

RE: LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE CANADA FOUNDATION – UPDATE
'Including the Voice of Indigenous Youth in Green Infrastructure' (2018 grant)

<https://lacf.ca/grants-portfolio/including-voice-indigenous-youth-green-infrastructure>

To: Faye Langmaid, LACF
Fr: Sheila Boudreau, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
Liat Margolis, University of Toronto
Date: Feb. 7, 2019

Dear Faye,

We are pleased to share this letter describing how the generous LACF grant has allowed us to initiate a unique, interdisciplinary employment and mentorship program for Indigenous high school youth in Toronto.

The program was named Nikibii Dawadonna Giigwag (NDG; Flooded Valley Healing, in *Anishinaabemowin*, Manitoulin dialect) and was co-developed by Indigenous Elders, Toronto Region and Conservation Authority (TRCA) staff, and University of Toronto (U of T) faculty. It was initiated in response to the following four challenges that were identified through conversations with the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Elders, parents, high school teachers, and Indigenous architects and professionals, and based on published reports and articles:

- 1) Lack of opportunities to be 'on the land', acknowledging spirit and connection to Land, essential principles of Indigenous world views, histories, learning processes, and teaching practices;
- 2) Intergenerational trauma and consequent loss of knowledges, languages, traditional practices, and cultural identity;
- 3) Limited pathways to post-secondary education and to professional career paths such as Architecture and Landscape Architecture; and
- 4) High unemployment rates

The NDG program weaves Indigenous traditional, spiritual, land-based teachings with conceptual and technical architectural design skills, and environmental conservation field work. It is particularly timely and relevant in context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action, the increasing focus on environmental sustainability and climate change action, as well as the recent attention that Indigenous architects and designers have gained thanks to the historic exhibition *UNCED: Voices of the Land* in the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale.

The 2018 NDG program brought together four Indigenous teens from different backgrounds and provided a six-week summer employment and experiential learning opportunity. It provided a forum for engagement in dialogue with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, U of T Landscape Architecture faculty and graduate students, as well as professional mentors from related fields. It helped develop an awareness of the youths' own urban and regional environment and their potential agency, particularly as it relates to Indigenous culture, identity,

and spirituality. Its aim was to build capacity and empower their own identity and place in their communities, find inspiration in their current lives and high school education, and raise their hope and awareness of future education opportunities and career paths.

The youths worked with an Elder throughout the six-week program and engaged in ceremony and traditional teachings. They were introduced to design approaches and tools in Landscape Architecture and Architecture, including precedent studies, regional watershed and topographic mapping, site survey, concept design, model making and laser cutting, digital design software, and presentation skills. They were also introduced to a range of environmental conservation field work, including stream restoration, benthic and water quality testing, and bumble bee surveying, organized by TRCA. A remarkable group of more than 30 experts generously mentored the students and contributed to the program with guest lectures and design reviews, and guided site visits to notable and award-winning projects in Toronto. Throughout the summer, the youth collaborated with the program mentors on design ideas for the revitalization of an existing cabin structure at TRCA Bolton Camp, a 254-acre site 40 kilometres north of the city at the headwaters of the Humber River, and a designated Canadian Heritage River celebrating its 20th year anniversary.

Below are web links displaying photographs and details about the program and names of all the mentors and supporters of this program:

<https://www.daniels.utoronto.ca/news/2018/01/30/engaging-indigenous-youth-green-infrastructure-design-faculty-receive-grant-develop>

<https://www.daniels.utoronto.ca/news/2018/08/29/inaugural-summer-program-engages-indigenous-youth-architecture-landscape>

<https://trca.ca/learning/bolton-camp-project/nikibii-dawadinna-giiqwag/>

<https://trca.ca/news/eagle-feather-ceremony-indigenous-youth-program/>

Next Steps

Thanks to the success of the first-run program, we received financial support from City of Toronto, Urban Forestry for the youth to be trained in tree and shrub planting in summer 2019. Health Canada has also expressed interest in supporting this innovative and interdisciplinary training for the next generation of climate change professionals as a case study project. These grants will allow us to lead a second summer employment and mentorship program in 2019.

With U of T First Nations House as a new partner, we submitted an application for funding that would allow the program to evolve as a U of T 'Access Program', intended to support under-represented communities in post-secondary institutions. If received, the funding will carry us through 2021 and will also support the development of a more comprehensive Elder-led curriculum. We continue to apply to a range of institutional, municipal, provincial, and federal grant funding, as well as pursue philanthropic donations.

Impact and Dissemination

- This program has become an official part of the TRCA Education and Outreach programming.

- At the U of T, this program has allowed the Daniels Faculty to make new connections with the First Nations House and other members of the academic and administrative Indigenous community, as well as help make progress on the U of T response to the TRC Calls to Action.
- Faculty, staff, and students at the Daniels Faculty as well as TRCA staff have had the opportunity to increase their awareness and sensitivity on Indigenous Issues, and partake in building pathways for reconciliation, trust building, and relationship building.
- We were recently invited to write an article about the program and experience for the upcoming 'Reconciliation' issue of Landscapes / Paysages. We intend on writing this as a collaborative piece with the Elder, youths, their parents, and participating mentors.
- The City of Toronto will highlight the program in the Indigenous engagement section of its upcoming 'Resilience Strategy'.
- Outreach for youth will include Indigenous communities in areas with TRCA initiatives (e.g. The Meadoway), to encourage a 'close to home' connection to the land.

As we collaborate in planning for the 2019 summer program, we welcome opportunities to share this story, which we are very humbled and honoured to be a part of. Please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us to discuss, or for additional information.

We would like to express our gratitude to the LACF for granting the seed funding which allowed this program to begin and to leverage additional funding and in-kind support to grow it further.

Sincerely,



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