



ECONOMIC SECTOR

What has the Economic Sector worked on over the last quarter?

In the first quarter of the fiscal year 2020-21, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Economic Sector has focused on advocating for economic stimulus support for First Nations businesses and flexibility for the First Nations labour market. As a result of the global pandemic, the economic closures were unprecedented. The closures impacted new development projects, trade, natural resources development, human resources development, procurement, fisheries, tourism, agriculture, connectivity, transportation and other sectors.

Through the federal Economic Response Plan, Canada announced stimulus programs to assist First Nations governments, individuals, organizations and businesses to survive the pandemic. The AFN National Chief and Regional Chief Portfolio Holder met with the Minister of Indigenous Services to advocate for First Nations business stimulus and amendments to federal stimulus programs. Following this meeting, the federal government made announcements of new stimulus funding for First Nations and Indigenous business needs for \$306.8M on April 18, 2020 and additional funding of \$133M on June 11, 2020. The latter being the measures to assist First Nations, Band corporations, on-reserve businesses, and tourism businesses, including micro-businesses that did not have access to previously announced funding. Amendments were made to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) so that more First Nations businesses could access this program. Early in the economic response measures, many of our businesses were unable to benefit from the stimulus funding identified for Canadian businesses. With this knowledge, the AFN advocated for corrections to amend eligibility criteria.

The Economic Sector has completed a gap analysis on the agriculture agri-foods sector, identifying existing gaps and barriers that First Nations face within the sector. The draft gap analysis will be presented to the Chiefs Committee on Economic Development (CCED) and technical committees.

The AFN prepared a submission to the *Standing Senate Committee on National Finance: Government Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic and its Economic Consequences*. The submission outlines key priorities as Canada moves towards economic recovery, First Nations must lead and be present at all levels of governmental discussion.

Further, the AFN has worked on a Social Finance and Social Innovation paper to advocate support for First Nations programs to respond to persistent socio-economic issues. This type of programming may be better placed to respect the current need for First Nations-driven solutions that are more flexible.

Are there recent current events or government action affecting your Sector or its priorities?

Canada is examining measures for economic recovery. First Nations business impacts on the economy are far-reaching both on- and off-reserve. Investments are needed in a First Nations economic strategy and in our businesses to support growth and longevity. As businesses adapt to the changing economic landscape, access to affordable and reliable broadband will be vital. The work is on-going as Canada and the provinces and territories examine and move to reopen the economy. The AFN advocates that the safety of First Nations citizens is of the utmost priority and that First Nations must be supported to reopen

*The AFN is the national organization representing First Nations citizens in Canada.
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locally, based on local priorities and circumstances, and to be included in all regional planning and decision-making processes.

What is your Sector planning for the future?

Advocacy for First Nations' jobs, workforce and involvement in the economy will continue; this will include working towards new investments in programs and inclusive processes so that no one is left behind.

With the guidance of the Chiefs Committee on Economic Development and the Chiefs Committee on Human Resource Development, the AFN will focus on:

- First Nations economic recovery and priorities to include longer term needs, a national strategy with support for foundations for trade, investment, procurement, and energy and access to markets.
- Continue to work towards a First Nations Agriculture Strategy and to advocate for First Nations priorities in the Food Policy for Canada.
- Work to close the connectivity gap experienced by First Nations.
- Continue to advocate for increased First Nations procurement opportunities, benefits and monitor implementation of relevant changes to these policies.
- Work to develop performance measures and planning tools, develop a paper on First Nations jurisdiction and authorities for labour market programming.
- Support discussion and recommendations regarding First Nations Persons with Disabilities' access needs and advocate for First Nations-led and delivered Social Innovation-Social Finance initiatives.
- Work with Natural Resources Canada to track progress on building relationships, capacity development and improvements on engagement.

Upcoming Events

- October and November 2020: Economic Sector Virtual Sessions – The Economic Sector is working on hosting several information webinars on First Nations economic and business recovery needs, including First Nations procurement, agriculture, tourism, labour market, connectivity and more.