

Indigenous Fire Marshal Office Project



Technical Engagement Sessions Outcomes Report October 2019



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1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The development of an Indigenous Fire Marshal Office (IFMO) is a project being undertaken by the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada (AFAC) to support the development of community capacity for safer and healthy Indigenous communities.

The IFMO project objectives include the following:

- Secure new funding for the required capacity to develop and operate the IFMO.
- Collaborate with existing Indigenous fire and emergency services.
- Engage with Indigenous communities to help define the IFMO.
- Design programs and services to build and maintain capacity within Indigenous communities.
- Address identified gaps in Indigenous fire service.

AFAC has worked for many years to research and raise awareness of the current fire service challenges faced by our Indigenous communities. Following the release of the AFAC-authored report *Transforming Canada's Indigenous Fire Service* (2017), the Hon. Carolyn Bennett, then Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, announced support for the creation of an IFMO.

Important national support was provisioned by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Resolution DR16 (2017) to support AFAC in the creation and implementation of an Indigenous Fire Marshal Office with the intent of creating safer communities without putting any new financial burdens on the Indigenous communities.

On August 16, 2019, the Hon. Seamus O'Regan, Minister of Indigenous Services, announced Budget 2019 funding of \$9.97 million over three years, starting in 2019–2020, to support the creation of an Indigenous Fire Marshal Office (IFMO).

During the 2018/19 fiscal year, the project focused on engagement sessions to establish if there was widespread community support for the creation of an IFMO. The resounding response was yes, and we began exploring the gaps that an IFMO could fill. It was clear that communities hold the knowledge to inform a successful and sustainable solution. Our summary report of the initial engagement findings is available on our website at www.ifmo.ca.

The project strategy for the 2019/20 fiscal year is to gather expertise from technical groups (i.e., firefighters, infrastructure managers, regional technical services groups) to build on the information gathered and to detail the programs and services that are needed. During October and November 2019, we will hold eight community engagement sessions to inform the organizational design. This report examines the findings of the five technical engagement sessions held in July and August 2019.





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2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Communication strategy for IFMO promotion and awareness building

Participation was open to all Indigenous communities, First Nations Technical Services Groups (funded service-providing organizations), national and regional political groups (such as AFN, UBCIC, FSIN, Chiefs of Ontario, Tribal councils, etc.), and Indigenous organizations such as friendship centres.

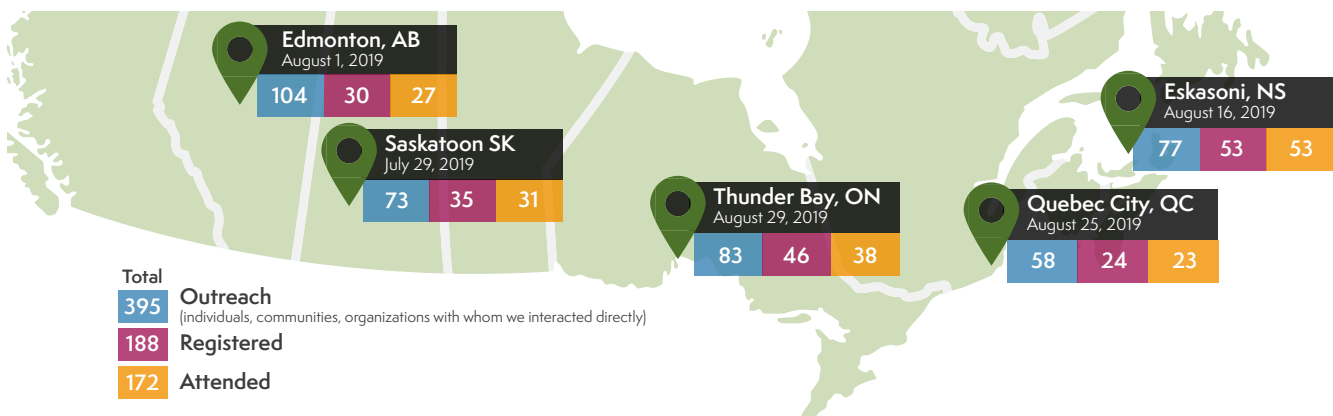
Our multifaceted communications strategy included a social media campaign featuring videos by Project Lead Arnold Lazare and a national brochure mail-out to all communities, regional and national political groups, and technical services groups in April and July. Our website was relaunched in June to focus on the IFMO project and our upcoming engagement activities.

Individual communities and organizations were contacted using a combination of emails and telephone calls supported by digital flyers detailing registration and expectations.

We promoted the engagement series through our participation at the following conferences:

- > Chiefs of Ontario Special Chiefs Assembly, Toronto ON, May 9–11
- > Federation of Sovereign Indian Nations Spring Assembly, Meadow Lake SK, May 22–24
- > First Nations Fiscal Institutions & The Lands Advisory Board - First Nations Innovation and Success: First Nations Leading the Way II, Calgary AB, May 28–30
- > Chiefs of Ontario All Chiefs Conference, Batchewana First Nation ON, June 11–13
- > Northwest Territories Association of Fire Chiefs Conference, Yellowknife NWT, June 8–10
- > Assembly of First Nations Annual General Assembly, Fredericton NB, July 23–25

In June 2019, a formal offer was extended to the regional First Nations Emergency and Technical Services groups from BC to Atlantic Canada to present at each of the eight regional firefighting competitions that serve as the mechanism to select the teams that compete at the National Firefighting Competition. We also held conference calls with national and regional technical services groups and the Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Regional Fire Protection Working Group to seek their input and keep them informed.





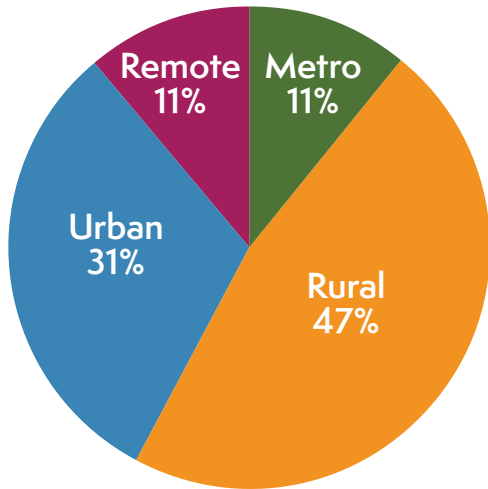
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Where participants came from:



Definitions:

Remote: More than 4 hours travel to access services and/or fly-in, boat, ice road access only.

Rural: 1.5-4 hours travel to access services

Urban: 30 minutes travel to access services

Metro: Direct access to services

2.2 The sessions

Important considerations in the event logistics included providing the participants with a pleasurable experience and minimizing financial inconvenience. Travel expenses were reimbursed by cheque at the end of the session. Healthy meals, including a hot breakfast, lunch, and breaks, were provided. Session locations were chosen to offer comfortable space for the event and easy access for a geographically diverse audience.

Feedback from the 2018/19 sessions was that having ISC and IFMO in the room negatively impacted the sessions as participants did not feel able to speak freely in their presence. Respecting this, we chose to have no IFMO representative in the sessions themselves. To have something of a personal touch, we played a video welcome by the IFMO Project Lead at the start of each session to thank participants for sharing their knowledge and expertise to inform the development of the IFMO. Arnold remained available by telephone during the sessions; however, this resource was not utilized.

Facilitation of the sessions was contracted to Innovation Seven Inc. (I7), a professional services organization that specializes in helping communities, businesses, governments, and agencies assess and develop opportunities for Indigenous knowledge and inclusion. I7 is responsible for coordinating the collection of data as well as ensuring that Indigenous communities and people have sufficient input into the creation of the IFMO.

Participants were asked to come prepared to speak about the experiences, needs, and successes of the communities they represent. The questions were not shared in advance of the session so that the facilitator could present them with the necessary nuances and context. The day-long sessions were a combination of presentation and facilitated discussion, with breakout groups to further explore themes and report back to the whole group. I7 captured and subsequently analyzed the participant responses.





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2.3 What We Heard

The voices of the participants echoed the concepts that we had initially considered for the IFMO.

Defining and Achieving Standards and Codes

"Existing codes could be utilized, with changes to ensure cultural appropriateness"

"Band councils should be responsible for enforcement"

"Codes should respect traditional values and cultural practices"

National Database and Data Collection

"Data analysis informs planning and prioritization of resources"

"Data collection should be with purpose and respect privacy"

Building Capacity and Training

"Training programs should be culturally appropriate and consider learning styles"

"Training should be certified"

"Creating careers and moving away from dependency on volunteer firefighters"

"Renumeration for training participation"

Community Advocacy

"Band council need to understand the importance and support FD activities"

"Help communities access funding and negotiate agreements"

"Raise awareness at local and national levels"

"Collaboration between Indigenous communities"

Fire Prevention Programs & Service Delivery

"The importance of targeting youth through school fire prevention programs"

"Appropriate theme, content, and language"

"Ensure that programs reach all community members including those who are homeless"

"Sustainable programs that can be delivered by community to community"





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3 WHAT IS THE IFMO GOING TO DO?

We have heard from technical experts representing communities across the land and have commenced planning how to implement their recommendations. We recognize the need for immediate action to reduce loss of life. However, developing a sustainable product will take time. We plan to test our programs and services through proof-of-concept trials during the balance of the 2019/20 fiscal year. Additional resources will be onboarded in March 2020 to begin expanding delivery of programs and services with the office being fully established in 2022.

3.1. Organizational and Governance Structure

The Indigenous Fire Marshal Office will be an Indigenous-led organization, working in collaboration with existing organizations and fire departments, to serve Indigenous communities and promote healthy, safe communities through fire protection and capacity building.

The IFMO National Advisory Committee (IFMO NAC) will provide project support and guidance from a governance level and to provide critical feedback at a national level from communities and National Indigenous Organizations. The invitation for membership to the IFMO NAC included the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council, and representation from Treaty and Self-Government communities. The IFMO NAC will be the architects of the governance structure design to ensure the IFMO is run without political interference and is responsive and relevant to the first nations communities it serves. The first meeting of the IFMO NAC is scheduled to take place in Ottawa on Thursday October 10, 2019.

3.2. Defining codes and standards

The IFMO will take an awareness and education approach, not enforcement. We will educate communities on the benefits of building codes and fire safety standards, including that the application of codes and standards helps realize the full lifespan of capital investment. We will debunk the myth that codes and standards need to be retroactive; in fact, they apply only to new construction, and contractors are obligated to build to code.

The IFMO will do the following:

- Collaborate with regional technical organizations and tribal councils to provide support in design and planning from a safety perspective.
- Provide inspection services and training for communities and partners to build this capacity if they so wish.
- Develop a suite of resources that can be utilized to support the implementation of codes and standards. Examples might include template agreements, online courses, or specific project support.





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3.3. National Database and Data Collection

The National Database will be utilized as a tool to capture data so that we can identify trends in Indigenous communities. It will also serve as a knowledge base of fire prevention, training, and standards resources and be leveraged to support research into fire safety, new standards, training, and equipment.

The database will provide communities with a technology platform to manage and deliver their fire services. Local chief and council will, for the first time, be able to conduct a comparative analysis of Indigenous communities. The data will help identify the success stories so that we can replicate the activities that are driving those successes.

The IFMO will support communities in using the database through the provision of training and IT support and offer both data entry and reporting services. We will work with communities to conduct proof-of-concept trials to ensure the appropriateness of the offering before roll-out.

Data elements will include (but not be limited to) training records, equipment, infrastructure, incidents, demographics, and fire prevention activities. We will work with communities to collaboratively develop the database structure, data collection mechanisms, privacy considerations, and data elements.

The collection of data helps with broader research and comparison of national trends, delineating what is causing loss of life and loss of property, and inform prioritization of activities. The IFMO can then identify the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and what resources and funds are needed to close those gaps.

3.4. Building Capacity and Training

In the immediate future, the IFMO will collaborate with existing Indigenous educational institutions to develop and deliver training, leveraging standards such as the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

Our long-term goal is to establish an Indigenous Fire Service Training College. One of the benefits this will offer is the ability to manage the curriculum without having to rely on other external sources. Unlike what we have seen with other colleges who have tried to deliver watered-down, uncertified training, we will deliver culturally appropriate certified training. Utilizing pedagogy and content that are appropriate for Indigenous Peoples, our college will focus on success rates and designing and delivering appropriate programs. For example, many fly-in communities are served by small aircraft. There is no airport firefighter training other than commercial aircraft training, which is cost-prohibitive and utilizes equipment that is not appropriate or attainable for remote communities.

Suppression currently forms the bulk of training for our Indigenous firefighters. We will provide a holistic complement of fire service-related training that includes suppression but is focused on prevention. For example, building inspections, infrastructure management, fire prevention and education, home safety assessments, database utilization, report writing, leadership, and management will be taught.





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Our distributed learning model will allow us to take the training to communities rather than requiring them to travel for development. The curriculum will be developed in Indigenous languages with a train-the-trainer model that maximizes the reach and builds capacity at the learner and trainer levels.

Our model will build long-term training plans so that individuals can progress toward the career of their choice. It is our long-term vision that we will develop such capacity within communities that retired Indigenous firefighters will be sought after to provide training and mentoring to others.

3.5. Community Advocacy

The framework that Indigenous communities have traditionally evolved in has been one without legislated standards and codes. Indigenous communities have practiced safety for millennia; we will merge Traditional Knowledge with modern fire knowledge to develop and build capacity in communities.

Fire departments are a resource provided by community governance. The IFMO will work to build the relationship and understanding by educating and informing governance on how the measurables link to safer communities and fewer fires. Building capacity in the fire service administration will further strengthen the relationship. The IFMO will maintain an ongoing relationship with Chief and Council so that the office remains relevant and responsive to community needs.

The IFMO will provide education and awareness on Occupational Health and Safety considerations related to firefighting. We will support recruitment and retention by the creation of paid on-call and part-time roles with the IFMO that will compensate volunteers for the work they are doing for their community and the IFMO. We will provide support to access appropriate funding levels so that efforts can extend beyond suppression and further into the community.

There is an opportunity to increase the scope of Municipal-Type Service Agreements (MTSAs) to support infrastructure management and bylaws to safeguard future capital investments in our communities.

The insurance challenge in our communities varies greatly. The IFMO will work with the insurance industry to identify what they are looking for and leverage the National Database to demonstrate the actual risk in communities and enable them to access insurance. As the IFMO programs and services are implemented, we will be able to demonstrate their effectiveness to re-negotiate rates.

3.6. Fire Prevention Programs and Service Delivery

The IFMO will work with communities to identify and meet their individual needs. We will create minimal standards around access to programs and services such as fire prevention and education, home safety assessments, train the trainers, governance training, fire department administration, and leadership training.

IFMO programs and services will be personalized and culturally and linguistically appropriate. Governance will be trained and supported in developing their objectives, for example, home safety assessments, community risk assessments, and use and misuse of alcohol and drugs and how they relate to fire incidences. Training plans will be built to meet individual needs and linked to overall governance objectives.





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The overall goal is to have a service delivery plan that will benefit communities directly and to work with the existing regional organizations to identify how resources can best be deployed. We will work with the regional political leaders to promote awareness and understanding of regional needs and programs. The IFMO will collaborate with existing technical groups and will seek to bring the organizations together to share knowledge and best practices at a national level.

4 CONCLUSION

As support continues to grow for the IFMO project, it has become clear that communities hold the necessary knowledge to move this project forward. The five technical engagement sessions that were held in July and August 2019 allowed participants to share their expertise and led to some insightful observations.

The future of fire service in Indigenous communities is through mechanisms that recognize the specific and unique needs and directly engage communities in culturally appropriate ways. To realize this, we are moving forward with the creation of the IFMO National Advisory Committee.

As we begin to create plans to implement the expert recommendations that came from the technical sessions, the IFMO is dedicated to creating successful, sustainable programs and services. As this project continues to develop and progress, we will continue to move toward realizing our long-term goal of establishing an Indigenous Fire Service Training College that will take a culturally and linguistically appropriate approach to providing certified training.

The IFMO recognizes that capacity building, awareness, and education are the way forward and will continue to work with Indigenous communities and relevant regional and national groups to realize the goal of creating safe and healthy Indigenous communities.







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