as key partners in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Two-thirds (73 of 113) of grant projects identified Indigenous participation in projects. Of these projects just over one-third (40 projects) identified Indigenous peoples as collaborators, either in planning or in knowledge-sharing roles. However, it was not always clear from final reports the depth of Indigenous involvement.

The evaluation found that 39 grant projects also focused on Indigenous-related issues encompassing a diverse array of activities aimed at promoting sustainable development and supporting Indigenous communities. For

example, 26 projects included educational programs that incorporated Indigenous perspectives and knowledge systems, 7 projects involved health initiatives including diabetes prevention, and 5 projects focused on renewable energy solutions. Almost 30% of project final reports described the inclusion of Indigenous priorities and cultural values, such as the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and respect, reciprocity and community support. The priorities and values were described as occurring through actions such as storytelling, sharing of traditional ecological knowledge or community-led workshops.

Of these 39 projects, 20 projects also identified Indigenous people (including Elders and youth) in leadership roles, including though:

- advisory roles and decision-making
- leadership and management
- facilitation and instruction
- community engagement and consultation
- cultural preservation

When asked about insights on fostering meaningful partnerships with Indigenous peoples and communities, one-third of grant interviewees (4 out of 12) shared examples of partnerships that they perceived as successful. These included collaborations where Indigenous partners played active roles in shaping project design, facilitating community engagement, or leading knowledge-sharing efforts. In some cases, organizations worked closely with Elders or youth to integrate Indigenous knowledge, values, and priorities into SDG-related initiatives. These experiences highlight the potential for the SDG Funding Program to support strong, community-driven partnerships on projects.

The majority of contribution funding recipients interviewed (6 of 11) identified that their projects established Indigenous peoples as key partners. Most contribution projects (11 of 13) also identified integrating Indigenous peoples and organizations in activity implementation, targeting Indigenous groups as beneficiaries, and/or consulting with Indigenous groups to reflect local knowledge. Furthermore, some contribution projects (6 of 13) also reported the identification/integration of Indigenous and/or local knowledge to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a key outcome generated by their activities. Examples provided by contribution projects ranged from funding pilot projects that empowered local Indigenous communities to apply their knowledge in advancing the SDGs to developing resources and frameworks that aligned the SDGs with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and Indigenous ways of knowing.

In reflecting on their experiences, key informants also offered valuable insights into what supports or facilitates mutually beneficial partnerships with Indigenous peoples, these included:

- Partnership-building requires time and dedicated resources: a third of grant recipient interviewees (4 out of 12) emphasized that meaningful collaboration with Indigenous-led organizations and communities takes time, often more than short-term funding cycles allow. The compressed timelines of the Program, combined with limited ramp-up periods, made it difficult to establish trust and build strong relationships.
- No “one-size-fits all” approach: one-third of grant recipient interviewees (4 out of 12) stressed that care must be taken to listen to the needs and goals of individuals and communities to help ensure mutually beneficial collaboration on projects.
- Alignment of language and frameworks matters: 4 out of 12 grant recipient interviewees noted that the SDG framework did not always align with Indigenous worldviews or resonate in the communities in which they worked. A grant recipient interviewee gave the example of how separating “life on land” from “life below water” did not reflect the holistic view of sustainability held by the Indigenous Nations with whom their organization engaged. This suggests that flexibility in language, as well as a willingness to adapt global frameworks to reflect local cultural perspectives, can support more meaningful and respectful engagement.

4.11 COVID-19 disruptions and adaptations

According to program funding recipients interviewed, they were generally able to adapt to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and made project modifications as required. Modifications mentioned by contribution key informants included:

- Shift towards virtual gatherings such as webinars and online training sessions to maintain engagement
- Adapting resources and support styles provided to member organizations, moving to more digestible formats and coaching-style assistance to accommodate varying capacities among community partners
- Meeting in outdoor settings when technological barriers prevented the use of online platforms
- In response to the pandemic and the desire for deeper engagement, 2 projects shifted their approach from large-scale discussions to localized gatherings. In both cases, it was mentioned that this had a positive impact as it allowed for more in-depth conversations and stronger relationship-building

4.12 Performance measurement

At the time of the evaluation, the draft program logic model in the Program’s Performance Information Profile (date 2018) focused on 2 outcomes, both of which were ultimate in nature, and pertained to commitments for the 2030 Agenda, not the Program itself. They are:

- Whole of government, whole of society, approach for Canada's implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Multi-dimensional sustainable development for all Canadians

As the draft logic model does not clearly reflect the expected outcomes of the Program, the evaluation drew from key performance indicators found in the Program's Terms and Conditions. Through consultations with the Evaluation Working Group, composed of representatives from the SDG Unit and ESDC's Program Operations Branch, this approach was agreed upon to identify expected short-term outcomes of the Program.

From a performance measurement perspective, there are inherent challenges associated with informing the performance of programs that aim to support a broad range of activities seeking to influence a framework like the SDGs. As well for these types of projects, reporting and monitoring tend to focus on outputs and activities, which are not well suited for impact evaluations.

In part, the Program's influence is commensurate with its size and stated objectives, which is meant to provide an enabling environment, rather than directly advancing the 17 SDGs. Upon reviewing project final reports, it was found that each individual project funded by the Program has its own expected outcomes. However, inconsistent tracking of outcomes, especially in terms of raising awareness, made it difficult to draw conclusions about the Program's ability to increase awareness about the SDGs.

There is an opportunity for the Program to build on projects that developed new data collection and measurement approaches. The evaluation found that 47 of 113 grant projects created tools, indicator frameworks, and participatory data-gathering methods tailored to specific populations or regions, which could inform broader SDG monitoring efforts. Additionally, some contribution projects involved creating digital resources for mapping of SDGs to other indicators. However, without continued funding, these innovations risk being lost. Integrating and harmonizing these innovations into existing SDG monitoring systems could significantly strengthen data collection and analysis efforts.

Updating the Program's Performance Information Profile and draft logic model to clearly define the expected outcomes of the Program, would assist in clarifying data collection requirements in the future. For example, a common set of outcome indicators by types of activities (such as for awareness raising activities) could allow for the aggregation of results and building on experiences.

In general, for programs that seek to influence an ecosystem, there is a greater onus on the strategic selection of projects. In the case of the SDG Program, 626 proposals were received, and 131 projects were funded. The selection of the funding instrument (grant versus contribution) is important, as it influences the maximum allowed duration and funding for projects. While outside the scope of the current evaluation, examining the benefits of having the project selection committee choose the funding instrument for projects, instead of asking

organizations to pre-select upon submitting a proposal, may assist in better alignment of project activities and timelines with funding instruments.

5 Lessons learned

The following lessons learned were collected through discussions with key informants and the review of project final reports.

LESSON LEARNED 1: STRATEGIC SELECTION OF FUNDED PROJECTS ALONG THE 17 SDGs IS KEY TO THE PROGRAM'S ABILITY TO REACH ITS OBJECTIVE AND BRING CHANGE. WITHIN THE MANDATE OF THE SDG FUNDING PROGRAM, THE SELECTION OF COMPLEMENTARY PROJECTS TARGETING SPECIFIC SDGs ARE A PROMISING APPROACH TO SUPPORT PROGRAM'S REACH AND REDUCE DUPLICATION OF EFFORTS.

The SDG Funding Program has supported a broad range of projects, many of which have made valuable contributions to raising awareness and fostering partnerships. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to take a more strategic approach to grant and contribution project selection by addressing specific SDGs rather than a broad range of SDGs. This ensures that funded initiatives a) are intentionally designed to achieve an objective that can meaningfully support progress on the 2030 Agenda, and b) build on one another and are in alignment with Canada's SDG priorities. By selecting projects that target specific SDGs, the Program could amplify its overall impact and reduce duplication of efforts.

LESSON LEARNED 2: ADAPTING SDG MESSAGING TO MAKE IT MORE RELATABLE AND ENGAGING HELPS DEVELOP GREATER COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE. WHEN FUNDING RECIPIENTS ADAPT SDG LANGUAGE TO BETTER REFLECT LIVED EXPERIENCES, CULTURES, AND EVERYDAY REALITIES OF THE GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES THAT PROJECTS ARE TRYING TO REACH, COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGEMENT IS INCREASED.

The program has played a role in raising awareness about the SDGs, with further opportunity to deepen its emphasis on the principle of "no one left behind." Funding recipient key informants spoke about adapting their use of SDG language, including using plain language, to better resonate across diverse communities. For example, moving away from separating the SDGs into 17 themes, may resonate better with the interconnected view of sustainability held by Indigenous groups, better supporting more meaningful engagement.

LESSON LEARNED 3: BUILDING TRUST AND STRONG RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRES TIME AND DEDICATED PROJECT RESOURCES. WHEN FUNDING RECIPIENTS ENGAGE WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES EARLY AND OFTEN DURING PROJECT DEVELOPMENT, IT ALLOWS FOR DEEPER COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT, LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, AND MORE MEANINGFUL INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHINGS INTO SDG PROJECTS

Project final reports and interviews with funding recipients point to the need to engage with Indigenous communities early and often throughout project design and development, to ensure accurate reflections of the communities that the projects seek to engage and serve. For Indigenous communities, this involves the inclusion of Indigenous voices and teachings in discussions and research, as well as in project design and

leadership. An opportunity exists to further support Indigenous leadership in advancing the SDGs by promoting alignment with Indigenous perspectives on sustainability and reconciliation. Providing support for Indigenous-led initiatives, or for projects that establish more structured partnerships with Indigenous organizations, could help strengthen their role as key partners in implementing the 2030 Agenda. In addition, many contribution funding recipients emphasized the importance of including a diverse range of stakeholders into projects to ensure a multi-faceted approach towards SDG work. Acknowledging this broader perspective helps ensure that interventions are inclusive and relevant to communities.

Grant funding recipients highlighted the need for meaningful collaboration with Indigenous-led organizations and communities on projects, which often requires more time than is available through short-term grant funding cycles (on average 1 year in duration). Key informants mentioned the time and care required to listen to the needs and goals of individuals and communities, to help to ensure mutually beneficial collaboration on projects. As well, being flexible, moving away from a “one size fits all” approach to project design and implementation, and being willing to adapt SDG language to reflect cultural perspectives, are viewed as supporting more meaningful and respectful engagement.

ESDC officials identified that during stakeholder consultations, it was recognized that the challenges of engaging Indigenous communities and vulnerable populations requires more time and resources. Consequently, the Program shifted the funding parameters of the fourth Call for Proposals - Grant Stream to extend grant projects for up to 2 years and increase funding.

6 Conclusion and observation

Overall, the evaluation found that the Program, through the projects funded, appears to be meeting its intended short-term outcomes.

The broad flexibility of the Program allowed organizations to implement multi-faceted initiatives, often reaching new audiences and engaging stakeholders across diverse sectors and platforms. It also allowed organizations to leverage their existing networks and areas of influence, leading to advancements in 3 key areas: increased public awareness of the SDGs, strengthened partnerships and networks, and innovative approaches to sustainable development challenges.

A strength of the funded projects was their ability to engage equity-deserving groups and vulnerable populations. Some projects focused on local communities, empowering diverse groups to drive change in their own regions by equipping them with the tools to lead locally tailored SDG initiatives or by providing funding to smaller organizations to address SDGs in more targeted contexts. Additionally, other projects established accessible platforms for cross-sector collaboration. A key takeaway was the importance of bridging the gap between global and national SDG efforts and local, context-specific solutions to ensure that SDG initiatives remained inclusive and intersectional.

Another outcome of the funded projects was the integration of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. Projects took 2 primary approaches to Indigenous engagement: meaningfully incorporating Indigenous perspectives into SDG-related work and building capacity within Indigenous communities by providing financial and resource-based support. These efforts helped align SDG initiatives with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, fostering collaborative, community-driven approaches to sustainable development.

Overall, the SDG Funding Program played a role in mobilizing diverse actors, strengthening networks, and fostering innovation in Canada's progress toward the 2030 Agenda. While the program was not explicitly designed to make direct progress on individual SDGs, it successfully enabled funded organizations to contribute to SDG advancement through awareness-raising, capacity-building, and partnership development.

6.1 Observation

The evaluation issues the following observation that may benefit the Program and funding recipients in the future.

FOSTER KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND COLLABORATION AMONG FUNDING RECIPIENTS TO SHARE BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The program has supported the development of partnerships within individual projects, with further potential to strengthen connections among funding recipients working on related themes. However, funding recipients identified limited opportunities to collaborate and share insights into each other's activities. There is an opportunity for ESDC's SDG Unit to take a leadership role in organizing information sharing activities among funding recipients to better document best practices and lessons learned.

7 Appendix A. Evaluation questions

The evaluation addresses the following questions:

1. What is the relevance of the SDG Funding Program within Canada's SDG ecosystem and what is the Program's role in supporting the SDGs implementation via a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach?
2. To what extent activities funded by the program supported its intended objectives, in the short term?
3. How have the grants and contributions projects supported and enhanced progress on the 2030 Agenda, including with equity-deserving groups and vulnerable populations, to ensure no one is left behind?
4. How have the grants and contributions projects contributed to the integration of Indigenous peoples as key partners in the implementation of 2030 Agenda into Government of Canada activities?
5. How are the current data collection efforts informing the Program's progress towards meeting its objectives?

8 Appendix B. Comparison of Government of Canada objectives and SDG Funding Program objectives to advance the SDGs

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA OBJECTIVES	PROGRAM OBJECTIVES SOURCE
Leaving no one behind by advancing gender equality and diversity.	- Strengthening partnerships and engagement with Canadians, including provinces and territories, municipalities, not-for-profit organizations, academia, the private sector, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and vulnerable and/or marginalized populations (Performance Information Profile) - Peoples from under-represented groups reached, including Indigenous peoples; women and girls; immigrant and refugee populations; persons with disabilities the 2SLGBTQI+ community (Performance Information Profile) - Support Official Languages Minority Communities (2019 Call for Proposal contributions funding assessment grid)
Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through partnerships and self-determination/Advancing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in the context of the 2030 Agenda	- Foster Indigenous traditional knowledge on sustainable development (Terms and Conditions) - Establish Indigenous peoples as key partners (Terms and Conditions) - The integration of Indigenous and local knowledge into approaches to achieve the 2030 Agenda (2019 Call for Proposal contributions funding assessment grid)
Aligning domestic and international efforts to achieve the SDGs.	Recognize and promote engagement initiatives at the international, national, subnational, and/or local level that mobilize assets and develop capacities and resources for action (Terms and Conditions)
Fostering leadership, governance, and policy coherence	- Recognize and support the ability of organizations to identify and address sustainable development priorities (Terms and Conditions) - Convening stakeholders to provide input and views on options for the National Strategy (Funding parameters)
Raising awareness, engagement, and partnerships	- Foster partnerships and networks to address sustainable development and the existing and emerging social, economic and environmental issues (Terms and Conditions) - Increased public awareness (Terms and Conditions)

Ensuring accountability, transparency, measurement, and reporting	• Establish accountability frameworks to support impact measurement and demonstrate SDG progress (2019 Call for Proposal contributions funding assessment grid) • The development of new ways to measure the impact of the SDGs indicators (2019 Call for Proposal contributions funding assessment grid)
Investing in the SDGs	• Performance Information Profile