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As part of the development of a new support program for Aboriginal community development in Quebec.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFNQL	Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador
AIF	Aboriginal Initiatives Fund
FNQLEDC	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Economic Development Commission
FNQLHSSC	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
RHS	Regional Health Survey
SAA	Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones

INTRODUCTION

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) was invited by the Quebec Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones (SAA) to submit a brief in support of the SAA's development of a new public support program dedicated to the economic, social and community development of Aboriginal people living in Quebec.

The FNQLHSSC is a non-profit organization created in 1994 (Resolution 3/1994) by the Chiefs of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador (AFNQL). The FNQLHSSC works in the areas of health, social services, early childhood, information resources, research and social development.¹ Its mission is to promote the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of First Nations and Inuit people, families and communities while improving access to comprehensive and culturally-sensitive health and social services programs designed by First Nations organizations that are recognized and sanctioned by local authorities, all the while respecting their respective cultures and local autonomy. The FNQLHSSC also assists communities that so desire to set up, develop and promote global health and social services and programs that are adapted and conceived by First Nations organizations.

Under the framework suggested by the SAA, this brief covers the following three themes:

- Theme 1: Solutions aiming to improve the Aboriginal Initiatives Fund II (AIF II)
- Theme 2: Solutions relating to the needs of Aboriginal communities in the areas of economic, social and community development
- Theme 3: New ideas in the area of public support for Aboriginal development

Each theme first sets out the main elements of the FNQLHSSC's analysis and observations, and concludes with recommendations.

It should be noted that the findings, analyses and recommendations contained in this brief reflect the perceptions and the overall vision of the FNQLHSSC in its areas of intervention. This brief must therefore be addressed as a complement to the content of other briefs submitted by Inuit and First Nations communities and organizations and that reflect their particular reality.

¹ Refer to the Annual Report 2015-2016 at http://www.cssspnql.com/docs/default-source/centre-de-documentation/rapp_ann_cssspnql_2016_07_eng_web.pdf?sfvrsn=2.



SUMMARY

To ensure equitable access to the financial resources of a public support program for Aboriginal people, it is important to make the process of accessing this funding flexible and inclusive, so that all eligible participants have a comparable chance of receiving funding. To correct any possible unfairness, the SAA should build into its program a flexible accompaniment service able to respond to the particularities of each community. A transfer of expertise to relevant First Nations organizations would be desirable to enable them to better serve their clients.

Improving the living conditions of First Nations is a major challenge for the whole society. The social and economic needs of these communities persist and are growing. The program should be more oriented towards projects or initiatives likely to achieve social and community purposes in all the categories it covers.

In general, we observe that in a number of economic development projects undertaken by communities under SAA programs, work is not always done in concertation or in a multisectoral manner. Data supports the importance of the collaboration of actors working in areas with social purposes and the economic development officers in the communities. It is therefore recommended that the experience of other programs be drawn on to promote a multisectoral approach in the new program. It is also advisable that economic, social and cultural development be covered by the program, in a manner that promotes various actors in addition to those who work under the authority of band councils.

Since young people represent a large and increasing percentage of the population of First Nations in Quebec, the “Youth entrepreneurship” category of the economic development component should be maintained in the new program. For reasons set out further in the brief, the maximum age should be increased to 40 years old to take into account the late entry into entrepreneurship of First Nations youth.

Moreover, more must be done to ensure that First Nations communities and organizations are aware of the funding opportunities offered by the program and to clearly make known that these opportunities are not solely limited to projects mentioned in the interim document. This is important information that needs to be better known by First Nations.

A number of areas and services that would ensure a favorable environment for the full development of members of the population are non-existent in the communities. The new program should be sensitive to projects encouraging initiatives for the development and strengthening of First Nations youth. In order to do so, the program would have to allow for funding broader initiatives. The funding of structures and organizations guided by objectives promoting the active participation of the next generation of First Nations to society is an element that would characterize the originality and flexibility of the new program.



1. THEME 1: SOLUTIONS AIMING TO IMPROVE THE ABORIGINAL INITIATIVES FUND II (AIF II)

1.1 A fairer process and simpler eligibility criteria

On August 16, 2016, the FNQLHSSC participated in the consultation launched by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Economic Development Commission (FNQLEDC) regarding the SAA call for briefs. As a result of the contributions of actors from several First Nations communities, we noted that the criteria required by the AIF II in several aspects and categories of the program are contested. For example, the principle of “first come, first served” under the program is not adapted to the reality of First Nations. Quebec First Nations communities face substantially the same socioeconomic issues, in varying degrees depending on their level of development. They do not all have comparable resources or benefit from the same degree of organization.

To ensure equitable access to the financial resources of the program, it is important to make the process of accessing this funding more flexible and inclusive, so that all eligible participants have a comparable chance of receiving funding. To correct any possible unfairness, the SAA should build into its program a flexible accompaniment service able to respond to the different organizational and geographical realities of the communities. The transfer of expertise to relevant First Nations organizations should also be ensured to enable them to act in a complementary way, through a culturally-adapted form tailored to the desires of the communities, to the accompaniment provided by the SAA.


The general eligibility criteria set out in the General application framework of the AIF should be clarified and simplified. Our view is that certain ambiguities persist because of the apparent contradiction between the following two paragraphs (see page 3, paragraph 2) [emphasis added]:

- “Projects submitted under the framework of the AIF II must be funded on a priority basis by the existing programs of the federal government as well as those of Gouvernement du Québec departments and agencies.
- The AIF II may be used only to fund those projects that no other program can fund and, as the case may be, those projects requiring additional financial assistance not available under existing programs.”

Such wording makes it difficult to determine whether a project eligible under the first paragraph is not disqualified under the second, unless an exception is made. This can lead to the impression among potential applicants that they are ineligible from the outset and that any possible steps they could take would be futile.

We recommend removing these paragraphs and strengthening other parts of the text to express the objective of complementarity of the AIF in relation to other programs. A project could become eligible for AIF funding if no other program covers that type of funding or if the funding made available through one or more other programs is insufficient to complete the entrepreneur’s initial investment and undertake the project.

Furthermore, we would like to see the SAA present examples of projects with a more detailed description of the nature of eligible activities and their potential impact on the community. The



examples presented would come both from activities that are in high demand as well as those that seem not to qualify for the program, even if the needs are well known.

1.2 Specific agreements with communities (economic development and specific infrastructures categories)

1.2.1 Agreements more oriented towards their social purpose


The guideline for the major categories in the AIF II aims to establish favorable conditions for the support and emergence of economic development based on the objectives of improving the socioeconomic status of First Nations communities in Quebec. However, the FNQLHSSC cannot affirm that the AIF II adequately addresses the development capacities, desires and concerns of First Nations communities, organizations, institutions and enterprises in an adapted manner. According to available data (February 2016), under 50% of the funds allocated to AIF II have been spent on projects since 2012. It is regrettable to realize that nearly \$77 million remain unused, with just over a year left in the life of the program. Yet in the category of community action, the anticipated budget has been nearly exhausted, with a remaining available balance of 15%. It is widely accepted that improving the living conditions of First Nations is a major challenge for the whole society. The social and economic needs of these communities persist and are growing. The AIF should be more oriented towards projects and initiatives likely to achieve social and community purposes in all the categories it covers.

1.2.2. Agreements encouraging multisectoral collaboration

We observe that most economic development projects undertaken by communities under the program are not carried out in concertation, or in a multisectoral manner. If we compare the AIF to another program, the Fonds québécois d'initiatives sociales – volet Premières Nations (FQIS-PN) which is administered by the FNQLHSSC, and in light of the first results from the activity report, we can affirm that the success of the projects undertaken is attributable to the collaboration of a number of actors from various sectors of activity in the communities. The data collected on the impact of FQIS – volet Premières Nations emphasizes the importance of the collaboration of actors working in the fields of health, social services, social development (income security), education, early childhood, culture, etc., and economic development officers in communities. It is therefore recommended that the experience gained through the FQIS program be drawn on to promote a multisectoral approach that should be encouraged by the SAA in the accompaniment it provides.

1.2.3 Expand the funding for social economy enterprises in the communities

In fall 2013, the FNQLHSSC was mandated by the Chiefs of the AFNQL to develop and promote the social economy, and has since that time been actively working to develop and promote the social economy among First Nations. In addition to contributing to the creation of jobs, fostering social and professional integration and providing access to services, the social economy contributes to meeting First Nations economic and social needs. The development of social economy enterprises in Quebec is growing and the emergence of numerous projects and enterprises within First Nations is no exception.



As regards the economic development component, and particularly the “Social economy” category, support for the development of the social economy among First Nations is an element of the AIF II that should take a more prominent place. Organizations dedicated to the development and promotion of the social economy² are in agreement that the active participation of social economy enterprises to meet the economic and social needs of the community is effective and plays a growing role. Despite this movement for the development of the social economy, various regional First Nations organizations have noted that the existing funding programs specific to First Nations are not adapted for all First Nations social economy projects. In addition, one of the shortcomings of the AIF II in this category is to have restricted access to this component to social economy enterprises located outside the communities. The FNQLHSSC counted roughly fifteen Aboriginal enterprises in urban areas conforming to the legal definition of a social enterprise compared to over fifty present in communities. On this point, the opportunity gap in favor of social economy entrepreneurs outside communities compared to those in the communities is unfair. This inequity is compounded in cases where several social enterprises located in First Nations communities are in a position to expand their activities over a wide area, yet do not have access to the same benefits as those located outside the communities. It is therefore necessary to restore equity between First Nations enterprises located within communities and those located outside communities, considering that the commercial potential of enterprises is not necessarily constrained by the territorial limits of communities.

1.2.4 Expand the scope of social economy enterprises


The founding principles of social economy enterprises include, but are not limited to, the empowerment, participation and accountability of individuals and communities in their local and regional development. Therefore, a social economy enterprise should enjoy managerial autonomy from the government and local authorities. It is thereby appropriate to establish a means for band councils to exercise legitimate control over the activities in their territory, while promoting the creation and management of independent enterprises. For example, for a project to be eligible for the AIF, it would be appropriate not to require a resolution of the band council, unless such is a requirement of the council. A permit or simple letter of authorization of the activities of an enterprise by an administrative body under the authority of the band council should be sufficient for project eligibility. The intervention of social economy enterprises to respond to local needs in ways that are complementary to the services offered by the band council is a preferred solution in various areas. On the basis of the expressed will of the AFNQL, we would like to see the model of the social economy further expanded to First Nations communities.

Based on the principle of respect and fairness, it is important to reduce access barriers to funding for the development of socioeconomic projects, particularly those initiated in a social economy model.

1.2.5 Encourage the involvement of youth

The “Youth entrepreneurship” category of the AIF II economic development component is an element not to be overlooked, since young people represent a large and increasing percentage of the First Nations population in Quebec. This category should be maintained in the new support program. The elevated school dropout rate in the communities, insufficient funds allocated to active measures for

² Chantier de l'économie sociale, TIESS



beneficiaries aged 18 to 24 of the Income Assistance Program, and the pressures of the high demand for the provision of training to adults and professionals confirm the need for action in support of the development of First Nations youth. Stimulating youth entrepreneurship is fundamental to increasing the capacity of this segment of the population and encouraging it to become more involved in the social and economic vitality of First Nations. Further, it is important that all our projects and actions be oriented towards responding to the needs of future generations in order to enable and increase their participation in the development and sustainability of current and future socioeconomic projects. To give form to this will, it is important to improve the accompaniment provided to youth in entrepreneurship by expanding, among other things, the activities of local employment centers and youth employment centers directed to First Nations clients (inside and outside communities). We also propose to increase the maximum age for the “Youth entrepreneurship” category from 35 to 40 years of age. These measures would not only be beneficial; such a commitment would concretely testify to the trust that the SAA places in the youth of First Nations to develop their communities.

1.2.6 Increase the scope of funding for leasehold infrastructure projects

The Regional Health Survey (RHS)³ reveals that the number of service requests is increasing, given the current health status of First Nations in Quebec. Many health problems require First Nations individuals to receive specialized health services of an indefinite duration outside their community (cancer cases, dialysis, etc.). These clients must therefore move near the service points, in urban areas such as Québec, Sept-Îles, Rimouski, Joliette, etc., where the rental market is very expensive, and access to social housing is often difficult.

The length of stay is indefinite because the client's health may improve after a first course of treatment or require another round of treatments in the near future. Throughout this period, people are unable to reside in their community as they must receive constant medical attention for several months or even for more than a year.


The persons concerned by this situation have poor health, usually have limited financial resources and generally have as their sole option social or subsidized housing. This is why it is imperative that housing resources are in place so that First Nations have access to low-cost housing close to services. These living environments would facilitate the establishment of alternative services that would certainly be beneficial for this population that is uprooted from their habitual environment (family, food services, childcare, psychosocial support, etc.).

It would also be appropriate to reserve space in the living environments so that rooms could be allocated to guests who need short-term accommodation in the major urban centers for medical reasons. For these reasons, the scope of the funding program should be expanded to support leasehold infrastructure projects of this type, both inside and outside the communities.

1.2.7 Promote the use of financial support for consultations

It is our observation that there is an emerging tendency in the Government of Quebec towards greater consultation with First Nations about transformative projects regarding legislation, policies and government action plans in areas as diverse as health, social services, social development, etc.

³ RHS 2008 [<http://www.cssspnql.com/en/areas-of-intervention/research-sector/population-surveys>]



Along these lines, it is necessary to increase the awareness of First Nations communities and organizations concerning funding opportunities offered by the AIF, and to clearly state that they are not only limited to projects mentioned in the interim document. The financial support provided by the AIF is not limited to consultations on projects related to land and resource management, but is also accessible to Aboriginal communities, associations and other organizations that are consulted in other areas of activity. This should be better known and communicated by the SAA.

In light of our analysis and the foregoing considerations, **we offer the following recommendations** in relation to theme 1:

1. It is recommended that the AIF framework be changed to put emphasis on a concerted and multisectoral approach in the accompaniment provided, and in the analysis and preparation of community economic development projects among First Nations.
2. It is recommended that the category “Youth entrepreneurship” be maintained. We also suggest that the criterion regarding the maximum age be changed from 35 to 40 years of age.
3. It is recommended that support for youth entrepreneurship be more structured and that it be reflected in the service offer of the various organizations working on the development of First Nations youth.
4. It is recommended that economic, social and cultural development be also covered by the AIF in order to promote various actors in addition to those who work under the authority of band councils. In doing so, it is recommended that the requirement of obtaining a resolution adopted by the band council to be submitted as part of the application process for funding for social economy enterprises in First Nations communities be eliminated, and that communities be allowed to determine the requirements.
5. It is recommended that the amount allocated to the “Social economy” category be increased from \$2 million to \$8 million. The proposed amount is a better reflection of the true development potential of the social economy enterprises among First Nations that could qualify for this type of program, without territorial distinction.
6. It is recommended that all processes of consultation and agreement initiated by a Quebec government agency provide sufficient time to enable a First Nations community or organization to obtain the financial support to which it is entitled and to adequately prepare its request for funding.



2. THEME 2: SOLUTIONS RELATING TO THE NEEDS OF ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN THE AREAS OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Workforce training and professional integration

To ensure harmonious development in First Nations communities, we must ensure that all the conditions for success and all the prerequisites for economic and social projects are brought together and put to work efficiently to maximize the success of socioeconomic and community initiatives. For economic projects, a prerequisite for the success of an enterprise is the quality and consistency of its workforce. Without this, very few enterprises can continue to offer quality products and services to their clients over the long haul. Depending on the sector of activity, we recognize the undeniable contribution of worker productivity in the financial success of enterprises. In First Nations communities, the increased risk caused by the lack of training to develop the professional skills of the population is a factor that directly affects the willingness of entrepreneurs to get involved, to invest and develop socioeconomic projects.

The development of First Nations is faced with two particular challenges: one related to the need to create jobs in First Nations communities and one related to the need of organizations to leverage trained and skilled workers. This last issue should be an integrated part of the discussions on improving funding programs in general and more particularly the AIF. We acknowledge the AIF II funding offer for workforce training that is already included in the program; however, the next AIF should put more emphasis on the proactivity of socioeconomic project promoters by immediately adding workforce training to the development of socioeconomic initiatives. One more reason to pay special attention to the multisectoral approach and concertation during the preparation and implementation of projects.

A number of areas and services that would ensure a favorable environment for the full development of the population are non-existent in the communities. It is important that the new program be sensitive to projects that currently receive little financial, technical or human support, whether for planning, start-up, operations, or infrastructure and maintenance. Various organizations come to mind that produce goods and create jobs, contributing as a consequence to the acquisition of knowledge and generating structural impacts in the medium and long term for individuals, families and communities. For these reasons, the AIF should participate in the development of new or innovative initiatives, such as a home care and long-term care center, a group home, a family center, a social pediatrics center, a continuing education center, a social integration center, a professional integration center, a leadership center, a childcare center, community gardens, a cultural center, etc.

In light of our analysis and the foregoing considerations, **we offer the following recommendations** in relation to theme 2:



1. It is recommended that support for initiatives for workforce training and capacity building be continued, especially in the areas of planning, management and administration.
2. It is recommended that the emergence of social initiatives that are innovative or currently absent from the communities be prioritized.



3. THEME 3: NEW IDEAS IN THE AREA OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Projects to support youth capacity development initiatives

We know that the First Nations population is predominantly young.⁴ As previously mentioned, the youthful character of the First Nations population in Quebec is a fact that must play an undeniable role in the socioeconomic and community development strategies for First Nations communities.

The AIF may also find its *raison d'être* by encouraging initiatives for the development and strengthening of First Nations youth. To do so would require that the program allow for the funding of broader initiatives. The funding of structures and organizations guided by objectives promoting the active participation of the next generation of First Nations to society is an element that would characterize the originality and flexibility of the new program. Project funding for overall youth promotion, capacity building and the personal and professional development of Aboriginal youth is a no-risk investment. There is already an interesting offer to enrich Quebec youth, particularly through arts and science, as well as through sports and entrepreneurial development. First Nations youth could also benefit from the Quebec model, by adapting it to their culture and identity. Investing in the potential of youth is, in our opinion, the solution for improving living conditions for First Nations.

To mobilize and stimulate the dynamism of Aboriginal youth, we could ensure, for example, the creation of leadership and entrepreneurship development incubators.

Similar facilities could be created for other young people who are guided by different interests, who should not be neglected. An example would be Aboriginal sports development centers that have the objective of encouraging more young people to participate in sports. On the one hand, we could target the development of a sports elite capable of serving as role models and, on the other hand, develop in many Aboriginal youth an enjoyment of physical activity and interest in related professions, such as facilitators, educators, trainers and nutritionists.

Finally, the creation of centers for the introduction to science and technology would attract the interest of another segment of Aboriginal youth and develop among young people a strong interest in science and technology, in a context oriented towards sustainable development.

In light of our analysis and the foregoing considerations, **we offer the following recommendation** in relation to theme 3:

1. It is recommended that initiatives that aim to stimulate the dynamism of youth be supported.

⁴ RHS 2008: "The median age of the population of Quebec First Nations is 28 years. When compared with the median age of the entire Quebec population, which was 41 in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2010), we understand that the population of Quebec First Nations is younger than that of Quebec."



CONCLUSION

The FNQLHSSC wishes to acknowledge the possibility offered to contribute to the SAA's process of designing a public support program for Aboriginal people in Quebec.

The ultimate aim of the FNQLHSSC is to improve the living conditions of First Nations in Quebec. This objective involves participation in community development and its determinants. It is therefore essential to create an environment that allows an opening up of programs to ensure an integrated approach that addresses the needs of the communities and respects their specific realities.

In the first part of this brief, the FNQLHSSC presented some pragmatic solutions for eligibility to the program and underlined the emergence of the social economy as an important source of social and economic development among First Nations. The design of a public support program should be an opportunity to enhance the efforts undertaken by First Nations, especially as regards projects with a social purpose, because of their significant impact on community development. The program should promote a multisectoral approach, which is more likely to mobilize actors from other concerned areas and lead to increased dynamism and structural effects.

In the second part, the FNQLHSSC emphasized the importance of supporting the skills development of the population. To implement sustainable projects and increase structural effects, we must ensure that qualified persons possess the required skills to perform their work and make the best decisions.

The last part focuses on the demographic reality. First Nations are a very young population. Initiatives must therefore also provide support to young people to foster the development of a population that can acquire knowledge and provide leadership, while promoting a process of community development that will be inspiring for future generations.

Whether we are active in the areas of economic development, education, health, etc., we are all working towards a common goal of improving people's living conditions. This process is an opportunity for the SAA and First Nations to strengthen their relations and to contribute to the improvement and transformation of existing policies and programs, while ensuring they are in better alignment with related policies through integrated and collaborative approaches.

