



Evaluation of the Skills and Partnership Fund

September 8, 2024



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Table of Contents

List of tables.....	ii
List of figures.....	iii
List of abbreviations	iv
Executive summary	v
Management Response and Action Plan	xii
1. Introduction	1
2. The Skills and Partnership Fund.....	2
2.1 Program description	2
2.2 Program funding	3
2.3 Monitoring and reporting.....	3
3. Evaluation approach	5
3.1 Evaluation objectives and scope.....	5
3.2 Evaluation issues and questions	5
3.3 Evaluation methods	5
3.4 Methodological strengths and limitations.....	7
4. Socio-economic profile and labour market context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada	10
4.1 Educational attainment and graduation rates.....	10
4.2 Employment rates.....	12
4.3 Median annual income.....	13
4.4 Unemployment rates.....	14
4.5 The Indigenous economy.....	15
5. Evaluation findings	16
5.1 Program relevance.....	16
5.2 Program design and delivery	18
5.3 Partnerships, collaboration and labour market integration	22
5.4 Profile of SPF participants.....	25
5.5 Outcomes of participation.....	28
5.6 Broader impact of participation	39
5.7 COVID-19 disruptions and responses	41
5.8 Challenges and promising practices	42
5.9 Performance measurement and data collection	44
6. Conclusions, observations and recommendations.....	47
6.1 Observations.....	48
6.2 Recommendations.....	49
Appendix A: Types of interventions funded through the SPF	50
Appendix B: SPF logic model, key outcomes and performance indicators	52
Appendix C: Characteristics of case study projects	54

List of tables

Table 1. Annual and total expenditures by province and territory (in millions).....	3
Table 2. Labour force employment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years, by Indigenous identity and highest level of education, 2021	12
Table 3. Employment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021	13
Table 4. Unemployment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years by Indigenous identity and level of education, 2021	14
Table 5. Unemployment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021	15
Table 6. Annual averages of labour market outcomes for 2017 and 2018 SPF participants	29
Table 7. Proportion and change in percentage of participants by average annual earnings ranges.....	30
Table 8. Pre-participation labour market characteristics of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants from by intervention type.....	31
Table 9. Labour market outcomes by type of SPF intervention for 2017 and 2018 participants	32
Table 10. Labour market outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by participant type	33
Table 11. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by Indigenous population group	34
Table 12. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by gender.....	35
Table 13. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by age group	38
Table 14. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by type of location (rural/remote and urban)	38

List of figures

Figure 1. Highest educational attainment rate (25-64 years) by Indigenous identity, 2021	11
Figure 2. Adults aged 25 to 64 years with a postsecondary qualification, by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021	12
Figure 3. Median annual income in 2020 among adults aged 25 to 64, by Indigenous identity and by gender	14
Figure 4. Location of SPF projects	19
Figure 5. Socio-demographic profile of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants	26
Figure 6. Types of barriers experienced by SPF participants	27
Figure B 1. SPF logic model	52

List of abbreviations

EI	Employment Insurance
ESDC	Employment and Social Development Canada
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ISSET	Indigenous Skills and Employment Training program
SA	Social assistance
SPF	Skills and Partnership Fund

Executive summary

The Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) supports short-term, demand driven, partnership-based projects aiming to support First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants along the path to employment. Led by Indigenous agreement holders, the projects are designed and delivered in partnership with new or existing public, private, and non-profit sector partners.

The 2016 call for proposals funded a broad range of projects through 2 funding streams:

- the **Innovation stream** supported projects that explored the use of diverse approaches to enhancing the employability of Indigenous individuals experiencing barriers to employment, and
- the **Training-to-Employment stream** supported projects that provided training to help participants fill existing or emerging jobs

The SPF funds projects in all provinces and territories, on and off reserve, and in urban, rural and remote areas.

The SPF investment

In the 5 fiscal years between April 2016 and March 2021, the total expenditures of the program were approximately \$224.5 million.¹

Key findings

Indigenous Peoples face persistent economic and systemic barriers. Relative to non-Indigenous Canadians, they have lower educational attainment, employment rates and income, and a higher unemployment rate.

Evaluation scope and objectives

The evaluation focuses on the 52 SPF projects that were funded through the 2016 call for proposals and implemented over the 5 fiscal years from April 2017 to March 2022.

The evaluation seeks to:

- provide timely information on challenges, opportunities and best practices relating to program design and delivery
- describe how the SPF is meeting the needs of individuals and communities and clarify the contribution of project partnerships to participants' labour market outcomes
- contextualise findings relating to program performance and provide insight into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects and their participants
- assess the data being collected and identify participants' labour market outcomes

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation draws from multiple lines of qualitative and quantitative evidence, including:

- a literature review
- a document review
- key informant interviews
- case studies
- outcome analysis, and
- a data assessment

Where possible, given the data and methodological limitations, a Gender-Based Analysis Plus lens is applied.

¹ A fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.

By helping participants to improve their labour market attachment and supporting Indigenous communities to benefit from emerging economic opportunities, the SPF:

- addresses key government priorities relating to labour market development and economic reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and
- responds to the educational, employment, and economic needs of Indigenous individuals, and
- is designed in way that reflects lessons learned about project-based funding and input provided by Indigenous partners

Project design and delivery

Partnerships: SPF agreement holders worked with public, private, and non-profit sector partners to design and deliver interventions, and to connect participants to work experience and employment opportunities. Partners generally also committed cash and in-kind contributions to the projects. In fact, half of the projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals indicated that a quarter or more of project resources would be provided by partners.

Objectives: while the ultimate objective of most projects was to help participants to obtain and maintain employment, most also sought to support pre-employment outcomes for a large portion of their participants. In other words, the immediate outcome sought for many participants was increased employability.²

Sectors targeted by SPF projects: the most common sectors targeted for training and employment were trades (60%), construction (38%), and mining (30%).

Participants: The program reached individuals in rural or remote areas (58%), and in urban areas (40%). Most participants in SPF interventions were status First Nations (75%), male (64%), and single (62%). Participants had relatively low educational attainment; over a quarter (29%) had not completed high school and only 1% had obtained a university degree.

Post-participation labour market outcomes

The outcome analysis focused on the post-participation labour market outcomes of the 5,003 participants who started an SPF-funded intervention in 2017 and 2018.³

Outcomes should be interpreted with caution as they may be influenced by broader trends and shifts in the labour market and economy. Because participant outcomes were not compared to those of non-participants, they cannot be attributed solely to program participation. The post-participation period overlapped with COVID-19 disruptions to the economy and labour market, and with pandemic response measures that may have influenced participants' employment decisions and use of income supports.

² In this report, increased employability is used to designate a pre-employment outcome when it involves progress along the labour market integration continuum up to, but excluding, the point of securing employment.

³ The selection of this cohort was made based on the availability of taxation data for a 3 year post-participation outcome observation period. The outcomes of the first participant cohorts may not be representative of overall participant outcomes.

Moreover, the analysis captures the outcomes of the first cohorts of participants following the launch of the projects; the outcomes of these first cohorts may not be representative of overall participant outcomes.

Overall participant outcomes: participants improved their labour market attachment after participating in SPF-funded interventions:

- they increased their earnings by \$4,150 per year; the proportion of participants earning less than \$10,000 decreased by 7.4 percentage points while the proportion earning more than \$30,000 increased by 6 percentage points
- they increased their incidence of employment by 4 percentage points

Outcomes by intervention type: participant outcomes varied across different types of interventions:

- Skills Development Apprentices had the strongest increase in incidence of employment (+12 percentage points), while Targeted Wage Subsidies had the highest increase in earnings (+\$10,494)
- of the 2 types of interventions taken by participants with weaker labour market attachment (Essential Skills Training and Job Creation Partnerships), only Essential Skills Training had stronger than average earnings outcomes

Outcomes by type of participant: of the 3 participant types (active EI claimants, former EI claimants, and non-EI claimants), non-EI claimants, who accounted for 62% of participants, had the strongest outcomes; they increased their incidence of employment by 14 percentage points and their earnings by \$7,089.

Outcomes by Indigenous group: non-status First Nations, Inuit, and Métis participants had relatively strong outcomes, while those of status First Nations were much lower.⁴ Prior to participation, status and non-status First Nations had similar levels of labour market attachment, but their post-participation outcomes differed:

- the earnings of non-status First Nations increased by \$10,860 while those of status First Nations increase by \$1,692
- the incidence of employment of non-status First Nations increased by 24 percentage points while that of status First Nations decreased by 0.5 percentage point

Outcomes by gender: women had much weaker outcomes than men:

- women increased their earnings by \$2,253 while that of men increased by \$5,455
- the incidence of employment of women decreased by 0.5 percentage points while that of men increased by 7 percentage points

⁴ Some projects for status First Nations who live on reserve had strong participant outcomes. These projects were generally designed to improve participants' labour market outcomes while enabling them to stay in their community; they trained participants to fill existing or upcoming labour market demand, such as large resource extraction projects, or to respond to employment opportunities and needs within the community. The lower outcomes for status First Nations may, to some extent, reflect the lower level of employment opportunities on reserves.

Outcomes by age: the earnings and incidence of employment of older participants decreased, while those of younger participants increased. Participants who were aged 30 or younger increased their earnings by \$9,430 and increased their incidence of employment by 15 percentage points.

Outcomes by type of location: the outcomes of participants in rural and remote areas were positive but much lower than those of participants living in urban areas:⁵

- participants in rural and remote areas increased their earnings by \$2,667, compared to \$6,110 for those living in urban areas
- the incidence of employment of participants in rural and remote areas decreased their 2 percentage points, while that of participants in urban areas increased by 12 percentage points

Broader project impacts

The evaluation identified several impacts that extended beyond program participants to their communities. Broadly, these included:

- supporting communities' economic, human resources, social and cultural development
- helping participants to access employment opportunities without having to move away from the community
- creating a sense of opportunity and possibility for community members, and
- strengthening families and households

Challenges and promising practices

The evaluation identified a variety of challenges that hindered project delivery and outcomes:

- project proposal and administrative processes can be difficult to manage for organizations that are not well-established or that have limited human resources capacity; providing support prior to calls for proposals and support throughout the duration of the project can be helpful
- many projects were forced to rethink their training or service delivery approach in response to COVID-19 related disruptions and response measures, such as lockdowns, social distancing, or closing communities to travel; the move to online delivery disadvantaged those who did not have access to highspeed internet, sufficient bandwidth, or computers
- staff turnover was a common challenge; for those in northern and remote communities, where it is often necessary to recruit individuals who do not live in the area, the loss of an employee or instructor can have severe impacts on project delivery and outcomes
- while working in partnership allows many projects to achieve positive outcomes, when partnerships do not proceed as planned or dissolve, the impacts on project delivery and outcomes can be severe; for agreement holders in rural and remote areas where there are fewer partnership opportunities, finding new partners can be challenging

⁵ The lower outcomes for participants in rural and remote areas may, to some extent, reflect the lower level of employment opportunities on reserves and in remote areas.

The evaluation also identified a number of promising practices:

- the most common response to COVID-19 related disruptions was to move service delivery and training online; while this approach was not appropriate for all context and types of interventions, it provided many projects with the opportunity to reach more participants⁶
 - in some cases, agreement holders were able to provide internet access and computers to participants
- a common thread among projects that had positive outcomes working with multi-barriered participants was the provisions of ongoing support throughout their path to employment; the agreement holders leading these projects emphasised that paths to employment are often not linear and that participants may need help to overcome a broad range of barriers

Performance measurement and data assessment

The program follows the best practice of collecting information at the individual level in a manner that enables the integration of program data with other administrative data sources and, potentially, with survey data. This approach supports the validation of short and medium-term post-participation employment outcomes while mitigating the administrative burden on agreement holders.

Agreement holders' ability to collect and report data were, at time, hindered by pandemic related disruptions, such as office closures. Despite these challenges, collected administrative data was found to be of sufficient quality and integrity to support the creation of participant profiles and post-participation labour market outcome analysis. Moreover, the data is of sufficient quality and integrity to support incremental impact analysis based on a 5-year post-participation period when the required taxation data becomes available in the 2027 to 2028 fiscal year.

Observations

The evaluation issues 4 observations that may benefit future SPF evaluations, call for proposals, and ongoing program implementation. These observations take into consideration that an SPF call for proposal was concluded in 2022 and that this limits ESDC's ability to make changes to program design.

Observation 1: For SPF projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals, it will be possible to carry out incremental impact analyses based on a 5-year post-participation period when the required taxation data becomes available in the 2027 to 2028 fiscal year.

Observation 2: Key informant interviews, the case studies, and previous engagement exercises with Indigenous partners identified challenges relating to SPF administrative processes for funding applicants that are not well established or that have limited human resources capacity. In particular, agreement holders noted that the investment of time and effort required to submit a competitive proposal can present a considerable challenge for smaller organizations.

⁶ The quality and effectiveness of the on-line training provided was not assessed as part of this evaluation.

Program officials noted that providing support prior to release of call for proposals can help to alleviate these challenges. It may also be relevant to explore additional options to simplify or facilitate the proposal submission process.

Observation 3: The post-participation outcome analysis of incidence of employment and employment earnings for different participant subgroups found that status First Nations and women benefited less from the interventions they received than other Indigenous groups and men. In general, participants with weaker pre-participation labour market attachment had stronger outcomes relative to participants who had stronger pre-participation labour market attachment. The outcomes of status First Nations and women did not follow this pattern; both had weaker pre-participation labour market attachment and weaker post-participation outcome relative to other Indigenous groups and men.

With respect to women, from a GBA+ perspective, it may be relevant to consider that few projects were designed specifically to support the labour market integration of women. Moreover, most of the projects were in male dominated fields and sectors, such as resource extraction related trades. Projects that included training in fields where women are well represented and that aligned with identified needs in Indigenous communities, such as nursing, education, and early childhood education attracted more women.

In future SPF calls for proposals, it may be relevant to explore options to solicit projects that are specifically designed to improve the labour market outcomes of women and status First Nations.

Observation 4: The average cost per participant was within the range expected for these types of programs. Evaluation found significant variation in the average cost per participants across projects. This variation reflects, in part, the higher costs associated with delivering programs in northern, rural, and remote areas, and with serving individuals facing persistent barriers to employment who may require multiple interventions. Nevertheless, ESDC may wish to closely examine projects with relatively high average cost per participants with a view to ensure that projects approved support the greatest number of Indigenous workers or jobseekers and represent the most effective avenue to provide employment support and services.

Recommendations

Northern and remote agreement holders and projects

The data assessment and document review identified contextual challenges and vulnerabilities relating to the organizational capacity of agreement holders located in northern and remote regions and to the limited partnership opportunities present in northern and remote areas.

Recommendation 1: ESDC is encouraged to explore options and take actions to offer further support to SPF agreement holders in rural and remote areas through each stage of the projects.

Data collection and performance measurement

The program is following the best practice of collecting individual-level data. The data collected and reported for projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals was of good quality and integrity

overall. The document review and the literature review, which included reports summarising Indigenous partner engagement findings, found that the data collection and reporting requirements continue to be challenging for some agreement holders.

Moreover, some projects reported on the cash and in-kind contributions they received from their project partners throughout the project. Some also reported on their experience of working with their partners, including the challenges and benefits. This information, particularly when collected across all projects, can be valuable for program and project design and delivery, program management, program evaluation, and performance measurement.

Recommendation 2: ESDC is encouraged to explore options and take actions to:

- continue to prioritize data integrity, including validating data uploads, and providing support to projects experiencing data collection and reporting challenges; and
- collect consistent partner contribution data across all projects.

Management Response and Action Plan

Overall Management Response

Employment and Social Development Canada's Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) and Program Operations Branch (POB) would like to thank the Evaluation Directorate and the Skills and Partnership Fund project recipients and their project partners who participated in the case studies included in the evaluation.

The evaluation findings are generally positive, despite many projects being impacted by the pandemic. The evaluation shows that the Skills and Partnership Fund is helping participants improve their connection to the labour market and is supporting Indigenous communities in benefiting from new economic opportunities. This fund addresses the educational, employment, and financial needs of Indigenous People, aligns with key government priorities related to labour market development and economic reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, and has been designed with input from Indigenous partners. The evaluation also found that participants improved their labour market attachment after taking part in Skills and Partnership Fund interventions, leading to increased employment rates and earnings.

The evaluation also identified several important holistic impacts that extended beyond program participants to their communities, such as:

- Supporting communities' economic, human resources, social, and cultural development.
- Helping participants to access employment opportunities without having to move away from their community.
- Strengthening families and households.

These findings illustrate how the Skills and Partnership Fund supported the labour market integration of Indigenous Peoples by addressing persistent economic and systemic barriers, contributing to the Department's objectives of facilitating and promoting labour market inclusion. The findings also highlight how the Skills and Partnership Fund supports the Government of Canada's commitments to advance Reconciliation and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDA) and the Inuit Nunangat Policy.

The evaluation provided valuable insights into the challenges that affected project delivery and outcomes, as well as successful practices. For instance, many projects had to adjust their training or service delivery due to disruptions caused by COVID-19, such as lockdowns, social distancing, and restricted travel. Moving to online delivery posed challenges for those lacking high-speed internet, sufficient bandwidth, or computers.

However, it did allow some projects to reach more participants, and in certain cases, agreement holders provided internet access and computers to participants. ESDC played a crucial role in helping organizations overcome pandemic-related setbacks by allowing for a 1-year extension of project completion without additional funding, recognizing the impact of the pandemic on training delivery and participant engagement. Nonetheless, it's important to acknowledge that the pandemic may have hindered the achievement of all anticipated outcomes. Regarding successful practices, it is worth noting that projects with positive outcomes for multi-barrier participants consistently provided ongoing support

throughout their employment journey. This underscores the need for flexible support to address various obstacles and achieve positive outcomes.

Since the 2016 Call for Proposals, an extensive engagement process was conducted from January to July 2021 to inform the future of the Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF). Nearly 200 organizations, including over 100 Indigenous organizations, participated. This engagement guided the identification of priority sectors for the 2022 Call for Proposals, which encompassed a broader range of sectors compared to 2016. These sectors include the Indigenous Public Sector, Green Economy, Information and Communications Technology, Infrastructure, and Blue Economy. Additional work is ongoing to support the renewal of the SPF program, considering the evaluation findings and recommendations. As part of this initiative, the Department will enhance the proposal process and facilitate regional Indigenous investment and priority setting. This effort aims to bring together relevant partners—including Indigenous organizations, governmental funding partners, Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program service providers, and industry representatives—to collaboratively identify and respond to economic opportunities.

Recommendation #1: The program is encouraged to explore options and take actions to offer further support to SPF agreement holders in rural and remote areas through each stage of the projects.

Management Response

Management agrees with this recommendation. Employment and Social Development Canada recognizes that some organizations, particularly in more rural and remote communities, may have additional barriers to applying for funding through Call for Proposals (CFP) processes and in implementing projects. The program and officials will continue to explore how to better support potential project applicants and recipients throughout the project life cycle as part of the ongoing SPF renewal process.

Management action plan		Planned completion date	Action status	Accountable lead(s)
1.1	The Department will engage agreement holders in rural and remote areas to confirm the challenges they are facing and identify how to support them throughout the project life cycle.	September 2025	Yet to commence	Lead: Director General, Social Programs Directorate Program Operations Branch
1.2	Streamline the proposal process to increase responsiveness to emerging economic opportunities identified by Indigenous organizations.	September 2025	Yet to commence	Lead: Director General, Indigenous Affairs Directorate Skills and Employment Branch

1.3	Establish Regional Investment Coordination Tables to engage Indigenous governments, other funders, and the private sector in priority setting and project identification.	September 2025 (to be implemented for next intake in 2027)	In progress	Lead: Director General, Indigenous Affairs Directorate Skills and Employment Branch
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Recommendation #2: The program is encouraged to explore options and take actions to:

- Continue to prioritize data integrity, including validating data uploads, and providing support to projects experiencing data collection and reporting challenges; and
- Collect consistent partner contribution data across all projects.

Management Response

Management agrees with this recommendation. Employment and Social Development Canada is committed to collecting and maintaining quality program data to support practical outcomes analysis for program participants. The report indicates that the program is following the best practice of collecting individual-level data and that the data collected was deemed of good quality and integrity overall. The program intends to continue to ensure data integrity and will seek to work proactively with organizations experiencing data collection and reporting challenges.

Management action plan		Planned completion date	Action status	Accountable lead(s)
2.1	Conduct a comprehensive review of data provided by current SPF project recipients to identify areas needing additional support.	September 2025	Yet to commence	Lead: Director General, Social Programs Directorate Program Operations Branch
2.2	Organize regional training sessions to enhance the technical capacity of project recipients and Service Canada officers.	December 2025	In progress	Lead: Director General, Social Programs Directorate Program Operations Branch
2.3	Develop a new performance measurement strategy with Indigenous partners to reflect the impacts of partnerships in achieving broader program objectives.	March 2027 (For next intake in 2027)	Yet to commence	Lead: Director General, Indigenous Affairs Directorate Skills and Employment Branch

1. Introduction

The present evaluation report builds on and complements the findings from previous evaluations of the Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF). The evaluation was conducted in compliance with the Federal Administrative Act and the Policy on Results.

The evaluation focuses on projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals and focuses on the 5 fiscal years between April 2017 and March 2022.⁷

The evaluation's qualitative lines of evidence complement the incremental impact analysis presented in the 2020 evaluation. The key informant interviews with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) officials, SPF agreement holders, and project partners along with 5 case studies, a literature review, and a document review of 52 SPF projects provide contextual insight into the SPF's design and delivery. In particular, the evaluation seeks to clarify the contribution of project partnerships to participants' labour market outcomes.

The report includes a quantitative analysis using linked administrative data for participants who began an SPF intervention in 2017 and 2018. The analysis provides the socio-demographic profile of participants who began an intervention during that period and findings on their post-participation labour market outcomes.

⁷ A fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.

2. The Skills and Partnership Fund

2.1 Program description

The SPF was launched in 2010 alongside the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, the predecessor of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) program. It is a project-based program that funds partnerships led by Indigenous organizations to increase the labour market participation of Indigenous Peoples.

The SPF complements the ISET program, which funds and supports a network of Indigenous service providers across Canada. The ISET Program provides Indigenous individuals with opportunities to develop and improve their skills and attain employment via a full suite of measures. Complementing the on-going activities of these service providers, the SPF funds short-term projects to connect Indigenous individuals to job opportunities by training participants and working in partnership with employers to meet their existing or anticipated labour needs.

The 2016 call for proposals included 2 funding streams: Innovation and Training to Employment.

- The **Innovation stream** funded projects that aimed to test innovative approaches to enhance the employability of Indigenous individuals by addressing a broad range of employment barriers within Indigenous communities, such as lower educational attainment, homelessness, and addictions.
- The **Training-to-Employment stream** funded projects that aimed to enhance participants' skills and access to employment through the provision of targeted training to fill in-demand jobs. Preference was given to projects that aimed to help at least 50 participants to secure long-term employment and projects that secured at least 50% of their total project resources from partners.⁸

Indigenous agreement holders could develop partnerships with a range of educational, non-profit, private and public sector partners to provide skills training to improve the labour market outcomes of Indigenous participants.⁹

Projects could support a broad range of activities from targeted training to help Indigenous individuals to fill existing or emerging job opportunities, to piloting new approaches to community-based work readiness and skills training. The interventions provided through the projects could range from light-touch job search activities to intensive pre-employment development with wraparound supports, to academic skills upgrading. More detailed information on intervention types is provided in Appendix A.

The SPF agreement holders were expected to leverage funding and in-kind resources from their partners in order to maximise the program's investments.

⁸ Long-term employment is defined as employment with a duration of at least 1 year.

⁹ SPF agreement holder refers to the entity that signed an SPF funding agreement; eligible entities include for-profit and not-for-profit Indigenous controlled organizations; Indigenous-controlled unincorporated organizations; Indian Act bands; band or tribal councils; and Indigenous self-government entities.

2.2 Program funding

In the 5 fiscal years between April 2016 and March 2021, the total expenditures of the program were approximately \$224.5 million. Table 1 provides an overview of the annual and total expenditures by province and territory.

To give agreement holders more flexibility to respond to COVID-19 related disruptions, 42 of the 52 projects funded under the 2016 call for proposals were extended into the 2021 to 2022 fiscal year with no additional funding. Accordingly, while some projects ended in March 2022, funding ended in the 2020 to 2021 fiscal year.

Table 1. Annual and total expenditures by province and territory (in millions)

Province/territory	2016 to 2017	2017 to 2018	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Total
Ontario	\$3.4	\$12.8	\$20.6	\$18.4	\$10.6	\$65.8
British Columbia	\$1.3	\$3.6	\$7.8	\$10.1	\$8.4	\$31.2
Northwest Territories	\$1.1	\$3.3	\$8.1	\$8.1	\$4.5	\$25.1
Saskatchewan	\$1.9	\$3.7	\$4.0	\$4.1	\$4.1	\$17.8
Quebec	\$1.5	\$1.7	\$4.1	\$3.1	\$4.3	\$14.7
Newfoundland	\$1.4	\$3.9	\$2.8	\$2.7	\$3.4	\$14.2
Alberta	\$1.3	\$2.1	\$2.8	\$3.1	\$2.8	\$12.1
Nunavut	\$1.6	\$2.1	\$2.5	\$3.4	\$2.2	\$11.8
Manitoba	\$0.0	\$1.0	\$2.9	\$4.0	\$2.4	\$10.3
Yukon	\$0.4	\$1.5	\$1.9	\$2.0	\$1.9	\$7.7
New Brunswick	\$1.2	\$1.5	\$0.8	\$0.8	\$0.8	\$5.1
Nova Scotia	\$1.2	\$0.0	\$0.8	\$1.1	\$1.4	\$4.5
Prince Edward Island	-	\$0.6	\$0.9	\$1.0	\$1.2	\$3.7
National Capital Region	\$0.0	\$0.2	\$0.3	n/a	n/a	\$0.5
Total	\$16.3	\$38.0	\$60.3	\$61.9	\$48.0	\$224.5

* The figures in this table have been rounded to the nearest decimal point meaning that the totals may not be exact.

2.3 Monitoring and reporting

SPF agreement holders are required to report on their project's activities and results on a quarterly basis. The specific data elements to be collected and shared are specified in the projects' funding agreements. These include data relating to the socio-demographic characteristics of participants, the interventions provided, and post-participation outcomes. In addition to this quarterly reporting, agreement holders are expected to submit a final report summarising the project's achieved results and progress toward targeted outcomes.

ESDC uses the information provided to track, assess and report on the program's outcomes and performance. Appendix B provides further details on the SPF's logic model and key performance indicators.

3. Evaluation approach

3.1 Evaluation objectives and scope

This evaluation focuses on SPF projects stemming from the 2016 call for proposals and covers the 5 fiscal years from April 2017 to March 2022. It is designed to build on and complement the findings from previous evaluations of project-based funding delivered by Indigenous organizations.

Specifically, the evaluation seeks to:

- provide timely information on challenges, opportunities and best practices relating to program design and delivery
- describe how the SPF is meeting the needs of individuals and communities and clarify the contribution of project partnerships to participants' labour market outcomes
- contextualise findings relating to program performance and provide insight into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the projects and their participants
- assess the data being collected and identify participants' labour market outcomes

Overall, the evaluation aims to help inform future cycles of program and policy development, and to support the evolution of the programs' performance measurement strategy and data collection.

3.2 Evaluation issues and questions

The evaluation addresses issues relating to program relevance, design and delivery, impact, reporting and data collection. Specifically, the evaluation addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent and how is the SPF meeting a need (such as the current economic reality and unique needs of Indigenous individuals and communities)?
2. To what extent and how is the SPF facilitating partnerships and collaboration among Indigenous organizations and other stakeholders (such as federal-provincial/territorial governments, industry, training institutions, and community organizations)?
 - a. How and to what extent are these partnerships contributing to the labour market integration of Indigenous individuals?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities affecting the SPF's capacity to achieve its objectives and expected results?
 - a. How can the administration of the program and service delivery be improved?
4. Are the Programs' performance measurement tools collecting and utilizing sufficient, valid and reliable data that support ongoing results reporting and decision-making?

3.3 Evaluation methods

The evaluation draws from multiple lines of qualitative and quantitative evidence, including a literature review, a document review, key informant interviews, case studies, administrative data analysis and assessment, and labour market outcome analysis. Where feasible and relevant, data from multiple lines of evidence are triangulated to validate and deepen evaluation findings.

Where possible, given the data and methodological limitations, a Gender-Based Analysis plus lens is applied.

Lines of evidence

Literature review

A literature review synthesises findings from relevant literature, program Indigenous partner engagement reports, and previous evaluations on the labour market context of Indigenous Peoples. The review provides an overview of Indigenous Peoples' educational attainment, employment and unemployment rates, and economies. It also includes a summary of labour market barriers and challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Document review

A document review covering 52 projects funded as part of the 2016 call for proposals provides a thorough overview of the design and delivery, partnerships and funding, targeted outcomes, and reported results of SPF projects. Reviewed documents included funding agreements, close-out summary reports, final project reports, and other reports and evaluations provided by SPF agreement holders.

Key informant interviews

Key informant interviews with ESDC program officials and SPF agreement holders provide insight into the SPF's design and delivery, administration, impacts on participants and communities, partnerships, and barriers to employment. The interviews also capture interviewees' knowledge and perspective relating to challenges, opportunities and lessons learned.

Thirty-seven (37) key informant interviews were completed, including 15 with ESDC program officials, and 22 with SPF agreement holders and their project partners. Twelve (12) of the 37 interviews were completed as part of the case studies.

Case studies

Five (5) project-based case studies were conducted, including 4 from the Training-to-Employment stream and 1 from the Innovation stream. Case studies were located in the Western, Central and Atlantic provinces.

Each case study is based on multiple lines of evidence, including key informant interviews, a document review, administrative data analysis and participant labour market outcome analysis.

The case studies provide insight into the relevance of the program, project design and delivery, program administration, the nature of the partnerships and their contribution to capacity building and participant labour market outcomes. The case studies also provide insight relating to challenges, opportunities and areas for improvement, successes, lessons learned and promising practices.

Administrative data analysis

Administrative data covering all participants and interventions in 2017 and 2018 were used to:

- create socio-demographic participant profiles
- identify the labour market barriers being addressed by projects
- identify the number and types of interventions being provided
- assess action plan results reported by service providers

Labour market outcome analysis

Labour market outcome analysis was completed using administrative data from EI Part I (EI claim data) linked to T1 and T4 taxation files from the Canada Revenue Agency. The analysis focused on the 5,003 individuals who began an SPF-funded intervention in 2017 and 2018. Participants' labour market outcomes were observed over a 9 year period, including 5 years pre-participation, a 1 year participation period, and 3 years post-participation.¹⁰

The outcome analysis provides descriptive statistics on participants' incidence of employment, average annual earning, and use of government income supports over time. Labour market outcomes were produced for 3 types of participants:

- **active EI claimants** are participants who started an SPF-funded intervention while collecting EI benefits
- **former EI claimants** are participants who started an SPF-funded intervention up to 5 years after they completed an EI claim
- **non-EI claimants** are participant who are neither active nor former EI claimants

Data assessment

The quality and integrity of SPF administrative data on projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals was assessed. The purpose of the assessment was to determine the extent to which it could be used to meet the programs' performance measurement and evaluation requirements.

3.4 Methodological strengths and limitations

Outcome analysis

The outcome analysis captures the post-participation outcomes of participants who began an SPF intervention in 2017 and 2018. These participants include the first cohorts of participants following the

¹⁰ Further details are available in the 2024 technical report entitled *Evaluation of the Skills and Partnership Fund: Data Assessment and participant outcome trends*. The report is available upon request.

launch of the projects.^{11,12} The outcomes of the first participant cohorts may not be representative of overall participant outcomes.

Outcome analysis provides an assessment of changes in participants' labour market outcomes over time. However, outcome analysis does not use comparison groups to compare the outcomes of participants to those of similar non-participants. Accordingly, it does not measure to what extent changes in participants labour market outcomes can be attributed to the intervention they received.

Labour market outcomes are influenced by changes in the economy, inflation, and the labour market. Several contextual factors should be taken into account when interpreting participants' labour market outcomes. The post-program participation period overlaps with the COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptive impact on the labour market. Moreover, several temporary income support measures were introduced during the pandemic that may have influenced participants' use of income supports and employment related decisions. These measures included, but were not limited to:

- the Canada Emergency Response Benefit from March 2020 to September 2020
- the Canada Recovery Benefit from September 2020 to October 2021

Moreover, available administrative data does not include income supports provided by Indigenous Services Canada through the On-reserve Income Assistance Program.

Accordingly, outcomes relating to the use of EI, use of SA, and the proportion of participants' incomes from government income supports should be interpreted with caution.

To mitigate these limitations, a follow-up study on impacts should be undertaken for this cohort of projects when the data required becomes available.¹³

Assessing partner contributions

Some, but not all, projects reported on the cash and in-kind contributions they received from their project partners, and some also reported on their experience of working with their partners. For these projects, the reported data enabled:

- the tracking of partner contributions
- the identification of reliable and committed partners, and
- the identification of challenges and benefits of working with partners

¹¹ Of the 51 projects included in the outcome analysis, 34 began between May and December 2017, and 17 began between March and October 2018.

¹² The selection of this cohort was made based on the availability of taxation data for a 3 year post-participation outcome observation period. The outcomes of these first cohorts may not be representative of overall participant outcomes.

¹³ For projects ending in 2020, the T1 and T4 taxation records necessary to observe outcomes over at least 3 years post-participation will be available in 2025. For a 5-year post-program participation period capable of supporting incremental impact analysis, data will be available in 2027.

Because partner contribution data was not consistently available in the project reporting documents, it was not possible to confirm the full extent of partner contributions across all projects.

Key informant interviews and case studies

The evaluation took place 1 to 4 years after the end of projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals. During this interim, agreement holder and project partner staff who had worked on SPF projects had begun working on other projects or had left the organization. This increased the challenge of scheduling interviews with SPF agreement holder staff who recalled the projects in detail. As a result, fewer interviews were completed than originally planned.

Engaging the partners of SPF agreement holders in evaluation activities proved to be challenging. While agreement holders are expected to participate in evaluation activities, project partners are not and have little incentive to do so. As a result, most of the key informant interviews conducted were with agreement holders, meaning that the perspectives of project partners are less well represented.

While the case studies provide valuable insight, they are not representative of the projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals. Overall, they include projects that:

- targeted participants who were further along in the employment integration continuum
- had private sector partners and received a large share of their project resources from partners
- had lower costs per participants, and
- had stronger employment outcomes

More information on the characteristic of the 5 case study projects and on how these compare to the average across the 52 SPF projects are provided in Appendix C.

Due to the challenges encountered in collecting qualitative data directly from agreement holders, the evaluation included more information collected by ESDC from agreement holders as part of program administration activities. In particular, the evaluation incorporated findings drawn from a review of the funding agreements and reporting documents of the 52 funded projects.

4. Socio-economic profile and labour market context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada

Approximately 1.81 million people self-identified as Indigenous in the 2021 Census, representing around 5% of the Canadian population. Of those who identified as Indigenous, approximately 1.35 million were of working age, that is 15 years of age or older.¹⁴

Compared with non-Indigenous Canadians, the Indigenous population is younger, growing faster and more likely to live in rural or remote areas:¹⁵

- the average age of Indigenous Peoples was 8.2 years younger than that of non-Indigenous Canadians;
- the Indigenous population grew by 9.4% from 2016 to 2021, compared to 5.3% for the non-Indigenous Canadian population;
- the proportion of the Canadian population that identified as Indigenous grew from 4.9% in 2016 to 5% in 2021;
- about 60% of Indigenous Peoples live in rural areas, compared to about a third of non-Indigenous Canadians; approximately a quarter of Indigenous Peoples live in a remote area, compared to 3% of non-Indigenous Canadians.

Indigenous Peoples face large and persistent economic and systemic barriers relative to non-Indigenous Canadians. On average, compared to non-Indigenous Canadians, they have lower educational attainment, employment rates, unemployment rates and income. Relative to non-Indigenous Canadians, Indigenous Peoples have inequitable access to health care, education, housing, and potable water.¹⁶

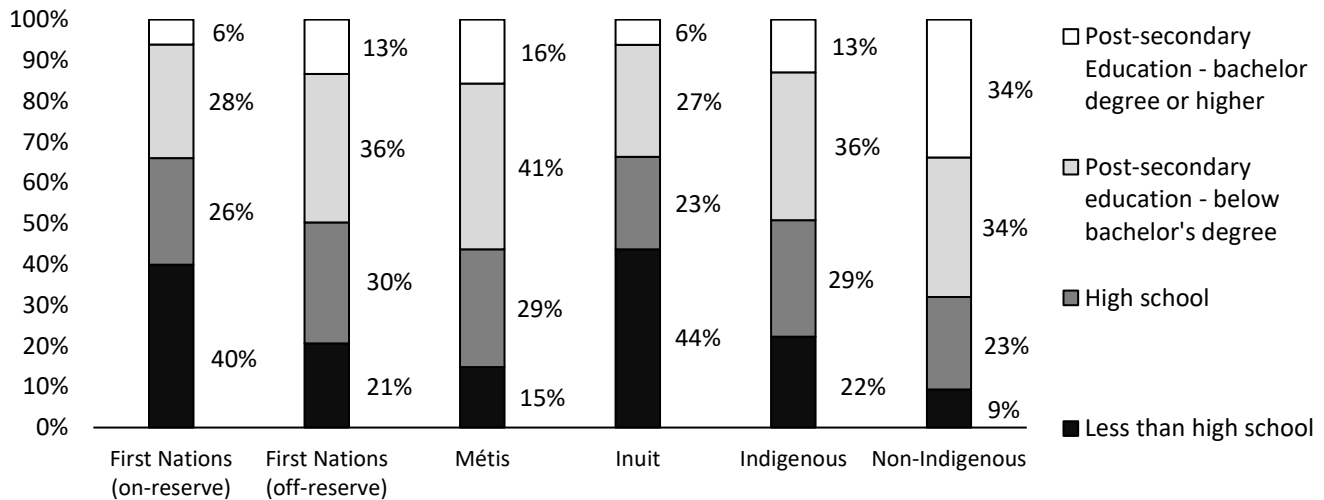
4.1 Educational attainment and graduation rates

Between 2011 and 2021, post-secondary education completion among Indigenous Peoples aged between 25 to 64 grew slightly from 48.4% to 49.2%. As can be seen in Figure 1, the 2021 Census found a gap of 20 percentage points between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians' completion of bachelor's or graduate degrees. Indigenous Peoples are also less likely to have graduated from high school. Nine percent (9%) of non-Indigenous Canadians had not graduated from high school compared to 22% of Indigenous Peoples overall, and to 40% or more of First Nations who live on reserve and Inuit.

¹⁴ Source: Statistics Canada. 2023. [Indigenous Population Profile. 2021 Census of Population.](#)

¹⁵ Sources: Bank of Canada. 2023. [An Overview of the Indigenous Economy in Canada](#); Statistics Canada. 2022; [The Daily: Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed](#); Statistics Canada. 2023. [How does the remoteness of one's community factor into high school completion among First Nations, Métis and Inuit?](#);

¹⁶ Sources: Bank of Canada. 2023. [An Overview of the Indigenous Economy in Canada.](#)

Figure 1. Highest educational attainment rate (25-64 years) by Indigenous identity, 2021

Source: Statistics Canada, [Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census](#), 2023.

Note: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit categories include persons who identify as only 1 Indigenous group.

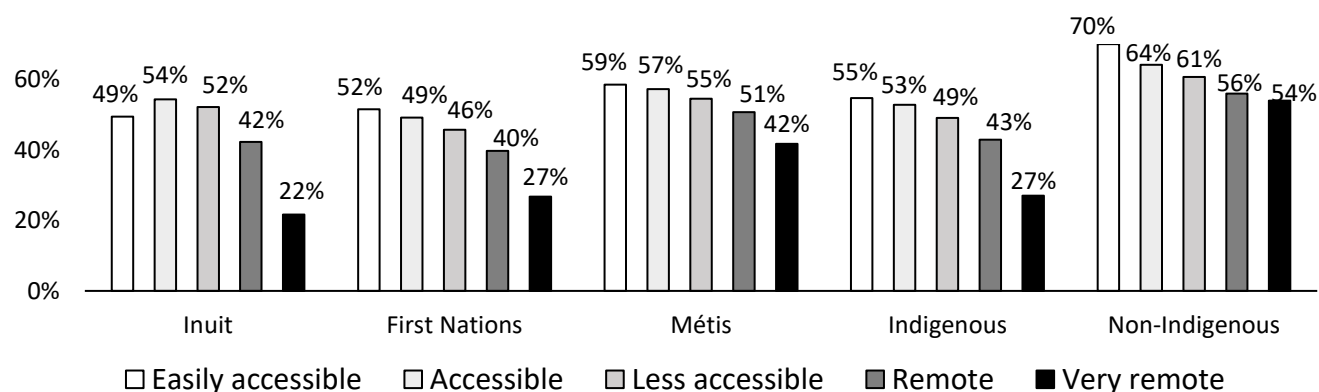
Nearly 60% of the Indigenous population lives in rural and remote areas. Geographic remoteness presents a barrier to educational attainment for Indigenous Peoples.^{17,18} As can be seen in Figure 2, the obtention of postsecondary qualifications decreases as remoteness increases. The correlation is more pronounced for Indigenous Peoples than for non-Indigenous Canadians.¹⁹ Relative to individuals who live closer to post-secondary education institutions, the post-secondary completion rate of those who live in very remote areas is 16 percentage points (70% to 54%) lower for non-Indigenous Canadians compared to 22 percentage points (55% to 27%) lower for Indigenous Peoples.

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, [Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census](#), 2023.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada uses an Index of remoteness to quantify the extent to which a census subdivision is remote or far from neighbouring population centres. There are 5 categories of remoteness: easily accessible, accessible, less accessible, remote and very remote census subdivisions. Statistics Canada, [Index of Remoteness](#), 2020.

¹⁹ The word correlation is used in the broad sense rather than to refer to statistical analysis.

Figure 2. Adults aged 25 to 64 years with a postsecondary qualification, by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census, 2023.

Note: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit categories include persons who identify as only 1 Indigenous group.

4.2 Employment rates^{20,21}

The 2021 Census found that Indigenous People between the ages of 25 and 64 had an employment rate of 61% compared to an employment rate of 74% for non-Indigenous Canadians. As presented in Table 2, employment rates rose with increasing levels of education. For those with a bachelor's degree or higher, there was no employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Table 2. Labour force employment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years, by Indigenous identity and highest level of education, 2021

Level of education	First Nations*	Métis	Inuit	Indigenous Peoples	Non-Indigenous Canadians
No certificate, diploma or degree	35%	45%	41%	38%	53%
High school diploma or equivalent	54%	65%	61%	58%	66%
Post secondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level	68%	74%	67%	70%	77%
Bachelor's degree or higher	81%	85%	85%	83%	83%
Population average	57%	69%	55%	61%	74%

Source: Statistics Canada, Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census, 2023.

Note: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit categories include persons who identify as only 1 Indigenous group.

²⁰ The employment rate is the percentage of the population who is 15 years of age or older who is employed.

²¹ This includes findings from a Statistics Canada report entitled [Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census](#), 2023.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the employment rates of Indigenous Peoples were slower to recover than those of non-Indigenous Canadians.²²

Like low educational attainment, geographic remoteness presents a barrier to employment for Indigenous Peoples. As shown in Table 3, employment rates decrease as remoteness increases. The correlation is more pronounced for Indigenous Peoples than for non-Indigenous Canadians. Relative to individuals who live in easily accessible areas, the employment rate of those who live in very remote areas was 15 percentage points (65% to 50%) lower for Indigenous Peoples compared to 7 percentage points (75% to 68%) lower for non-Indigenous Canadians.

Table 3. Employment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021

Level of remoteness	First Nations*	Métis	Inuit	Indigenous Peoples	Non-Indigenous Canadians
Easily accessible	62%	70%	59%	65%	75%
Accessible	56%	69%	61%	62%	74%
Less accessible	55%	68%	65%	60%	72%
Remote	53%	67%	61%	57%	71%
Very remote	49%	59%	50%	50%	68%

Source: Statistics Canada, Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census, 2023.

Note: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit categories include persons who identify as only 1 Indigenous group.

4.3 Median annual income²³

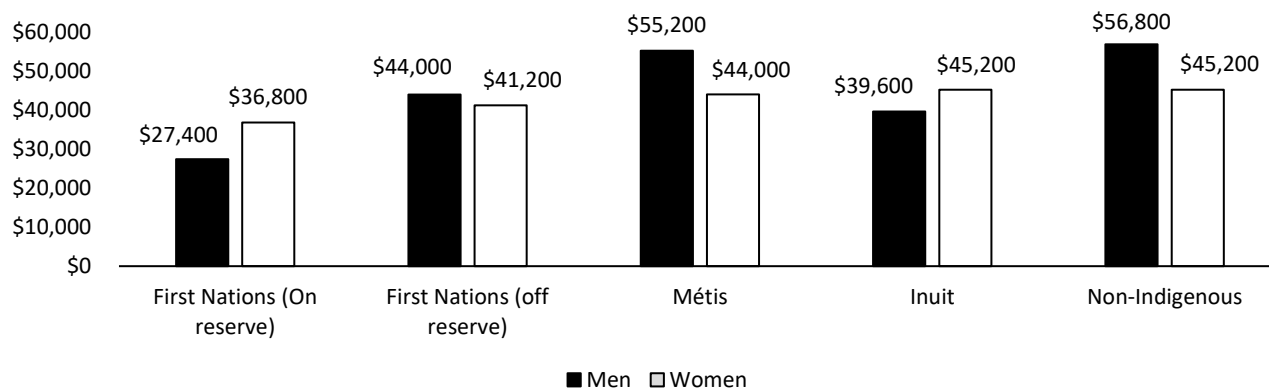
The 2021 Census found that Indigenous men earned less annually than non-Indigenous men. As shown in Figure 3, relative to non-Indigenous men who earned a median annual income of \$56,800, the difference ranged from \$29,400 less for First Nations men who live on reserve, to \$1,600 less for Métis men.

The annual income differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women were less pronounced. These ranged from \$0 for Inuit women, who had the same annual income as non-Indigenous women (\$45,200) to \$8,400 less for First Nations women who lived on reserve.

²² Source: Bank of Canada, [An Overview of the Indigenous Economy in Canada](#), 2023.

²³ Individuals in the "non-binary persons" category are distributed in the other 2 gender categories and are denoted.

Figure 3. Median annual income in 2020 among adults aged 25 to 64, by Indigenous identity and by gender



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, An update on the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous Peoples and the non-Indigenous population in Canada: Highlights from the 2021 Census.

4.4 Unemployment rates^{24,25}

As shown in Table 4, the 2021 Census found that the unemployment rate of Indigenous Peoples (13%) was 5 percentage points higher than that of non-Indigenous Canadians (8%). The gap decreases as education increases. The unemployment rate of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who had a bachelor's degree was the same (6%).

Table 4. Unemployment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years by Indigenous identity and level of education, 2021

Level of education	First Nations*	Métis	Inuit	Indigenous Peoples	Non-Indigenous Canadians
No certificate, diploma or degree	23%	20%	23%	22%	15%
High school diploma or equivalent	17%	13%	16%	15%	11%
Post secondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level	13%	10%	14%	11%	8%
Bachelor's degree or higher	7%	5%	5%	6%	6%
Population average	15%	11%	17%	13%	8%

Source: Statistics Canada, Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census, 2023.

*Note: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit categories include persons who identify as only 1 Indigenous group.

²⁴ The unemployment rate is the percentage of the population who is not employed but who is looking for work; it does not include individuals who are not looking for work.

²⁵ This section includes findings from a Statistics Canada report entitled [Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census](#), 2023.

As presented in Table 5, the 2021 Census found that the unemployment rate of Indigenous People who lived in easily accessible areas was 12% compared to 16% for those who lived in very remote areas.

Table 5. Unemployment rates among adults aged 25 to 64 years by Indigenous identity and level of remoteness, 2021

Level of remoteness	First Nations	Métis	Inuit	Indigenous Peoples	Non-Indigenous Canadians
Easily accessible	13.3%	10.7%	15.3%	12%	8.5%
Accessible	15.7%	10.7%	14.9%	13.2%	7.9%
Less accessible	15.4%	10.6%	14.4%	13.4%	8.1%
Remote	16.3%	11.5%	14.2%	14.8%	9%
Very remote	15.6%	16.3%	18.8%	16.4%	11.7%

Source: Statistics Canada, Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes among Indigenous Peoples in Canada, findings from the 2021 Census, 2023.

Note: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit categories include persons who identify as only 1 Indigenous group.

4.5 The Indigenous economy

The economic activities of Indigenous Peoples accounted for an estimated 2.2% of Canadian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020. Public services, construction and finance, insurance and real-estate make up over 50% of total Indigenous GDP. Indigenous GDP is also more concentrated in Western provinces which accounts for over half the Indigenous GDP, compared to only 34% of the Canadian GDP.²⁶ It should be noted however that census data does not fully capture the economic activity in Indigenous communities.

In 2017, 85% of working age Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat participated in at least 1 traditional land-based activity or craft, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering wild plants, and making clothing, footwear, handicrafts and artwork. Over a quarter of those reported they did so to earn money or supplement their income.²⁷ For First Nations living off reserve and Métis, almost 60% indicated they participated in traditional land-based activities and crafts.

²⁶ Source: Bank of Canada, [An Overview of the Indigenous Economy in Canada](#), 2023.

²⁷ Source: Statistics Canada, 2019 [Inuit participation in the wage and land-based economies in Inuit Nunangat](#), 2019.

5. Evaluation findings

5.1 Program relevance

The SPF addresses key government priorities, responds to demonstrable needs, and is designed in way that reflects lessons learned about project-based funding and input provided by Indigenous partners.²⁸

Labour market development and economic reconciliation

In addition to ongoing labour market development priorities, the federal government has identified several priorities intended to support economic reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.²⁹ These include working with Indigenous communities and organizations to:

- support Indigenous Peoples to increase their educational attainment
- support Indigenous Peoples' participation in the economy, and
- increase the benefits that Indigenous communities derive from major projects in their territories

The SPF supports these government priorities by helping Indigenous individuals to:

- improve their educational attainment and labour market attachment, and
- build partnerships that enable them to benefit from emerging economic opportunities and major projects

Labour market development needs and barriers to employment

The program responds to the labour market needs of Indigenous Peoples and to some of the barriers to employment that they face.

The socio-economic profile section of this report identifies inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians with respect to their educational attainment, employment rates, unemployment rates, and average annual income. Moreover, while the educational and labour market outcomes of all Canadians worsen as remoteness from urban areas increases, the impact of remoteness is more pronounced among Indigenous Peoples.

²⁸ ESDC, [Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programming](#), 2016; ESDC, [Engagement on the Future of the Skills and Partnership Fund - What we learned report](#), 2021; ESDC, Evaluation Directorate, *Literature review on effective labour market programs and services to assist with the integration of Indigenous Peoples into the labour market*, Internal document, 2020.

²⁹ See for example priorities identified in [Budget 2023 - A made in Canada plan: Strong middle class, affordable economy, healthy futures and Statement and impacts report on gender, equality, diversity and quality of life](#).

With respect to barriers to employment, the most common barriers identified by participants were lack of work experience, low educational attainment, and lack of marketable skills.³⁰ Other common barriers included lack of transportation and living in a rural area with few job opportunities. For women in particular, lack of access to dependent care was a common barrier to employment.

The SPF responds directly to these needs and barriers by supporting Indigenous-led projects that:

- support participants in their efforts to increase their level of education and training
- support participants to increase their employability and work experience
- help connect participants to existing and emerging job opportunities and to increase their employment income
- help communities and Indigenous service providers to build and maintain working relationships with employers, and
- reach Indigenous individuals who live on-reserve, in rural areas, and in remote communities

Finally, the SPF seeks to respond to the needs of multi-barriered individuals by providing the flexibility to design programs and services that:

- respond to a broad range of barriers, such as access to childcare and transportation, resources to buy basic equipment, and access to mental health supports, and
- allow projects to support participants who are further from the labour market as they progress along the path to employment

Relevant and informed program design

In their complementarity, the SPF and the ISET Program reflect lessons learned from previous evaluations of ESDC labour market integration programs for Indigenous Peoples and input provided by Indigenous partners.

A previous evaluation of Indigenous labour market programs funded through ESDC yielded important lessons relating to project-based funding for employment programs:³¹

- projects focusing on specific industrial developments, such as a particular mining project, yield stronger employment results than projects with a broader focus, such as the mining sector in general
- partnering with employers and tailoring training to their needs creates a training-to-employment path for project participants yielding stronger outcomes for participants and employers
- partnerships with greater employer engagement, particularly those including formal agreements for in-kind or cash contributions, yield stronger employment results, as employer partners are more invested in the outcomes

³⁰ See the Profile of SPF participants, Barriers to labour market participation section for more detailed information on the barriers identified by participants.

³¹ ESDC, Evaluation Directorate, *Literature review on effective labour market programs and services to assist with the integration of Indigenous Peoples into the labour market*, Internal document, 2020.

Engagement with Indigenous partners also yielded valuable insight relating to the design and delivery of labour market training programs for stronger, broader, and longer lasting impact:³²

- longer-term funding supports the maintenance and development of experienced service providers with knowledgeable staff who produce strong results
- stronger connections are needed between Indigenous service providers and potential employers in local industries to:
 - better align training opportunities with in-demand skills and long-term employment opportunities
 - help develop the local economy and help participants to stay in their communities with their families
- greater flexibility is needed for service providers to design programming to meet the complex needs of their people and communities, such as:
 - pre-employment interventions to increase employability, such as life and essentials skills training
 - wraparound services and individualised supports
 - supports to complete and skills up-grading to move beyond entry-level positions

Overall, with ISET supporting a stable network of experienced service providers across the country, the SPF aims to respond to these lessons learned and insights by providing timely funding to develop strategic partnerships with employers for training-to-employment projects and to test flexible approaches to addressing complex issues through community-based service delivery.

Key informants interviewed as part of the evaluation added that the SPF is part of a broader ecosystem of programs aiming to improve the labour market integration of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. While these programs have similar objectives and offer similar types of interventions, they differ in their approach. Key informants specified that the SPF contributes to the broader effort by supporting the development and maintenance of cross-sectoral partnerships, including employers, training institutes, and post-secondary education institutions to take advantage of existing and emerging employment opportunities; these findings were further confirmed through the document review.

5.2 Program design and delivery

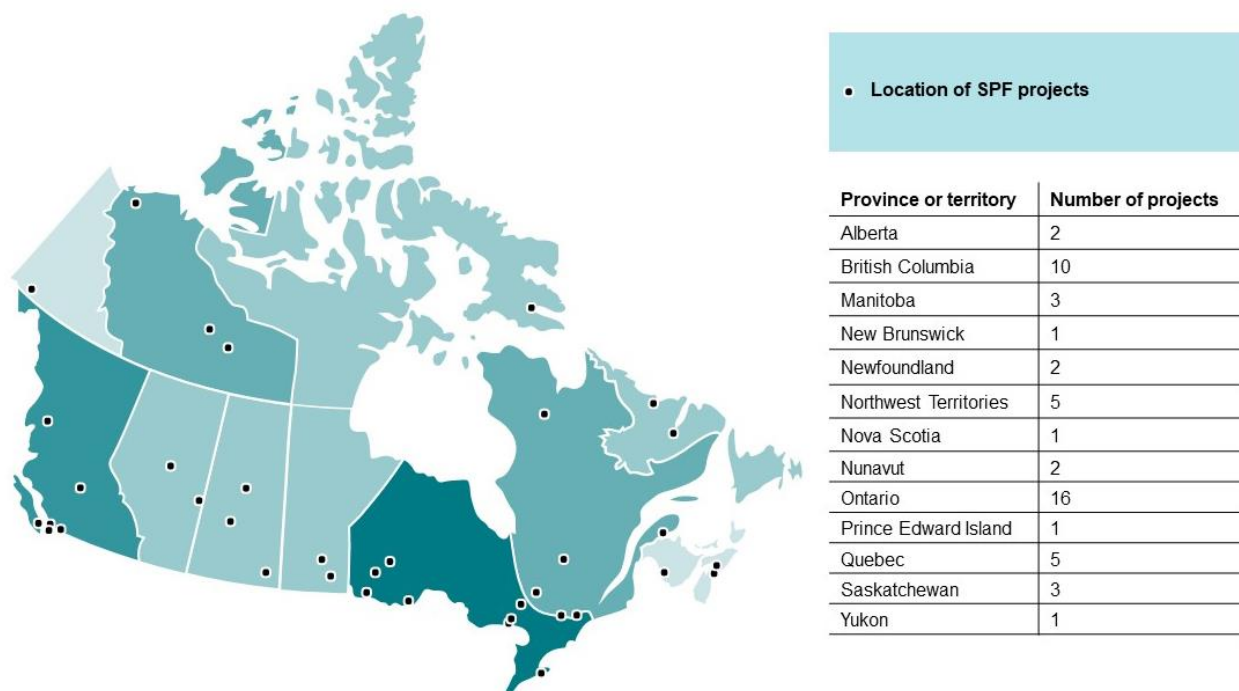
SPF agreement holders

Most of the projects were led by Indigenous bands, councils, and governments (42%), Indigenous led non-profit organizations (33%); 15% were led by Indigenous education institutes, and 10% were led by Friendship Centres.

Agreement holders were located in each of the 13 provinces and territories. However, 70% were located in 4 provinces and territories: Ontario (31%), BC (19%), the Northwest Territories and Quebec (10% each).

³² ESDC, [Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programming](#), 2016; ESDC, [Engagement on the Future of the Skills and Partnership Fund - What we learned report](#), 2021.

Figure 4. Location of SPF projects



SPF funding streams

Of the 52 projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals, 60% were funded through the Innovation Stream and 40% through the Training to Employment Stream.

Innovation stream

Projects in the Innovation stream generally aimed to support individuals who were further from the labour market and who were facing multiple intersecting barriers to employment. For the most part, these projects were not developing new program and service delivery approaches. However, most were experimenting with practices and approaches that were new to their organizations and communities in order to improve the labour market outcomes for their participants. In general, the stream supported experimentation and iterative service delivery improvement.

Training-to-Employment stream

Projects in the Training-to-Employment stream generally supported individuals who were somewhat more work-ready. In keeping with the stream description, projects funded through this stream generally focused on in-demand skills training and working with employers to connect participants to employment opportunities.

Scope and objectives

The objectives and intended outcomes of each project were identified in their funding agreements. While all were ultimately aimed at improving participants' labour market participation, most projects

included progress along the pre-employment continuum as an immediate project outcome for a large portion of their participants.

Overall, the most common immediate outcomes sought by projects were:

- participants find employment (98%)
- participants complete occupational skills training (80%)
- participants reach the pre-employment outcome of increased employability (76%)
- participants complete pre-employment training (64%)

Populations targeted by SPF projects

Indigenous Peoples

SPF-funded interventions are intended for Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Most SPF projects (65%) were targeted toward a specific First Nation, Inuit, or Métis community or group of communities, while the rest were intended to serve more than 1 of the 3 Indigenous population groups. Overall, based on the documents reviewed:³³

- 81% of the projects aimed to serve First Nations individuals
- 21% of the projects aimed to serve Inuit individuals
- 15% of the projects aimed to serve Métis individuals

Location of targeted participants

SPF projects aimed to serve Indigenous individuals throughout Canada, both on and off reserve, and in urban, rural, and remote areas. Overall, based on the reviewed documents:³⁴

- 63% aimed to serve individuals who live on reserve or in an Inuit community
- 56% aimed to serve individuals who live in or near an urban area
- 46% aimed to serve individuals who live in rural areas that are not close to an urban area³⁵
- 17% aimed to serve individuals who live in a remote community

Targeted population sub-groups

Each SPF project identified whether it had provisions aimed at increasing the participation of women and youth. They also identified what targets, if any, had been set with respect to the number of women and youth served. While fewer than 3 projects were intended exclusively for women or youth, most

³³ Values amount to more than 100% because projects could serve individuals from more than 1 Indigenous population groups.

³⁴ Values amount to more than 100% because projects could serve individuals in more than one type of location.

³⁵ These locations are categorised as being outside of a census metropolitan area and census agglomeration and as having weak or no metropolitan influence. Source: Statistics Canada, [Statistical Area Classification](#), 2016.

projects had provisions to increase the participation of 1 or both groups. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of projects had provisions for women, 77% for youth, and 71% for both women and youth.

Fewer than 3 projects expressly identified older adults or persons with disabilities as targeted participants.

Economic sectors targeted

SPF projects provided training aimed at helping participants to secure employment in a wide variety of sectors. The most common sectors were:

- trades (non-specific) (60%)
- construction (38%)
- mining (30%)
- hospitality and tourism (28%)
- healthcare (22%)
- carpentry (22%)

Programs and services provided

SPF projects provided a broad variety of services, ranging from light-touch employment assistance services to intensive pre-employment training and support to complete university degrees:

- 96% of projects provided interventions aiming to improve participants' general employability; for example:
 - 69% provided essential skills training
 - 62% provided pre-employment development interventions aimed at improving participants employability, and
 - 60% provided various work experience programs
- 87% of projects provided various types of occupational skills training, including certificates, diplomas, and degrees from recognised post-secondary institutions, apprenticeships, and industry recognised certificates
- 63% of projects offered some type of employment assistance services, such as:
 - employment counselling (52% of projects)
 - career research and exploration (40% of projects), and
 - job search supports (22% of projects)
- 23% of projects provided ongoing wrap-around supports for participants facing multiple barriers to employment

Many projects incorporated Indigenous approaches, methods, and practices into their training programs. Agreement holders noted that this practice increased participant engagement, created a supportive learning environment, and helped to support participants' wellbeing.

Average cost per participant

Contextual factors should be taken into account when considering the cost per participant of interventions. For the SPF, the document review found that projects with higher costs per participant were affected by the following factors:

- the higher cost of delivering labour market programs in rural, remote, and northern areas (compared to urban areas), and
- the higher cost of supporting individuals who face persistent barriers to employment, as they may require interventions over a longer period of time, broader and more intensive support, and may not have a linear path to employment.

For all projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals, the anticipated average cost per participant prior to program delivery was \$11,263. The actual cost per participant once the program had been delivered was \$14,437.³⁶

Taking the contextual factors into account, the anticipated cost per participant was relatively low, and the actual cost per participant was within the range expected for these types of programs. It is expected that some projects will encounter unforeseen challenges that will increase their cost per participant. The impacts of the pandemic on participant numbers, project delivery, the labour market and the economy may also have influenced costs.

Evaluation found significant variation in the average cost per participants across projects. This variation reflects, in part, the higher costs associated with delivering programs in northern, rural, and remote areas, and with serving individuals facing persistent barriers to employment who may require multiple interventions. Nevertheless, ESDC may wish to closely examine projects with relatively high average cost per participants with a view to ensure that projects approved support the greatest number of Indigenous workers or jobseekers and represent the most effective avenue to provide employment support and services.

5.3 Partnerships, collaboration and labour market integration

According to key informants and project documents, the SPF supported the delivery of projects with long-established partners as well as with the development of new partnerships. Some of the most successful projects harnessed their relationships with existing partners to engage new partners.

Types of partners

SPF agreement holders worked with a variety of partners in the public, non-profit, and private sectors. The number of partners per project ranged from 1 to over 20. Overall,

³⁶ The pre-delivery estimated cost per participant is based on the amount of SPF funding indicated in SPF funding agreements and the targeted number of participants. The actual post-delivery cost per participant is based on the amount of SPF funding indicated in funding agreements and the actual number of participants reported by agreement holders at the end of their projects.

- 71% of projects partnered with Indigenous bands, councils, and governments
- 62% of projects partnered with private sector firms, corporations, and businesses
- 56% of projects partnered with post-secondary education institutions
- 56% of projects partnered with Indigenous-led non-profit organizations

Nearly 60% of the projects that identified private sector partners worked with partners in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector.

Partner contributions

Partner contributions took many forms, including:

- supporting project design
- delivering training
- providing work placements
- commitments to hiring trained participants, and
- providing cash and in-kind resources

Funding agreements identified the planned sources of funding for each project, including the anticipated cash and in-kind resources to be provided by partnering organizations. Overall:

- 54% of the funding across all projects was to be provided by the SPF
- partners were to contribute 13% of project resources as cash contributions, amounting to over \$50 million across all projects
- partners were to provide 33% of project resources as in-kind contributions, amounting to an estimated value of over \$126 million across all projects

Funding and in-kind resources to be provided by partners ranged from 0% to 89% of total resources per project. A quarter (25%) of the projects were to receive at least 50% of their project's resources from their partners. Another quarter (25%) were to receive 25% to 49% of their project resources from their partners.

Although many partnerships evolved as planned, the document review reveals that some agreement holders experienced challenges in securing anticipated contributions from their partners. It was not possible to confirm the actual amount of cash and in-kind resources provided by partners, nor to confirm to what extent partners had honoured their initial commitments across all projects.³⁷

Benefits and challenges of working with partners

Benefits

The case studies, key informant interviews, and document review revealed numerous examples of successful partnerships. These led to many of the benefits associated with the partnership approach, namely:

³⁷ More details are provided in the Performance measurement and data collection section.

- improving employer cultural awareness and willingness to work with Indigenous communities and service providers to meet their labour force needs
 - building relationships between employers and Indigenous service providers and communities
- aligning training to prepare participants to meet the existing or upcoming labour force needs of employers
 - enabling participants to move beyond entry level positions
 - developing local opportunities thereby enabling participants to stay in their communities and with their families
- enabling communities to benefit from major projects on their territories or in other locations, and
- enabling projects holders to support individuals who face multiple barriers to employment

Two (2) projects that exemplify successful partnerships were taken from the case study projects.

Case study example 1

A well-established agreement holder partnered with industrial training providers, trade certification bodies and employers. They leveraged their extensive network of industry partners to identify small and medium enterprises willing to provide work experience and on the job training, and to hire participants.

Unemployed and underemployed participants received occupational skills training and were then matched with employers so that they could complete mandatory on the job components of their training, apprenticeship, or certification process.

The organization recognises that participants often face multiple barriers. To be responsive to participant needs, the service provider maintains flexibility to support participants through setbacks and to change action plans to support participants growth in a way that is best suited to their needs, interests, and objectives. The organization commits to supporting participants as long as necessary to achieve a successful outcome.

By the end of the project, 499 participants were employed, which was 260 more than the targeted outcome.

Case study example 2

A well-established agreement holder saw an emerging opportunity as a major shipbuilding contract had been secured by a corporation operating in their region. The corporation had worked with the agreement holder before and enough confidence had been built that the partner chose to invest in the program.

The agreement holder worked in partnership with the corporation, relevant trades unions and associations, and a skills training institute to prepare participants to compete for and obtain employment in the shipbuilding sector. Participants received occupational skills training that was aligned with the corporation's upcoming labour force needs and were provided with opportunities to gain relevant work experience.

Overall, 339 participants were employed following their interventions, which was 131 more than the targeted outcome.

Challenges

In some cases, partnerships did not unfold as planned. The challenges encountered were varied, but examples include the following:

- some partnerships were based on major projects that did not proceed as planned
- some projects involved recruiting participants to work for or be trained by partners in another location, and had to suspend their activities during pandemic related lockdowns, social distancing periods, or community travel bans
- partnerships between SPF agreement holders and partners who had never worked with Indigenous Peoples sometimes encountered challenges relating to lack of cultural awareness, miscommunication, and work environments that were not welcoming to Indigenous participants
- in some cases, different organizational cultures and capacity levels, and different visions for project design and delivery hindered the ability of partners to work together, or led to the dissolution of partnerships

Some SPF agreement holders were able to adjust by finding new partners or by rethinking their project. For example:

- an agreement holder encountered barriers relating to cultural awareness and responded to the experience by developing an awareness training module relating to Indigenous history, the current context and advancing reconciliation; the training has now been delivered to private, non-profit, and public sector organizations across several maritime provinces
- a project that was impeded from moving ahead because it was based on a major project that was stalled indefinitely was able to identify many new smaller employer partners and to train participants to meet their labour force needs
- a project with an out of community training component became unworkable due to community travel bans and lockdowns; it adapted by working with partners to adapt the training for online delivery
 - as a result, the training is now able to reach many more participants over a broader geographic area than it could prior to the pandemic

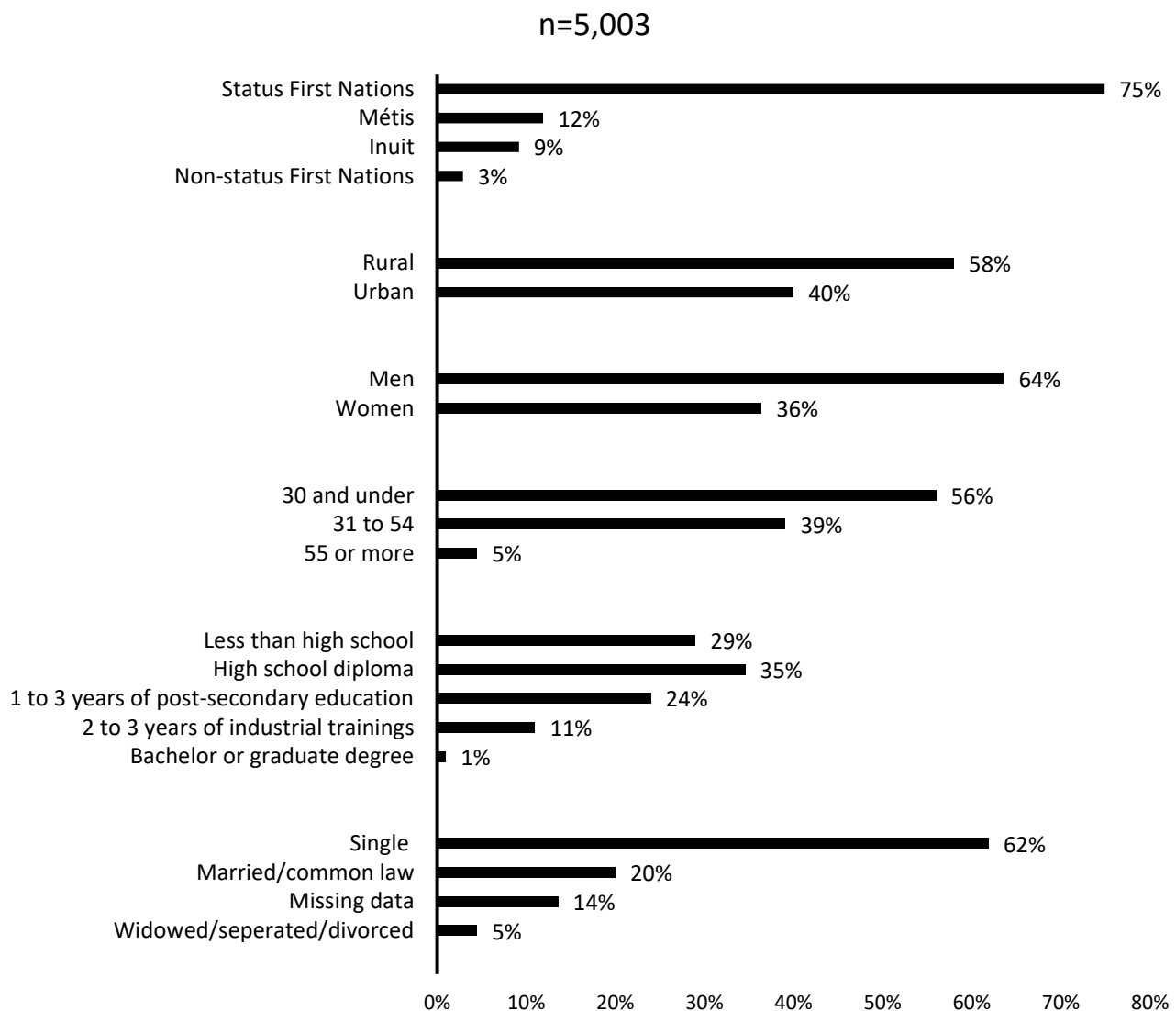
5.4 Profile of SPF participants

Approximately 5,000 Indigenous participants started 1 or more intervention funded through the 2016 SPF call for proposals in 2017 and 2018. Figure 5 presents the socio-demographic profile of participants by Indigenous population group, location type, gender, age, level of education, and marital status. Overall:

- 75% of participants were status First Nations; of the remaining quarter 12% were Métis, 9% were Inuit, and 3% were non-status First Nations
- the program reached individuals who live in both rural (58%) and urban areas (40%)

- most participants were men (64%)³⁸
- participants had low educational attainment; 29% had not completed high school, and 35% had obtained a high school diploma but had not participated in any type of additional training or education
- most participants were single (62%)

Figure 5. Socio-demographic profile of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants



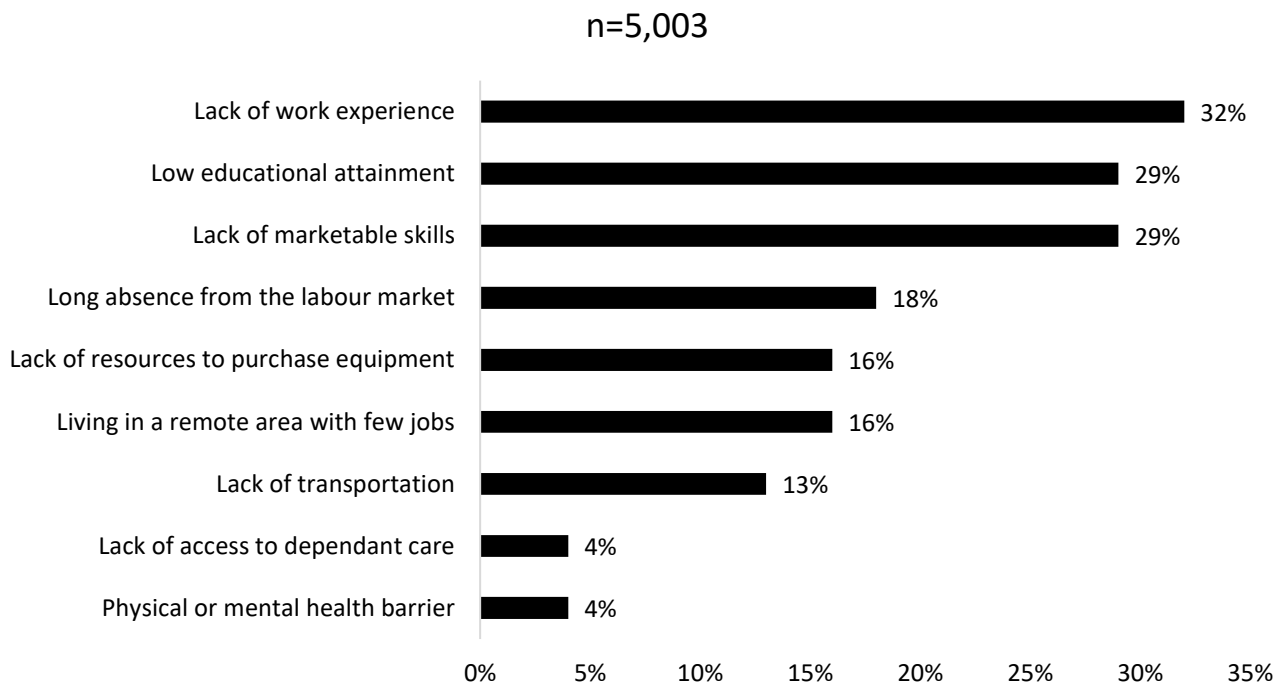
Source: SPF administrative data.

³⁸ Most funding agreements included provisions to recruit women and many agreements included specific targets for the participation of women in funded interventions. The evaluation did not assess whether these provisions increased the participation of women relative to projects funded through previous SPF calls for proposals.

Barriers to labour market participation

At the start of their SPF-funded intervention, participants were asked to identify which barriers affected their ability to find a job and to stay employed. Figure 6 presents the barriers identified by participants. Given that participants may have chosen not to report their barriers to employment or may have been uncomfortable reporting some types of barriers, findings should be understood to represent a conservative estimate.

Figure 6. Types of barriers experienced by SPF participants



Source: SPF administrative data.

Reflecting the high proportion of participants who were youth, and the high proportion who had low educational attainment, the 3 most common barriers identified by participants were:

- lack of work experience (32%)
- low educational attainment (29%)
- lack of marketable skills (29%)

Long absence from the labour market (18%), limited resources (16%), living in a remote area (16%) and lack of transportation (13%) were also identified as barrier by at least 15% of participants. With respect to remoteness, key informants noted that the shift toward online training that began in response to the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated training for participants who had access to highspeed internet

with sufficient bandwidth. For those who did not, the move to online training became a major obstacle to participation, particularly for those living in communities that closed during parts of the pandemic.³⁹

Only 4% of participants identified lack of access to dependent care as a barrier. However, there was variation by gender; 8% of women who participated in SPF-funded interventions identified dependent care as a barrier, compared to 2% of men.

Barriers to employment were identified when participants began their interventions, and most began their interventions before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of schools, childcare centres, and other dependent care services had a disproportionate impact on women and on single parents, meaning that dependent care may have become a more common barrier during the pandemic.⁴⁰

5.5 Outcomes of participation

The outcome analysis focused on the pre and post-participation labour market outcomes of the 5,003 participants who began an SPF-funded intervention in 2017 and 2018:

- **pre-participation** values represent annual averages over the 5-year period prior to program participation
- **post-participation** values represent annual averages over the 3-year period after program participation
- **outcomes** are the change in the annual averages from the pre-participation period to the post-participation period

Labour outcomes are measured through 5 indicators:

- **earnings:** participants annual average employment earnings including income from self-employment
- **incidence of employment:** annual average percentage of participants who are employed for at least 1 day in a given year
- **use of EI benefits:** annual average amount of EI benefits received by participants
- **use of SA benefits:** annual average amount of SA benefits received by participants
- **income supports as a proportion of overall income:** the proportion of participants' annual income (earnings from wages, salaries, and self-employment plus EI and SA benefits) that comes from government income benefits (EI and SA)

Readers should exercise caution when interpreting the outcomes. The outcome analysis captures the post-participation outcomes of the first cohorts of participants following the launch of the projects. The outcomes of these first cohorts may not be representative of overall participant outcomes.

³⁹ The quality and effectiveness of the on-line training provided was not assessed as part of this evaluation.

⁴⁰ Labour Market Information Council, [Women in Recovery : COVID-19 and women's labour market participation](#), 2022.

Moreover, participant outcomes cannot be attributed solely to program participation. Changes in participants' labour market attachment over time may be influenced by broader trends and shifts in the labour market and economy. Of particular relevance for this evaluation is that the post-participation period used for the outcome analysis overlaps with the COVID-19 pandemic measures and disruptions to the labour market and economy.

A number of temporary income support measures which may have influenced participants' employment decisions and use of income supports were made available during the post-participation period.⁴¹ What is more, the outcome analysis does not include income support provided through the On-reserve Income Assistance Program to status First Nations who live on reserve.⁴² For these reasons, outcomes relating to the use of EI, use of SA, and the proportion of participants' incomes that came from government income supports should be interpreted with caution.

General participant outcomes

Table 6 presents the pre and post-participation labour market outcomes for 2017 and 2018 SPF participants.

Table 6. Annual averages of labour market outcomes for 2017 and 2018 SPF participants

Labour market attachment indicator	Pre-participation	Post-participation	Outcome
Earnings	\$13,920	\$18,070	+ \$4,150
Incidence of employment	55%	59%	+ 4 percentage points
Use of EI benefits	\$1,551	\$3,553	+ \$2,003
Use of SA benefits	\$1,085	\$1,615	+ \$530
Income supports as proportion of overall income	19%	31%	+ 12 percentage points

Table 7 presents the pre and post-participation proportion of participants who fell in 6 different earning ranges of \$10,000, from \$0 to \$60,000 or more per year. It also presents the post-participation change in the proportion of participants who fell in each earning range.

⁴¹ Examples of temporary income support measures made available during the post-participation period include but are not limited to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit from March 2020 to September 2020, and the Canada Recovery Benefit from September 2020 to October 2021.

⁴² The outcome analysis does not include income supports provided by Indigenous Services Canada through the On-reserve Income Assistance Program. Use of SA findings for status First Nations should therefore be understood to apply only to status First Nations who do not live on reserve.

Table 7. Proportion and change in percentage of participants by average annual earnings ranges

Earnings Range	% of participants pre-participation	% of participants post-participation	Change between pre and post participation (percentage points)
\$0 - \$9,999	66.7%	59.3%	-7.4
\$10,000 - \$19,999	10.9%	10.7%	-0.2
\$20,000 - \$29,999	6.5%	8.1%	+ 1.6
\$30,000 - \$44,999	6.5%	7.9%	+ 1.4
\$45,000 - \$59,999	3.3%	4.9%	+ 1.5
\$60,000+	6.2%	9.2%	+ 3

As shown in Tables 6 and 7, after participating in SPF-funded interventions, participants:

- increased their earnings by \$4,150 per year
 - the proportion of participants earning less than \$10,000 decrease by 7 percentage points while the proportion earning more than \$30,000 increased by 6 percentage points
- increased their incidence of employment by 4 percentage points
 - based on the results reported by SPF agreement holders, 48% of participants were employed following participation (including 1% who were self-employed)
- increased their use of EI benefits by \$2,000, their use of SA benefits by \$530, and increased the proportion of their income that came from government income supports by 12 percentage points

The increase in use of EI benefits is not necessarily negative as it may reflect post-participation improvements in participants' labour market attachment. In other words, having worked more, participants became EI eligible and were able to access EI benefits.

The labour market outcomes cannot be attributed solely to SPF participation. However, an incremental impact analysis completed as part of the 2020 evaluation of the SPF found that the program had positive impacts. Compared to similar non-participants, individuals who started an SPF intervention between January 2011 and December 2012 had higher annual earnings in the post-participation period; active EI claimants earned \$5,000 more, former EI claimants earned \$6,010 more, and non-EI claimants earned \$1,240 more.⁴³

⁴³ Source: ESDC, [Evaluation of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund](#), 2020.

Findings by SPF intervention type

Outcomes were produced for participants in 6 types of SPF interventions.⁴⁴ Overall, the findings reveal variation with respect to:

- the labour market characteristics of participants in different types of SPF interventions, and
- the labour market outcomes of participants in different types of SPF interventions

Labour market characteristics of participants in different SPF interventions

Table 8 presents the pre-participation labour market characteristics of participants in each type of intervention.

Table 8. Pre-participation labour market characteristics of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants from by intervention type

Intervention type	% of SPF participants*	Average annual earnings	Incidence of employment	Use of EI benefits ⁴⁵
Skills Development Regular (n = 2,035)	41%	\$12,957	54%	\$1,489
Employment Assistance Services (n = 1,235)	25%	\$17,542	61%	\$2,134
Essential Skills Training (n = 479)	10%	\$10,152	48%	\$993
Targeted Wage Subsidies (n = 411)	8%	\$15,459	66%	\$1,545
Skills Development Apprentices (n = 394)	8%	\$17,966	63%	\$1,517
Job Creation Partnerships (n = 267)	5%	\$4,869	33%	\$884
All interventions	98%*	\$13,920	55%	\$1,551

*Note: Total does not amount to 100% as participants in the Self-employment and Students Work Experience programs were excluded. Self-employment was excluded because the intervention does not lend itself to the type of outcome analysis conducted as part of this evaluation. Students Work Experience was excluded due to its low number of participants.

Overall:

- individuals who participated in the following 3 types of interventions had stronger labour market attachment prior to their participation:
 - Skills Development Apprentices

⁴⁴ Analyses by intervention type were conducted using a unit of analysis called an Action Plan Equivalent. For participants who received more than one intervention; units are based on the principal (longest) intervention received.

⁴⁵ Higher amounts of EI benefits received prior to participation suggest that participants had strong labour market attachment as they were eligible to receive EI benefits and qualified for higher benefits amounts.

- Employment Assistance Services
- Targeted Wage Subsidies, and
- individuals who participated in the following 2 types of interventions had weaker labour market attachment:
 - Essential Skills Training
 - Job Creation Partnerships

Labour market outcomes

Table 9 presents the labour market outcomes of participants in each type of intervention.

Table 9. Labour market outcomes by type of SPF intervention for 2017 and 2018 participants

Intervention type	Earnings	Incidence of employment (percentage points)	% of income from income supports (percentage points)
Targeted Wage Subsidies	+ \$10,494	+ 7	+ 13
Skills Development Apprenticeship	+ \$10,097	+ 12	+ 10
Essential Skills Training	+ \$5,240	+ 4	+ 13
Skills Development Regular	+ \$4,356	+ 4	+ 11
Employment Assistance Services	+ \$392	+ 1	+ 13
Job Creation Partnership	- \$439	- 11	+ 13

Among the types of programs that served participants who were, on average, more strongly attached to the labour market prior to participation, Targeted Wage Subsidies and Skills Development apprentices had relatively strong outcomes.

Among the types of programs that served participants who were, on average, less attached to the labour market prior to participation, Essential Skills Training had relatively strong outcomes.

The pre-participation labour market attachment and post-participation outcomes of participants in Skills Development Regular were both very near the average for all participants; their outcomes were positive.

Participants in **Skills Development Apprentices** and **Targeted Wage Subsidies** accounted for 16% of participants (8% each). As shown in Table 9, post-participation increases in earnings and incidence of employment were higher for participants in these interventions relative to those who participated in other interventions.

A quarter of participants (25%) received **Employment Assistance Services**. The interventions resulted in moderate increases in earnings and incidence of employment. These services generally aim to facilitate a quick return to employment rather than to increase participants' skills level. Accordingly, they are expected to have a more modest impact on earnings than other types of interventions.

Participants in **Job Creation Partnerships** accounted for 5% of all SPF participants. Relative to participants in other interventions, they had the weakest outcomes as they saw both their earnings and

incidence of employment decline following participation. Participants in Job Creation Partnerships gain work experience by working on community benefiting projects. These projects may have broader benefits for Indigenous individuals and their communities that are not captured through labour market outcome indicators.

The findings for these 6 types of interventions are generally consistent with those found for similar interventions evaluated by ESDC.⁴⁶

Findings by type of participant

Post-participation outcomes were produced for 3 types of participants:⁴⁷

- active EI claimants, who accounted for 15% of participants
- former EI claimants, who accounted for 23% of participants, and
- non-EI claimants, who accounted for 62% of participants

Each type includes individuals with different levels of pre-participation labour market attachment (earnings and incidence of employment). As shown in Table 10, active EI claimants had the strongest pre-program participation labour market attachment while non-EI claimants had the weakest attachment.

The differences in the level of labour market attachment of the 3 types of participants are maintained in the post-participation period. In other words, active EI claimants continue to have the highest annual incomes and incidence of employment, while non-EI claimants continue to have the lowest. However, non-EI claimant participants had stronger post-participation increases in earnings and employment. In fact, while active and former claimants decreased their incidence of employment, non-EI claimants increased theirs by 14 percentage points.

Table 10. Labour market outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by participant type

Labour market outcome indicators	Active EI claimants	Former EI claimants	Non-EI claimants
Pre-participation earnings	\$29,381	\$19,407	\$8,014
Pre-participation incidence of employment	80%	74%	42%
Pre-participation proportion of income coming from government income supports	20%	26%	16%
Post-participation earnings outcome	- \$2,575	+ \$418	+ \$7,089
Post-participation incidence of employment outcome (percentage points)	-11	-13	+ 14

⁴⁶ See, for example, the [Horizontal Evaluation of the Labour Market Development Agreements](#).

⁴⁷ Active EI claimants are participants who started an SPF-funded intervention while collecting EI benefits. Former EI claimants are participants who started an SPF-funded intervention up to 5 years after they completed an EI claim. Non-EI claimants are participant who are neither active nor former EI claimants

Post-participation change in proportion of income coming from government income supports (percentage points)	+ 9	+ 6	+ 14
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Findings by participant subgroup

Outcomes were produced for participant subgroups based on:

- Indigenous population group (status First Nations; non-status First Nations; Inuit; Métis)
- gender (men; women)
- age (30 and younger; 31 to 54; 55 and older)
 - youth with no high school diploma
- type of location (rural; urban)

Within these participant subgroups, the outcome analysis found differences in participants pre-participation labour market attachment and post-participation outcomes. The outcome analysis does not account for differences in the composition of subgroups. For example, there may be differences in the level of education, age and type intervention received across different Indigenous population groups, which could account for some of the differences relating to their labour market attachment and outcomes. For this reason, findings should not be compared across subgroups. Nevertheless, some insight can be gained by interpreting outcomes in conjunction with subgroups’ pre-participation level of labour market attachment. Differences in outcomes that cannot easily be explained may reveal areas that would benefit from further exploration.

Indigenous population groups

Table 11 presents the pre-participation labour market attachment and post-participation outcomes for 4 Indigenous population groups:⁴⁸

- status First Nations (75% of participants)
- Métis (12% of participants)
- Inuit (9% of participants)
- non-status First Nations (3% of participants)

Table 11. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by Indigenous population group

Labour market attachment indicators and outcomes	Inuit	Métis	First Nations (status)	First Nations (non-status)
Pre-participation earnings	\$25,131	\$24,600	\$11,110	\$10,907
Pre-participation incidence of employment	75%	71%	51%	53%

⁴⁸ The SPF is not a distinction based program.

Pre-participation proportion of income coming from government income supports	18%	17%	19%*	19%
Post-participation earnings outcome	+ \$13,411	+ \$8,167	+ \$1,692	+ \$10,860
Post-participation incidence of employment outcome (percentage points)	+12	+ 15	-0.5	+ 24
Post-participation change in proportion of income coming from government income supports (percentage points)	+ 3	+ 8	+ 13*	+ 11

*Note: The findings do not include use of SA by status First Nations who live on reserve. Those who live on reserve are served by Indigenous Services Canada through the On-reserve Income Assistance Program, and ESDC does not have access beneficiary data for this program.

Pre-participation, the labour market attachments of status and non-status First Nations were similar, and both were weaker than that of Inuit and Métis participants. However, the post-participation outcomes of status and non-status First Nations differed:

- earnings for non-status First Nations increased by \$10,860 while those of status First Nations increase by \$1,692
- incidence of employment of non-status First Nations increased by 24 percentage points, while that of status First Nations decreased by 0.5 percentage points

Lower labour market outcomes for status First Nations may, to some extent, be explained by where they live. In 2016, 40% of status First Nations lived on reserves where there often fewer job opportunities.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, some projects for status First Nations who live on reserve had strong participant outcomes. These projects were generally designed improve participants' labour market outcomes while enabling them to stay in their community. They trained participants to fill existing or upcoming labour market demand, such as large resource extraction projects, or to respond to employment opportunities and needs within the community.

Inuit and Métis participants increased their earnings by \$13,411 and \$8,167, respectively, and achieved an average incidence of employment of 86%.

Gender

Table 12 presents the pre-participation labour market attachment and post-participation outcomes for men, who accounted for 64% of participants, and women, who accounted for 36% of participants.

Table 12. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by gender

Labour market attachment indicators and outcomes	Men	Women
Pre-participation earnings	\$16,348	\$9,693
Pre-participation incidence of employment	58%	51%

⁴⁹ Canada. Statistics Canada, [Status First Nations people in Canada: A snapshot from the 2021 Census](#), 2023.

Pre-participation proportion of income coming from government income supports	16%	24%
Post-participation earnings outcome	+ \$5,455	+ \$2,253
Post-participation incidence of employment outcome (percentage points)	+ 7	-0.5
Post-participation change in proportion of income coming from government income supports (percentage points)	+ 12	+ 12

The pre-participation labour market attachment of women was weaker than that of men and, compared to men, women had weaker post-participation outcomes. Participants with weaker pre-participation labour market attachment (youth, urban participants, and non-EI participants) generally had stronger post-participation outcome. Women and status First Nations were the only participant subgroups to have both weaker pre-participation labour market attachment and weaker post-participation outcomes.

The 2016 call for proposals included provisions to support the recruitment and participation of women in SPF projects. While most projects identified provisions to increase the participation of women, few were designed specifically for Indigenous women. The only project specifically designed for women for which results reporting was available had relatively strong post-participation results with over 50% of participants employed after participation.

It is not clear from the evaluation lines of evidence what might have contributed to the weaker outcomes for women. Many of the projects were training participants to work in male dominated fields, such as construction and resource extraction related trades. Projects that included training in fields where women are well represented and that are aligned with identified needs in Indigenous communities, such as nursing, education, and early childhood education attracted more women.

Access to dependent care may have impacts women's outcome. During their program intake, 8% of the women who began an SPF intervention in 2017 and 2018 identified lack of access to dependent care as a barrier to employment. The COVID-19 pandemic may have increased the prevalence and severity of this barrier. Enhanced health and safety protocols requiring that children stay home at the first sign of illness along with daycare and school closures, led many women to exit the workforce or to reduce their work hours. Moreover, women in low-earning occupations experienced greater job losses and were the slowest to recover.⁵⁰

Example of training designed for women

The project was funded through the Innovation stream and led by an Indigenous women's non-profit organization. Over the course of 55 months, the project experimented with and refined a supportive, trauma-informed approach to help Indigenous women train for, obtain, and retain jobs in the mining, green economy, energy, agricultural and sustainable development sectors.

⁵⁰ Labour Market Information Council, [Women in recovery: COVID-19 and Women's labour market participation, 2022.](#)

The program supported women to overcome socio-economic challenges and provided a broad variety of pre-training supports such as helping participants to obtain ID, open bank accounts, and receive individual counselling.

The training curriculum was gender specific, trauma-informed, and culturally based to help participants succeed in male dominated workplaces. It integrated culturally grounded activities such as moccasin and medicine bag making, the Seven Grandfather teachings, and ceremonies with standard training such as occupational health and safety training, First Aid and CPR, lift truck awareness, and occupational skills training.

The project worked with an intersectoral network of partners including school boards, postsecondary education institutions, trade associations and union, mining corporations, and other Indigenous organizations. Together, they provided occupational skills training, connected participants to jobs, and helped participants to successfully integrate the work environment.

Slightly over 50% of the participants were employed after completing their training. Some were able to launch their own business, which supported their families and communities in addition to improving their individual labour market outcomes.

Age

Table 13 presents the pre-participation labour market attachments and post-participation outcomes of participants who were:

- 30 years of age or younger (56% of participants)
- between 31 and 54 years of age (39% of participants)
- 55 years of age or older (5% of participants)
- youth (15 to 30 years of age) with no high school diploma (15% of participants)

The pre-participation labour market attachment of participants in different age groups was consistent with that of the broader Canadian workforce. Older participants had the highest earnings, those in their core working years had the highest incidence of employment, and younger participants had the lowest pre-participation earnings and incidence of employment.

Post-participation outcomes differed between the 3 age groups. Younger participants had higher than average increases in earnings (+ \$9,430) and incidence of employment (+ 15 percentage points), while those over 30 years of age saw both their earnings and incidence of employment decrease. Youth with no high school diploma also increased their incidence of employment (+10 percentage points) and earnings (+\$5,374).

The differences in outcomes can be partially explained by the life stage of participants in different age groups. Younger individuals are either making the transition from school to work or are at the beginning of their work life. Accordingly, youths' incidence of employment and employment earnings are expected to increase regardless of program participation. Conversely, older workers are more likely to exit the work force due to retirement.

Table 13. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by age group

Labour market attachment indicators and outcomes	Youth with no high school diploma	30 and younger	31 to 54	55 and older
Pre-participation earnings	\$7,224	\$8,715	\$19,703	\$29,576
Pre-participation incidence of employment	41%	48%	66%	66%
Pre-participation proportion of income coming from government income supports	17%	14%	27%	20%
Post-participation earnings outcome	+ \$5,374	+ \$9,430	- \$2,257	- \$6,897
Post-participation incidence of employment outcome (percentage points)	+ 10	+ 14	- 10	- 17
Post-participation change in proportion of income coming from government income supports (percentage points)	+ 15	+ 14	+ 8	+ 9

Type of location (rural/remote and urban)

Table 14 presents the pre-participation labour market attachment and post-participation outcomes for participants in rural and remote areas and those in urban areas, who accounted for 58% and 40% of participants, respectively.

Pre-participation, participants in rural and remote areas had moderately higher earnings and incidence of employment relative to those in urban areas. However, stronger post-participation outcomes for participants in urban areas brought their earnings nearly to parity and left those in urban areas with a much higher incidence of employment.

Table 14. Labour market attachment and outcomes of 2017 and 2018 SPF participants by type of location (rural/remote and urban)

Labour market attachment indicators and outcomes	Rural and remote	Urban
Pre-participation earnings	\$15,669	\$11,444
Pre-participation incidence of employment	57%	54%
Pre-participation proportion of income coming from government income supports	18%	19%
Post-participation earnings outcome	+ \$2,667	+ \$6,110
Post-participation incidence of employment outcome (percentage points)	-2	+ 12
Post-participation change in proportion of income coming from government income supports (percentage points)	+ 12	+ 12

5.6 Broader impact of participation

Previous engagement with Indigenous service providers has established that labour market integration programs and services can have broader impacts that extend beyond participants to their families and communities.⁵¹ Most key informants identified such impacts among the benefits of the program, as did many of the final project reports submitted by the SPF agreement holders.

These broader impacts can be grouped under 4 categories: community economic and human resource development; community development, the opportunity effect; and stronger households.

Community economic and human resources development

Projects that help participants to live and work in their community can support the economic development of the community as a whole. For example:

- projects that support job creation opportunities, either through the creation of a self-employment business or through the development of local services, can lead to the creation of employment opportunities for more community members
- projects that connect participants to job opportunities in surrounding communities or in the region can also build ties and paths leading to employment for more community members
- projects that focus on skills development, for example in trades and healthcare, increase the skills of community members

Community development

Projects that help participants find work in or near their community, or that enable them to live in the community while working elsewhere part of the time help participants to:

- maintain their community ties
- remain involved in the cultural life of their communities
- continue to participate in traditional harvesting activities such as fishing and hunting, and to pass these skills to the next generation

When youth and families are able to stay and thrive within their community they contribute to the ongoing growth, development, and vitality of the community as a whole.

Opportunity effect

Aside from the creation of new paths to labour market integration, projects can create an opportunity effect. In other words, seeing participants successfully complete studies, obtain new skills, gain employment and return to their community can increase community members' sense of what is possible and of what is within their reach.

⁵¹ ESDC, [Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programming](#), 2016; ESDC, [Engagement on the Future of the Skills and Partnership Fund - What we learned report](#), 2021.

Strengthening families and households

Life and essential skills training have benefits that extend beyond increased employability to other areas of participants' lives, including family life and household management.

Skills development and other interventions that help connect participants to sustainable, long-term employment reduces families' vulnerability to housing and food insecurity. In some cases, agreement holders reported that the improvements were such that families who had been separated, largely due to the consequences of poverty, were able to be reunited.

Examples of broader project impacts

Example 1

The project targeted individuals who face persistent and severe barriers to employment. Most targeted participants lived in one of the most impoverished neighbourhoods in the country, faced housing and food insecurity, and had been incarcerated. The project aimed to improve participants' basic employability and to help them find stable, entry-level employment in trades.

One of the project's main partners was Corrections Canada. Through this partnership, the project was able to work with participants to support their re-integration into the community before they completed their sentence, at first on day work releases, and then when they began parole.

The agreement holder reported several benefits that extended beyond participants' employment outcomes. In addition to helping 54% of their participants to find employment, the project:

- significantly reduce the rate of recidivism among participants;
- actively supported 12 mothers to be reunited with their children, and
- helped to insulate single family homes managed by a non-profit housing authority.

Example 2

Working in partnership with a mining sector corporation, the project trained Indigenous individuals who live in remote norther communities to work in the mining sector.

Most individuals in these communities had never had stable employment opportunities due to the lack of economic opportunities in or near their communities. As part of the project, participants were trained to work in many trades and occupations, such as heavy equipment operators and technicians, millwrights, electricians, welders, cooks, and insulators. Nearly 50% of the participants completed their training and found employment.

Underground mining is a growing sector in the region and represents a rare long-term employment opportunity for those living in the area. For this reason, the success of community members who completed their training and obtained employment is benefiting families and creating a sense of hope and opportunity for entire communities.

The project sent participants out of province to receive training in Ontario, which proved to be challenging for participants. Based on their experience with the project, the agreement holder is working with its major mining sector partner to bring mining training to the communities.

Example 3

Led by an Indigenous post-secondary training institute, the project worked in partnership with a network of public, private, and non-profit sector partners to offer broad range of occupational skills

training. For example, participants were trained to work as licensed practical nurses, social service workers, early childhood educators, First Nations liaison workers, First Nations education assistants, certified cooks, painters, welders, and heavy equipment operators.

The project was implemented on reserve in a rural area with limited employment opportunities. It was designed to be client-centred and to support participants throughout their path to employment, from life and essential skills training, pre-career explorations and work readiness development to occupational skills training, work experience, and employment. Overall, 56% of the participants were employed after completing their training.

The impact of the project is expected to reach far beyond increased labour market attachment for participants. For example, by the end of the project:

- 12 participants trained as First Nations liaison workers secured employment in the social services sector, which is expected to improve service delivery to Indigenous people in the area
 - 2 participants secured employment with their Band to help address intergenerational trauma in the community's family support home, which increases the knowledge and skills available to the community
- 24 participants trained as First Nations education Assistance were hired to work in local schools; they will be able to support and advocate for Indigenous students in those schools
- participants trained as licensed practical nurses are now working in 12 First Nations communities who are benefiting from their medical skills and knowledge

Many participants were among the first in their families and community to complete post-secondary education. The entire community is proud and many attend the graduation ceremonies.

5.7 COVID-19 disruptions and responses

To provide agreement holders with more flexibility to overcome setbacks related to the pandemic, ESDC extended the timeframe within which agreement holders could complete their projects and reach their targeted outcomes. No additional funding was provided.

Key informant interviews, case studies, and the document review identified a variety of challenges related to the pandemic, for example:

- some interventions that required in-person training or work experience components were not able to proceed
- some communities were closed during the pandemic, meaning that some participants could not travel to complete training, gain work experience, or accept employment
- many projects were forced to rethink their training or service delivery approach in response to COVID-19 response measures, such as lockdowns, social distancing, or closing communities to travel
- many participants experienced increased mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression during the community closures and lockdowns

SPF agreement holders were generally, though not always, able to adapt to these changes in context by developing new partnerships and moving their training and service delivery online.

For many, the move to online training transformed itself into an opportunity to reach and engage more participants. Online delivery effectively mitigated challenges that predated the pandemic, such as:

- the cost of providing interventions to participants over large territories
- the cost and disruptions to participants' lives and families when they have to leave the community or travel to participate in interventions
- participants being unable to travel to participate in interventions due to weather conditions, unforeseen family responsibilities, or other changes in personal circumstances

Example: The move to online service delivery and increased access to training

Having a high school diploma or General Education Diploma is a pre-requisite for many occupational skills training programs. Because there are usually no transportation and housing supports to help people who live in remote communities to travel to urban centres in order to obtain their General Education Diploma, those who have not completed secondary school are often unable to qualify for entry into training.

Due to the pandemic, an agreement holder was forced to move the General Education Diploma portion of their program online, and participants were able to obtain their Diploma without having to leave their communities. The completion rate increased significantly after the program was moved online, and the agreement holder has decided to maintain online delivery of the program. Participants who obtained their General Education Diploma became eligible to participate in occupational skills training programs.

For individuals who did not have access to computers and a high-speed internet connection with sufficient bandwidth, the move to online delivery represented a greater challenge. In some cases, agreement holders were able to connect participants to the resources they needed, but this was not always the case.

5.8 Challenges and promising practices

Administrative processes and SPF agreement holder capacity

Key informant interviews, the case studies, and previous engagement exercises with Indigenous partners identify challenges relating to SPF administrative processes for funding applicants that are not well established or that have limited human resources capacity. For example:⁵²

- the investment of time and effort required to submit a competitive proposal can present a considerable challenge for smaller organizations
- securing well-defined cash and in-kind contributions from potential new partners can be challenging for organizations that do not have an established partner network
- reporting requirements can be challenging for smaller organizations, particularly when they experience staff turnover, when their main government contact changes, or when they rely on partners to collect and report data

⁵² ESDC, [Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programming](#), 2016; ESDC, [Engagement on the Future of the Skills and Partnership Fund - What we learned report](#), 2021.

Program officials reported that providing support before the call for proposal is released and throughout the duration of the project can be helpful.

Increasing capacity, expanding the pool of potential candidates and bringing work to a remote community

An agreement holder operating in the territories experienced persistent data collection and reporting issues throughout most of the duration of its project. In particular, outdated technology, repeated staff turnover in their data specialist position, long stretches without a data specialist followed by periods of onboarding and training meant that data was often reported late and that reported data was incomplete.

Toward the end of the project, the agreement holder became one of the first in the territory to adopt a cloud-based case and data-management application that:

- will enable data entry and reporting to be completed anywhere that has satellite internet access,
- will enable the agreement holder to open the data specialist position to a much broader pool of candidates throughout the territory, and
- will enable the creation of a job opportunity anywhere in the territory that has internet access

Staff and partner recruitment and retention

Issues relating to staff retention and the difficulty of filling vacant job positions were widespread throughout the country during the pandemic. A common challenge faced by the projects with lower employment outcomes was the difficulty of recruiting and retaining staff, instructors and partners.

Staff and instructor turnover had a particularly negative impact on projects located in northern and remote areas. These communities tend to have small populations with very limited human resources pools. They often have to recruit from outside of their community and find individuals willing to move to their community. This process can take a long time and require significant resources. These challenges are compounded in communities that are not connected to highspeed internet, as shifting to online training is not an option. Therefore, the loss of a single staff member or instructor can have a severe impact on projects outcomes.

Similarly, SPF agreement holders in northern and remote areas have a limited pool of potential partners to choose from. In some communities, there is only 1 large employer. Consequently, when a partnership dissolves or does not go as planned, finding new partners can prove very challenging. When it is not possible to find a new partner, or when new partners have much smaller labour force needs than the initial partner, project outcomes are negatively impacted.

These challenges, although compounded by the pandemic, are part of the reality of serving communities in northern and remote areas. In some cases, when given the flexibility to adjust project design, and additional time to secure new staff or partners and to reach their targets, agreement holders were able to overcome setbacks and achieve positive results.

Ongoing participant support

A common thread among the SPF agreement holders that achieved positive outcomes was the need to provide ongoing support to participants. Projects were designed and delivered around the

understanding that paths to employment may not progress in a linear fashion, may encounter setbacks, and may require course adjustments and multiple interventions. Service providers were prepared to offer or connect participants with a broad range of supports.

Responsive program design and services

Working with partners in the aviation sector and provincial government, the project targeted participants in remote, fly-in communities for training in the aviation sector.

The project provided pre-employment training followed by occupations skills training. Pre-employment training included, example, essential skills, life skills, financial literacy, and mental health First Aid training for First Nations. Examples of occupational skills training provided included pre-trades, heavy equipment operation, and airport operations.

The project initially used a place-based approach, bringing participants to receive training on location near an airport. However, it became apparent with the first cohort of participants that this approach would not work, as many struggled with the challenges of being away from their families and communities. For the subsequent cohorts, the project adapted by developing land-based approach to ensure the holistic well-being and safety of the participants. Using a mobile training lab, they moved the training to a secluded lodge, where the instructors and participants could stay together rather than living separately in rented apartments. Using this approach, they were able to successfully serve 3 cohorts of participants.

The last cohort of land-based learning had to be cancelled due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social-distancing rules and community closures made the land-based approach untenable. They were able to move parts of their training online, provided participants with the equipment they needed to access the training, and provided in-person training when the social distancing rules permitted.

They were given an extension to complete their project and were able to provide the last cohort of land-based training in 2022.

Over 50% of the participants found employment after completing the training.

5.9 Performance measurement and data collection

The SPF follows the best practice of collecting information at the individual level in a manner that enables the integration of program data with other administrative data sources and, potentially, with survey data. This approach supports the validation of short and medium-term post-participation employment outcomes and assessment of program impacts while mitigating the administrative burden on agreement holders.

Contributing to this best practice, SPF agreement holders collect and report data relating to project participants and interventions. For example, they collect data on participants' age and gender, on barriers to employment, on intervention results, and on post-participation outcomes. The reporting documents and administrative data collected for projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals were assessed to determine to what extent agreement holders were able to collect and report these data, and whether the data could support outcome and impact assessment.

Program officials reported that agreement holders' ability to collect and report data were, at time, hindered by pandemic related disruptions, such as office closures. Despite these challenges, collected

administrative data was found to be of sufficient quality and integrity to support the creation of participant profiles and post-participation labour market outcome analysis. Moreover, the data is of sufficient quality and integrity to support incremental impact analysis based on a 5-year post-participation period when the required taxation data becomes available in the 2027 to 2028 fiscal year.

Capturing post-participation results

Results are collected after program participation and can include, for example, whether or not participants found employment or returned to school. To collect this information, project holders must contact former participants to confirm whether they found employment or returned to school after the end of their intervention.

Several factors can hinder agreement holders' ability collect this information. For example, after program participation, some participants may move, change their telephone numbers, or become unreachable for other reasons. Accordingly, it is expected that agreement holders will not be able to confirm results for all the project participants.

The assessment of the programs' administrative data found that, in the period following participation, agreement holders were able to collect and report results for 85% of participants.

Capturing progress along the pre-employment continuum

Many types of interventions provided through SPF projects are not conceived to result in employment in the short-term post-program period. Rather, such interventions aim to support participants' progress along the pre-employment continuum. Although employment is the end goal for all participants, agreement holders emphasise the importance of capturing pre-employment outcomes.

SPF agreement holders can use several indicators to capture pre-employment outcomes; these include the number of participants who:

- increased their employability
- completed pre-employment training, and
- gained work experience

The document review found that the meaning of employability and the approach to measuring increased employability varied across projects.

Identifying barriers to employment

Individuals can face many different barriers that prevent them from entering or remaining in the workforce, such as lack of transportation, lack of access to childcare, and lack of work experience, for example.

Agreement holders ask participants to identify which types of barriers are affecting their ability to find and maintain employment. Participants are not obliged to provide this information and may choose not to report 1 or more of the barriers they face. Participants may also be more comfortable reporting on some barriers than others. For example, they may be comfortable revealing that they lack work experience, but uncomfortable revealing that they have a health or mental health issue.

The administrative data assessment confirmed that some participants chose not to provide information on some types of barriers. For example, information on disability status was missing for 42% of participants.

Accordingly, while the administrative data on reported barriers can be used to gain insight into commonly experienced barriers to employment, barriers of a more sensitive or personal nature may be underreported.

Assessing partner contributions

Developing and maintaining partnerships with public, non-profit and private sector organizations to support program and service design, delivery, and outcomes is an integral component of the SPF program. As part of their proposal, organizations must identify and quantify the cash and in-kind resources that their partners will contribute to the project. Projects that can secure at least half of their project resources are given priority consideration during the project selection process. Yet, agreement holders are not systematically requested to report:

- to what extent their partners honoured their commitments, and
- whether they developed new partnerships and how these contributed to their projects

The document review identified a few instances of agreement holders reporting that partners had not contributed to the projects as expected. While this may not be a widespread challenge, in the absence of systematic reporting, the actual contribution of project partners to the projects cannot be assessed.

6. Conclusions, observations and recommendations

Overall, the evaluation findings are positive. The SPF responds to well-documented needs and aligns with federal government objectives relating to labour market development and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The program's project-based intersectoral partnership building training to employment approach complements the ISET program and is informed by Indigenous partners' insight and lessons learned from previous evaluations.

Through projects funded as part of the 2016 call for proposals, the SPF supported both the maintenance of existing partnerships and the development of new partnerships to improve the labour market outcomes of Indigenous participants. Across all projects, the cash and in-kind resources commitments of partners accounted for 46% of project resources and amounted to an estimated value of \$176 million. Examples of in-kind contributions included post-secondary institutes delivering training, employers ensuring that training aligned with their forecasted labour needs, and natural resource extraction projects committing to providing work placements to participants.

The SPF reached Indigenous Peoples across the country. Projects served individuals who had weak labour market attachment and who faced a variety of labour market barriers. In 2017 and 2018, 5,003 Indigenous individuals participated in interventions delivered as part of 52 SPF projects. The outcome analysis found that participants increased their average annual earnings and incidence of employment in the 4 years following their participation. In the absence of impact analysis, it is not possible to identify to what extent these outcomes could be attributed to the intervention alone.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on participant recruitment, program and service delivery, and on post-participation labour market opportunities.

Many SPF agreement holders were able to adjust their projects to the pandemic context in order to minimize the impact on projects and participant outcomes. In fact, agreement holders reported that initial challenges turned into opportunities as the move to online service delivery enabled them to reach more participants by reducing barriers to participation such as travel costs, housing, and having to leave family and community in order to receive programs and services. Other agreement holders were unable to adjust, either because of the nature of their projects or because their avenues for adjustment were too limited.

Projects in northern and remote communities had more limited options and less flexibility to respond to setbacks and changing context. These are small communities with limited human resources meaning that they often have to recruit staff and instructors from distant communities. In this context, agreement holders' organizational capacity is less stable. The communities are also located in areas with limited labour market and partnership opportunities, meaning that projects are more likely to be based on a single partnership with a major employer. Finally, these communities are less likely to have access to reliable highspeed internet, meaning that online delivery is more difficult.

Reflecting these challenges, the evaluation found that the following setbacks were more likely to have stronger negative impacts on project delivery and participant outcomes in these communities:

- the loss of a staff member or instructor
- dysfunctional partnerships or the loss of a partner, and

- the cancellation or delay of a major commercial project

Approximately half the projects were located in rural and remote areas where entire communities contend with limited human resources capacity and employment opportunities. Within this program delivery context, Indigenous partners noted that the impacts of the program extended beyond individual participants to their families and communities. Projects were reported to create a sense of opportunity and possibility for community members. Where projects helped participants find employment without having to move away, they were reported to contribute to the social, cultural, and economic development of whole communities.

6.1 Observations

The evaluation issues 4 observations that may benefit future SPF evaluations, call for proposals, and ongoing program implementation. These observations take into consideration that an SPF call for proposal was concluded in 2022 and that this limit ESDC's ability to make changes to program design.

Observation 1: For SPF projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals, it will be possible to carry out incremental impact analyses based on a 5-year post-participation period when the required taxation data becomes available in the 2027 to 2028 fiscal year.

Observation 2: Key informant interviews, the case studies, and previous engagement exercises with Indigenous partners identified challenges relating to SPF administrative processes for funding applicants that are not well established or that have limited human resources capacity. In particular, agreement holders noted that the investment of time and effort required to submit a competitive proposal can present a considerable challenge for smaller organizations.

Program officials noted that providing support prior to the release of call for proposals can help to alleviate these challenges. It may also be relevant to explore additional options to simplify or facilitate the proposal submission process.

Observation 3: The post-participation outcome analysis of incidence of employment and employment earnings for different participant subgroups found that status First Nations and women benefited less from the interventions they received than other Indigenous groups and men. In general, participants with weaker pre-participation labour market attachment had stronger outcomes relative to participants who had stronger pre-participation labour market attachment. The outcomes of status First Nations and women did not follow this pattern; both had weaker pre-participation labour market attachment and weaker post-participation outcome relative to other Indigenous groups and men.

With respect to women, from a GBA+ perspective, it may be relevant to consider that few projects were designed specifically to support the labour market integration of women. Moreover, most of the projects were in male dominated fields and sectors, such as resource extraction related trades. Projects that included training in fields where women are well represented and that aligned with identified needs in Indigenous communities, such as nursing, education, and early childhood education attracted more women.

In future SPF calls for proposals, it may be relevant to explore options to solicit projects that are specifically designed to improve the labour market outcomes of women and status First Nations.

Observation 4: Taking the contextual factors into account, average cost per participant was within the range expected for these types of programs. Evaluation found significant variation in the average cost per participants across projects. This variation reflects, in part, the higher costs associated with delivering programs in northern, rural, and remote areas, and with serving individuals facing persistent barriers to employment who may require multiple interventions. Nevertheless, ESDC may wish to closely examine projects with relatively high average cost per participants with a view to ensure that projects approved support the greatest number of Indigenous workers or jobseekers and represent the most effective avenue to provide employment support and services.

6.2 Recommendations

Northern and remote agreement holders and projects

The data assessment and document review identified contextual challenges and vulnerabilities relating to the organizational capacity of agreement holders located in northern and remote regions and to the limited partnership opportunities present in northern and remote areas.

Recommendation 1: ESDC is encouraged to explore options and take actions to offer further support to SPF agreement holders in rural and remote areas through each stage of the projects.

Data collection and performance measurement

The program is following the best practice of collecting individual-level data. The data collected and reported for projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals was of good quality and integrity overall. The document review and the literature review, which included reports summarising Indigenous partner engagement findings, found that the data collection and reporting requirements continue to be challenging for some agreement holders.

Moreover, some projects reported on the cash and in-kind contributions they received from their project partners throughout the project. Some also reported on their experience of working with their partners, including the challenges and benefits. This information, particularly when collected across all projects, can be valuable for program and project design and delivery, program management, program evaluation, and performance measurement.

Recommendation 2: ESDC is encouraged to explore options and take actions to:

- continue to prioritize data integrity, including validating data uploads, and providing support to projects experiencing data collection and reporting challenges; and
- collect consistent partner contribution data across all projects.

Appendix A: Types of interventions funded through the SPF

The SPF supports projects offering a wide range of programs and services, including:

1. **Career Research and Exploration** Supports participants to access information on career opportunities, employment prospects, qualifications, requirements, and benefits for different jobs to help participants make informed career decisions.
2. **Diagnostic Assessment** Helps orient participants career choices through a variety of assessments, such as: language, literacy, workplace essential skills testing, Myers Briggs personality testing, and learning disability assessments.
3. **Employment Counselling** Assists participants to make suitable career choices with the advice and guidance of designated employment counsellor, within the context of an Action Plan.
4. **Skills Development – Essential Skills** Helps participants to enhance their essential skills⁵³ to the level required for specific occupations through targeted instructional programs.
5. **Skills Development – Academic Upgrading** Enables participants obtain high school credits or academic qualifications required to pursue further post-secondary instruction or training through targeted instructional programs.
6. **Work Experience – Job Creation Partnerships** Provides participants with opportunities to gain work experience working on public or non-profit sector-led projects that should benefit the community as well as the participants.
7. **Work Experience – Wage Subsidy** Helps participants obtain time-limited work experience or on-the-job training by providing employers with a wage subsidy.
8. **Work Experience – Student Employment** Helps students to acquire work experience during school breaks or while still in school by providing employers with a wage subsidy.
9. **Occupational Skills Training – Certificate, Diploma, Degree** Supports participants to achieve their career goals through programs of study leading to a certificate, diploma or degree from a provincially recognized public or private university, college, institute or school.

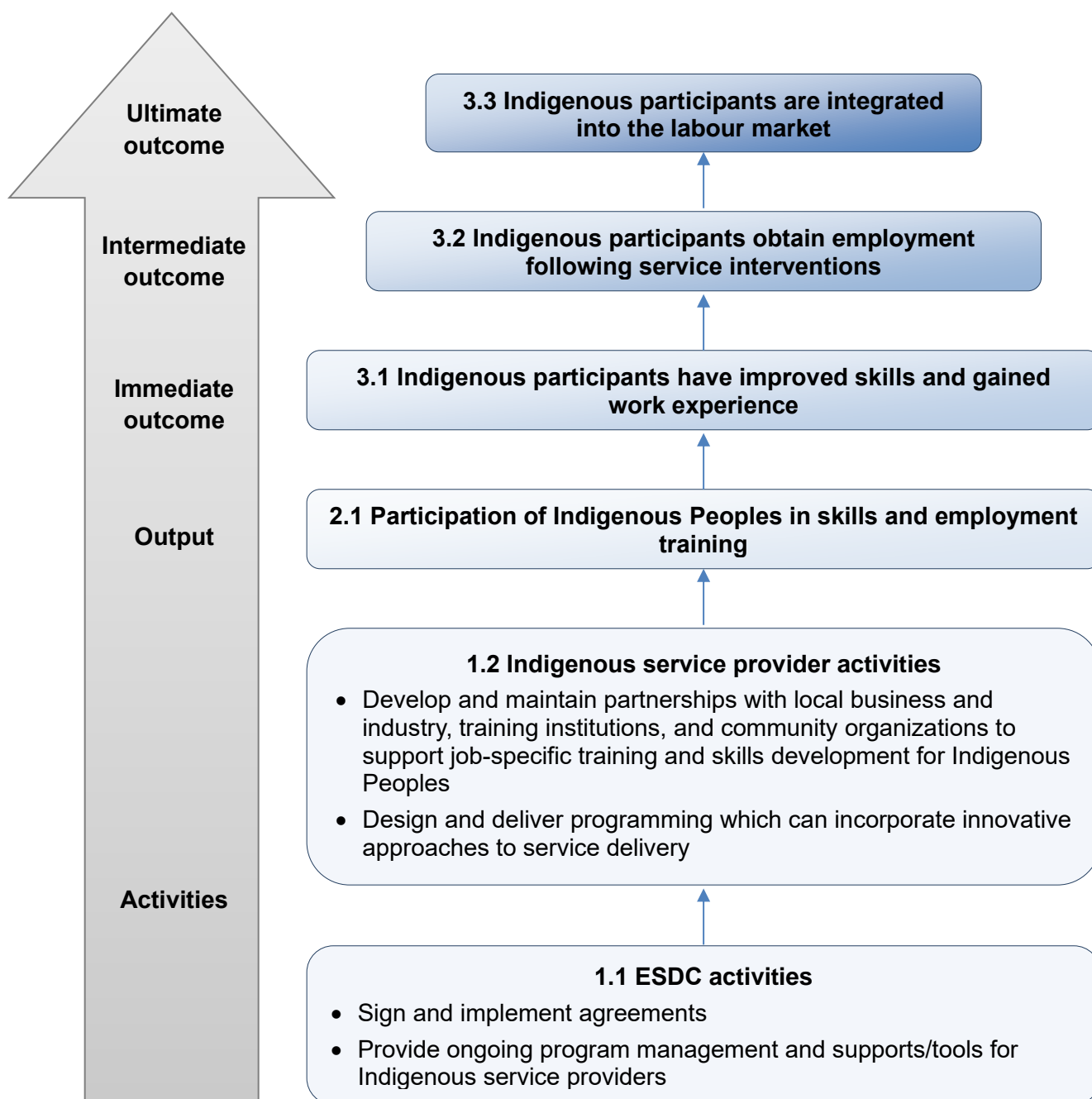
⁵³ ESDC identifies 9 essential skills: reading text, document use, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, continuous learning, thinking skills, and computer use.

10. Occupational Skills Training – Apprenticeship	Supports participants to achieve their career goals through pre-apprenticeship training or apprenticeship technical training in a designated trade. ⁵⁴
11. Occupational Skills Training – Industry Recognized	Supports participants to achieve their career goals through formal skills instruction that may provide certificates of completion, tickets and/or licenses, such as driver's training, First Aid/CPR training, and safety training.
12. Self-employment	Provides direct financial assistance, business training or professional support to enable participants to start a business or continue a self-employment career.
13. Job Search Preparation Strategies	Provides the support of an employment counsellor or job finding club as participants complete job search related activities, such as resume and cover letter writing, labour market research, and practicing interview skills.
14. Job Starts Supports	Enables participants to seek, obtain, and start employment through the provisions of basics such as the purchase of work equipment, work clothing, or bus tickets.
15. Employer Referral	Refers participants to an employer to seek information on the company, the occupation of interest and/or an employment opportunity within the company.
16. Employment Retention Supports	Provides temporary assistance to enable employed participant to retain their job.
17. Referral to Agencies	Refers participants to agencies that can help them overcome employment barriers; referrals are provided as part of action plans.
18. Pre-Career Development	Helps participants to increase their employability through developmental activities such as language, essential skills or cultural awareness training.

⁵⁴ This intervention does not cover the practical training of an indentured apprentice that occurs on the job or a pre-employment training intervention that is not recognized as credit towards a designated trade.

Appendix B: SPF logic model, key outcomes and performance indicators

Figure B 1. SPF logic model



SPF Key performance indicators

A key performance indicator has been developed for each of the outputs and outcome:

- **Output indicator:** Number of participants served, overall
- **Immediate outcome indicator:** Number and percentage of clients who complete action plans
- **Intermediate outcome indicator:** Number and percentage of clients who obtain employment following service interventions, overall
- **Ultimate outcome indicator:** Incidence of employment 3 to 5 years post program participation, overall

Appendix C: Characteristics of case study projects

Case study project description

Five (5) case studies were conducted as part of the SPF evaluation.

1. Case study 1

Stream: Training-to-Employment

Location: Western provinces (urban, near urban)

Population(s) served: First Nations, Inuit, Métis

Types of partners: Indigenous educational institute(s), non-profit organization(s), sector council(s) and trade association(s), provincial government, private sector

Training sector(s): trades, apprentices, construction

Intervention type(s): employment assistance services, essential skills training, work experience, occupational skills training (including apprentices)

2. Case study 2

Stream: Training-to-Employment

Location: Western provinces (urban, near urban)

Population(s) served: First Nations

Types of partners: non-profit organization(s), sector council(s) and trade association(s), private sector (mining)

Training sector(s): trades, apprentices, construction, electrical, forestry, mining, welding

Intervention type(s): essential skills training, occupational skills training (including apprentices)

3. Case study 3

Stream: Training-to-Employment

Location: Central provinces (northern, remote, Inuit self-government communities)

Population(s) served: Inuit

Types of partners: non-profit organization(s), Indigenous government(s), provincial government, private sector (mining)

Training sector(s): trades, apprentices, carpentry, construction, mining

Intervention type(s): employability training, employment assistance services, essential skills training, work experience, occupational skills training (including apprentices)

4. Case study 4

Stream: Training-to-Employment

Location: Atlantic provinces (northern, remote, including on and off reserve and Inuit self-government communities)

Population(s) served: First Nations, Inuit, Métis

Types of partners: post-secondary institution(s), provincial government, private sector (mining)

Training sector(s): trades, apprentices, mining

Intervention type(s): essential skills training, employment assistance services, work experience, wage subsidies, occupational skills training (including apprentices)

5. Case study 5

Stream: Innovation

Location: Atlantic provinces (urban, near urban)

Population(s) served: First Nations

Types of partners: post-secondary education institution, Indigenous government(s), non-profit organization(s), provincial government, municipal government(s), private sector

Training sector(s): arts and culture, green energy, information and communications technology

Intervention type(s): employability training, employment assistance services, essential skills training, work experience, occupational skills training (including apprentices)

Case study representativeness

The 5 case studies are not representative of the 52 SPF projects funded through the 2016 call for proposals.

Project stream: 80% of the 5 case study projects were in the Training-to-employment stream, compared to 40% for all projects

Post-participation employment outcomes: 71% of the case study projects were employed post-participation compared to 46% across all projects

Project design and delivery: compared to the 52 SPF projects, the 5 case study projects:

- targeted participants who were more work ready
- offered more skilled trades training and less pre-employment development
 - 100% of case study projects included apprentices training compared to 15% overall
 - 40% of case study projects included employability training compared to 62% overall
- obtained a greater portion of their project resources from partners (73% for the 5 case study projects compared to 46% overall)
- partnered with private sector partners more (100% of the case study projects compared to 62% overall)
- had a lower cost per participant (\$11,875 for the 5 case study projects compared to \$17,574 overall)
- targeted Inuit and Metis participants more, and First Nations participants less
 - 5 case studies: 60% First Nations, 40% Inuit, 40% Métis
 - 52 SPF projects: 81% First Nations, 21% Inuit, 15% Métis
- targeted participants who live on reserve less
 - 40 % of case study projects targeted mostly individuals who lived on reserve on in self-governed Indigenous communities, compared to 63% across all projects