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ABORIGINAL E-COMMUNITY PROGRAM CONCEPT
A national initiative partnering with regional Aboriginal organizations

Goal Support First Nation community-based broadband connectivity, ICT deployment and application solutions that ***close economic, health, education, infrastructure and service gaps, generate new socio-economic opportunities and improve the quality of life*** of Aboriginal people.

Rationale

Industry Canada's First Nations SchoolNet (FNS) has been recognized internationally for it contribution to connectivity, computer equipment, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training and curriculum development leading to effective use of ICTs in First Nation classrooms. An E-Community program would be based on the present FNS e-learning development model but have the expanded mandate of contributing to the costs of developing a broad range of ICT applications to improve access to and the quality of additional sectors including health, economic, governance, justice and other community services. Just as FNS contributes a small proportion of a school's budget towards ICTs and connectivity and yet has a significant effect on results, the E-Community initiative would add the efficiency of appropriate technology to current services. Capital funding ($6 million) for telehealth services to 24 remote northern Ontario First Nations, for instance, was secured with the business case developed with this type of seed funding. An estimated 4000 patients will 'see' a doctor virtually each year rather than fly to the nearest doctor resulting in over $4 million per year in Health Canada travel costs that will be avoided and be available for improved community wellness and health initiatives.

The Program

As with FNS, aboriginal service organizations with an ICT track record would deliver the program under a contribution agreement with Industry Canada. Nunavut and the territories, which are currently ineligible for FNS support could be included in E-Community. Groups of communities with common interests would be supported to deploy ICT solutions tailored to their particular situations. The majority of program resources would be invested in the sample opportunities and initiatives listed below that demonstrate effective uses for ICTs.

Broadband Infrastructure and Services
- business plans to establish broadband infrastructure
- negotiation of service levels and rates for groups of communities
- small broadband builds and network links among community organizations, health and other institutions

Health
- integration of health care and continuing medical education with provincial services
- facilitate effective deployment of telehealth services as opportunity arises
- public health - disease prevention and management, particularly diabetes
- ICT to facilitate early childhood development and parental participation
- metal health education and treatment, suicide prevention
- attraction, retention and continuing education of nurses and community health staff

Education
- development of on line aboriginal appropriate curriculum that meets provincial standards
- use ICT to promote life long learning and stay in school particularly for grades K-12
- on-line tools to increase parental involvement with school and their children's studies
- videoconference visits between parents and children or teachers at distant schools
- attraction, retention and continuing education of qualified teachers

Economic Development
- develop community owned networks where there is no business case for the private sector
- web based marketing of high quality arts, crafts, tourism and ICT services
- GIS mapping of resources and aboriginal values to facilitate sustainable resource management and development

Justice
- Videoconference based fact finding, legal advice and court hearings for communities
- videoconference based family visits with young offenders incarcerated far from home
- sentencing hearing involving family and community members in far away communities

Governance
- attraction, retention and skill development for administrators and businesses
- on line citizen engagement in local government decisions, spending and results
- GIS based management of housing , utilities, equipment
- remote monitoring and control of water and sewage treatment and other utilities

Research and Reporting
- tracking, assessing and reporting of improvements in results due to ICT and other investments
- establishing baseline data in priority sectors
- streamlined tracking and reporting of changes in socio-economic indicators
- partnering with post-secondary and other institutions in monitoring effective uses, documenting successes and lessons learned

Projected Cost Estimates to serve First Nations (based on present FNS budget)
- $10 million in the first year (plus $15 million continued annual funding of FNS)
- $15 million and $20 million in years 2 and 3 as aboriginal ICT agencies develop opportunities