

# Evaluation of the Education Facilities Program

## Evaluation Coverage:

- This evaluation examined program activities delivered through the CFMP authority over a five-year period from April 2016 to March 2021.
- The total materiality over the scope of the evaluation is approximately \$1.88 billion.
- The focus was on the needs of First Nations in relation to education infrastructure on-reserve, the extent to which the program had achieved its intended outcomes, as well as the performance of program design, delivery and governance.

## Evaluation Issues:

- Relevance, effectiveness and efficiency; and crosscutting issues including service transfer, COVID-19 impacts, Gender-Based Analysis Plus, climate change impacts.

## Evaluation Methodology

- A survey targeting 1,098 respondents across 588 First Nations with 50 questionnaires completed on the EF program;
- 54 Interviews with 60 individuals representing First Nations community members, partners and technical organizations, as well as ISC staff both at the national and regional levels;
- One focus group was conducted with members of a First Nation community in Alberta;
- A case study was conducted on the School Bundling initiatives.

## Relevance

- While there is a continued need of the EF program in providing essential services to communities on reserve and they continue to align with federal and departmental mandates and priorities, its relevance is limited as they did not fully meet the needs of First Nations.
- The magnitude of existing and future demands of education facilities far exceeds the funding available. A few intensifying or emerging factors, including population growth on-reserve, impacts of climate change and COVID-19 and the growing needs of diverse segments of the communities have placed additional pressure on already limited resources.

## Effectiveness

- The EF program has contributed to the achievement of program outcomes and resulted in increased on-reserve enrolment and academic success, positive impacts on the wellbeing of community members, especially children; however, the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program (CFMP)'s overarching objectives of maximizing the life cycle of assets, mitigating health and safety risks and ensuring assets meet applicable codes and standards were not fully achieved.
- Teacherages are identified as a gap to be addressed as funding to build, repair and maintain teacherages is not always included in new builds and O&M budgets.
- The pilot Circuit Rider Training Initiative of the EF program was seen as beneficial for operation and maintaining education facilities.
- Data availability and reliability remain as issues in project tracking, reporting and capturing asset conditions.

## Efficiency

- The asset-focused and project-based approach in program delivery without systemic integration across asset areas has resulted in more administrative burdens on First Nations and lost opportunities to better support communities in addressing their needs and priorities from a whole-of-community lens.
- Despite not generating the cost-efficiencies as anticipated, the bundling approach allowed for greater engagement and decision-making of First Nations communities in the design and build of their schools, which resulted in the integration of more community-focused and culturally relevant elements into the school projects.

## Service Transfer

- While First Nations communities are at different stages in service transfer, the vast majority are not positioned to assume control of their community infrastructure program indicating the importance of meeting the right conditions before taking control, such as addressing existing infrastructure gaps, capacity building, sustainable funding, and strategic planning.

## COVID-19 Impacts

- While the funding to mitigate impacts of COVID-19 was viewed as timely and effective, the pandemic has not only posed additional challenges in implementing education facilities projects and highlighted the lack of community infrastructure, but also exacerbated other existing challenges in relation to construction costs and skilled labour within the community.

## Climate Change

- Climate change is increasingly and negatively impacting education facilities on-reserve, particularly for remote communities; however, there is currently no proactive and consistent approach in planning and design taking into consideration infrastructure resiliency to address and mitigate these impacts on communities.

## Gender-Based Analysis Plus

- First Nation communities have increasing needs for education facilities to better accommodate First Nations children with special needs and mental health issues, which requires special equipment, quiet rooms and space for specialists.



# Management Response and Action Plan (MRAP)

**Recommendation #1:** Better support community-led infrastructure planning and prioritization to meet First Nations' needs.

**#1.1 Review and adapt community infrastructure planning processes to better support First Nations in having reliable, sustainable, and community-led infrastructure**

**Action 1):** Advance the initiative to review and modernize ISC's infrastructure policy and funding delivery models that support long-term, whole-of community infrastructure planning in collaboration with First Nations partners. (Q3 2023-24)

**Action 2):** Update and modernize Operations and Maintenance (O&M) national funding formulas including annual updates to the cost indices to keep pace with inflation. (Ongoing)

**#1.2 Explore opportunities to better align program design and implementation with the evolving priorities identified in this evaluation by First Nations to address the unique needs in their communities, which could include health outcomes, climate change, and accessibility.**

**Action 1):** Develop a plan for further collaboration between Regional Operations branches and regions, including First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, to better support health outcomes in First Nation communities. (Q2 2024-25)

**Action 2):** Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation considerations and resiliency tools, aligned with ISC's Climate Change Strategy, into project selection decisions and implementation. (Q4 2023-25)

**Action 3):** Develop a plan that best supports First Nation identified accessibility needs on reserve (TBD)

**Recommendation #2:** Prioritize or allocate dedicated funding or efforts to areas identified as top needs or gaps by the communities.

**#2.1 Conduct an analysis to identify the barriers for communities that are smaller, more remote and with lesser resources in accessing funds**

**Action 1):** Conduct a review and analysis of existing studies and reports that identify gaps in addressing First Nations' needs, including smaller, more remote communities. (Q2 2024-25)

**#2.2 For communities that rely on teacherages, provide dedicated funding for teacherages, for existing schools where teacherages are not sufficient or when building new schools and major renovations.**

**Action 1):** Review ISC's Teacherages Policy to modernize and provide flexibility to meet First Nations requirements for teacherages. (TBD)

**#2.3 Further assist and support communities with their capacity development activities to support the operation and maintenance of education facilities and service transfer.**

**Action 1):** Develop a Circuit Rider Training Program (CRTP) for Education Facilities modelled on the successful program for Water and Wastewater infrastructure to advance the delivery of operation and maintenance activities to extend the capital lifespan of First Nation infrastructure. (TBD)

**Recommendation #3:** Improve data quality in departmental systems, including to establish clear definitions of the fields and categories used in the Integrated Capital Management System (ICMS) Project Tracking module to help ensure data entry is consistent to improve data quality.

**Action 1):** Extend the ACRS inspection program to provide data that forecasts future capital investment needs for existing infrastructure and ensures a comprehensive inspection of major components of each asset. (Q4 2025-26)

**Action 2):** Update ICMS to allow for import and export of the capital investment forecasts from the extended ACRS inspection program and create reports to be generated from ICMS. (Q3 2024-25)

**Action 3):** Conduct an analysis of the data collected in ICMS – Project Tracking module to determine its reliability and assess information gaps to implement improvements related to data quality and lead a regional standardization business process exercise (tools and practices) in the ICMS – Project Tracking module to ensure a common understanding and usage of the data to improve reliability and the planification and tracking of infrastructure investments. (Q2 2026-27)

**Recommendation #4:** Implement strategies to mitigate impacts of staff turnover to better support collaboration with First Nations.

**Action 1):** Review existing human resources, succession and onboarding plans, processes and guides, and develop strategies to ensure new staff have been sufficiently trained to carry out their duties in working with First Nations. (Q3 2024-25)

**Action 2):** Review communities of practice and other knowledge sharing tools/forums to develop a toolkit to improve collaboration, information sharing and knowledge transfer during staff turnover. (Q3 2024-25)

