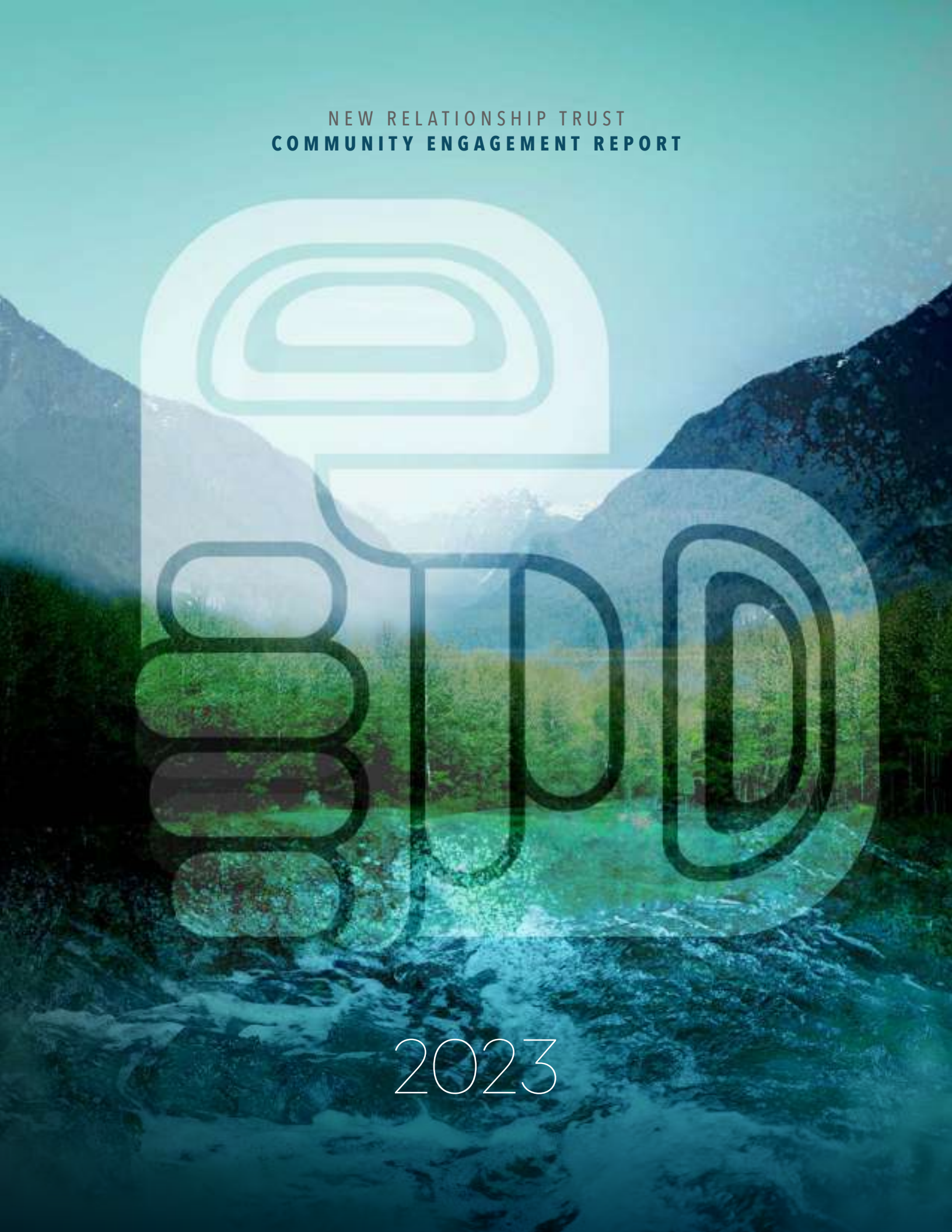
NEW RELATIONSHIP TRUST

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT



2023



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NRT FUNDING PROCESSES

Representatives from First Nation communities and organizations in BC were asked about their experiences with NRT funding processes from application through to reporting.

The NRT funding application process is generally viewed positively, with many appreciating the simplicity and clarity of the application forms. NRT is flexible in its funding model and collaborates well with applicants during the application process. The front-line team was described as helpful, responsive and providing constructive feedback on how to improve future submissions.

There were a number of suggestions for areas of improvement, including how funding deadlines and applications results are determined and communicated; and suggestions for further simplification of the application and reporting processes.

Overall, the positive feedback from participants in this area validate NRT's earlier strategic efforts to harness innovation and responsiveness in developing "next-generation program delivery" to accommodate the evolving, contemporary needs and priorities of First Nations in BC, and that NRT has met its goal of establishing and implementing a user-friendly, automated online funding application platform with intuitive, simple to follow guidelines and processes for First Nation applicants.

FUNDING PROCESSES FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Representatives from First Nation communities and organizations in BC were asked to identify key considerations from an Indigenous perspective with regards to application and reporting processes with any funder.

Interview participants spoke of the importance of flexible, simplified funding processes and eligibility criteria in reducing barriers for First Nation communities and organizations in accessing funding and safeguarding scarce staff resources. Disparities in capacity between communities was highlighted with suggestions to improve access to funding, particularly where digital access is an obstacle. Finally, a collaborative funder relationship was deemed key to building trust and communication, and that funders needed to dedicate resources to developing these relationships in community. Interview participants emphasized the value of funding processes that are informed and led by Indigenous people in order to address the particular needs of First Nations in BC.

These considerations speak to NRT's current strategic goals, as outlined in the "2023-2026 Strategic Plan", in the areas of Nation Building and Communication to provide funding that is responsive to the particular contexts of each First Nation community and to engage and collaborate directly with First Nations.

IMMEDIATE CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND CURRENT NATION BUILDING PRIORITIES

Interview participants discussed a wide range of capacity developing needs and Nation building priorities. A recurring theme was the need for administrative capacity across a range of areas, in particular human resources and fundraising/grant writing capacity, and capacity to engage with diverse stakeholders to negotiate agreements and treaties.

Nation Building priorities included the development of self-governance capacity, particularly among youth; the development of foundational self-governance documents such as a constitution and drafting of Indigenous laws; asserting authority over territories and resources, and developing the capacity to administer and protect lands, particularly with respect to climate change planning. Community revitalization was also a key priority, with communities focused on economic development, language and cultural revitalization, childhood and adult education and developing community infrastructure.

Engagement feedback in this area directly informs the implementation of NRT's Strategic Priority 1: Nation Opportunities, by identifying the capacity needs and Nation-building priorities that will allow NRT to meet its objectives of developing innovative ways to support and deliver flexible Nationhood capacity building solution, increasing First Nations participation in key sectors in the economy, and expanding First Nation knowledge and capacity.

FUNDING ALLOCATION PREFERENCES

Interview participants were divided in their responses, offering arguments for both presented options. Many, however, proposed that a case-by-case approach would be warranted, and there were several arguments in favour of adding multi-year funding as an option to overcome the challenges presented by reaching more communities through smaller funding amounts. Some applauded NRT's current funding model and noted they appreciate the "more stringent" eligibility criteria.

Engagement feedback in this area bears directly on the desired outcomes of NRT's Strategic Priority 1: Nation Opportunities, which envision both an increase in number of First Nations communities funded by NRT and an increase in the total value of projects funded by NRT each year, and may inform future strategic priorities for the NRT fund.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW NRT FUNDING AREAS OR SERVICES

Interview participants were asked to consider new funding areas or services they would be interested in from NRT. Much of the feedback centered on a vision of NRT as a knowledge and relationship hub for First Nations in BC, with NRT undertaking active community engagement, hosting networking and capacity building events, and providing a resource hub for First Nations communities to learn from best practices and each other. There were also suggestions to expand eligible initiatives within economic development, education, and language and culture streams, as well as a new funding across a range of capacity development priorities, such as climate change planning, adaptation and recovery. There were also suggestions for expansion of NRT's funding model to include multi-year and collaborative funding opportunities, among others.

Engagement feedback deeply reflects and validates the objectives, actions and outcomes outlined in NRT's Strategic **Priority 1: Nation Opportunities** and Strategic **Priority 4: Communications**, in particular to:

- Engage with First Nations communities and leadership to assess and co-develop programs and initiatives to effectively build capacity.
- Identify and target conferences to increase awareness of NRT programs and showcase success stories of First Nations funded by NRT.
- Share resource templates and success stories of funded projects with First Nations to help inspire action.
- Participate or support emerging sector events that are aligned with First Nation priorities and facilitate best practices knowledge sharing and peer to peer dialogue and mentoring.
- Collaborate with First Nations to share their project stories and positive impact outcomes.
- Proactively participate in high profile conferences, symposiums, and gatherings that involve First Nations.

ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

Several interview participants expressed gratitude and appreciation for the interview process and for NRT sitting down face-to-face to engage with communities. There was also appreciation expressed NRT's work in supporting First Nations in BC through an effective, trust-based model, and for the scope and variety of projects that can be funded, including for urban First Nations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK

NRT staff conducted interviews in-person and by email with representatives from First Nation communities and organizations that had previously applied for funding with NRT.

BC First Nations Interviewed:

1. Xwchíyò:m (Cheam) First Nation
2. Huu-ay-aht First Nations
3. The Nisga'a Nation village of Gitwinksihlkw (formerly Canyon City)
4. səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil'Waututh Nation)
5. Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation)
6. Binche Whu'ten
7. Whispering Pines / Clinton Indian Band
8. Old Massett Village Council
9. Kwikwetlem First Nation
10. Kwiakah First Nation
11. Urban Native Youth Association
12. McLeod Lake Indian Band
13. Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis First Nation
14. Uchucklesaht Tribe Government
15. Xwísten (Bridge River Indian Band)
16. Daylu Dena Council
17. T'Sou-ke First Nation
18. Quatsino First Nation
19. Hulitan Family and Community Services Society
20. Skwah First Nation
21. First Nations Summit
22. Kitsumkalum First Nation
23. Britannia Elementary School
24. Outma Sqilx'w Cultural School
25. Haíłzaqv (Heiltsuk) Tribal Council
26. Sik-E-Dakh (Glen Vowell Band)
27. Klahoose First Nation
28. P'egp'íg'lha Council
29. ʕaaḥuusʔatḥ (Ahousaht)
30. Nanoose Economic Development Corporation



APLICANT EXPERIENCES WITH NRT FUNDING PROCESSES

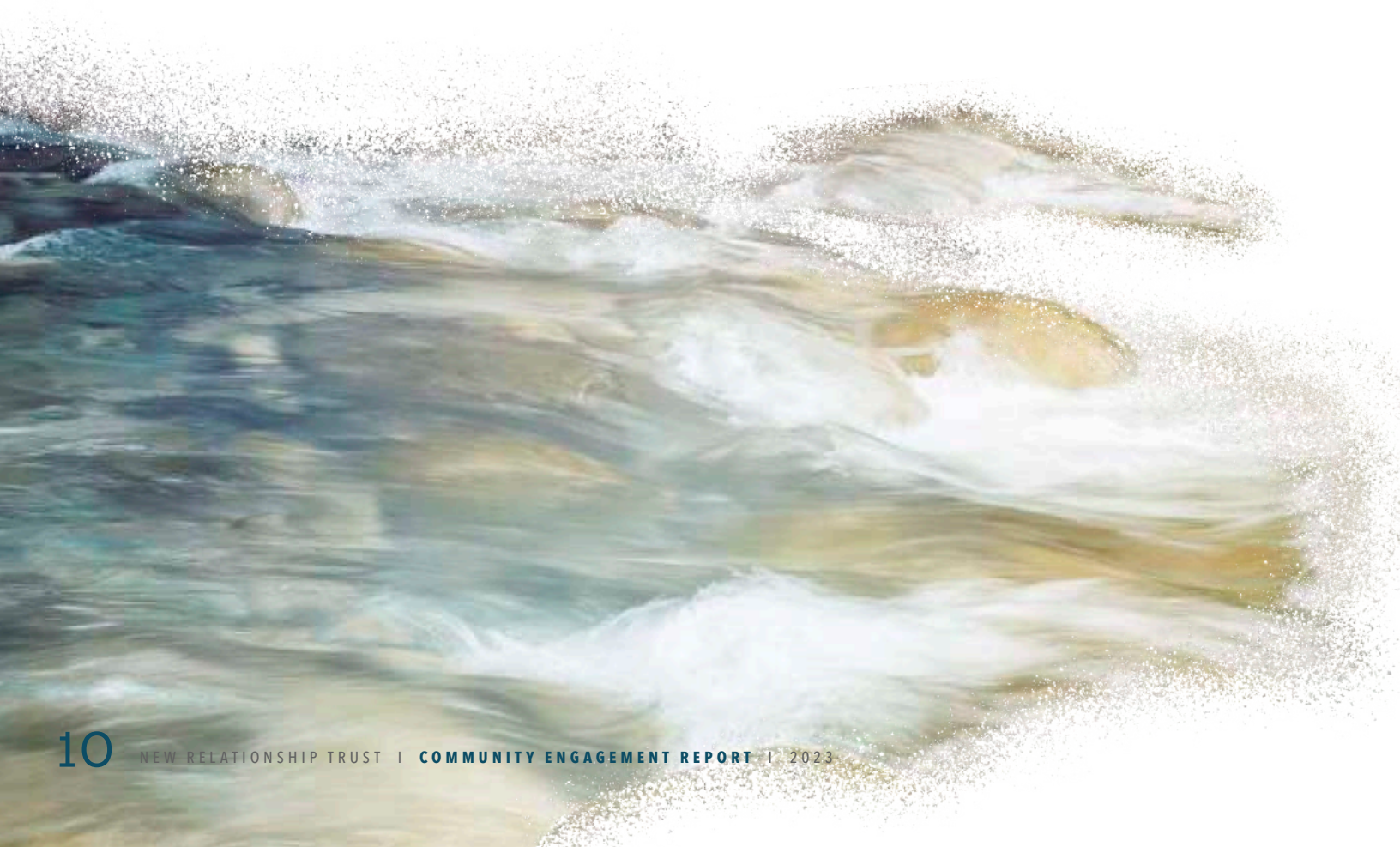
"How did you experience the NRT Funding Application & Reporting process? What went well, is there a way this could be improved?"

Representatives from First Nation communities and organizations in BC were asked about their experiences with NRT funding processes from application through to reporting.

The NRT funding application process is generally viewed positively, with many appreciating the simplicity and clarity of the application forms. NRT is flexible in its funding model and collaborates well with applicants during the application process. The front-line team was described as helpful, responsive and providing constructive feedback on how to improve future submissions.

There were a number of suggestions for areas of improvement, including how funding deadlines and applications results are determined and communicated; and suggestions for further simplification of the application and reporting processes.

Overall, the positive feedback from participants in this area validate NRT's earlier strategic efforts to harness innovation and responsiveness in developing "next-generation program delivery" to accommodate the evolving, contemporary needs and priorities of First Nations in BC, and that NRT has met its strategic goal of establishing and implementing a user-friendly, automated online funding application platform with intuitive, simple to follow guidelines and processes for First Nation applicants.



AREAS OF STRENGTH

"NRT trusts the Nations to do the work."

CLEAR, ACCESSIBLE AND TIMELY PROCESSES

There were several comments from interview participants that NRT's funding processes compares favourably to those of other funders, which can be overly complex and require unnecessary information: "NRT is hitting the mark." The BCICEI application in particular was described as one of the "lightest" applications.

Overall, participants consistently described NRT's processes as "clear", "simple", "low-barrier", "accessible", "transparent", and "not too daunting". One participant noted that NRT's process "works well for First Nations".

Applications were described as "straightforward", "streamlined" and "easy to apply to". The amount of information required was deemed appropriate and covering essential information, while also providing sufficient structure to guide applicants' experience. The narrative style of the application was also appreciated. The budget outline was described as easy to work with and one participant stated that they appreciated that examples of budget elements that could be included were provided by NRT.

Reporting processes were characterized as "common sense", "easy to follow" and "clearcut", and the funding disbursement process was also described as straightforward. Participants emphasized that NRT contrasts well with other funders in its quick response time and timely funding turnaround.

Participants that had applied multiple times for funding to NRT noted that the process has noticeably improved, becoming easier over time. One participant also noted that they appreciated NRT's willingness to protect the confidentiality of some aspects of their projects.

FLEXIBLE FUNDING MODEL

Interview participants stated that they appreciate NRT's collaborative and flexible funding model, which allows for a broad range of eligible initiatives and allowable uses for funding, rather than requiring applicants to fit their projects to narrowly pre-determined frameworks. One participant stated this allows Nations to engage in "blue sky thinking" when developing their project goals. Participants appreciated that NRT makes it clear that there is flexibility in the process and are willing to grant extensions when needed, so that applicants can simply "reach out if anything changes". The option for joint funding applications was also highlighted as a welcome rarity in the funding landscape.

NRT STAFF SUPPORT

NRT's front line staff were warmly praised for their support throughout the funding process and for the relationships developed with applicants. "It felt like the understanding was already there with NRT," noted one interview participant. Individual staff members were described as "very positive", "easy to work with", and offering "good support': "[They] respected teachings of relationship and understandings of need to connect."

As funding applicants, interview participants had found it helpful to know that staff were available to discuss project eligibility and appreciated that they offered support in drafting applications, which helped to avoid wasted effort: "Some other proposals you have to interpret what they asking, and you go through the trouble of applying then get denied."

Participants pointed out that staff would often reach out proactively to discuss "what is working or not" and appreciated their willingness to provide feedback on draft proposals. This support continued even after applications were approved: "They help us where we need to improve on future submissions, they make it feel like NRT still wants us to apply....I will tell you how many grantors do that: just one, NRT! I love your team."

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

"The reporting is always tough; a simplified reporting process is welcomed by anyone on the team."

APPLICATIONS AND REPORTING

Interview participants noted that one-off grants are less helpful for long-term or new program/initiative development and delivery, and that NRT should consider offering multi-year grants: "[Our programs] need some time to get running, [we] need time to build internal capacity to continue on."

There were concerns that some of the smaller NRT grants require a lot of details in the application resulting in a disproportionate amount of work, and some participants stated applications could be further simplified overall. There were suggestions for NRT to provide lists of examples of ineligible activities in their application guidelines, as well as a list of eligible Indigenous consultants to work with. One participant suggested that NRT could also make accommodations for consultants without technical certifications that nonetheless have community/on-the-ground experience. Additional suggestions included further simplifying the application process and enabling supporting documents to be uploaded separately to the application portal.

Reporting was described by many interview participants as a burden. There were suggestions to streamline the process to reduce workloads for Nation staff, such as conversation-based reporting and simplified reporting templates to speed up the process. Participants noted that the emphasis should be on accountability and follow up, rather than extensive reporting.

DEADLINES

Some interview participants stated that the rolling deadline process needs improvement as they had personally missed out on funding opportunities despite reaching out to NRT staff to ensure they would not miss the application window. There were suggestions that NRT adopt a competitive application process with fixed deadlines, rather than allocating funding until it runs out.

Applicants to education funding suggested that NRT open the application grants in May when schools are setting up their budgets, and to set March as the final reporting deadline.

COMMUNICATION/ FOLLOW UP ON APPLICATION RESULTS

Suggested improvements to NRT's funding application and reporting processes included providing clear communication and information on the amount of funding remaining. Some interview participants noted they have had difficulty connecting with the proper personnel to confirm the status of their grant application or report deadline, particularly during the pandemic. There were suggestions to implement a file naming system to help applicants identify which application has been approved when multiple projects have been submitted.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FROM AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE

"What are some key considerations regarding application and reporting processes from an Indigenous perspective?"

Representatives from First Nation communities and organizations in BC were asked to identify key considerations from an Indigenous perspective with regards to application and reporting processes with any funder.

Interview participants spoke of the importance of flexible, simplified funding processes and eligibility criteria in reducing barriers for First Nation communities and organizations in accessing funding and safeguarding scarce staff resources. Disparities in capacity between communities were highlighted, with suggestions to improve access to funding, particularly where digital access is an obstacle.

Finally, a collaborative funder relationship was deemed key to building trust and communication, requiring dedicated resources to developing these relationships in community. Interview participants emphasized the value of funding processes that are informed and led by Indigenous people in order to address the particular needs of First Nations in BC.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

These considerations speak to NRT's strategic goals as outlined in the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan in the areas of Nation Building and Communication, both in providing funding that is responsive to the particular contexts of each First Nation community and in engaging and collaborating directly with First Nations.

Strategic Priority 1: Nation Opportunities addresses NRT's means to expand First Nations knowledge and capacity by engaging with First Nations communities and leadership to assess and co-develop effective, capacity-building programs and initiatives, and to deliver relevant and responsive funding that supports First Nations in developing Nation building solutions within their own context. Feedback highlights the diversity of capacity needs and priorities within First Nations communities, and the value of funding processes that are informed and led by Indigenous people in order to address the particular needs of First Nations in BC.

Strategic Priority 4: Communication speaks to cultivating excellence of in partner relations by establishing a culture of continuous engagement and collaboration with First Nations, which feedback suggests is highly valued by First Nation communities.

FLEXIBLE, SIMPLIFIED PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

"Good application processes are shorter, with broader ways [funding] can be used in community."

Interview participants stated that flexible, nimble and adaptable funding processes and allowable uses are critical for projects that will often need to be adjusted as they progress (e.g., refinements to outcomes or budget estimates). This includes allowing for flexibility on funding mid-grant, an approach that participants noted several funders have already implemented.

Participants emphasized that narrow or detailed eligibility criteria can be exclusionary; projects may not get off the ground, or can be run into the ground, when funders are rigid or "nit-picking". Laborious, protracted applications can lead to missed windows of opportunity for new projects and destabilize existing projects that seek ongoing funding.

Applicants may also simply lack the resources to apply if lengthy and onerous applications may take more time than is available to go around. Participants stated that it was important applications be designed so that they can be completed quickly and with limited capacity so as not to overtax Indigenous communities' resources.

Participants identified the need for clear guidelines and instructions, with concise, clear language in point for where possible. Eligibility criteria should be "blunt and up-front", and budgets should clearly identify eligible and ineligible expenses. One participant suggested that the widely standardized 10% allocation for administration costs needs to be revisited.

Additional suggestions included simplifying reporting processes—which had been highlighted by many participants as one of the more challenging elements of the funding process workload—by offering verbal or video reporting options with talk to text transcription, and for funders to proactively reach out to funding recipients for updates by email or telephone, with prompts and documents at hand.

One participant spoke to the challenges of reporting from an authentically Indigenous perspective for communities that have a significant proportion of non-Indigenous staff.

FUNDER RELATIONSHIPS

"It makes a difference having First Nations on the other end to understand where we come from, understanding the struggles and challenges of BC First Nations."

Interview participants emphasized the value of funding processes that are informed and led by Indigenous people in order to address the particular needs of First Nations in BC. They noted that this also helps to create a feeling of community and a shared understanding of the barriers, capacity burdens and other pressures experienced by Indigenous applicants: "I think NRT understands there are barriers. I don't know if many others funders know potential limitations of people applying, e.g., human resources."

Having dedicated staff within the funding organization to building relationships with applicants was also noted as vital to supporting applicants through their funding journeys and ensuring a collaborative relationship that provides opportunities to hear what communities have to say.

Participants also stated that it was important funders make themselves visible and accessible at the community level, not just with Indigenous leaders and at regional events. Suggestions included conducting open houses or setting up at job fairs/educational events in communities, and outreach to friendship centres.



CAPACITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

"Keep in mind not everyone has a computer, especially in remote areas."

Interview participants highlighted that capacity is a key consideration that varies considerably between First Nation communities, especially with regards to grant writing/fundraising, financial literacy and basic human resource capacity (staff time). It was noted that these disparities can prevent some communities from even getting started with project development and seeking funding. NRT's clean energy funding was held up as a good example of accessible funding targeted to communities that have the least capacity.

Knowledge sharing was raised as a way to reduce capacity disparities in the funding landscape. Interview participants suggested that successful project applications should be published in a database once projects are completed, which would increase transparency in the competitive process and serve as templates to help guide subsequent applicants: "Those who don't get funded, can learn and grow and still receive value. Everyone wins".

While some interview participants appreciated online funding portals as convenient and paperless, others pointed out that for some, technology can be "overwhelming" and that many rural, Northern and remote First Nation communities do not have sufficient digital access and/or skills to explore and use online funding portals. There were suggestions to provide accessible alternatives, including proactive funding invitations to communities and mail-in or verbal applications/reporting.



CAPACITY NEEDS AND NATION BUILDING PRIORITIES

"What are your immediate community capacity development needs/current Nation building priorities?"

Interview participants discussed a wide range of capacity developing needs and Nation building priorities. A recurring theme was the need for administrative capacity across a range of areas, in particular human resources and fundraising/grant writing capacity, and capacity to engage with diverse stakeholders to negotiate agreements and treaties.

Nation Building priorities included the development of self-governance capacity, particularly among youth; the development of foundational self-governance documents such as a constitution and drafting of Indigenous laws; asserting authority over territories and resources, and developing the capacity to administer and protect lands, particularly with respect to climate change planning. Community revitalization was also a key priority, with communities focused on economic development, language and cultural revitalization, childhood and adult education and developing community infrastructure.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

Engagement feedback in this area directly informs the implementation of NRT's Strategic Priority 1: Nation Opportunities, by identifying the capacity needs and Nation-building priorities that will allow NRT to meet its objectives of developing innovative ways to support and deliver flexible Nationhood capacity building solution, increasing First Nations participation in key sectors in the economy, and expanding First Nation knowledge and capacity.



ADMINISTRATIVE CAPACITY

**“Our Nation is subject to doing a lot of work on the side of the desk….
We don’t have the financial resources to staff this work.”**

Interview participants pointed to a wide range of capacity needs with regards to all aspects of administration, in particular human resources and fundraising/grant writing capacity. Other areas mentioned included the need for CAOs, and staff to manage housing, project management, economic development and IT. Participants pointed to a need for more education, mentorship and training dollars to build administrative capacity, and some noted that the lack of capacity is negatively impacting financial benefits agreements and self-governance implementation.

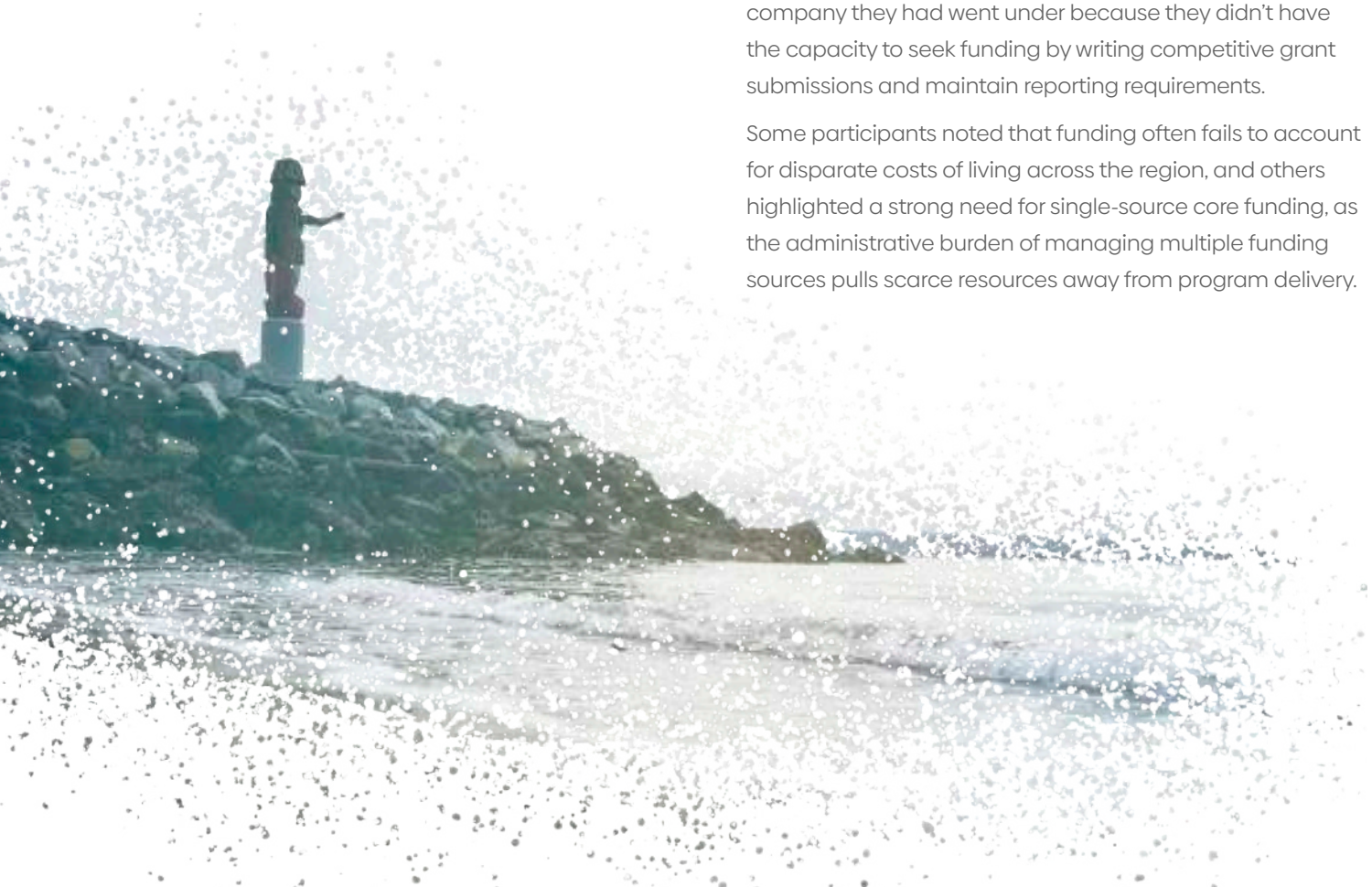
HUMAN RESOURCES

Human resource capacity needs ran the gamut from human resource training; staff recruitment, professional development and retention, including team building and retreats; succession planning and knowledge transfer; policies and organizational planning to support staff success; and the financial resources to bring in more staff. Core funding was described as essential, and one participant noted that staff in many First Nations are burned out and “looking at other opportunities”.

FUNDRAISING/GRANT WRITING

Fundraising support was identified as a large capacity gap, and there were many calls for grant writing support from NRT and other funders to provide training and workshops. Participants representing Indigenous nonprofits/organizations noted they contend with systemic discrimination in the funding landscape and typically receive less funding than non-Indigenous orgs, which impacts the quality of their programs and services, and fair remuneration for staff. One applicant shared that a company they had went under because they didn’t have the capacity to seek funding by writing competitive grant submissions and maintain reporting requirements.

Some participants noted that funding often fails to account for disparate costs of living across the region, and others highlighted a strong need for single-source core funding, as the administrative burden of managing multiple funding sources pulls scarce resources away from program delivery.



NATION BUILDING

“Our elders say, don’t go and learn their law and paint it red, that’s not how it works for our people. [We] can’t bend our law into theirs. We all have ways we took care of our own and our children, and these pieces of who we are need to be the basis of legislation, of our own laws.”

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Interview participants highlighted the need for ongoing education within the community, and in particular the next generation, regarding self-governance and its implications. There were calls for more funding for self-governance training, especially for youth, including capacity development and mentorship support. One interview participant noted that there were no youth at a recent First Nations Leadership Gathering: “Everyone was asking, ‘where are the youth?’”

CONSTITUTION / INDIGENOUS LEGAL ORDERS

Interview participants stated that their communities were focused on core aspects of Nation building and self-governance, including drafting constitutions as well as codifying Indigenous legal orders and developing enforcement protocols/mechanisms. Some noted that enshrining Indigenous legal orders is an essential foundation for agreements with provincial and federal governments: “We’ll need to know how to govern ourselves and what our laws will look like going forward.” Participants noted the need for greater awareness and capacity development in this area, and there were suggestions that NRT could have a role in encouraging communities to think about these self-governance fundamentals. It was noted that the Indigenous Law Research Unit at the University of Victoria offers workshops for communities on this topic.

LAND, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE

Several self-governance priorities and capacity development needs relating to land were identified, including archeological research; and land code development, land use planning and implementation; archeological research; pursuing the formal recognition of territories; and land purchases and additions to reserve. As one participant noted, “[We] need to secure more land for future generations.”

Environmental protection was also identified as an area of focus, with calls for more capacity funding to support First Nations to ensure the health of their territories/lands/waters by conducting environmental surveying/monitoring, protecting biodiversity, restoring traditional food systems (including food forests), and eliminating harmful logging practices.

There were also calls for capacity funding for climate action, including funding for education and technical skills to develop climate action strategies, as well as climate impact recovery funding for communities affected by climate impacts such as wildfires and flooding, and the loss of infrastructure and habitable land.

ENGAGEMENT

Interview participants are focused on increasing their capacity to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, including industry, other governments, and conducting outreach and cultural education with local non-Indigenous community members, nearby communities and schools on the topics of reconciliation, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act (DRIPA): "Bring in good leaders and technicians. We do a lot of work in education and outreach with surrounding communities. People don't understand what it's like to live on reserve, compared to fee simple."

OTHER SELF-GOVERNANCE NEEDS/PRIORITIES

Community planning, food sovereignty, treaty negotiations, sectoral self-governance agreements for education, and building community capacity to participate in the implementation of UNDRIP/DRIPA were also identified as key self-governance needs/priorities by interview participants.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

"What are the opportunities in territory that will provide a stable living?"

Several interview participants stated their communities need support to develop own source revenue (OSR) streams in order to reduce reliance on government funding. Some communities are keen to move away from resource extraction as the dominant source of revenue and to develop alternative revenue streams by encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting business development planning, especially in the area of tourism. Some participants noted the need for seed funding capital and micro-loans for entrepreneurs, as well as job readiness training and mental health supports to develop employment opportunities for community members as part of a focus on community revitalization.

LANGUAGE/CULTURAL REVITALIZATION

"To bring young people back to see where their ancestors cherished — that is Nation building."

Interview participants identified language and cultural revitalization as priorities for their communities. Specific cultural goals mentioned included building cultural centres and long houses; hosting cultural rediscovery camps; restoring, archiving and displaying historical documentation; traditional food harvesting/gathering practices and teachings; rebuilding historic village sites; and developing cultural tourism opportunities. There were calls for more support for cultural health and language revitalization, including support for elders and knowledge keepers to transmit cultural knowledge, especially to youth; and language training for educational staff.

CHILDHOOD AND ADULT EDUCATION

"I would love to see a group training session… incorporating First Nation values and methods of education to rural communities."

Capacity support for education, including adult education and financial literacy, was identified as a key priority for First Nation communities, particularly in rural communities where lack of infrastructure forces youth and families to leave their community to pursue education and training. Some interview participants identified a need for basic school supplies including lunches in schools. There were calls for support for professional development in culturally appropriate educational methods that incorporate verbal/auditory pedagogies, storytelling, and land-based education. Some educational organizations are focused on initiatives that build intercultural bonds, community and sense of belonging for Indigenous students.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

"Our vision: Every citizen to return home, and a home to return to."

Along with economic development, community infrastructure was identified as a key priority and part of a broader focus on community revitalization that will allow people to live and work in community. In addition to the fundamentals of housing and health and safety services, interview participants identified a range of infrastructural priorities including educational, cultural and administrative buildings; business complexes; transportation infrastructure including roads and water access; agricultural infrastructure; playgrounds; streetlights; telecommunications and IT equipment; and clean energy infrastructure to reduce high hydro costs and power economic development projects. A need funding for long-term capital projects was also identified.

HOUSING

Interview participants stated that upgraded and new housing was a key priority for many communities. This includes ensuring existing housing is safe, up to code, and protected from flood risks; new housing construction with a focus on rapid and affordable housing to address homelessness, community revitalization and staff housing needs; and energy efficiency upgrades.

HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICES

Community health and wellness services was identified as key priority for remote and northern communities, who identified the need for help with building capacity and professional development for health staff, as well as infrastructure for in-community health services (including traditional, land-based healing, mental health, addictions and emergency services). Some participants also mentioned the need to improve the accessibility and reach of existing services, and for public safety services such as preventative and programming capacity for substance use harm reduction and violence prevention.

NRT FUNDING ALLOCATION

"Regarding NRT's funding allocation, do you think it is more impactful to fund a larger number of communities at lower amounts, or larger amount of funding dollars to fewer Nations?"

Interview participants were divided in their responses, offering arguments for both presented options. Many, however, proposed that a case-by-case approach would be warranted, and there were several arguments in favour of adding multi-year funding as an option to overcome the challenges presented by reaching more communities through smaller funding amounts. Some applauded NRT's current funding model and noted they appreciate the "more stringent" eligibility criteria.

STRATEGIC RELEVANCE

Engagement feedback in this area bears directly on the desired outcomes of NRT's Strategic Priority 1: Nation Opportunities, which envision both an increase in number of First Nations communities funded by NRT and an increase in the total value of projects funded by NRT each year, and may inform future strategic priorities for the NRT fund.



LARGER AMOUNTS/FEWER NATIONS

“NRT understands the goals.”

Some interview participants argued that small amounts are very limiting in terms of the type and scope of project that can be envisioned, and that the cost of living is outpacing funding: “$5000 doesn’t go very far.” Some noted that their own community’s interests lie in making meaningful progress with larger amounts, which deliver greater impact, especially for smaller communities that don’t have own source revenues or capacity to seek funding from larger organizations/governments. Others noted that it can be difficult to find additional funding for larger projects, especially those that require extensive engineering or capital projects, and that larger amounts from NRT can make them possible.



SMALLER AMOUNTS/MORE COMMUNITIES

“NRT’s strength is funding a diverse range of initiatives on small to med level of proposals. These small projects are often the beginning, the incubation period to test the waters if this is something we want and can do in community.” Some interview participants argued that smaller amounts allow communities to “get their feet wet” and move a project forward, rather than spend down all the available funding on a few large projects, and that funding a diverse of range of small to medium projects is one of NRT’s strengths. Some pointed out that smaller amounts allow for greater fairness in funding distribution, and that smaller amounts are sufficient for building internal capacity and can be supplemented with other funding streams if needed.

MULTI-YEAR FUNDING

Several participants noted that offering multi-year funding as an option would offset some of the challenges that come with smaller funding amounts, such as the administrative burden of annual applications, and would offer the longer horizon that many projects require to get off the ground, such as projects with a “large human component…those that require training, adaptation, learning and planning.”

There were also arguments in favour of the stability multi-year funding provides to communities by supporting communities/organizations in implementing programming that won’t disappear in a year. Some noted it is much harder to find staff for short-term projects. One participant shared that their organization does not apply for one-off funding outside of capital projects because it ultimately erodes trust in the services they provide: “I have an ethical responsibility to the community we serve that we are not giving something and taking it away. I don’t want to contribute to this problem. It takes time to build things.”

VARIABLE FUNDING MODEL

"[Funding] should be program response specific, on an as-needed basis."

Several participants argued that a one-size-fits all approach was limiting, and that not all projects and Nations' needs are same. There were comments that remote communities may face higher project costs, for example, and that one-off projects and phased projects should elicit different approaches. A case-by-case approach would allow NRT to prioritize projects with the highest impact.

There were suggestions to prioritize gaps in funding by examining areas covered by other funding sources, as well as areas of high demand within NRT's past applications. Interview participants noted that NRT could evaluate community readiness and develop an assessment tool to determine appropriate funding amounts. Communities would initially be eligible for small grants to demonstrate their capacity to implement and meet deliverables, and this could lead to a eligibility for higher funder amounts for more ambitious projects while also building capacity for communities: "Community programming and development needs to happen congruently."

There was also a suggestion to adopt a per-capita model consisting of a base funding amount and a per-capita top-up to level the playing field for communities of disparate sizes.



EXPANSION OF NRT FUNDING SERVICES

"Is there a funding area, or service that NRT could consider delivering/supporting, in a way not currently doing so?"

Interview participants were asked to consider new funding areas or services they would be interested in from NRT. Much of the feedback centered on a vision of NRT as a knowledge and relationship hub for First Nations in BC, with NRT undertaking active community engagement, hosting networking and capacity building events, and providing a resource hub for First Nations communities to learn from best practices and each other. There were also suggestions to expand eligible initiatives within economic development, education, and language and culture streams, as well as a new funding across a range of capacity development priorities, such as climate change planning, adaptation and recovery. There were also suggestions for expansion of NRT's funding model to include multi-year and collaborative funding opportunities, among others.

Engagement feedback deeply reflects and validates the objectives, actions and outcomes outlined in NRT's Strategic Priority 1: Nation Opportunities and Strategic Priority 4: Communications, in particular to:

- Engage with First Nations communities and leadership to assess and co-develop programs and initiatives to effectively build capacity
- Identify and target conferences to increase awareness of NRT programs and showcase success stories of First Nations funded by NRT.
- Share resource templates and success stories of funded projects with First Nations to help inspire action.
- Participate or support emerging sector events that are aligned with First Nation priorities and facilitate best practices knowledge sharing and peer to peer dialogue and mentoring.
- Collaborate with First Nations to share their project stories and positive impact outcomes.
- Proactively participate in high profile conferences, symposiums, and gatherings that involve First Nations.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Interview participants provided considerable feedback that centered on a vision of NRT as a knowledge and relationship hub for First Nations in BC, founded in deep community engagement.

"Relationship Building is Nation Building."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Several interview participants stated that direct community engagement and "boots on the ground advocacy" is rare from funders and yet necessary to building informed relationships with First Nation communities: "Always face-to-face is number one."

In-person engagements offer the opportunity to connect with First Nations and understand their goals, and help Nations understand what funding NRT offers and how to apply. Several interview participants noted the value of the interviews themselves in achieving those outcomes. Others noted recommended an NRT presence at local events or conferences "so it's easy to meet the team, because as of right now NRT seems elusive, out of reach. There's no place to meet face to face."

There were suggestions for NRT to build a network in BC for First Nations communities, organizations and other interested funders by hosting public community meetings and networking forums, as well as larger events and conferences to support knowledge sharing and relationship building between First Nations across the province. Such events would be particularly important in the North: "Rural areas need gatherings."

These events would provide an opportunity for communities and organizations to learn from each other, foster collaboration on shared priorities and gain economies of scale, and celebrate the good work being done: "This is also capacity development."



DIRECT CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Interview participants made several suggestions for areas in which NRT could directly support capacity development by offering workshops, both in-community and at networking events.

Of particular interest were fundraising and grant writing capacity workshops, which many participants had identified as a strong capacity gap for First Nation communities and organizations. Several participants also noted the need for governance and organizational capacity training, including board governance, youth governance, and organizational assessments.

Other areas of interest included economic and resource planning, additions to reserve knowledge sharing and climate change planning. One participant suggested NRT could directly promote reconciliation and the implementation of UNDRIP among First Nations.

BEST PRACTICES DOCUMENTS/GUIDES

There were calls for NRT to support the development of best practices resources such as guides, which one participant noted NRT had developed in the past. Best practices areas mentioned included a roadmap for constitutional development, and resources to support Nations struggling with environmental degradation, climate impacts and natural disasters, for which one participant noted resources are "fragmented" and lack "unified advocacy/resource groups". There were also requests to develop resources to support First Nation communities in educating non-Indigenous communities and residents about Indigenous histories, cultures and values, and the histories of the territories they live on.

One participant suggested NRT could support the creation of a centralized First Nations data centre, and partner with organizations such as the First Nation Technology Council to create a census to gather data (such as housing) from First Nation communities to inform funding and capacity needs.



NEW/EXPANDED FUNDING STREAMS

"When NRT supports Indigenous not-for-profits, NRT is still serving Indigenous communities."

There were a number of suggestions for the expansion of existing funding streams and new funding streams for NRT to consider.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Interview participants identified the need for more funding to support communities in achieving self-reliance and sustainability through own-source revenue development and economic planning. They also noted that more support is needed in securing equity contributions, and called for more partnerships to deliver entrepreneurial support.

LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE PRESERVATION

There were suggestions to expand initiatives covered by NRT's language and culture funding streams to include preserving and archiving historical documentation and artifacts; Indigenous language training for educators; and language and culture preservation initiatives such as recordings and transcriptions of elders to pass their knowledge on: "So many elders are passing, and they are taking the history with them."

EDUCATION

Suggestions for expanded eligibility for educational initiatives included after hours staff honoraria; and a food security program for students "to ensure they are healthy and so that hunger or nutrient deficiency is not a barrier to their learning".

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION/ADAPTATION FUNDING

Interview participants identified a pressing need for climate change mitigation/adaptation funding, particularly in coastal communities, and suggested that NRT can build in-house capacity for planning and environmental assessments/feasibility studies to help these communities. They also noted that there is a funding gap for year-end repairs from climate damages, which aren't covered by federal funding.

INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Interview participants representing Indigenous organizations noted that there is little support available to them outside of Friendship Centres, and made the case that NRT's community funding model could readily be adapted to Indigenous nonprofits, which typically service the high proportion of Indigenous people living outside of their communities: "Urban Indigenous organizations are communities for urban Indigenous people."

OTHER

Other proposed funding streams included: health and wellness initiatives; land use planning; social enterprises; capital support; housing; traditional medicines; and technology.

FUNDING MODEL

"Seventh generation principle."

Interview participants also suggested NRT could expand its funding model to include multi-year funding, with suggestions ranging from 2 to 10 years, to support long-term planning; to provide greater flexibility with spending deadlines and/or allow funding to roll over; and to develop a collaborative funding stream for smaller nations that have shared or overlapping priorities: "Some kind of grant that creates linked communities".





ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK

"CHEN WANÁXWSTÚMIYAP (I RESPECT YOU ALL)."

Several interview participants expressed gratitude and appreciation for the interview process and for NRT sitting down face-to-face to engage with communities: "Community Engagement goes a long way". There was also appreciation expressed NRT's work in supporting First Nations in BC through a successful trust-based model, and for the scope and variety of projects that can be funded: "[NRT is] one of most effective organizations that we submit applications to, that support things are important to us that others don't offer". One participant noted that NRT fills a gap for urban First Nations, who have fewer available funding options.

One participant called for NRT to advocate for the creation of a First Nations Secretariat within the provincial government: "All our people need to be connected there, for Nations to seek help." Other feedback included a suggestion to emphasize the value of a Community Energy Plan as a community-driven process, and to advertise that NRT does not invest in or take funds from extractive oil and gas companies: "Although controversial, a lot of communities would appreciate this."



NEW RELATIONSHIP TRUST
Empowering First Nations in British Columbia

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3188 Alder Court
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V7H 2V6

PRINCE GEORGE OFFICE
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