

**The Conference
Board of Canada**

Sharing Knowledge From Indigenous Trusts

A Primer on Common Practices for Governance



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The Centre for the North

Canada's North is rich in culture, resources, and natural beauty. Yet northern regions, lag their Southern counterparts in critical social and economic areas, such as employment, income, education, health, and infrastructure. Closing these gaps would be undeniably valuable to the North and to Canada as a whole.

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The Centre maintains a grounded and action-oriented approach that embraces the North's diversity, provides tools for better decision-making, and highlights innovative and successful initiatives. Its members—public, Indigenous, private, not-for-profit, and academic organizations—jointly inform a program of research and convening that targets issues of pivotal importance to Canada's North.

Our Research Centre is funded by multiple members united in their mission for progress who support and inform the Centre's research agenda. We are appreciative of the support from our funding members. Their passion and understanding of the urgent need for progress helps propel us forward and allows us to conduct research that matters to Canada's North.

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Highlights

- Indigenous trusts vary in purpose, size, governance structure, and beneficiaries. Indigenous communities have pursued a range of approaches to developing trust agreements, and participants emphasize that a one-size-fits-all approach to wealth management is neither appropriate nor effective.
- Engaging community beneficiaries when developing trust agreements and related policies can help to create a shared vision for the future of the trust and align it with the community's values.
- Indigenous communities are strengthening trust management by investing in finance and governance education for trustees, community members, and community leaders.
- Developing clarity around trust rules, roles, and responsibilities can help to build positive relationships between beneficiaries, community leaders, and trustees. A simple trust agreement can mitigate challenging administrative restrictions.
- Indigenous communities face challenges finding trustworthy and knowledgeable advisors who can fill gaps in community expertise. Trustees are seeking more opportunities for formal and informal knowledge-sharing across communities, which can generate recommendations to reduce these challenges.



Building community trusts

Indigenous communities across Canada have established trusts to invest settlement funds and create a strong financial legacy for future generations. Many communities are also injecting new capital into trusts with funds flowing from agreements with industry partners, successful community-owned businesses, and other revenue sources.

It is estimated that more than \$20 billion in financial resources are now managed through Indigenous trusts.¹ This has significant potential to advance Indigenous sovereignty and self-sufficiency.

Data from Indigenous Services Canada's First Nations Financial Transparency Act database show that in 2017, 277 communities reported revenue from trusts. Many of the 600 specific claims related to violations of Indigenous rights and lands have resulted in settlement funds being placed into trusts, and there are a further 378 active settlement claims as of January 2024.² All of this is in addition to 26 modern treaties.

While most available data relates to First Nations trusts, there are active Inuit and Métis trusts as well; however, the full number of Indigenous trusts is unknown.

Trusts can be a driving force in Indigenous communities' futures, but they also have limitations and potential challenges. This research shares insights from representatives of eight trusts and eight experts, including trust services providers and investment managers, to provide a better understanding of common structures, practices, and resources deployed by Indigenous trusts. Two of the trustees we spoke with also worked in advisory or trust services roles.

While we identify wise governance and administrative practices of Indigenous trusts in this primer, we acknowledge that each community and trust is unique. We must not assume that what works for one Indigenous trust will work for another. Each community draws on its own individual strengths and distinct cultural practices, faces its own unique set of circumstances, and must plan its future using its own decision-making processes.

This review is not intended as an instruction manual or a one-size-fits-all guideline, but as a resource for trustees, community leaders, and others interested in learning how trusts are approaching different challenges.

Recognizing the diversity of Indigenous communities and nations in Canada

Indigenous populations in Canada are diverse. Indigenous identity groups in Canada include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. But each of these groups encompass a significant number of distinct cultures, regions, and economic circumstances. We recognize these distinctions, and the reader should be aware that the findings in this primer do not necessarily reflect the views of all Indigenous peoples in Canada.

1 NATOA, "Trustee Training."

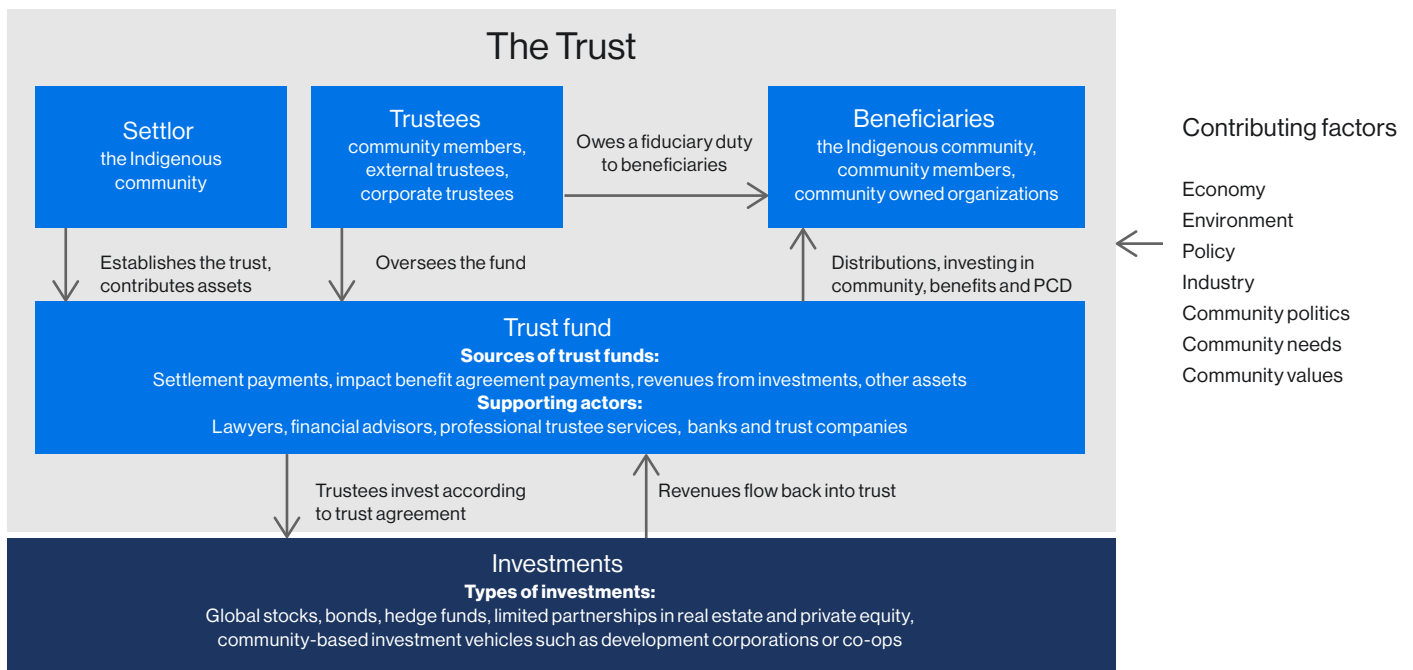
2 Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, "Reporting Centre on Specific Claims."

Where do trusts fit in an Indigenous community?

A trust is a fiduciary relationship between a settlor who establishes the trust (in this case, an Indigenous government), the beneficiaries (typically the nation, the community members, or other organizations such as charities), and the trustees, who are selected to protect and manage the trust funds. (See Exhibit 1.) A trust deed or trust agreement describes how trustees may invest and distribute the funds, and includes the potential for trustees to be guided by a range of professionals, which may include lawyers, financial advisors, banks, and trust companies. Representative organizations such as the National Aboriginal Trust Officers Association (NATOA) also provide support to trustees.

Trust agreements and accompanying policies can be highly complex and must consider the overall governance and policies within and surrounding a community. Finding the right professionals who can guide communities through the intricacies of taxation or the emerging practice of using trust assets to secure credit is crucial. If errors are made in the trust agreement, an Indigenous trust may be required to pay taxes when it would otherwise be exempt.³ If trust assets are used as collateral for loans, beneficiaries may miss out on annual payments;⁴ on the other hand, restrictions on a community using trust assets to secure credit may prevent it from taking advantage of economic development opportunities.⁵ Understanding both a community’s needs and the associated laws and policies will support the creation of a trust that can help a community thrive.

Exhibit 1
Trust structure and relationships²



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

³ Young, "Indigenous Settlement Trusts."

⁴ VP at a trust services organization

⁵ Young, "The Implications of Sections 89 and 90 of the Indian Act."

Trusts are long-lasting relationships that can support the growth and financial stability of a community, operating on timelines that span generations. Their total duration depends on the province or territory and the rules set forth by the trust agreement. For example, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland and Labrador all have laws against perpetuities that limit a trust’s timeline to the lifetime of the community members at the creation of the trust, plus 21 years (or 60 in PEI’s case). On the other hand, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia have no perpetuity limits, while other provinces and territories lie somewhere in between.⁶

Trusts can represent a meaningful turning point for a community. Some Indigenous trusts are named after historic places and events that commemorate a grievance or injustice, like the Sayisi Dene First Nation Relocation Trust. There, funding was set aside to commemorate the experiences of the Sayisi Dene’s relocation. They also use their funds to support community healing through healthy foods, education, and building community facilities.

Trusts may also be created for specific causes that are valued by the community: for example, the Dehcho First Nations Master Trust created separate funds for economic development, education, and Elder heritage.

Establishing governance practices

Creating a shared vision for the trust

Drafting an effective trust agreement or deed requires robust engagement to align the priorities of community members with those of community leaders. Nearly all interview participants mentioned some form of engagement. One participant noted that “creating the vision”⁷ for the trust through engagement is one of the first steps to making decisions about trust policy or usage. This can be a challenging and time-consuming task; communities are not homogenous, so it is important to seek out perspectives from a variety of stakeholders, such as youth, Elders, and members who live both in and outside of the community.

In practice, this can mean using methods such as surveys, workshops, votes, meetings, education, discussions, and Q&A sessions to gather input on how the trust should function. As one trust advisor stated: “The more members are engaged in the trust, the better outcomes you’re going to get.”⁸



6 Alberta Law Reform Institute, “Perpetuities Law: Abolish or Reform?”

7 VP at a trust services organization.

8 Executive director at a trust services organization.

Engaging members living outside the community

When a substantial portion of a community's members live across Canada and abroad, as five participants mentioned, undertaking sufficient member engagement can be difficult. In general, about 40 per cent of First Nations peoples live on-reserve.⁹ They may have very different priorities and goals from members who live off-reserve, but all members are served by the trust. A member who lives abroad may prefer a scholarship or a per capita distribution (PCD), while someone who lives on-reserve may prefer that funding go toward new infrastructure, community events, or housing initiatives.

To ensure engagement with beneficiaries who live elsewhere, some trustees have begun hosting virtual meetings¹⁰ or engagement events outside the community.¹¹ Other trusts have comprehensive websites with members-only sections, annual reports, meeting minutes, or social media pages to improve engagement with people living abroad.

9 Statistics Canada, "A Snapshot: Status First Nations People in Canada."

10 Trustee at a Northern First Nation.

11 Trust manager at a Western First Nation.

Ten participants emphasized the importance of getting a big-picture view of a community when developing a trust, including its governance structures, existing policies, values, membership requirements, and long-term goals. In addition to engagement with community members, participants mentioned reviewing existing governance policies, providing education for all people involved (including beneficiaries, community leaders, trustees, and advisors), establishing a working group of community members, and asking what the community needs instead of telling them.

Strategies for community engagement included:

- surveys
- workshops
- AGMs or other meetings
- member votes
- open-door policies for trustees and advisors
- brainstorming sessions
- Q&A sessions
- open discussions and roundtables

"If the trust agreement is not drafted in a manner that will support the strategic plan of the community, or the capital plan, or the community comprehensive plan, and they don't complement each other, then it's not actually going to provide value to the nation."

Interview with a vice-president at a trust, 2023

Engagement in action: Comprehensive community planning

As part of the Sayisi Dene Relocation Settlement process, the Sayisi Dene First Nation created a comprehensive community plan (CCP). They used engagement sessions to gain an understanding of core community values that should guide the trust, including transparency, accountability, capacity-building, and future generations.¹² A comprehensive community plan is a “community-led approach to planning, where the process is driven and owned by all community members, rather than by a small group or committee.”¹³

Community engagement and support, capacity-building and training, communications, social media, resources (both human and financial), and mentorship are present at each stage of comprehensive community planning.¹⁴ In the Sayisi Dene First Nation, this included dozens of meetings over three years, discussions with interactive activities for adults and children, sharing meals at engagement sessions, and traditional singing and drumming.¹⁵ The outcomes of the plan informed the trust’s goals, which have now been put into effect by commemorating the settlement and healing the community through education, healthy foods, and economic development activities.¹⁶

12 Sayisi Dene First Nation, *Sayisi Dene Comprehensive Community Plan*.

13 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “CCP Handbook.”

14 Ibid.

15 Sayisi Dene First Nation, *Sayisi Dene Comprehensive Community Plan*.

16 Sayisi Dene First Nation Relocation Settlement Trust, “Sayisi Dene First Nation Ongoing Projects.”

Transparency builds confidence among community members that a trust is operating responsibly. One advisor we interviewed put it simply: “Members need to know what’s going on.”¹⁷ Eight participants mentioned transparency and accountability as priorities. Clear policies, roles, decision-making processes, and communication all play a role in maintaining transparency. See Table 1 for more information on ways to align trust agreements with the needs of the community.

“If you’re telling your community what’s going on and you’re being open and honest about it ... even if not everybody agrees with everything, at least they know what’s going on and they’re not left to wonder.”

Interview with an executive at a trust services organization, 2023

Table 1
Aligning trust agreements and community needs

Transparency and accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish clear policies for rules and responsibilities • Include monitored audited financial statements • Disclose annual reports • Document expectations and consequences • Document relationships with advisors, corporate trustees, custodians, etc.
Accessible and ongoing communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree to share information among trustees, leadership, and beneficiaries • Use discussion- or storytelling-based communication • Include visuals, plain language, brief reports, and translations into local languages • Consult Elders and youth to help build trust and share information
Approaches for flexible trusts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policies and governance models separately to avoid an overly complex trust agreement • Create investment policies alongside the agreement • Update policies according to community needs and economy while the agreement remains the same • Ensure threshold for amendments is high but attainable • Administrative amendments (due to taxes, drafting errors, policy change) to reduce cumbersome or costly processes for updating the agreement

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

17 Executive at a trust services organization.

Balancing adaptability and stability

Trusts need to balance immediate priorities, like community projects or per capita distributions, with long-term priorities like sustaining the fund for future generations. In some cases, trusts are created through agreements that can stand indefinitely, while others must contend with legal constraints such as the laws against perpetuities mentioned above, meaning some trusts will unwind after a certain period. Other trust agreements may also include strict amendment requirements that can make changes practically impossible.

Five of the trustees and advisors we interviewed emphasised the importance of incorporating flexibility into trust agreements so that policies and operations can evolve along with the community.¹⁸ Trust agreements that include detailed administrative processes¹⁹ or set out exactly how the income from the trust will be used (for example, 20 per cent for economic development, 20 per cent for education, and so on)²⁰ can create challenges as time goes by due to changing circumstances in the community. Developing investment policies, distribution policies, and administrative processes that exist alongside the trust agreement, not within it, can help prevent such challenges. These policies can adapt to community needs while the trust agreement stays the same.

However, it is important to find a balance between security and flexibility.²¹ Seven participants mentioned that trusts need to be protected from day-to-day politics and current events that can divert a trust from its original mandate. Participants mentioned several strategies for balancing flexibility with protection of the trust's mandate and assets:

- clear policies for rules and responsibilities, such as codes of conduct, administrative policies, and distribution policies;
- monitored and audited financial statements;
- annual reports;
- documented roles, expectations, and consequences;
- documented relationships with corporate trustees, custodians, lawyers, or other advisors.



18 Vice-president at a trust.

19 Trustee and trust advisor.

20 Vice-president at a trust services organization.

21 Executive at an Indigenous trust.

Distributions

Trusts differ in how they manage distribution of investment earnings. In some cases, trust agreements have defined spending categories, such as health, education, culture, environment, or economic development. Trusts can also publish guidelines for project-based funding and issue calls for proposals so that qualifying community members, organizations, or community leaders can submit grant applications.

A wide range of initiatives are funded through trust distributions, including:

- community infrastructure²²
- employment training²³
- scholarships²⁴
- cultural events²⁵
- strategic plans
- land use plans
- economic development plans²⁶
- community energy plans
- feasibility studies
- legal and policy frameworks
- industry negotiations²⁷
- judicial reviews related to the duty to consult²⁸
- per capita distributions (PCDs)
- pensions
- health and dental benefits

Exploring per capita distributions

Participants noted that per capita distributions (PCDs) have become a bigger topic of discussion in recent years. The viability of PCDs and the amount that can be distributed depends on factors such as the size and location of the population, the amount of funds available, whether it is a one-time or recurring payment, and other community priorities.

When PCDs were used, participants reported that a priority was placed on financial education for beneficiaries:²⁹ “We always recommend to communities if there’s going to be a per capita distribution that their youth get financial education, and not the day before they get the money, but a couple of years before and then a year before, so that when those funds come into their account, they’ve had some education and some opportunity to give thought to what they want to do with it.”³⁰

²⁹ Trustee and trust advisor.

³⁰ Executive director at a trust services organization.

²² Rainy River First Nations Trust, “Success Stories.”

²³ Future Generations Foundation, “Beneficiaries.”

²⁴ Peguis First Nation Surrender Claim Trust, “Community Fund Approved Projects.”

²⁵ Squamish Nation, “Cultural Project Grants.”

²⁶ Peguis First Nation Surrender Claim Trust, “Community Fund Approved Projects.”

²⁷ New Relationship Trust, “Nation Building Grants.”

²⁸ Peguis First Nation Surrender Claim Trust, “Community Fund Approved Projects.”

How trust distributions are handled can depend on the types of beneficiaries they have. Trusts take a variety of approaches; for example, issuing distributions to a community government, with a minimum annual disbursement amount so the beneficiary government has stability to plan its expenditures.³¹ Other trusts distribute earnings to charities or other organizations that have been set up to spend the funds.³² Trusts may also provide annual per capita distributions or dividends directly to individuals, but may withhold these payments if doing so would reduce the trust's assets below a set amount.³³ The text box highlights several resources that can help trusts improve their approaches to distribution.



Indigenous Services Canada resources for trusts

The First Nation Infrastructure Fund supports on-reserve infrastructure initiatives, including projects aligned with planning and skills development, such as comprehensive community planning (CCP). The fund aims to support long-term community development, improved infrastructure, and training. It provides up to \$10 million per year for infrastructure and community planning projects.

The First Nations Public Service Secretariat has a First Nations Well-Being fund that offers support for community development planning. They also host a Comprehensive Community Planning Community of Practice where leaders and mentors can meet and discuss their work.

The First Nations Communications Toolkit was developed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (now Indigenous Services Canada), B.C. Region, and Tewanee Consulting Group. It shares different methods and strategies for communicating on a community level, including media relations, engaging the community, planning events, and using social media. Trustees may find it useful in their engagement with beneficiaries.

The Professional and Institutional Development Program offers funding for projects with a capacity development and governance component. Inuit and First Nations communities starting CCP initiatives can apply for support.

More resources for comprehensive community planning can be found on ISC's CCP information page, including funding opportunities for B.C. communities.

31 Neyaskweyahk Trust, Neyaskweyahk Trust Annual Report 2020.

32 Executive at a Northern trust.

33 The Sahtu Secretariat Inc., *The Sahtu Trust: How It Works*.

Strengthening capacity of trustees and communities

Building a strong board of trustees

When a trust is established, the community decides whether they want to have only community trustees on their board or if they also want to include financial professionals (member or non-member), corporate trustees, and community representatives.

Participants who worked with both community and financial trustees valued each type of trustee, noting that community trustees provided important perspectives and connections to the community, while financial and corporate trustees provided useful expertise and guidance. Participants also emphasized the value generated from knowledge-sharing between community and financial trustees. Those from trusts with only community trustees expressed a sense of pride and accomplishment that their members had the expertise to manage a trust without external involvement.³⁴



Trusts that recruit community trustees are typically seeking people who are willing to learn, and in most cases, new trustees receive some form of training and education as part of their onboarding. Other trusts require individuals to hold a bachelor's degree in finance or another relevant field. Table 2 outlines some of the requirements and assets that are used to evaluate new trustees.

Table 2
Examples of requirements for trustees

Characteristics and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willing to learn • Team player • Contributes to community • Self-motivated • Good listener
Administrative requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of the community • Driver's license, passport, or other ID • Over 18 years old • Credit check • Has not been bankrupt • In good standing with their professional body (if applicable) • Criminal record check
Educational requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NATOA trustee training • Bachelor's degree • Background in finance

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

34 Trustee at a Western First Nation.

Strict requirements and administrative barriers can also create challenges. Five participants noted that there were challenges with finding qualified trustees from their community. A trustee noted that their nominating committee had been held up for several years as they tried to find qualified candidates, leading to major issues as they failed to reach quorum and could not disburse funds or make investment decisions. Another was considering allowing non-members to serve as community trustees because they could not find candidates who met their requirements.³⁵

Trusts and advisors can provide education to community members to grow the pool of qualified and motivated trustees in their communities. Two participants noted they had seen improvements in communities that had prioritized such education.

Training and onboarding for trustees were mentioned in nearly all of the interviews. Participants focused their education efforts on financial literacy, investment knowledge, and governance capacity. This was approached in different ways; for example, by developing training modules, signing trustees up for training courses offered by the National Aboriginal Trust Officers Association (NATOA), or bringing in experts to run workshops or educate their trustees on specific asset classes. Participants also facilitated informal training by providing opportunities for new trustees to ask questions and hosting career days that encourage youth to pursue careers in finance and business. See Table 3 for more details on educational opportunities for trustees.

Table 3
Approaches to training and development

Finance and governance training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NATOA trustee training • Educational modules developed by the trust • Finance or governance courses sponsored by the trust
Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speakers and presenters to teach about industry or asset classes • Attendance at NATOA and industry conferences
Mentorship and informal training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-the-job training and guidance for young members • One-on-one coaching before trustee meetings • Senior advisors and trustees assist with orientation • Knowledge-sharing between community trustees and financial/corporate trustees • Open lines of communication

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

The National Aboriginal Trust Officers Association (NATOA)

Nearly everyone interviewed had used NATOA's services in some way. The organization was established to support Indigenous trustees and their communities. It offers several services and certifications, such as the National Aboriginal Trust Training Program to improve trustee knowledge and skills and a partnership called Reconciliation and Responsible Investment Initiative that promotes reconciliation in investing. NATOA also hosts an annual conference to provide a platform for networking and knowledge-sharing among trustees, advisors, and other experts in the field.

³⁵ Trust chair of a Western First Nation.

Building successful relationships with advisors

As Indigenous communities build the internal capacity needed to manage the complex legal and financial aspects of their trust, they also work with various types of advisors, such as corporate trustees, consultants, financial managers, and lawyers.

However, participants noted that it can be challenging to find capable advisors who are a good fit for their community. Participants recounted stories about advisors who were “patronizing,” “transactional,” “pushing their product,” “wouldn’t listen,” and who ultimately “didn’t have our best interests at heart.” Communities have been left in the dark about how their money was being invested—in some cases, their funds were invested in the same companies they were battling in court.³⁶ Some advisors lack the expertise to work with Indigenous law and finance, resulting in million-dollar mistakes or unadministrable agreements with long-term impacts on the trust and its beneficiaries.³⁷

Suggestions for ways to find reliable advisors included conducting research, issuing calls for proposals, asking about advisors’ experience and policies for working with Indigenous communities, and building relationships before hiring.

The challenges faced in finding financial advisors for trusts are compounded by the fact that Indigenous communities are more likely to believe they will be taken advantage of by financial professionals.³⁸ A report by FP Canada showed that Indigenous survey respondents have below-average levels of trust in finance professionals and higher-than-average levels of fear that they will be discriminated against when accessing financial advice. FP Canada found that these concerns can discourage Indigenous people from asking all the questions they have and getting the answers they need to make informed financial decisions, and that this reduces perceived access to financial services.³⁹

This lack of trust underscores how important it is for advisors to make efforts to build relationships. Advisors who have had success in this area recommend spending time in the community, getting to know its goals and values, contributing to community education and capacity-building, and hosting community events.

“So much of this business is relationship-based ... we always go out to the communities. That’s really important to show that you’re willing to show up and spend time there and not be racing back to the airport for your flight.”⁴⁰

Executive at a trust services organization

Capacity-building, training, and education were top of mind for participants. Advisors can serve as a resource for communities, offering guidance, mentorship, education, and connections to other reliable partners, so that trusts can build their networks and capacity.⁴¹

Knowledge-sharing between communities

Collaboration and transparency between communities can provide valuable insights into who to work with and how to develop trusts.

Communication between trusts can contribute to greater transparency around consultants’ experience, services, and fees to allow for more informed decision-making during the search for expertise. Speaking to trustees from other communities can yield important information about which advisors already have a strong track record working with other Indigenous communities.

36 Trust manager at a Western First Nation.

37 Vice-president at a trust.

38 Almazora, “How Advisors Can Build Trust with Indigenous Clients.”

39 FP Canada, *FP Canada Imagine 2030 Benchmark Report*.

40 Executive at a trust services organization.

41 Ibid.

“Sharing who our advisors are, who we work with ... we share that information because we don’t want another trust to have a bad experience with somebody if we’ve already had that.”⁴²

Interview with a trustee at a Northern First Nation, 2023

Building relationships and sharing knowledge between communities was a highly valued approach to developing and operating Indigenous trusts. This occurred through conversations with trustees and other experts, sharing trust agreements and other documents, attending conferences, and conducting independent research into the successes and failures of past trusts. For example, an advisor shared that a community they worked with “talked to all these communities across Canada and the United States. They set up their trust after doing all that work themselves, and the result was excellent.” Participants who did their own research and collaboration with other communities valued being able to learn from each other instead of relying on advisors and consultants.

“We like learning from one another, but also sharing what we have. Having knowledge is good, but it’s better if you’re able to share it. And we do have communities that reach out to us and talk to us about our experience.”

Interview with a trust manager at a Western First Nation, 2023

Building local financial capacity

Education and capacity-building in the community were top of mind for interview participants. Indigenous financial and management professionals can bring important perspectives and understanding to economic activities in their communities, but they remain underrepresented in business, management, and public administration.⁴³ For Indigenous businesses, attracting skilled employees was noted as the top barrier to growth.⁴⁴ First Nations are commonly unable to grow their human resources due to unstable federal funding that makes it challenging to retain staff and create long-term plans. Attracting workers is difficult when they are unable to provide competitive salaries, work-life balance, or job security.⁴⁵

Like many Indigenous trusts across the country, nearly all the community trustees we interviewed said their trust disburses funds to support community education. The priority placed on education was cited by participants as a reason for the financial success of their communities and the availability of strong candidates for their boards of trustees. Advisors we interviewed also emphasized the role of education in communities’ self-sufficiency and made efforts to provide financial literacy workshops for communities and encourage careers in finance. They even provided their own funding for community education.

Through trust fund disbursements and engagement with beneficiaries, communities with trusts can create valuable educational opportunities. Due to the long-lasting role of trusts in these communities, expanding the programming and funding available for administering trusts can help them to have a lasting impact.

42 Trustee at a Northern First Nation.

43 Fiser and Wapass, *Indigenous Finance and Management Professionals*.

44 Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, *Promise and Prosperity*.

45 House of Commons of Canada, *Summary of Evidence*.

Communities that trust

Indigenous nations and communities are using trusts in a variety of ways to manage financial resources for the benefit of current and future generations. At the same time, trusts are evolving to meet the needs of their communities and adapt to changing policies. Some strategies that can help make a trust effective include strong community engagement, transparent operations, and a continuous emphasis on good governance and capacity-building across trustees, community leaders, and community members. Building formal and informal relationships with trustees from other communities can also be an important means of connecting with reliable partners that can further fuel these efforts. Balancing flexibility and stability is an important factor in a trust's success.

Continued research on the role of trusts in diverse communities will help to inform both trustees and financial professionals. Our future research will aim to take an inclusive approach and be guided by questions such as:

- How are Indigenous trusts incorporating community values into investment policies, and what does this mean for responsible investing, shareholder activism, or environmental, social, and governance investing?
- What can be done to support collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and partnerships among Indigenous trusts, government bodies at all levels, non-profits, and the private sector to improve the impact of trust activities?
- What kinds of innovative approaches are trusts and communities exploring to manage their wealth for future generations?



Appendix A

Methodology

Data for this project were collected through a series of 16 interviews with representatives from trusts, advisors, and subject matter experts. Interview participants were guaranteed anonymity. The project was guided by advisors and external reviewers. The Research Advisory Board members are listed in the acknowledgements section.

The list of potential participants was collected using a list of First Nations with trusts based on the First Nations Financial Transparency Act, as well as online research. We also continued to contact new potential interviewees throughout the research based on recommendations from participants and advisory board members. In total, we interviewed 16 participants.

We interviewed eight representatives from Indigenous trusts and eight subject matter experts, such as trust service providers or financial managers. Two of the trustee participants also had experience as advisors and could speak to both perspectives. Trust representatives were mostly from the territories and Western Canada. Advisors and subject matter experts were from organizations that operate nationally. More detailed information cannot be disclosed to protect the identities of participants.

Table A1

Location of interview participants

Territories (NU, YT, NWT)	2
Western Canada (BC, AB, SK, MB)	10
Central Canada (ON, QC)	3
International participants	1

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Métis trusts were not included in the sample due to limited available data on existing Métis trusts and lack of response from those contacted. Similarly, when we contacted trustees in the Atlantic provinces, we did not receive responses.

We conducted two rounds of interviews in the spring and summer of 2023. Emails were sent to participants beginning in March 2023, with two follow-up emails sent to participants one to two weeks after the initial email. A second round of invitations and follow-up emails was sent out in August 2023.

The first round of interviews took place in March and April 2023, and the second round took place in August and September 2023. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted via Microsoft Teams video call.

The research questions for the study were developed with input from the Centre for the North (CFN) and the Research Advisory Board. The interview guide was developed based on available literature on trusts and with input from advisory board members.

Interview themes for trustees included:

- trust structure
- mandate and goals
- partners and advisors involved with the trust
- day-to-day operations
- skills and requirements for trustees
- training and onboarding for trustees
- communication with community members and leadership
- challenges in trust operation
- investment strategies
- long-term plans
- balancing interests of community and long-term trust goals
- opportunities for partnership
- opportunities to increase impact of trusts
- perspectives on future of trusts

Interview themes for advisors included:

- types of services offered
- mandate and goals
- description of working relationship with a trust
- managing relationships between trusts, communities, and others
- skills and requirements for trustees
- characteristics of high-functioning trusts
- challenges for trusts
- trends and changes in trust operation over time
- future opportunities for Indigenous community wealth management

The interviews were transcribed using the Microsoft Teams Live Transcription tool, and resulted in 475 pages or 134,053 words of transcribed data. Initial coding themes were based on the questionnaire and interview notes taken by the researchers. During analysis, more detailed codes were developed. Coding and analysis was completed using NVivo software.

Appendix B

Bibliography

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Email: accessibility@conferenceboard.ca

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