



INDIGENOUS
TOURISM ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

ASSOCIATION TOURISTIQUE
AUTOCHTONE
DU CANADA

Dear ITAC Board Members and Partners,

I am writing today on behalf of the board of the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) to reiterate our full support and trust in ITAC's President & CEO Keith Henry and his team. The board, is very proud of the entire team's work managing the COVID-19 Stimulus Development Fund. As of yesterday, ITAC had paid out over \$16 million of the total \$16.2 million and we are confident that all \$16.2 million of the grant funds will be paid out fairly to qualified members before the end of December, as per ITAC's contract terms with ISC.

Despite an overwhelmingly positive ITAC story of fighting for and distributing COVID-19 relief, a media story was recently broadcast on CBC yesterday. The negative angle on this story has been pushed by disgruntled former board members who have been working to discredit ITAC's work in advocating and finding financial resources for our members. This unfair questioning of our governance policies has been disheartening. We remain steadfast in our commitment to support our Indigenous tourism members and communities more than ever.

The process of receiving stimulus funding and then immediately allocating it back out to members was not without challenges due to the delayed timing of receiving federal funds and required due diligence and paperwork required by our funders. We acknowledge there were many learnings and some members had to wait longer than others to receive funding, which was regrettable but unavoidable. This was due to the mechanisms put in place by our funding partners for due diligence as well as delays created due to the unfounded allegations of mismanagement by past board members, which further pushed back the receipt of money from the funders.

We unequivocally deny that there was any mismanagement of the funds or that any members, board or otherwise, were given unfair preferential treatment. The allocation process was unbiased and impartial, relying on strict [eligibility requirements](#) that were agreed upon by ITAC and its funding partners to determine which businesses would ultimately qualify. Additionally, the grants were required to be distributed to a mix of export-, market- and visitor-ready Indigenous tourism businesses in Canada over multiple phases, and in that order, so the staggered rollout did mean that some businesses were required to wait for later phases in order to become eligible.

That said, to ensure a fair and unbiased allocation, **ITAC established an adjudication committee, with applications status blind from ITAC Board, ITAC CEO and Provincial-Territorial partners to remove bias and to keep the process as fair as possible.** The team remains hard at work in distributing the funds to all applicants who meet the criteria set up by our funding partners. Notwithstanding such challenges and learnings, on balance, an exceptional result was achieved in a short window of time during a pandemic by a small but dedicated team.

For further details about the rollout of the COVID-19 Stimulus Development Fund, please find a Fact Sheet attached, which includes the application criteria, submission process, adjudication process, the



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requirements imposed on ITAC by the RDAs and ISC to manage and distribute the funds, how much of the funding has been already delivered as well as the timeline for completing grant distribution.

Also, in question, was the matter of our President & CEO, Keith Henry's, compensation. Keith had been without a contract for several months and, in fact, negotiations began well before the COVID pandemic hit. **The board followed best practices in negotiating Keith Henry's transition from consultant to employee, effective September 1, 2020, and his salary and any incentives are tied to deliverable results. We can also confirm that despite false claims to the contrary, no part of Mr. Henry's remuneration package was paid from the COVID-19 relief funding received from federal partners or RDAs.** Other than a small (3%) administration budget, all funding for the Stimulus Development program from ISC and the RDAs went directly to our members. For additional details about the administration budget, please see the attached Fact Sheet.

You want a President & CEO who is incentivized to deliver measurable growth results for the collective benefit of the entire organization and the broader Indigenous tourism industry across Canada. This includes advocating on behalf of and raising funds to ensure Indigenous tourism across Canada continues to grow in times of high market demand and survives when a crisis like a global pandemic hits. Without ITAC and Keith's fervent advocacy for federal stimulus and the need for it to be directed through indigenous-led solutions to save the Indigenous tourism industry, we cannot be sure that our industry would have received directed support at all.

Decisions made by the Board are based on the highest standards of board governance, following board policies and bylaws, with meeting minutes [posted online](#) for all members to review. The board approves ITAC's strategy, year-over-year, including special projects, ensuring the team consistently operates under an approved mandate.

In closing, I, along with the board, would like to reemphasize support for our President and CEO Keith Henry and his team's unwavering dedication and excellent ongoing work managing the COVID-19 Stimulus Development Fund.

Sincerely,

Brenda Holder
Chair
Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada