

CIF IMPACT REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The CIF impact report explores the impact of 58 Community Innovation Fund (CIF) projects over the first three years of funding (2020 – 2024) as part of Tamarack Institute’s five-year [Communities Building Youth Futures](#) (CBYF) Initiative.

CBYF is funded by the The Government of Canada’s Supports for Student Learning Program. CBYF operates in 20 rural, remote, and/or Indigenous communities across the country with the goal of developing community-wide strategies to support youth (aged 15 – 30) to graduate high school and successfully transition to post-secondary, training, and employment. CBYF communities use Collective Impact, which invites organizations and groups across a variety of sectors to co-create novel strategies for youth success. Each CBYF community receives core funding as well as capacity building support from Tamarack to develop and implement their local action plan.

The 20 CBYF Communities are also eligible to apply annually for one-year innovation fund grants. These Community Innovation Fund (CIF) grants enable local CBYF initiatives to balance the deep work of better understanding and addressing the priorities of their community’s youth with opportunities to achieve “quick wins” on pressing issues.

This report set out to answer four research questions:

1. What impacts and insights did the Community Innovation Fund (CIF) Projects have on **youth outcomes**?
2. What impacts and insights did CIF Projects have on **community capacity**?

3. What impacts and insights did CIF Projects have on **systems** that affect youth?
4. What insights have been generated about the role of **innovation and impact** in the work of community change by CBYF’s CIF projects?

THE IMPACT OF CIF PROJECTS ON YOUTH

CIF Grant projects confirm the necessity of ensuring youth have an array of supports to achieve educational success and they also highlight the importance of young people developing social and emotional skills alongside academic achievements to be successful at high school and beyond. Key impacts related to youth outcomes include:

- **2,096 youth** discovered life-long career passions, graduated from high school, entered post-secondary institutions, gained certifications, and/or achieved their dream jobs with the help of CIF grants.
- Youth leaders of at least **11 CIF initiatives** specifically reported that their leadership experience with the project had resulted in either successful applications to further education or jobs in their desired field.
- **2,249 youth** had the opportunity to meet one or more basic needs through their involvement with CIF initiatives, helping them focus on success in education and beyond.
- **1,380 youth** received opportunities for greater connection with adult allies and local services because of their involvement with CIF initiatives.

- **18 CIF projects** also provided Indigenous cultural teachings and mentorship from elders for their majority Indigenous youth populations.
- Of these projects, **4 final reports** specifically mentioned that the CIF initiatives represented the greatest or only connection youth had to their Indigenous identities.



Matriarch Ninsstiksi
by Chataya Holy Singer

THE IMPACT OF CIF PROJECTS ON COMMUNITY CAPACITY

The impact of CIF projects was not limited to youth. The CIF projects also built capacity and generated impact within their communities that will influence in the long term the ways communities support youth. The results and impact of some CIF projects reinforced that the collective contributions of the community and key partners are vital to youth success. CIF projects provided opportunities for communities to grow their confidence, partnerships, youth engagement, and commitment to invest in the success of young people and to sustain their efforts after the end of their CIF initiatives. Key impacts related to community capacity include:

- CIF projects supported over **2,700 youth** to engage with local leaders, politicians, business owners, and other community members.
- **All 20 communities** who engaged directly with CIF initiatives were more likely to understand the vital role they played in supporting youth success and were more likely to feel empowered to continue their involvement in the future.
- **4 final reports** mentioned the ways community members voluntarily began discussing and designing further youth- focused initiatives because of their increased understanding of their own capacity to contribute to youth success.
- **18 CIF projects** focused on connecting Indigenous leaders and community members with **1,155 Indigenous young people** for knowledge sharing and emotional support.

THE IMPACT OF CIF PROJECTS ON SYSTEMS

Systems level impact is an important focus in order to achieve high-impact lasting change on a complex issue like youth educational and employment success. In addition to addressing an immediate problem, the work of systems change intentionally focuses on identifying and addressing factors that contribute to and perpetuate the very issues that we are working to fix. Key impacts related to systems that affect youth include:

- **7 CIF initiatives** specifically empowered youth to engage with local political leaders and systems to advocate for better youth-focused support systems.
- **Almost 60% of CIF project leaders** who engaged with local systems wrote about how the experience profoundly increased youth leaders' confidence and understanding of their own capacity.
- **54 CIF initiatives** have already been successful in attracting additional funding and

in-kind contributions from outside investors, organizations, and community members.

- One initiative, Portage La Prairie's Roving Campus attracted **\$250,000 in additional funding** to continue their work based on the success of their 2020 CIF initiative.
- **75 youth** had the opportunity to directly impact the Yukon youth territorial strategy.

THE ROLE OF INNOVATION IN CHANGING COMMUNITIES AND SYSTEMS

CIF projects demonstrate the necessity of innovation in the achievement of meaningful impact on youth success in school, work, and life. Rarely will a single innovative solution be able to achieve long-term impact: the barriers that youth face are complex and thus meaningful impact is more likely to be the result of several innovative solutions that are loosely aligned and affect a variety of sectors. CIF projects revealed the following learnings about the role of innovation in community and systems change:

- **1,526 youth** were involved in designing and developing innovative CIF initiatives.
- Almost **10,000 youth** were encouraged to become active project leaders, sharing their opinions and making changes to the project design.
- **58 innovative projects** were designed with youth at the very centre of decision-making between 2020 and 2023.
- **100% of CBYF communities** continued successfully supporting local youth after the one-year funding window.

YOUTH ENGAGED 2020-2024

Accessible Education 3,069

Employment & Mentorship 3,318

Holistic Health & Wellbeing 2,610

Service Navigation 1,898

Youth Engagement & Leadership 9,969

Identity & Social Connections 5,869

CONCLUSION

Our review of 58 CIF projects demonstrated the multiple impacts that short-term innovation projects can have on young people, communities, and systems. The tremendous variety between CIF projects highlights the creativity and willingness of the leadership teams to embrace the input of young people.

CIF initiatives also demonstrate the necessity and value of using a “whole community” response to ensuring youth success in school and in life. CIF projects have helped unusual contributors such as business owners or local leaders integrate into existing youth-serving networks to form holistic webs of support.

Finally, CIF projects illustrate the importance of funding multiple domains of youth support such as health, social connection, and leadership, because success in these areas can strengthen success in education. When CIF projects provided access to services, adult mentorship, and training and employment opportunities, many youth were not only able to graduate from high school, they were inspired to become leaders and mentors in their own communities.