First Nations Technology Council

Indigenous Digital Enablement Series: Exploring Affordable Connectivity Solutions for First Nations in BC

Request for Proposals - July 2025

The First Nations Technology Council (Technology Council) invites proposals from qualified research firms or consultants to develop an engaging and actionable report addressing the affordability gap in access to wifi and cellular data for First Nations communities in BC. Affordability, availability, and digital skills are essential elements of achieving digital equity for First Nations communities. This project aims to identify the key barriers preventing First Nations communities in BC from accessing affordable and reliable connectivity, focusing on how these challenges differ across urban, rural, and remote areas. It will also assess the efficacy of existing subsidized internet programs and explore community-driven solutions to address the affordability gap in digital access.

Purpose

To provide actionable research that supports First Nations communities in advocating for affordable connectivity solutions that reflect their unique contexts. This includes exploring innovative, community-led models, such as Indigenous Internet Service Providers, to advance digital equity across BC.

About the First Nations Technology Council

The Technology Council is committed to advancing digital literacy, improving internet connectivity, and providing guidance on data and digital technology for all 204 First Nations across the province. This report will be the third installment of the Indigenous Digital Enablement Series (IDES). The first report explored the state of access to the Internet for First Nations in BC, and the second forthcoming report will assess the opportunity for spectrum sovereignty as a potential solution for connectivity in First Nations communities.

Ensuring affordable access to the internet is a key component of addressing the digital divide and aligns directly with the Technology Council's mandate to foster equitable access to

connectivity and technology. Affordable connectivity options enable First Nations communities to fully participate in digital economies and strengthen community resilience.

Background

BC has the third lowest average cost (after Quebec and Ontario) of an internet subscription plan within Canada for an urban area at $68/month for 50/10 Mbps.[1] However, connectivity still remains unaffordable for some low-income households. In particular, there is a rural divide that persists in connectivity, with people in rural areas, on average, paying more for their internet packages.[2]

The Connecting Families Initiative, supported by the Government of Canada and various service providers, offers low-income seniors and families affordable high-speed home internet. This program provides 200 GB of data for $20 per month, with no equipment or installation fees.

Some larger service providers also offer their own subsidized programs:

- **Rogers Communications**: The **Connected for Success** program provides affordable mobile, TV, and internet services for eligible individuals.
- **TELUS**: The **Connecting for Good** program offers subsidized internet and cellular services to low-income families, seniors, and others.

Many First Nations continue to face barriers accessing subsidized internet programs due to restrictive eligibility criteria, voluntary ISP participation, and limited data transparency. In response, several communities have developed innovative, community-led solutions, such as Indigenous-owned ISPs and co-designed mesh networks, that offer culturally relevant, affordable alternatives. These models not only address gaps in mainstream services but also demonstrate the power of self-determined approaches to digital infrastructure. Documenting and analyzing these efforts can help strengthen advocacy for connectivity solutions that are locally driven, culturally relevant, and responsive to the diverse realities of First Nations communities.

Research Questions

[1] First Nations Technology Council. (2024). *BC First Nations Community Internet Connectivity*. Retrieved from: https://www.technologycouncil.ca/our-work/what-we-do/research/indigenous-digital-equity-series/
[2] Ibid.

1. What are the existing subsidized connectivity solutions? How effective are they in addressing affordability challenges for First Nations households, and what are the gaps in their accessibility and implementation?
2. What impact does the lack of affordable connectivity solutions have on First Nations communities, particularly in remote areas?
3. What community-driven solutions can effectively address the affordability gap in digital access for First Nations communities?

Methodology

We are open to a range of methods to answer the research questions, but expect them to involve a combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative community engagement. Consultants are encouraged to outline how their proposed methodology will provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. They should also include details on how community engagement will align with the principles of OCAP®, ensuring that First Nations communities maintain Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession of their data throughout the research process.

Outputs

- **Report with executive summary (max 5,000 words):** An engaging document outlining the issue, analysis of data and community insights, along with recommendations to improve the affordability gap.
- **Blog:** an engaging 500-word blog post summarizing the issue and key findings to support First Nations advocacy efforts.

Timeline

The project will commence in early September, with final deliverables due by the end of January 2026.

Budget

The total available budget for this project is $60,000 CAD (inclusive of fees, taxes, and any subcontracting costs).

Commissioning Process

Please send a proposal of a **maximum of 10 pages,** including:

1. Your understanding of what is needed and experience undertaking similar work.
2. A proposed methodology, including how you would approach the work, a timeline indicating when you would plan to deliver different activities, key milestones and deliverables against each of these.
3. A description of the deliverables you will provide.
4. A detailed budget specifying daily or hourly rates, the number of days proposed and the cost of particular activities.
5. Details of the project team you propose for this work, including a description of the team's skills. Resumes can be included as an appendix to the proposal and do not count toward the page count.

Submitting a Proposal

Please send your proposal as a PDF document to kai@technologycouncil.ca.
Proposals must be submitted by Wednesday, 20 August 2025, 12:00 pm (PST).

Assessing your proposal

Contracts will be awarded based on the provider whose offer is assessed to be the most advantageous in terms of cost, approach, understanding of the issue, and relevant experience. Proposals will be assessed using the following criteria:

- Skills and experience to carry out all elements of the work
- Knowledge of the audience for outputs and an appropriate approach to format, tone, and accessibility
- Overall cost-effectiveness of the proposal