

**A Review of
ISSP Evaluation Reports
From 2000 – 2007**

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For the ISSP Committee**

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Executive Summary

This project involved a review of ten program evaluations sponsored by the ISSP Committee throughout the past seven years. This project also provides an analysis of the proposals submitted to the ISSP during the past three years. That analysis is intended to highlight the types of First Nations post-secondary programs needed in British Columbia, as well as the partnerships that have been established with mainstream post-secondary institutes.

There were a number of consistent characteristics amongst the evaluated programs. All of the courses were fully articulated and transferable, and all of the programs were governed by a First Nations controlled agency. A relatively large proportion of the students enrolled in First Nations controlled post-secondary programs/institutes face a large number of pressures. The goals of the students entering the programs are varied – a factor that ideally will be reflected in the programs' design and delivery.

One of the primary measures of the ISSP sponsored programs is their effectiveness in terms of delivering course content. Overall, interview respondents indicated that the programs are effective, and that the standard of teaching they received was good or very good.

Closely associated with program effectiveness is the issue of First Nations traditions. In fact, a desire to make the programs culturally relevant is one of the primary reasons why First Nations communities and institutes offer their own programs.

Almost all of the programs were located in or very close to First Nations communities, which appears to have tremendous significance to the communities and to students.

Another critical issue is the emphasis placed on providing students with an extraordinary level of support. The staffs of the programs and institutes were commended for creating friendly, safe, welcoming and comfortable environments. Also, because the programs and institutes enroll relatively

small numbers of students, the participants have good access to instructors and to support. The evaluated programs also support students by providing as much flexibility as possible without compromising standards.

The evaluation reports identified a very strong community component to the First Nations controlled post-secondary programs – a characteristic that makes the programs unique and effective.

There are also many very significant challenges for the ISSP funded programs. The programs and institutes are operating with extremely limited funding, which is the foundation of most of the challenges that were reported. Staffing can also present difficulties, and the preparedness of students entering the programs was also raised as an issue for consideration. Another challenge relates to the need to better promote the quality of learning opportunities available through First Nations controlled programs.

Overall, the programs are providing important capacity building opportunities. The students indicated that attending the programs had been a positive experience for them. Also, many of the students would not have been able to access post-secondary opportunities without the chance to study in a First Nations environment.

Considerations for the ISSP Committee

- The critical importance of funding issues was one of the most consistent themes raised in the evaluation reports. The ISSP Committee is encouraged to continue its efforts to promote this issue to INAC through cooperative efforts with First Nations leadership and with the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA).
- The ISSP Committee can work with First Nations institutes to increase awareness about the benefits and successes of First Nations programming.
- The ISSP Committee is encouraged to work with IAHLA to identify ways to address the need for and fund professional development opportunities for instructors in First Nations post-secondary programs, as currently

First Nations institutes do not have funding for external professional development.

- Given existing funding realities and the need to ensure minimum student cohorts to take developed programs, the ISSP Committee can work with IAHLA and First Nations institutes to promote greater cooperation.
- The ISSP Committee could help to promote the importance of mainstream institutes working with First Nations programs to assist students.

Considerations Related to a Five-Year Funding Limit

For some time, the ISSP Committee has instituted a limit of five-years of funding for any specific program. Reflecting upon both the advantages and disadvantages of that policy, the ISSP Committee should consider eliminating the five-year funding limit in the long-term. The ISSP processes already account for the applicant's clear demonstration of program need. Additionally, in the case of programs that have been funded for five continuous years, the Committee could ask applicants to specifically demonstrate an ongoing need for the program and the existence of an adequate number of students to justify its extension.

Considerations for the ISSP Evaluation Process

Evaluations can be extremely beneficial in identifying program strengths, challenges, and possibilities for improvement. Efforts should be made to continue the practice of evaluations. INAC should consider funding the ISSP evaluations on a regular basis so that they can be appropriately planned and scheduled. However, such funding must not be provided through the existing ISSP budget, as those resources are already inadequate to meet demand.

Trends in ISSP Proposal Requests

A review of the proposals submitted to the ISSP Committee throughout the past three years shows a range of training and educational requirements in

First Nations communities, as well as a significant funding need. The proposals also demonstrate that First Nations communities and institutes are committed to working with a number of public post-secondary institutes in BC and elsewhere.

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Section 1: Introduction

The Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) is a funding initiative of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). The objectives of the ISSP are as follows.

INAC ISSP Objective

To support the development and delivery of college and university level courses for First Nation and Inuit students, and research and development on First Nation and Inuit education. This is expected to increase the availability of post-secondary education programs tailored to First Nation and Inuit cultural and educational needs and thus increase the number of First Nation and Inuit students pursuing a post-secondary education. This in turn will foster enhanced educational outcomes for First Nation and Inuit students, and reduce the gap in the level of educational achievement between Aboriginal and other Canadians.

ISSP Committee BC Region Objectives

- To promote access to quality First Nations Post-Secondary learning programs.
- To encourage the preservation and maintenance of First Nations languages and cultures.
- To support and encourage the development of accredited First Nations post-secondary programs.
- To encourage First Nations people in the development of economic and social self-reliance through education and capacity building.
- To secure consistent funding for external evaluations of programs funded by ISSP.
- To promote First Nations institutional and community capacity.

In British Columbia, ISSP funding is managed through a cooperative arrangement between INAC and a Committee of First Nations representatives. The Committee members are selected to represent different

parts of the province; individuals are recommended by First Nations in specific regions and Committee members are then selected according to their post-secondary education experience and commitment to the ISSP. The ISSP Committee also includes a non-voting representative of INAC.

ISSP funding is allocated through an annual proposal process. The ISSP Committee is responsible for preparing the proposal guidelines, reviewing the submitted proposals, and making recommendations to INAC regarding the allocation of the annual ISSP budget.

Each year the Committee also strives to provide grants for the evaluation of ISSP funded programs.¹ This practice, and the number of evaluations funded, has depended upon funding availability.

ISSP sponsored program evaluations have several objectives, as outlined below.

- The evaluations are meant to allow First Nations institutes and communities to thoughtfully review their own programming, which is a critical aspect of growth and improvement.
- The evaluations are an opportunity for institutes and communities to give value to the programs that are funded by the ISSP by demonstrating to others what is being achieved.
- The evaluations are also an important chance to highlight overall challenges and outline plans for improvement.
- The evaluations should assist the ISSP Committee in tracking good practice and sharing successful program ideas.
- Finally, the evaluations reflect one component of the ISSP's accountability to First Nations communities, students, and to government funding agencies.

¹ Historically, the ISSP Committee has attempted to sponsor program evaluations with funding from outside of the regular ISSP budget. In most years, INAC has agreed to provide additional funding for program evaluations.

This project involved a review of ten program evaluations sponsored by the ISSP Committee throughout the past seven years. Each of the evaluations was undertaken by an external evaluator who was contracted to provide objectivity and new ideas.

This project also provides an analysis of the proposals submitted to the ISSP during the past three years. That analysis is intended to highlight the types of First Nations post-secondary programs needed in British Columbia, as well as the partnerships that have been established with mainstream post-secondary institutes.

1.1 Evaluations Reviewed

For the purpose of this project, the following evaluations were reviewed.

- Chemainus Native College, 2001, Business Management Program
- En'owkin Centre, 2000, Certificate in Indigenous Fine Arts
- First Nations Training and Development Centre, 2002, Natural Resource Technologist Certificate and Diploma Programs, Management Studies and Community Economic Development, Aboriginal Childhood Education, and Family and Community Counselling Programs
- George Manuel Institute, 2006, University College Entrance Program and Aboriginal Human Service Worker Programs
- Gitwangak Education Society, 2004, Aboriginal Community Economic Development Certificate and Diploma Programs, and Natural Resource Technology Program
- Native Education Society, 2000, Aboriginal Adult Basic Education and Family and Community Counselling Program
- Nicola Valley Institute Technology, 2005, Aboriginal Community Economic Development and Business Administration Programs
- Sto:lo Nation, 2003, Sto:lo Language Programs
- Wilp Wilxo'oskwahl Nisga'a, 2005, First Nations Studies and University College Entrance Programs

- Yinka Dene Language Institute, 2000, Language Teacher Training Program

(NB: In order to maintain anonymity for the evaluated First Nations institutes and programs, this report refers to each program using a letter – for example, “Program X.” While using a code may be somewhat cumbersome, the project Terms of Reference clearly referred to the need to respect the confidentiality of the evaluated programs and institutes – a very meaningful goal).

The ISSP Committee provides a guide for evaluations (see Appendix A), so there was considerable consistency amongst the evaluations submitted. Generally, the format involves an external evaluator reviewing annual program reports and other relevant documents. In addition, the evaluations include surveys and structured interviews to gather feedback and input from program stakeholders, including instructors, administrators, Board members, and particularly emphasizing students. This aspect of the evaluations is very valuable, as the observations, experiences and suggestions from those directly involved in the programs can most meaningful speak to the strengths and challenges of the programs.

According to the ISSP guidelines, the evaluations were of ISSP funded programs, not of institutes as a whole. However, this distinction was sometimes blurred, as it is difficult to consider one aspect of an institution’s operations without making some comment on the overall infrastructure. Therefore, this report focuses on ISSP funded programs, but it also has some application to First Nations institutes themselves.

This report is primarily qualitative in nature, reflecting the evaluations that were reviewed. In some cases, the program evaluations did include some student data, but the numbers were inconsistent between reports and largely undefined, and the data therefore could not be amalgamated or analyzed in a meaningful way. Further comments on this aspect of the project are included in the concluding section of the report, Considerations for the ISSP Committee.

1.2 General Description of The Programs Reviewed

A range of programs were described through the evaluations reports, including certificate programs, degree programs, and university and college preparation programs. Accordingly, the length of the programs ranged from one to four years.

The subjects of focus also varied significantly, reflecting the differing needs of the First Nations communities and students served. The programs focused on, among other things, language and culture training, business and community economic development, early childhood education, fine arts/creative writing, university and college preparation, and natural resource issues.

In addition, the places in which the programs were offered varied. Not only were the programs located in a variety of geographic locations with differing degrees of isolation; some were delivered by First Nations controlled post-secondary institutes while others were offered by First Nations communities without an institutional infrastructure in place. In those cases, the programs were generally adaptations of mainstream university programs, delivered locally by the public post-secondary institute through a brokering or affiliation agreement.

In spite of those important differences, there were also a number of consistent characteristics amongst the evaluated programs, as described below.

1.2.1 Transferability

All of the courses funded by the ISSP Committee must be fully articulated and transferable. This funding requirement is defined in the ISSP Proposal Guidelines as follows.

Accreditation: an eligible program leads to a certificate, diploma or degree that is recognized by a public institute, college or university.

The courses leading to the certificate, diploma or degree must be transferable to other public post-secondary institutes.

In fact, the transferability requirement not only reflects the commitment of the ISSP Committee; First Nations institutes and communities themselves also want to ensure that their students are taking widely recognized programs so that students can use their completed courses to pursue other opportunities. For example, as the evaluation report for Program A states, “it was forward thinking community leadership that saw the need to develop an accreditation agreement with the local University in order to ensure the academic standards of the program and to allow students to pursue post-secondary education without further barriers.”

The evaluation reports generally emphasized that the affiliation of the programs to other recognized post-secondary institutions has advantages for students, as it allows them to gain credit for entry into other post-secondary programs or ladder into degree programs. As will be described throughout this report, many of the students enrolled in the evaluated programs – and in other ISSP sponsored programs, as well – use their experience as a “stepping stone” to other opportunities, including other post-secondary programs. The evaluations demonstrate that the programs are seen as foundations that give students the confidence to continue on and reach their educational and career goals. In fact, sometimes a First Nations institute or community uses ISSP funding to offer only a portion of the overall program, such as the first two years of a four-year program. In those cases, there is an explicit expectation that students will begin the program locally and then move to another institute to complete the diploma or degree.

In terms of transferability, no significant concerns were highlighted in the evaluation reports. The evaluators consistently indicated that the courses were transferable to other institutes, and accreditation arrangements generally were said to be well defined. Almost no students reported any difficulty in transferring their credits if they chose to continue with their studies.

1.2.2 Governance

The way in which the evaluated programs were governed varied somewhat depending upon the community structures. For example, some of the programs/institutes were controlled primarily by a Chief and Council, sometimes with an education committee acting as a liaison. In other cases, the First Nations institutes were overseen by an autonomous First Nation Board or similar governing agency. In spite of this variation, however, all of the programs were governed by a First Nations controlled agency, which is consistent with ISSP funding requirements.

1.2.3 Unique Student Needs

It is difficult to generalize about the students enrolled in the evaluated programs, as they varied significantly in terms of their characteristics and goals. However, there are several points that can be made in this regard – factors that are key to understanding the other themes that arose through the evaluation reports.

- Although data in this area is limited, anecdotal information strongly suggests that a relatively large proportion of the students enrolled in First Nations controlled post-secondary programs/institutes face a relatively large number of barriers. For example, a large proportion of the students have numerous family obligations and very limited financial resources. In addition, many of the students enrolled in the programs have returned to school after a relatively long period of time, and often after a challenging experience in their previous schooling experience. Also, while efforts to promote community and personal healing are ongoing in First Nations communities, they remain pressing issues for many First Nations people. These factors mean that a large proportion of the students must deal with significant emotional, financial, and family issues while attending the

programs. The unique situations of the students means that the programs must meet not only academic but also a variety of personal needs if students are to be successful.

- The goals of the students entering the programs are varied – a factor that ideally will be reflected in the programs’ design and delivery. The majority of the students who participated in the program evaluations reported that they were interested in preparing for further education and/or accessing the knowledge, skills, and accreditation required for work. However, additional goals were often cited, including improved self-confidence, better parenting skills, preparation for and an opportunity to act as a role model for other community members (including their children), and a better ability to make community contributions. In fact, First Nations programs and institutes can best be evaluated in terms of their ability to support students in achieving a range of goals.

Section 2: Consistent Themes

In addition to the characteristics highlighted above, several additional themes arose throughout all of the evaluation reports. Those issues, which are actually interconnected, include program effectiveness, the inclusion of First Nations language and culture, local delivery, support for students, and community involvement. The themes are not described in order of priority, as they are all important aspects of the evaluated programs.

2.1 Program Effectiveness

Clearly one of the primary measures of the ISSP sponsored programs is their effectiveness in terms of delivering course content. In this regard, the evaluation reports were quite consistent. As cited in the report for Program B, the program’s courses “met all of their objectives in terms of information transmission,” and in the Program C evaluation the students were “uniformly positive about the skills they acquired.”

Instructor effectiveness was also highlighted in many of the evaluation reports. For example, in the Program D evaluation all of the surveyed students indicated that the standard of teaching they received was good or very good. Students enrolled in Program E also reported that they were pleased with the quality of instructors. In all of the programs, instructors are regularly evaluated, usually involving student evaluation forms, and maintaining quality instruction was a critical goal for all of the funding recipients (although this issue is effected by the funding available to the institutes and programs, as discussed further in the Challenges section below).

Overall, the evaluators for Program F noted that “the program has a good record of delivery and accomplishment. There is overall student satisfaction with program content and delivery. There is general acceptance of the institute’s ability to deliver high quality courses.” The Program G evaluators also emphasized the rigorousness of the programs, and they noted that there has been a strong focus on raising and then maintaining high academic standards. Such comments were made throughout the evaluation reports.

2.2 Cultural Foundation

Closely associated with, and actually a component of program effectiveness, is the issue of First Nations traditions. All of the First Nations programs that were reviewed for this report included a cultural component, with the goal of providing an appropriate mix of mainstream and First Nations specific content. In fact, a desire to make the programs culturally relevant is one of the primary reasons why First Nations communities and institutes offer their own programs, as opposed to relying solely on mainstream post-secondary institutions for their educational programming.

In the evaluated programs, the goal of making the programs First Nations specific is being achieved to varying extents, depending largely upon the subject matter being covered, the resources available to develop and include cultural aspects in the programs, as well as the expertise available within the institutes.

Several of the programs reviewed focused specifically on training in First Nations languages and cultures. In these cases, the cultural aspect of the courses was obvious. Programs B, D, and H were all specifically developed to teach First Nations languages and cultures, and as such First Nations languages, values, and traditions were the very foundations of the programs.

In other cases, the program subject matter was not as directly related to First Nations cultures, but in these cases significant effort was made to include First Nations content. For example, in the Program C evaluation, the majority of students reported that they enjoyed the First Nations content, which was said to be a “good combination of mainstream and First Nations studies.” Similarly, the evaluators for Program G reported that “substantial First Nations content has been integrated in order to maximize the relevance to the students and to the eventual application of their skills in the workplace.” Similarly, Program I’s objectives included offering course content and approaches that are culturally appropriate, and accordingly the institute adapts selected mainstream university courses to address First Nations issues, perspectives, and resources. That program’s evaluators commented that “this is the defining feature of the program and is perceived as a great strength by both the students and faculty that were interviewed.”

In addition to specific course content, the atmosphere of the programs was said to be relevant to First Nations learners. Efforts to ensure cultural appropriateness included, among other things, the use of First Nations guest speakers, First Nations role models, and language lessons for instructors, staff, and interested students. Staffs of the programs also understand and respect cultural practices, such as protocols associated with funerals and community events. Also, the programs strive, when possible, to offer practicums at First Nations centres.

The appropriate and respectful environments created for the students were highlighted in all of the evaluation reports. The evaluators for Program J, for example, stated that “if the course material did not lend itself to being particularly First Nations, it was the class environment that provided the cultural content.” Program G’s evaluators also noted that all courses are taught from a First Nations perspective, and “the curriculum presents ideas

from an Aboriginal perspective so that students can learn about their own history and culture in a way that is not possible in another setting.”

2.3 Local Delivery

Directly associated with and expanding upon the issue of cultural appropriateness is the fact that almost all of the programs were located in or very close to First Nations communities, which appears to have tremendous significance to the communities and to students.

In all of the reports, the majority of students who were interviewed indicated that they would not have enrolled in a post-secondary program if it were located in a different location. Students who were interviewed spoke about the comfort of studying near home, and many students reported that prior to enrolling in an ISSP funded program they had lacked the confidence needed to undertake new studies while also making a major life move. For such students, studying close to a family support network can be very helpful (although family responsibilities can also prove to be a distraction – an issue which is addressed by the First Nations institutes and programs through an emphasis on student support, as described below).

Many of the reports emphasized that family and work responsibilities would have made a move impossible for many students, as reflected in Program E’s evaluators reporting that “having programs offered in home communities is very beneficial, since relocation would be costly for students and would be difficult given family responsibilities.”

The importance of this issue is reinforced by the following comments from the program evaluators.

- “A key strength of the program relates to the community-based access to education that is afforded by offering these educational opportunities at a local institute. ... Without community-based programming, almost **none** of the past and current students would have been able to participate (emphasis in original document)” (Program A).

- “Many students would not take the training if their only option was leaving the area” (Program D).
- “Virtually all students surveyed indicated that they would likely not have embarked on this program if it were not delivered in or near their own community” (Program F).

2.4 Support for Students

Another critical component of the programs’ design and success is the emphasis placed on providing students with an extraordinary level of support. As demonstrated throughout the reports, this area of programming is especially crucial given the unique needs of the students being served. As several of the evaluators described, the students require special support because of personal and home issues and because of the unique issues facing First Nations communities generally.

Student support is provided by the program and institute staff in practical ways, including, as possible, the provision of computers for student use, tutoring services, a study room for students, on-site counselling, and Elder involvement to allow students an opportunity to discuss cultural and spiritual issues. One program (C) also reported that it offered part-time work to help students financially.

More generally, the staffs of the programs and institutes were commended in every evaluation report for providing emotional support and for creating a friendly, safe, welcoming and comfortable environment (C, G, and K). The evaluation report for Program E noted that the program’s affiliation agreement states that the partnering institutes will “work together to ensure that students receive the best possible chance of success,” and that “the level of support provided to the students proved to be invaluable.”

In terms of effectiveness of the student support activities, Program G was referred to as a “healing space” where students who have suffered a history of racism and other problems can get the support they need. The instructors at Program B were also said to be successful in providing guidance and support

for students, and the evaluators for Program H similarly reported that the critical component for many students was the supportive, family-like relationship that developed between students, the instructors, and the Elders.

Other relevant comments in this regard are outlined below.

- “The institute provides a safe, welcoming environment that stresses Aboriginal values and cultures, as well as collaboration rather than competition” (Program G).
- “The culturally grounded nature of the program is one of the most important supports for students who typically must master two cultures. Having support in their own culture facilitates student learning” (Program D).
- “The centre is friendly, students feel safe and secure, and there is a nurturing environment and a sense of belonging. Students take the program because it is offered at a First Nations institute. They need the support, comfortable atmosphere and First Nations environment. Then they gain confidence and feel ready to move to other mainstream institutes or to work” (Program C).
- “There was a sense of belonging, sense of family, comfortable atmosphere. Every step they encouraged me and understood my goals. They genuinely wanted to help. Having a First Nations teacher who pushed us and had high expectations was key” (Student in Program A).

Specific components of the supportive environment are discussed in more detail below, including the role of instructors and staff, small class size, and program flexibility.

2.4.1 Instructors

As demonstrated throughout the evaluation reports, perhaps the most important factor in the provision of excellent student support is the instructors and other staff people involved with the program delivery. The

instructors in Programs F and B were said to be well prepared, knowledgeable, and encouraging. Similarly, Program C and G's students highlighted the commitment of their instructors, who were said to "go well beyond the call of duty." Program A's evaluators also reported that "one of the key strengths of the program, articulated particularly by students, is the instructors. Their dedication, long-term service in the program, and overall willingness to help students appear to be major components of program effectiveness."

One aspect of instructor support that was mentioned in several reports was the availability of First Nations instructors. When First Nations instructors were available to teach courses, they were said to achieve a special connection to students. For example, the evaluator for Program G noted that the availability of Aboriginal instructors was a "real strength of the Institute, as First Nations students can learn from Aboriginal teachers who understand where they are coming from. A real rapport builds between the students and their instructors and a sense of working together as a team develops." First Nations instructors were also said to provide role models for students.

However, even in those cases where courses could not be taught by a First Nations instructor (an issue discussed more in the Challenges section of this report), the instructors were said to show a real commitment to the students and communities. Program F's report, for example, noted that "those instructors who are not First Nations seek, through their own initiative, to improve their knowledge and understanding of First Nations culture. In this way they are able to enhance their ability to deliver courses whose content is structurally sound and relevant to First Nations." Further, Program F's evaluators reported on the strength of having First Nations and non-First Nations instructors working together.

2.4.2 Small Class Size

As suggested above, another aspect of the supportive environment created through the First Nations programs is small class size. Because the programs and institutes enroll relatively small numbers of students, the participants have good access to instructors and to support (Programs C and E). The evaluators for Program G referred to the "personability of classes," which

students felt were “not intimidating like mainstream institutes.” As several of the reports demonstrated, small class size also allows for a supportive relationship amongst students.

2.4.3 Flexibility

The evaluated programs also support students by providing as much flexibility as possible. Several reports noted that scheduling classes outside of working hours made it possible for students to attend, and the reports for Programs A, D and G noted that students are assessed upon entry to determine their starting point in the various subject areas so that they can begin studying at the level that is right for them. The evaluator for Program D also reported that it offers flexible scheduling, which assists the majority of students who are either working or looking for work, parents who need to study part-time, or seasonal workers. Many of the students interviewed in all of the evaluations commented that the more flexible approach offered at a First Nations institute/program reflected their personal and work needs, and that such flexibility was necessary for them to “get a foot back into education.”²

2.5 Community Involvement

The evaluation reports also identified a very strong community component to the First Nations controlled post-secondary programs – a characteristic that makes the programs unique and effective.

Clearly, the ISSP funded programs support First Nations by enhancing community members’ skills and improving their ability to contribute to community building. For example, as the evaluators for Program A note, “the opportunity that the program offers to pursue degree-track education in a community-based setting is an important component of building individual and community capacity.” Similarly, the report for Program F states that “the

² Footnote: Overall, program flexibility was highlighted as an important strength of the evaluated programs, although an added caution was that too much flexibility could allow students to lose focus. In several instances, students themselves highlighted the need to keep some pressure on individuals to ensure that they complete their course requirements.

program has greatly enhanced students' understanding of the subject matter, made them more employable, [and] has allowed them to contribute more to their communities.”

As described above, three of the programs reviewed focused specifically on language and culture transmission, which is key for community building (Programs B, D, and H). These institutes and programs contribute immensely to their communities, as the program goals include the development of curriculum and learning resources to support language and culture teaching – a vital service. In addition, the programs allow the First Nations communities to retain control of their language and culture, which is a critical goal of First Nations.

Many of the other programs focused on subjects directly related to the employment needs of First Nations communities, such as natural resource technician training, business and community economic development, and early childhood education. Individuals skilled in these and other areas are important for the successful implementation of self-government. For example, the Program D evaluator noted that “the training helps to build confident and capable citizens who, in turn, can make important contributions to their communities. The list of jobs now held by former students demonstrates just how significant this outcome is.”

Also, the overall development of individuals' self-confidence, self-discipline, and awareness will help individuals in whatever they choose to do, which will ultimately make them stronger community members. For example, Program J's evaluation report highlights an important program objective – “to educate First Nations people in the development of children to improve their parenting skills as individuals and, by extension, within the community.”

Additionally, the evaluated programs make other specific community contributions, such as offering workshops for community members on topics of interest and, when possible, offering space for community activities.

It is also important to note that the strong program and community support is reciprocal; community members contributed greatly to the post-secondary

programs that were reviewed. For example, community recognition of students' achievements was highlighted as a key component of their success. Celebration of students' efforts helps to increase their self-esteem and pride, and encourages them to continue to pursue their educational and career goals.

Community members often volunteer their time to assist with the development of teaching materials, and in many cases program planning includes a diverse group of community members, including Elders. Program F also includes an Elders council made up of local Elders who students trust and can ask for traditional or spiritual support. For that program, "instructors felt very strongly that the Elders Council plays a huge part in supporting students." Additionally, community agencies help to sponsor student practicums, and in some cases community employers allow flexible work hours so that interested employees can go back to school part-time.

2.6 Challenges

In spite of the many strengths highlighted above, however, there are many very significant challenges for the ISSP funded programs.

Overall, the evaluation reports all clearly indicated that the programs and institutes are operating with extremely limited funding, which is the foundation of most of the challenges that were reported.

To begin, limited resources mean that it is not always possible to offer the ideal range of courses and/or only the beginning of a program, requiring that students who want to finish must transfer to another post-secondary institution. While this structure may work well for some students, it can present challenges for students who would prefer or who can only afford to complete their educations closer to home. Therefore, some of the students interviewed in the ISSP program evaluations recommended the addition of higher-level courses so that they could stay longer in their community/institute – a change that could require considerably more resources.

Other challenges presented by limited funding include the following.

- There is little money available for curriculum development and specifically for efforts to include culture in the programming.
- Resources are not readily available for promotion and recruitment activities.
- Many programs operate with inadequate space and facilities.³ Without core funding, few programs have the resources to upkeep their buildings and infrastructure. Also, the programs generally have limited computer, library, and learning resources.
- In two cases, the evaluated programs lacked funding for a coordinator, and these programs were seen as the least successful due to the associated lack of structure and student support.
- Most of the programs offer limited services for students with special needs, including no accommodations for students who require special physical access.
- In spite of the very successful student support efforts described above, almost all of the evaluations highlighted a need for increased counselling and student advising services – a need which was not being addressed due to inadequate funding.

In addition, perhaps some of the primary challenges resulting from the funding difficulties relate to staffing. It is difficult for the programs and institutes to maintain consistent full-time instructors because their pay scales are often lower than other institutes. Also, because grants are given on an annual basis, funding is uncertain from one year to the next. As such, instructors do not know if they will have continued employment, creating stress for both the instructors and program administrators. As Program H's report clearly states, "the unpredictability of funding from year to year means that good teachers, who have invested considerable time in developing their skills, do not know from year to year if they will have employment. There is a

³ Two programs were notable exceptions to this issue, and their beautiful facilities were specifically noted as a program strength (Programs F and G).

danger that the best of them will be lured away to positions with more job stability.” Also, Program D’s evaluator noted that “the budget does not allow for the hiring of a faculty of full-time instructors who could provide service to the growth and development of the institute.” The evaluator commented that full-time faculty could make remarkable contributions to the development of First Nations curricula in all course areas.

The evaluation reports also highlighted some other challenges related to instructors that do not relate directly to the programs’ funding. For example, the need to hire instructors with the credentials required for transferability can limit the institutes’ ability to hire local experts. Several of the reports also identified the need for more First Nations instructors, as “they seem to find ways to make the link between students’ experiences and the new materials they have to learn” (Program G). However, as the number of First Nations instructors is limited, especially in the north, the goal of hiring only First Nations instructors is currently “not seen as a reality” (Program J).

Professional development opportunities for instructors and other staff members were also extremely limited in the evaluated programs. With the exception of Program F, the evaluations found that instructors do not have access to a planned and coordinated program of staff development commensurate with their professional aspirations or the changing skill demands being placed upon them with the maturing of the program. This issue was thought to be primarily related to funding availability, although it was also affected by the instructors’ physical isolation from other colleagues and research centres.

The preparedness of students entering the programs was also raised as an issue for consideration – not only in terms of academic preparedness, but also in terms of students understanding their own goals and commitment. Program C’s evaluators, for example, reported that “some students come back without a vision of where they are heading, and so they drift along, coming back year after year.” Overall, it appears that the more widespread use of placement tests for entering students would be useful. Several evaluation reports noted the need to better ensure that students have the background they need to succeed, and for the institutes that **do** place a strong emphasis

on appropriate placements, this practice was noted as a significant strength of their programming.

In several cases, maintaining an adequate number of students for a program was also raised as an issue for consideration, as significant work goes into developing a program while there may be a limited population of students to take it. Also, small numbers of students in a program can have a negative effect on course planning and selection. Finally, while small student numbers can be beneficial in terms of student support and quality interactions with instructors, it can also inhibit certain kinds of learning that profit from a relatively larger, more diverse group structure (Programs D and I).

Another challenge noted in almost all of the evaluation reports relates to communications and the promotion of the learning opportunities available through First Nations controlled programs. This issue has multiple facets, including limited resources for recruitment, as well as the need for a better understanding of the opportunities available. As Program G's report highlights, the quality of the centre's programming has improved dramatically since its establishment, but its reputation has not grown with it. This situation makes it difficult to recruit students and causes difficulties for students needing to access funding from their community's post-secondary education budget (Programs D and G). Better promotion of the work being done in First Nations programs would also assist with the respectful and equitable negotiation of agreements with public post-secondary institutes.

In fact, the evaluation reports commented specifically on relationship building between First Nations and public, non-First Nations institutes, specifically noting the need to maintain better cooperation for student registration, tracking, and reporting. Improved communications, it was suggested, could help students make an easier transition between institutions. One report (J) specifically recommended that a representative of mainstream institutes should visit First Nations programs to help students who might be continuing by providing advice on application procedures and the nature and expectations of the new programs they will be taking.

Section 3: Conclusions

The evaluation reports reviewed for the purpose of this project highlighted numerous issues that are common to ISSP funded programs. For example, it would be difficult to exaggerate the challenges created by the limited funding afforded to the programs. While ISSP sponsorship is critical for the implementation of these important initiatives, it does not compensate for the lack of core funding for First Nations institutes and programs. Although ISSP funding is intended to “support” First Nations post-secondary education programming, there are very few other funding sources available, making an over-reliance on ISSP funding an unfortunate reality. Also, competition for ISSP funding means that annual allocations are not guaranteed, creating uncertainty for all First Nations programs and institutes.

However, in spite of very limited budgets and an ongoing struggle to access the resources they need, the evaluation reports also emphasize that ISSP sponsored programs are having a critical, positive impact on First Nations students and communities. To begin, the programs are providing important capacity building opportunities for individuals who might not otherwise pursue post-secondary education. The programs train people to fill much needed positions within their communities, and many of the programs also promote language and culture education, which is vital to the maintenance of the threatened resources. Overall, First Nations programs can provide an education that is relevant to First Nations communities while building capacity in First Nations individuals that is recognized by the mainstream.

Also, while preparing students to fulfill roles within their own communities is critical, the programs also encourage students to look beyond their own communities and have the confidence to explore opportunities elsewhere. As stated in Program K’s report, prior to the course the students were seen as having “tunnel vision” in that they saw only their own communities. After being enrolled in the program, the students “had broadened their vision and experience.” Encouraging students to leave their communities is certainly not a goal of ISSP funded programs, but helping students believe that they can pursue a range of options is a positive outcome.

With very few exceptions, the students interviewed through the evaluations agreed enthusiastically that attending the programs had been a positive experience for them. As the reports show, personal growth generally accompanies a growth in knowledge and skills, and ISSP funded programs emphasize this benefit of educational programming by making special efforts to promote students' self-esteem and personal healing.

It is critical to note that many of the students who attended the ISSP sponsored programs would not have been able to access post-secondary opportunities without the chance to study in a First Nations environment. The institutes were continually said to "make for a good transition back to college." For example, Program I's report notes that the program "provides an effective means for First Nations students to develop study skills and earn first and second year academic credits in a small, supportive learning environment before making the transition to a university setting."

The importance of the ISSP funded programs was also echoed in previous reports on the BC ISSP. For example, in 2000 the ISSP Committee sponsored a summary of program evaluations conducted prior to that year. That report, prepared by Jeanie Cockell, highlighted findings very similar to those of this study – noting the strengths of the programs in terms of culturally relevant curriculum, student support services, and effective instruction. That report also emphasized the critical shortage of funding available for First Nations post-secondary programming.

In addition, a review of the ISSP itself, prepared by Renee Spence in 2000, stated the following.

Any barriers facing Aboriginal students who wish to pursue post-secondary education must be addressed. ... If the barrier is funding, more funding must be made available. If the barrier is the downfall of mainstream institutions in meeting the needs of First Nations students, other alternatives must be made available. These alternatives have been identified by First Nations people and include First Nations institutes and

partnered programs offered in or near their communities. These are the types of programs supported by the ISSP.

The following comments also speak to the strengths of the programs reviewed through this initiative.

- “The instructors used well-developed and accredited courses but presented them as traditional classroom-based courses and provided extra time and individual support for students who were having difficulties” (Program C).
- “It helped me with confidence and self-esteem. It opened doors for further education. It helped me overcome my fears” (Student enrolled in Program A).
- “Students interviewed were enthusiastic about both the learning environment and the quality of instruction that they were experiencing in the program. They stressed the positive and supportive atmosphere created by the faculty and staff, and the degree of individual attention and challenge they received. They emphasized how much they value the First Nations focus in their coursework and they commented that other educational experiences that they had lacked this important perspective” (Program I).
- “The program instructors all agreed that the First Nations institute was the better choice for students because of its First Nations focus, its small size, and because it is within their own communities. Relocating for school was considered too difficult for those with families and too expensive.” (Program K).

In the end it is difficult to say how many students would access an education elsewhere if the ISSP sponsored program was not available, and perhaps even more difficult to predict whether the students would have been successful in a different environment. However, the evaluation reports reviewed through this project clearly indicate that the ISSP funded programs are providing a meaningful educational opportunity to students who

otherwise would find it very difficult to return to school. As an instructor with Program K stated:

Students are still coming with not a lot of confidence or self-esteem. But they're still coming in the door. Several have said "If it wasn't for this First Nations institute I wouldn't have come back to school."

Section 4: Proposal Trends

As described above, as well as a review of the ISSP sponsored program evaluations, this project also involved an analysis of proposals received for the past three ISSP funding years. The results of that analysis are shown below.

The proposals received indicated the following areas of education/training needs. NB. The chart shows the categories of needs included in all proposals received (including developmental programs) – not just the funded proposals – as the **requests** for funding is thought to be the better indicator of need.

Training Need (as Per Proposals)	05/06	06/07	07/08
Aboriginal Early Childhood Education	3	6	5
Business/Economic Development		1	2
Education (general/non-Language Teaching)	5	1	0
Language Training/Language Teacher Training	3	10	4
First Nations Leadership	2		
First Nations Public Administration	2	3	
Health	2	1	2
Natural Resources/Land Management	3	1	1
Social Services	3		1
Tourism Training	1	1	1
Other		4	4
UCEP/College Preparation	10	18	17
Needs Assessments (for developmental proposals)	2	1	1
Developmental activities (for developmental proposals)	1	5	2

The proposals submitted in the past three years also demonstrate that the following partnerships have been developed. NB. Again, the following chart includes **all** proposals received (except developmental projects that had not yet identified a partner). Also, the total number of partnerships may not be equal to the number of proposals received, as some programs included two or more partners.

Partnerships	05/06	06/07	07/08
BC Open University	2	1	
British Columbia Institute of Technology		1	
Camosun College	1		
College of New Caledonia	3	2	3
Institute of Indigenous Government	1		
Malaspina University College	3	4	5
Native Education Centre	4	6	4
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	3	4	2
Norquest College	1		1
North Island College		1	
Northwest Community College	1	4	3
Selkirk College	1	1	1
Simon Fraser University	1	2	3
Thompson Rivers University College	1	4	6
University College of the Cariboo	4	1	
University College of the Fraser Valley	2		
University of British Columbia		2	1 UBC-O
University of Northern British Columbia	2	3	2
Vancouver Community College	1	2	
Justice Institute			1

Partnership Types	05/06	06/07	07/08
Affiliation	15	25	24
Brokering	12	11	5

Note: the project terms of reference requested information regarding the costs of partnerships, but this information is not requested in the ISSP proposal guidelines. Therefore, the information was not available in a consistent format. The ISSP Committee should therefore consider this issue when reviewing its latest funding guidelines format.

Finally, the submitted proposals indicate the following trends in terms of projected numbers of students served and funding request levels.

Projected Student enrollment	05/06	06/07	07/08
Range of student enrollment	12-51	12-50	11-85
Average Number of Students Enrolled	19.8	22.9	22.5

Year	Amount Requested	Amount Funded
2005/2006		
Established	\$ 3,231,708.00	\$1,298,348.00
UCEP	\$ 428,525.00	\$387,275.00
Developmental	\$ 243,678.00	\$225,678.00
Total Requested vs. Available Funding 2005/2006	\$ 3,903,911.00	\$1,911,301.00
2006/2007		
Established	\$3,405,711.00	\$1,394,499.00
UCEP	\$1,257,348.00	\$520,425.00
Developmental	\$283,185.00	\$59,876.00
Total Requested vs. Available Funding 2006/2007	\$4,946,244.00	\$1,974,800.00
2007/2008		
Established	\$2,759,485.00	\$1,671,668.00
UCEP	\$1,694,392.00	\$348,600.00
Developmental	\$78,400.00	\$37,632.00
Total Requested vs. Available Funding 2007/2008	\$4,532,277.00	\$2,057,900.00

Section 5: Considerations for the ISSP Committee

This evaluation review suggests several ideas for consideration by the ISSP Committee. To begin, some general issues were raised through the reports themselves. Additionally, the project Terms of Reference asked for specific comment on two issues – a five-year funding limit (which has been removed in 2007/08 on a pilot basis) and suggestions for the evaluation process itself. All of those topics are discussed below.

5.1 General Issues

5.1.1 Promote Funding Needs

The critical importance of funding issues was one of the most consistent themes raised in the evaluation reports, both in terms of the need for greater ISSP funding and also the need for secure core funding for First Nations post-secondary institutes. It is important to emphasize that the existing ISSP budget cannot possibly meet existing funding needs, regardless of how effectively the resources are allocated. The ISSP Committee is therefore encouraged to continue its efforts to promote this issue to INAC through cooperative efforts with First Nations leadership and with the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association.⁴

5.1.2 Promote the Achievements of ISSP Funded Programs

The evaluation reports also highlighted an overall need to promote the achievements of First Nations controlled post-secondary programs and institutes. The ISSP Committee can work with First Nations institutes to increase awareness about the benefits and successes of First Nations programming, including the awareness of students, First Nations communities, and the public post-secondary education system. Continuing the sponsorship of evaluations is one way to achieve that goal.

⁴ The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) is a collective organization that represents the interests of all Aboriginal controlled adult learning centres and post-secondary education institutes in BC.

5.1.3 Facilitate Professional Development Opportunities

Providing professional development for instructors and staff in First Nations post-secondary programs appears to be a widespread challenge and an issue that can be practically addressed in the short-term. The ISSP Committee is encouraged to work with IAHLA to identify ways to address that issue. The facilitation of relevant professional development may be a particularly appropriate service for a collective organization such as IAHLA, and the ISSP Committee can use the information it gathers through evaluations and annual reports to provide valuable insight into the types of training that would be beneficial. The ISSP Committee may also use its connections to INAC to identify potential sources of funding for professional development activities; its ongoing communications with INAC may sometimes alert the Committee to relevant sources of money that occasionally arise. Some of the specific professional development possibilities highlighted through this project include: opportunities for sharing and developing skills for cultural inclusion in post-secondary curriculum, and training related to supporting and counselling post-secondary students.

5.1.4 Promote Cooperation

Given existing funding realities and the need to ensure minimum student cohorts to take developed programs, the ISSP Committee can work with IAHLA and First Nations institutes to promote greater cooperation. This effort will require extensive planning and sustained commitment, but it would be very beneficial to explore possibilities for coordinating program delivery from regional centres. In considering this issue, the importance of local delivery, highlighted so clearly above, must be emphasized. However, there may be ways for neighbouring communities to identify common education and training needs and coordinate their efforts to meet those needs. For example, it may be possible to work together to develop and/or adapt mainstream programs to ensure that communities are not charged for those activities again and again. Collectively scheduling programming in specific regions could also help to reduce transportation costs and could be helpful in coordinating instructors' time and travel.

5.1.5 Promote Stronger Partnerships

The evaluation reports clearly indicated that many ISSP funded programs provide a foundation for students wanting to return to post-secondary education. In this regard, the ISSP Committee's emphasis on transferability is very effective and appropriate. However, the evaluations also suggested that greater assistance could help students make an easier transition to the mainstream post-secondary environment. The ISSP Committee could help to promote the importance of mainstream institutes working with First Nations programs to assist students with application and registration procedures and to help students understand the expectations and new environment they will be experiencing after their transition – thereby giving the students every possible chance for success.

5.2 Considerations Related to a Five-Year Funding Limit

For some time, the ISSP Committee has instituted a limit of five-years of funding for any specific program. To implement this practice, the Committee has sent notice to any funding recipient that had received funding for the same program for five straight years. That notice indicated that, in order to be eligible for subsequent ISSP funding, the recipient would have to apply for funding for an alternate program.

The reasons for the funding limit include the widespread need for the very limited ISSP funding, and the ISSP Committee's commitment to share the funding as equitably as possible. In addition, the policy was meant to reflect the fact that ISSP support was not intended as continuing funding, but instead had historically been focused on the development of First Nations programming. In addition, the Committee felt that ISSP support should not become viewed as "core" funding for long-established programs and institutes; rather, the ISSP resources are allocated through an annual, very competitive proposal process in which no program or institute is guaranteed access to any funding.

Through reflection upon the evaluation reports as well as the author's experience working with the ISSP Committee for almost seven years, the following thoughts are offered for consideration by the ISSP Committee.

Advantages of a Five-Year Funding Limit

- The policy helps to ensure that the very limited ISSP resources are used for a variety of programs. Given the lack of funding available to First Nations institutes, it would be very possible to allocate all of the ISSP funding to a few continuous programs, which would limit access to the funds and could inhibit the development of new programs.
- A five-year funding limit may lead to creative approaches to fundraising for communities and institutes that want to continue programs for more than five years. That would allow the ISSP funding to be used for new initiatives.
- A five-year funding limit may help First Nations institutes and programs to remember that ISSP funding cannot be viewed as "core," sustained funding. If institutes and programs do view the ISSP as a guaranteed source of annual support, there could be very negative consequences in the event of an unsuccessful proposal.
- A five-year funding limit may encourage institutes and communities to carefully monitor the need for a program, including student interest and a continued minimum cohort of students.
- Supporting short-term programs can be beneficial, as such programs encourage students to complete their education programs and move on to other opportunities in a timely way. This has benefits to students and it also helps to reduce pressure on community post-secondary education budgets.

Disadvantages of a Five-Year Funding Limit

- Communities and institutes often invest tremendous time and effort into developing a program, including significant financial and personal contributions. Following such effort, it would be unfortunate to then cripple a program by eliminating its ability to access one of the only significant sources of funding for First Nations post-secondary programming. The damage caused by such a policy would be most significant if students have only partially completed their studies when the five-year funding limit is reached, which could result in significant difficulties for the most important ISSP stakeholders -- students.
- To apply the policy equitably – which is a long-standing ISSP goal – the five-year funding limit must impose a general rule in all instances, when specific circumstances may dictate the need for a program’s continuation. For example, some complex initiatives may require considerable time for implementation – initiatives such as First Nations language promotion. Such efforts may require preparing students for their studies, teaching the language, and ideally providing teacher education training, as well. In another example, communities may have a large cohort of students still wanting to take a specific type of training, particularly if more people become aware of the program’s effectiveness because of its first five successful years of operations. In such cases, setting a maximum funding period for a specific program could be seen as penalizing success.
- Practically, the five-year funding limit is difficult to monitor and implement fairly. For example, the policy is difficult to apply if there have been gaps in a program’s operations, either because of community needs or because of unsuccessful attempts to access funding. Would a program that operated for two years, did not operate for two years, and then operated again for three years be considered at its five-year limit? How long would a community have to wait after the five-year limit before applying for program funding again? Is there a difference if a program has been operating only part-time – a reasonable way to run a program given the need for flexibility, as discussed above? In such a case, a community or institute could have been awarded a fraction of the resources provided to a

full-time program during the same time period. Is that an issue for concern? The numerous questions raised demonstrate that the effective and equitable application of the policy could be very complicated, and may result in a considerable administrative burden in monitoring its application.

- The five-year funding limit is not consistent with a commitment to First Nations communities determining their own educational needs. As the evaluation reports reviewed through this project clearly show, many communities are making considerable efforts to monitor their own education and training needs, often through extensive needs assessment processes. It would be unfortunate to deny funding for a program that has been identified as a significant priority by the community that best knows its educational needs.

5.2.1 Suggestion Regarding the Five-Year Funding Limit

To begin, it is important to note that there is no specific reference to a five-year funding limit in either the INAC or ISSP Committee objectives for the ISSP program, and so the policy appears to be at the discretion of the ISSP Committee (with INAC approval).

Given that situation, and recognizing the significant disadvantages of the policy, the ISSP Committee should consider permanently eliminating the five-year funding limit. The ISSP Proposal Guidelines now require that funding applicants outline the rationale for each program, and the ISSP proposal scoring methodology accounts for the applicant's clear demonstration of program need. Also, proposals for ISSP funding are expected to include letters of community support, which should indicate that the community believes the program continues to be necessary and important.

Additionally, in the case of programs that have been funded for five continuous years, the Committee could ask applicants to specifically demonstrate an ongoing need for the program and the existence of an adequate number of students to justify its extension. This practice would take

into consideration some of the advantages and disadvantages of a five-year funding limit while respecting the unique needs of different First Nations communities.

5.3 Considerations for the ISSP Evaluation Process

The ISSP Committee should be commended for its efforts to ensure that ISSP funded programs are thoughtfully reviewed on a regular basis. Evaluations can be extremely beneficial in identifying programs strengths, challenges, and possibilities for improvement. ISSP Evaluations also contribute to the credibility and autonomy of First Nations institutes, which will help when they are negotiating with public post-secondary institutes for accreditation. Given the limited resources available for the programs and institutes – both financial and personnel resources – it would be very difficult for the programs to implement thorough evaluations without the specific funding provided by the ISSP Committee.

The evaluations reviewed through this project were clearly focused on supporting program planning for growth. The evaluations allowed for anonymous feedback from students, instructors, and community members, which is important for monitoring the effectiveness of the program design. The evaluations also facilitated an objective consideration of the program's achievements, which is helpful in identifying areas for improvement. As Program A's evaluation report notes, "including evaluation in the cycle of program design and implementation is sound and important practice, and results in the ultimate strengthening of programs that are being delivered."

Efforts should be made to continue the practice of evaluations, and the ISSP Committee should continue to emphasize their importance to the institutes and to INAC. In fact, INAC should consider funding the ISSP evaluations on a regular basis so that they can be appropriately planned and scheduled. However, such funding must not be provided through the existing ISSP budget, as those resources are already inadequate to meet demand.

Assuming that the practice of evaluations will continue, the following considerations are offered.

5.3.1 Scheduling Evaluations

The ISSP Committee should consider working with funding recipients to ensure that evaluations are conducted at an appropriate time. Currently, recipients are notified that they will be receiving funds and that they are expected to complete the evaluation by a pre-established deadline. While this practice does ensure that evaluations are completed, it might be more effective to consult with institutes and programs to determine an appropriate schedule, as circumstances within institutes and communities may effect when an evaluation would be most effective. The ISSP Committee has been clear that the evaluations are intended to strengthen First Nations post-secondary programs, as well as maintain accountability for the ISSP funding. The benefits of the evaluation should be emphasized in communications with funding recipients, so that they welcome and help to effectively time their reviews.

5.3.2 Maintaining a Standard Evaluation Format

The use of a standard format appears to be very effective. Currently, a detailed outline is provided for the program reviews, and although the evaluators may adapt that format somewhat to reflect specific needs, using the ISSP evaluation guidelines provides several benefits. To begin, the evaluation guidelines are a useful resource for program and institute staff; they can be used as a “ready-made” scope of work for the contractor who is expected to complete the evaluation. The guidelines can also assist the evaluators by outlining the issues to be considered and providing sample questions for interviews and surveys. Providing a standard format also ensures considerable consistency amongst the reports, which is very valuable in identifying overall themes. It is therefore recommended that the ISSP Committee continue its practice of providing a format to guide the evaluations, and that evaluators be encouraged to use those guidelines with only minor adaptations required to reflect unique program needs.

5.3.3 Reviewing the Existing Format

The existing ISSP external evaluation guidelines seem to be effective and no relevant concerns have been expressed by either the evaluators or the evaluated programs. The current format results in thorough reports and thoughtful feedback from program participants. However, it may be useful for the ISSP Committee staff person to contact some of the evaluated programs and possibly some of the evaluators to request specific feedback on the guidelines.

5.3.4 Emphasizing Qualitative Information

As mentioned above, the evaluations submitted to the ISSP Committee are primarily qualitative in nature, which is reflected in the qualitative nature of this report. In fact, having the evaluations focus on detailed descriptive information and stakeholder perceptions is very appropriate, as this kind of data is very meaningful but requires considerable effort to collect. The ISSP evaluation funding provides one of the few opportunities to gather qualitative input in a thorough way.

Also, the qualitative information gathered through the evaluations complements the quantitative data being collected through other mechanisms. The ISSP Committee has made considerable effort to create an annual report format that facilitates standard reporting of completion, retention, and graduations rates. Historically, it has been difficult to gather consistent data through the annual reporting process, reflecting the need to develop common definitions and build capacity for accurate data collection. The ISSP Committee has worked to achieve that goal, and it is expected that the Committee's ongoing efforts to gather consistent information will allow for an analysis of quantitative data from the ISSP Annual Reports.

In addition, the collection of qualitative data through the ISSP external evaluations can be used to complement the collective data collection effort being sponsored through IAHLA. That initiative encourages all First Nations institutes and programs in BC to complete a standard, very detailed data collection instrument on an annual basis. The IAHLA data collection efforts began quite recently and the instrument is still being refined, but given the

challenges associated with accurate data collection it would be most useful to have BC First Nations institutes focus on one collective effort.

5.3.5 Ensuring Objective External Evaluators

While this did not appear to be a widespread problem in terms of the evaluation reports reviewed through this project, the ISSP Committee may consider reviewing its existing guidelines regarding the selection of external evaluators. In order for the individual reviews and the overall ISSP evaluation process to be seen as legitimate, it is critical that the external evaluators be objective and removed from the Institutes under review. Program staff could be encouraged to consult with the ISSP Committee regarding their choice of evaluator prior to beginning their review to monitor this critical aspect of the evaluation process.⁵ In addition, ISSP Committee members could be trained to act as external evaluators in order to support institutes and build capacity of the ISSP Committee.

5.3.6 Promoting Information Sharing

While the evaluation process is intended to share best practices amongst First Nations institutes and programs, this aspect of the process is not emphasized as much as possible because the reports are not shared. The evaluations reviewed through this project were very positive, highlighting numerous strengths and useful practices. They also include specific suggestions that might be meaningful in other circumstances. It is impossible to capture all of the individual details in a summary report, particularly because sharing specific information would be inconsistent with the goal of maintaining confidentiality. Therefore, the ISSP Committee is encouraged to ask evaluated programs for permission to share their reports with other interested institutes and programs. Agreeing with this request could be completely voluntary, thereby remaining respectful of the individual programs and institutes while also resulting in important information sharing.

⁵ A minor correction to the Evaluation Guidelines: the Guidelines instruct the funding recipients to use an evaluation team of two or more individuals. This practice was used for only one evaluation. This instruction should therefore be removed from the Guidelines.

Appendix A

The ISSP Committee's Guidelines for Evaluations

Information for External Program Evaluations

5.1 External Program Evaluation Information

In order to track best practices, and depending upon availability of funding, ISSP will provide funds to conduct an external evaluation of established programs that have received ISSP funding. If funding is available, up to four institutes will be notified that they will be provided funding to undertake an evaluation.

The evaluation process is intended to allow First Nations institutes to strengthen and give value to programs which are funded by the ISSP. The evaluations should provide an opportunity for First Nations institutes to paint a picture of their own programs, and demonstrate to other people what is being done for First Nations students. Established programs will be notified of a strict deadline date to complete this process. Failure to adhere to the deadline will result in ineligibility for subsequent funding from ISSP until this process is complete.

**Funding for external program evaluations, when available,
is allocated on an annual basis.**

5.2 External Program Evaluation Guidelines

The program evaluations are intended to provide program evidence in the following areas:

- students
- community
- curricula
- staff
- governance

The evaluation process will include two components: an internal and an external evaluation. In the internal evaluation, institutes will amalgamate and verify past final reports, and collect relevant evidence and additional information at their discretion.

The external evaluation will involve a team of two or more individuals verifying the final reports and reviewing the collected evidence through such things as surveys/interviews with staff, past and current students, instructors, and members of the community(ies) the program serves. The external evaluators will prepare a written report with recommendations. That report will identify other financial contributions to the program, as well as the interaction of the program with other institutes (such as affiliation agreements, working relationships with other organization(s) to implement the program, etc.). The written report must be made available to the Institute and the ISSP Committee. The Institute will be consulted in the preparation and review of the report and recommendations.

**Individuals on the external evaluation team
must be independent of your institute/organization.**

For example, they must not be on your Board of Governors, they must not be current instructors, they should not act in a consultative capacity, and they should not be in any other situation that would imply a conflict of interest.

Evaluation Questions

Program Description

- What is the program purpose?
- Is this program accredited, and are the courses transferable? If so, to which other post-secondary institutes can they be transferred?
- How would you describe the First Nations community/communities and students you serve?
- How is your program curricula approved, and how is it made relevant to the First Nations your program serves?

Students

- How does your program offer student support?
- How does your program provide access to the First Nations students you serve?
- How many students have participated in your program? Where have those students been from? If this program was offered at a provincial institute, would those students have participated? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What are some former program students doing now? (Please provide examples.)
- Have the students generally had a positive learning experience in this program?
- How has the program effected the lives of the students who participated in it?

Program Resources and Instructors

- What kinds of human resources are available to support your program?
- How many of your instructors are First Nations people? How many of your instructors are from the First Nations you serve? What constraints effect your hiring of instructors? How do you attempt to address those constraints?
- What process is used to determine that an instructor is qualified, and who is responsible for that process?
- How do you ensure that instructors are available to their students for adequate time and support?
- How does your program deal with instructor effectiveness?
- How is professional development encouraged for your instructors and staff?
- How do your instructors contribute to the community/communities they serve?

Program Governance

- How is your program governed (for example, a Board of Governors...)? Who makes up the governing body? Where are those individuals from?

Community Support/Interaction

- How does the community contribute to and support your program?