



**UNTAPPED  
POTENTIAL: A  
CASE STUDY OF  
INDIGENOUS  
ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT  
CORPORATION  
CAPACITY  
IN FEDERAL  
PROCUREMENT**



CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR  
**INDIGENOUS  
BUSINESS**



## **About the report**

Untapped Potential: A Case Study of Indigenous Economic Development Corporation Capacity in Federal Procurement is the third report of a multi-report collaboration with ISC focused on Indigenous procurement.

## **About the design**

The cover and additional report graphics were designed by CCIB, Associate, Marketing and Communications, Jolene Arcand. The artwork in this report was designed using a modern take on the traditional Indigenous woodland art style.

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A man in a dark suit and light blue shirt is looking towards the camera. In the background, a whiteboard displays a line graph with two lines, one red and one blue, showing an upward trend. The graph has data points labeled with numbers: 2.3 and 1.7. The overall image has a red and orange wavy overlay at the top and bottom.

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# About CCIB

Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) is committed to the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's economy. As a national, non-partisan association, CCIB has a mission to promote, strengthen, and enhance a prosperous Indigenous economy through the fostering of business relationships, opportunities, and awareness. CCIB offers knowledge, resources, and programs to its members to foster economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and businesses across Canada.

For more information, visit [www.ccib.ca](http://www.ccib.ca).

CCIB conducts research to support and exceed the Government of Canada's five percent Indigenous procurement target. Our research covers a wide range of Indigenous economic issues, including trade and export, procurement, women's entrepreneurship, digital adoption, and industry-specific areas such as mining, marine, and aerospace.





# Introduction

# Background

CCIB, in collaboration with Indigenous Services Canada, has undertaken this research to better understand the procurement experiences and relationships of Indigenous Economic Development Corporations (IEDCs), with a specific focus on federal supply chains. While combining insights from various secondary materials, this report highlights the Mikisew Group of Companies (Mikisew Group) as a case study. The case study explores the IEDC's roles in procurement and its impacts on staff and the broader community.

Using desktop research, financial reporting, and in-depth interviews with IEDC employees, we aim to showcase how IEDCs generate revenue from a diverse business portfolio to support community activities. Social and economic benefits include enhanced employment opportunities, education or training resources, Elder programs, and own-source revenue for essential services and infrastructure. Federal procurement has the potential to catalyze the growth of community-owned firms, enabling them to secure large contracts, build credibility, develop their capabilities, and establish extensive networks that facilitate market reach, thus increasing the benefits to the community while reducing their dependence on government subsidies.



# Key Insights

- IEDCs provide socioeconomic value to communities by reinvesting in the community in terms of training, hiring, and donations.
- IEDCs can benefit financially from federal procurement, which allows them to reinvest more into the community they serve.
- Federal procurement is important to IEDCs as it allows them to diversify their portfolio, which helps to withstand downturns in other industries they might be involved in.
- IEDCs promote self-determination by operating businesses that sustain and empower their communities economically.
- The federal procurement process is difficult for IEDCs to navigate, and streamlining it would benefit them and save resources.
- Restructuring procurement contracts into smaller segments would enable smaller IEDCs to participate in the procurement process.

# Methodology

This qualitative case study uses interviews to investigate an IEDC's procurement capabilities and the potential benefits of procurement for the community. Mikisew Group was selected as a case study partner based on its size, established operations, and interest in government procurement opportunities.

The data collection phase involved examining financial and annual reports, conducting six in-depth interviews with Mikisew Group's executive leadership and organizational representatives, and incorporating secondary research on IEDCs' participation in procurement activities, where necessary.

The interview guides varied, with questions tailored to align with the expertise and specialization of each staff member.

The following were some of their many diverse roles and duties:

- Advocacy efforts.
- Human resource and administration roles.
- Strategic advice, partnership development, and stakeholder management.
- International and domestic business development activities.



# Indigenous Economic Development Corporations: Background



After decades of social and economic marginalization, Indigenous Peoples are now poised for economic prosperity. As Indigenous communities demonstrate their economic potential and more Canadians recognize the need to confront institutional racism, there is an urgent priority for governments and industry to engage with Indigenous Peoples in community-led projects and business development in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action to further economic reconciliation. One important aspect of this economic prosperity is the increasing success of Indigenous Economic Development Corporations (IEDCs). Although development corporations date back to the 1970s,<sup>1</sup> First Nations in Northern Saskatchewan began asserting ownership rights over their lands in the last decade. The First Nations wanted to ensure they were engaged and consulted in matters related to their well-being, particularly regarding environmental stewardship of uranium development, and formed a unified and organized corporation. This resulted in the formation of an IEDC.<sup>2</sup>

According to the CCIB, IEDCs are “the economic and business development arm of a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit government and are a major economic driver for Indigenous communities.”<sup>3</sup> These community-owned organizations form and operate businesses on behalf of the Indigenous community or communities they serve.<sup>4</sup> According to estimates from 2015, over 250 IEDCs were

operating throughout Canada. Some of these organizations possessed assets worth billions of dollars.<sup>5</sup> As Indigenous communities increasingly recognize the economic opportunities IEDCs can produce, development corporations are becoming a vital tool for promoting economic reconciliation. They can also help to break stereotypes attributed to the Indigenous economy and showcase the latent capacity of Indigenous businesses that are currently overlooked by much of the Canadian economy.

IEDCs are unique from mainstream businesses because they are usually established with a specific social purpose that reflects the values of the First Nations community or communities they represent. This social purpose guides their operations to address socioeconomic issues within the community directly or promotes further economic activities that aim to address these issues. The decisions and economic ventures that an IEDC pursues are often influenced by community considerations and whether they return investment to the community. Therefore, many IEDCs form industry partnerships to produce social returns on investment (SROI).

This social impact is exemplified through Indigenous partnerships such as the consortium of thirteen Yukon-based First Nations economic development corporations. Yukon First Nations Telco LP was established to purchase, provide, and lease out fibre optic infrastructure to deliver high-speed internet to homes in First

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1 Huber, P. (N.D). (2024). *Indigenous Community-Owned Business: An Overview*. Industry West. <https://industrywestmagazine.com/features/indigenous-community-owned-business-an-overview/>

2 Huber, P. (N.D). (2024). *Indigenous Community-Owned Business: An Overview*. Industry West. <https://industrywestmagazine.com/features/indigenous-community-owned-business-an-overview/>

3 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2015). *Community and Commerce: A Survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations in Ontario*. [https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Community\\_and\\_Commerce\\_2015\\_web.pdf](https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Community_and_Commerce_2015_web.pdf). Pg. 13

4 Huber, P. (N.D). (2024). *Indigenous Community-Owned Business: An Overview*. Industry West. <https://industrywestmagazine.com/features/indigenous-community-owned-business-an-overview/>

5 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2020). *Aboriginal Economic Development Corporation Capacity*. <https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CCAB-Report-1-web.pdf>. Pg. 4

Nations communities across the Yukon.<sup>6</sup> By pooling their resources and working together, these economic development organizations could break into the telecommunications industry, enabling them to create new revenue streams, increase local capacity, and improve the standard of living in their communities.

Another prominent example of Indigenous-industry partnerships that create social benefits is the Atlin Hydro Project in Northwestern British Columbia. This arrangement allows the development corporation owned by the Taku Tlingit First Nation to leverage resources gained through their participation in the project to offset the socioeconomic challenges faced by the community. These challenges include infrastructure deficiencies, loss of connection to the land, unemployment, food insecurity, limited educational opportunities, lack of traditional language or culture-based services, barriers to realizing self-determination, and lack of supports for the mental and physical wellness of community members.<sup>7</sup>

IEDCs frequently describe their success in terms of local economic and social outcomes, specific project accomplishments, and financial growth.<sup>8</sup> They are significant employers of community members, particularly among Indigenous Peoples, providing Indigenous employees with opportunities for career growth. In addition to creating jobs in their communities, they also attract business investment through networking. They further support small business owners within their communities by connecting them to preferred suppliers, providing mentorship, and offering financial assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Indigenous Economic Development Corporations are important pillars of economic success in Indigenous communities. They play a crucial role in generating their revenue independently of government funding. Additionally, IEDCs provide employment, training, capacity-building, and economic development opportunities for Indigenous communities. With the potential to become industry leaders, IEDCs can grow even further and contribute to the overall success of the Indigenous economy.

## An Overview of IEDCs and Procurement

In many cases, Indigenous Economic Development Corporations utilize government procurement opportunities to promote economic development within their communities or generate

additional revenue for their operations. Prior research by CCIB demonstrates that IEDCs are better positioned for government procurement contracts than Indigenous businesses operating as sole proprietorships

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6 CBC/Radio Canada. (2022). *13 Yukon First Nation Development Corporations buy fibre optic infrastructure from Northwestel* / CBC News. CBCnews. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/13-yukon-first-nation-development-corporations-fibre-optic-infrastructure-northwestel-1.6443179>

7 The Conference Board of Canada. (2021). *The Atlin Hydro Project: Making a Meaningful Contribution to Community Health and Well-Being*. [https://www.conferenceboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce\\_uploads/reports/10973\\_IP\\_The-Atlin-Hydro-Project\\_Jan2021.pdf\\_Pg\\_12](https://www.conferenceboard.ca/wp-content/uploads/woocommerce_uploads/reports/10973_IP_The-Atlin-Hydro-Project_Jan2021.pdf_Pg_12)

8 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2015). *Community and Commerce: A survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations*. <http://www.nadf.org/upload/documents/community-and-commerce-final-report.pdf>. Pg. 2

9 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2015). *Community and Commerce: A survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations*. <http://www.nadf.org/upload/documents/community-and-commerce-final-report.pdf>. Pg. 2

or other business structures, particularly when compared to small businesses.<sup>10</sup> By consolidating resources, IEDCs can benefit from several advantages. These benefits include easier access to employee licenses or certifications, improved financial security or sustainability to withstand lengthy procurement application processes, assets that can be used as collateral for insurance or bid bonding, and an expanded business portfolio to access more business development opportunities.<sup>11</sup>

For many Indigenous communities and businesses, accessing procurement opportunities has been hindered due to discrimination, marginalization, and a lack of capacity to engage effectively in the procurement process.<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging and understanding these limiting factors and developing smarter policies to address them are crucial to supporting the Indigenous economy and fostering economic reconciliation. Federal procurement has a significant impact on national economies. It drives business development, attracts investment, facilitates partnerships and networking, spurs innovation, and creates opportunities to access financing or capital.<sup>13</sup> While the Canadian economy reaps the benefits of government procurement, it continues to be underutilized in terms of

supporting Indigenous Peoples' economic and business growth.<sup>14</sup> This discrepancy is largely due to the long and ongoing history of the marginalization of and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples.

Over the last decade, there has been a targeted effort to modernize how the government conducts Indigenous procurement, and recent government considerations suggest that change is on the horizon. These changes include updating the Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Businesses (PSIB), redesigning the Canada Buys e-procurement tool, and shifting procurement to the forefront of discussions around Indigenous businesses and economic reconciliation.<sup>15,16</sup> This shift is reflected in landmark publications like the National Indigenous Economic Strategy (NIES), which contains eight Calls to Economic Prosperity related to procurement, such as strategy development, devolution of services, and better reporting practices.<sup>17</sup> Though these changes represent positive momentum in the recognition of procurement as a tool for economic reconciliation, continued efforts are required to ensure the long-term success and inclusion of Indigenous businesses within procurement and government supply chains.

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10 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2020). *Aboriginal Economic Development Corporation Capacity*. <https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CCAB-Report-1-web.pdf>. Pg. 10

11 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2020). *Aboriginal Economic Development Corporation Capacity*. <https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CCAB-Report-1-web.pdf>. Pg. 4

12 Sooran, C. (n.d.). (2024). "Indigenous Procurement: Too Important to Fail." *Canadian Politics and Public Policy*. <https://www.policymagazine.ca/indigenous-procurement-too-important-to-fail/>

13 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2017). *Indigenous Procurement: Presentation to the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association*. <https://nacca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NACCA-GMsMeeting2017-Day2-INAC-CarolPoulinBrittWatson-Procurement.pdf>. Pg. 2

14 Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2017). *Indigenous Procurement: Presentation to the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association*. <https://nacca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/NACCA-GMsMeeting2017-Day2-INAC-CarolPoulinBrittWatson-Procurement.pdf>. Pg. 2

15 PSPC. (2021). *Government of Canada announces federal-wide measures to increase opportunities for indigenous businesses*. Canada.ca. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-services-procurement/news/2021/08/government-of-canada-announces-federal-wide-measures-to-increase-opportunities-for-indigenous-businesses.html>

16 PSPC. (2024). *A new way of doing business*. CanadaBuys. <https://canadabuys.canada.ca/en/about-us/news-and-events/new-way-doing-business>

17 National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada 2022. (2022, June). *Pathways to Socioeconomic Parity for Indigenous Peoples*. [https://niestrategy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/NIES\\_English\\_FullStrategy\\_2.pdf](https://niestrategy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/NIES_English_FullStrategy_2.pdf). Pg. 33

# IEDC Case Study: Mikisew Group of Companies



# About the Company

Mikisew Group of Companies is an Indigenous Economic Development Corporation based in Enoch, Alberta. The company was established in 1991 with a mission statement focused on supporting the economic development of the Mikisew Cree First Nation.<sup>18</sup> Since its establishment, Mikisew Group has been aiming “to build sustainable companies that are recognized as reputable, strong, proud, and prosperous partners of industry.”<sup>19</sup> They have accomplished their goal through their broad portfolio of partnerships and wholly owned companies. According to Mikisew Group staff, the purpose of an IEDC is to build self-sufficiency within a First Nation community. Mikisew Group runs businesses that aim to sustain and empower the community economically.

## A Mikisew employee states the benefits of an IEDC:

*“What we look to provide is sustainable profits for the mix to create First Nation and we also have it done through a social purpose. So economic development for our community in particular is quite invaluable because it provides out opportunities to nation members as well as provides the nation with actual funding to employ their strategic imperatives... for example education, housing, elders’ etcetera.”*

At the time of this research, Mikisew Group underwent a board shift, with four board members resigning and new members stepping into their positions,<sup>20</sup> which impacted the information and individuals we had access to during the research process. Specifically, we were unable to obtain the strategic insights on procurement opportunities that we had hoped to receive from board members.

## Community Profile

*Mikisew Cree (Cree: ᑭᑭᑭᑭ; Mikisew, meaning: “golden eagle”)*

Mikisew Cree First Nation is a community with over 3,000 members residing mainly in the Athabasca Delta and Wood Buffalo National Park of Northeastern Alberta.<sup>21</sup> Members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation are spread across various locations of Western Canada, including Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Fort Smith, Fort Chipewyan, and the Northwest Territories. Mikisew Cree First Nation (Mikisew) members have lived on the ancestral lands of the Athabasca Delta and Wood Buffalo National Park in northeastern Alberta since time immemorial.<sup>22</sup> According to information provided by the Nation’s website, the lives of their members are linked to the land and to a close understanding of traditions, history, and a natural way of life.<sup>23</sup> Many of their members live in the hamlet of Fort Chipewyan, and their traditional lands cover a large portion of what is now known as the Athabasca oil sands deposits.<sup>24</sup>

18 Mikisew Group. (2024). <https://mikisewgroup.com/>

19 Mikisew Group. (2024). <https://mikisewgroup.com/>

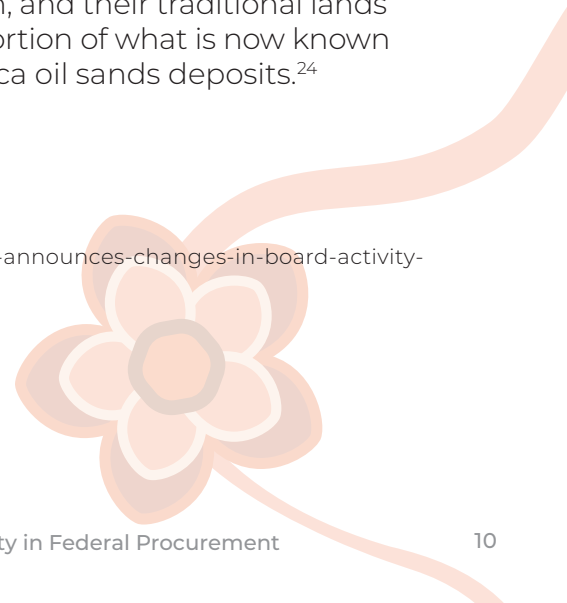
20 [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/mikisew-energy-services-group\\_mikisew-group-announces-changes-in-board-activity-7160415242064130049-bWYO?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/mikisew-energy-services-group_mikisew-group-announces-changes-in-board-activity-7160415242064130049-bWYO?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

21 Mikisew Cree. “About Us.” (2023). [www.mikisewcree.ca/about-us/](http://www.mikisewcree.ca/about-us/).

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.



Mikisew members speak Woodland Cree, an Indigenous language commonly spoken by individuals in Northern Manitoba, Northern Saskatchewan, and Northern Alberta.<sup>25</sup> According to Statistics Canada data from 2021, Cree has over 85,000 speakers and is the largest of the three remaining Indigenous languages, with a substantial speaker base (Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway).<sup>26</sup> However, the Woodland or Woods Cree dialect is an increasingly endangered subgroup of the Cree language.<sup>27</sup>

According to Statistics Canada data updated in February 2024, 76% of the 3,250 registered Mikisew members live off-reserve (2,467), approximately 19% live on another reserve, on Crown land, or in non-Crown land regions (608), and just over 5% live on-reserve (175).<sup>28</sup>

Data collected by Statistics Canada in 2016 show that the community's workforce has a participation rate of 54%, an employment rate of 42%, and an unemployment rate of 22%.<sup>29</sup> These employed individuals are most concentrated in the following industries and activities:

- Health and social services
- Education, management, and government
- Construction
- Transportation and warehousing
- Retail, sales, and wholesale trade
- Agriculture and natural resources
- Trades and manufacturing<sup>30</sup>

Additionally, data reported in interviews with Mikisew Group executives finds that the IEDC has a current workforce of approximately 600 employees, ten of whom are members of the Mikisew Cree First Nation in mid-level management or senior professional positions. Mikisew Group also has Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN) members in its labour force, which varies based on projects and perspective work seasons. It has peaked at around 100 MCFN employees but usually averages around 70–80 out of 600 employees.

These indicators offer key insights into the opportunities and challenges the Mikisew Cree First Nation faces in the labour market. In response to the employment barriers captured by their 22% unemployment rate, Mikisew Group staff members outline how they are actively working to generate sustainable, good-paying employment opportunities for community members to strengthen the overall economic landscape.

## An Overview of Mikisew Group of Companies' Business Portfolio

Mikisew Group has three key components of economic activity and engagement. The first component is their two wholly owned and operated companies, MM Limited Partnership (MML) and MFM Limited Partnership (MFM). These two Mikisew Group entities operate in the fleet, plant,

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25 Ibid.

26 Statistics Canada. (2023). *Indigenous Languages in Canada 2021*. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023029-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2023029-eng.htm).

27 The Gift of Language and Culture. (2022). "Woodland Cree Culture and Language." [www.giftoflanguageandculture.ca/woodland-cree/](http://www.giftoflanguageandculture.ca/woodland-cree/).

28 Government of Canada. (2021). *Registered Population*. [https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND\\_NUMBER=461&lang=eng](https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=461&lang=eng)

29 Government of Canada. (2021). *Workforce Characteristics*. [https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNWorkforce.aspx?BAND\\_NUMBER=461&lang=eng](https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNWorkforce.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=461&lang=eng)

30 Government of Canada. (2021). *Workforce Characteristics*. [https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNWorkforce.aspx?BAND\\_NUMBER=461&lang=eng](https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNWorkforce.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=461&lang=eng)

and heavy equipment maintenance marketplace.<sup>31</sup> Their primary focus has been on servicing the needs of the oil sand production sites in northern Alberta through building operation, maintenance, and repair offerings.<sup>32</sup> These two wholly owned operations expose the IEDC and Mikisew Cree First Nation to many unique business opportunities in lucrative sectors of the Albertan economy.

They have also undertaken numerous joint ventures (JVs) and investment roles with other large industry partners and First Nations communities, which have generated significant revenue and capacity-building opportunities. To view a complete list of these joint ventures and investments, please refer to the Appendix.

## IEDC Procurement within Mikisew Group

### Joint Ventures: International SOS and The Procurement Contract

Since 2015, Mikisew Group has formed a collaboration with International SOS, aiming to foster beneficial outcomes within communities. International SOS is a prominent entity offering extensive health, safety, and corporate travel solutions worldwide. Additionally, it serves as the primary private medical service provider in Canada.<sup>33</sup>

A representative of Mikisew International SOS mentioned some of the benefits they bring to the community:

*“So really, there is benefit in a few ways; number one is revenue share, which is always part of a good partnership. But more so, we help with community wellness, community health, and emergency services if needed.”*

31 Mikisew Group. (2023). Year in Review. <https://mikisewgroup.com/yearinreview/>

32 Ibid.

33 Mikisew Group. (2023). *Mikisew International SOS*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/international-sos/>

As a result of this partnership, Mikisew International SOS has emerged as a highly versatile provider of health and emergency assistance tailored to the resource sector.<sup>34</sup> Their operations include managing Canada's most extensive fleet of emergency vehicles and a substantial pool of medical and fire rescue personnel.<sup>35</sup>

Mikisew International SOS has made a few notable contributions to the Mikisew Cree First Nation in health and wellness. Some of their impacts include assisting communities with hands-on health and wellness consultations and delivery. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they assisted Mikisew Cree First Nation in procuring protective equipment and cleansing solutions when supply chains were disrupted, especially in remote areas.<sup>36</sup> They expedited the delivery of face shields, gowns, masks, and hand sanitizers for Mikisew health workers and were also the first to make rapid test kits available to the community.<sup>37</sup> In addition, they supported the community healthcare team in creating an emergency preparedness plan for communicable diseases and continue to assist them in that capacity.<sup>38</sup>

## Federal Procurement

During the pandemic, they grew capacity through procurement, resulting in Mikisew International SOS receiving two contracts from a federally funded package of COVID response procurement opportunities valued at \$1 million each over four years.<sup>39</sup>

Over the four years, Mikisew Group will work with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to support community health and wellness by providing nursing backup to ISC staff in First Nations communities, including Mikisew Cree First Nation and surrounding communities. Mikisew Group's portfolio of federal procurement is currently sparse, with this joint venture contract being their first experience with winning a federal procurement bid.

## Corporate Procurement Contracts

Mikisew Group has some experience with corporate procurement, especially in the natural resource sector. Being close to the Northern Alberta oil sands production area allows for easier partnerships and procurement opportunities in the local economy's oil sands sector. Mikisew Group also boasts a long track record of success in this field, as they have been a leading oil sands partner specializing in site services, maintenance, logistics, and construction since 1991.<sup>40</sup> They are well-positioned to offer general labour, heavy lifting and transport, tool repair, piping installation and fitting, electrical engineering and construction, general contracting, ventilation, emergency services, and passenger transportation.<sup>41</sup>

Data from their annual reports demonstrate that their main revenue stream is related to oil and gas in the Fort McMurray region, with many of their joint ventures and other investments being directed toward activities in this industry.<sup>42</sup> An example

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Mikisew Group. (2023). *Year in Review*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/yearinreview/>

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 PSPC. (2024). *Remote, isolated, and semi-isolated First Nations Nursing Services*. CanadaBuys. <https://canadabuys.canada.ca/en/tender-opportunities/contract-history/ws3761422780-cw2334825-acm174423856-002>

40 Mikisew Group. (2023). *Year in Review*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/yearinreview/>

41 Ibid.

42 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Annual publication*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/annual-publication/>



of their involvement in the oil sands would be the limited partnership formed between Mikisew Group (51%) and Aecon (49%) in 2018 (Mikisew Aecon Limited Partnership), where Fort Hills Energy LP awarded a Master Service Agreement (MSA) on a Fort Hills oil sands project operated by Suncor.<sup>43</sup> Mikisew Aecon Limited Partnership was responsible for waste removal and other prominent civil and earthworks at Fort Hills. The two initial contracts awarded in the MSA were estimated to be worth \$100 million when aggregated.<sup>44</sup> Mikisew Group was also involved in an oil sands deal in 2021, where one of their JVs, Mikisew North American Limited Partnership, was awarded a contract projected to generate \$275 million in revenue.<sup>45</sup>

Currently, most of Mikisew Group's investments are in corporate procurement. They are looking to diversify their portfolio within federal supply chains, which would help balance their portfolio and ensure long-term success and resilience. Portfolio diversification is important to ensure sustained profits in the event of downturns in the oil and gas industry, allowing them to continue giving back to their community.

## Procurement Processes and Preparing for Contracts

Mikisew Group has streamlined its processes in preparation for federal procurement contracts. Despite developing a procurement and bidding strategy customized to align with the requirements of each specific contract, they have yet to secure a successful federal procurement contract.

A procurement officer at Mikisew Group shared their strategies for finding and preparing for federal procurement opportunities:

*"[We] liaise with staff at Federal Agencies, [that is] PSPC, ISC, Defense Construction Canada. We are always looking for opportunities to meet new folks, having meetings [and] simple information sessions. We've [also] attended a few of their conferences as well."*

Another aspect to consider is that the procurement process may sometimes appear unfair, particularly when contending against larger companies with prior experience in the federal procurement process. One motivation for partnering with industry leaders with extensive capacity and experience is to overcome these competitive disadvantages and learn alongside the top performers in their field.

As a result, Mikisew Group prepares for contracts by ensuring they are a good fit and can provide outstanding performance and value to their partners. They make sure they can offer their partners what they need to succeed in their bid. An interview participant from Mikisew Group noted some of the ways they bring value to their partnerships, including applying their experience liaising with the federal government, educating more prominent multi-national companies on the importance of working with Indigenous businesses, and leveraging their extensive roster of partners to establish credibility.

43 Aecon Group Inc. (2018). *Aecon Announces Partnership with Mikisew Group of Companies and master service agreement for fort hills oil sands project*. Cision Canada. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/aecon-announces-partnership-with-mikisew-group-of-companies-and-master-service-agreement-for-fort-hills-oil-sands-project-689549771.html>

44 Aecon Group Inc. (2018). *Aecon Announces Partnership with Mikisew Group of Companies and master service agreement for fort hills oil sands project*. Cision Canada. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/aecon-announces-partnership-with-mikisew-group-of-companies-and-master-service-agreement-for-fort-hills-oil-sands-project-689549771.html>

45 GlobeNewswire. (2021). *North American Construction Group Ltd. announces \$275M oil sands contract award and extension*. GlobeNewswire Newsroom. <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2021/09/14/2296612/0/en/North-American-Construction-Group-Ltd-Announces-275M-Oil-Sands-Contract-Award-and-Extension.html>

In addition, they collaborate with enterprise resource planners and create a bidding strategy specific to the contract they are trying to bid on. When identifying bids, they review bid sites and attend in-person conferences and networking events. They look at bids through a private equity lens to see if there are opportunities for community members to be employed through contracts. Mikisew Group also looks for opportunities in industries where there is little to no Indigenous participation due to the high barrier to entry, but there are latent opportunities.

A Mikisew Group employee discusses some of the industries they want to break into:

*“One of the main gaps we see right now is National Defense. There [aren’t] many Indigenous organizations [involved in] National Defense, and rightfully so. It does take a lot of background checks at the federal level as well as heavy capital investments, and its technology heavy. So, based on [these] factors, there’s a lot of barriers to entry, but as a business, you also like to have those barriers because it does limit the amount of competitors that can enter into those venues.”*

After forming partnerships that align with their goals for large-scale procurement, the barriers to entry could mean limited competition for those opportunities. In addition, Mikisew Group employees expressed interest in engaging in federal programs such as the five percent Indigenous procurement target.

## Strategic and Economic Development Goals

While Mikisew Group recognizes that a significant portion (80%) of its revenue originates from a single source, it aims to diversify. Procurement presents an avenue to achieve this goal, particularly given the government’s Indigenous procurement objectives. Engaging in federal procurement enables Mikisew Group to broaden its scope of activities and confer on its enterprises a competitive edge. Diversification fosters growth opportunities by venturing into new markets and sectors and fosters long-term financial stability for the community by lessening dependence on any individual revenue stream.

Mikisew Group continually endeavours to elevate the value proposition for their partners during the bidding process, leveraging their advantageous position as an IEDC. This competitive edge, along with requirements for including Indigenous businesses, supports and enhances their partnership efforts. Through experience gained from prior collaborations with organizations like International SOS, Mikisew Group brings valuable knowledge in maneuvering federal government engagements to their partners interested in federal procurement opportunities. Furthermore, Mikisew Group strives to contribute to the government’s five percent Indigenous procurement target, aligning with broader organizational development objectives associated with economic reconciliation, reinvestment in Indigenous communities/ businesses, and diversifying their business portfolio.

# Challenges within the Procurement Process

The following are the main challenges highlighted by Mikisew Group during the early stages of their federal procurement and supported by literature:

**Challenges of Large and Complex Procurement Contracts:** High-value contracts create barriers to entry and diminish participation for smaller organizations and businesses due to limited participation capital and contract fulfillment capacity.

A Mikisew Group employee mentioned the following:

*“Not all federal agencies or not all governments divide the contracts into small contracts; they keep a contract very large, which basically creates a barrier to entry for small companies to bid on.”*

**Limited Labour Capacity and Burdensome Procurement Administration Processes:** The procurement process is labour-intensive, and a lot of time and resources are needed to get through the process. This challenge regarding initial resource availability discourages Indigenous businesses from participating in government supply chains. The response turn-around times are usually slow, and regulatory issues typically arise due to requirements that prevent the overlapping of funding agency contributions involved in the process, making it a hassle for applicants. Some of the issues raised by Mikisew Group staff regarding the procurement process are highlighted in the following:

*“It is very much a trial by fire. There is a way to write them, and there is a way to respond, and there is a way to prepare, and I think those who have been in the space for a while have gone through the growing pains*

*and growth pains that we are saying what is the exact, or what is the best way to approach this.”*

*“It is such a complicated and convoluted application and process to obtain [or] procure an opportunity or to procure funding that it is almost an exercise in will and strength. You have to stay with it, you know; it gets sent back like five times.”*

**Expertise and Experience in Procurement Processes:** The lack of expertise, skills, experience, and guidance all contribute to Indigenous businesses' inability to successfully maneuver through the procurement process. The procurement process is daunting when first encountered and has many requirements and moving parts, which makes it difficult for businesses to effectively navigate, deterring them from participating in it.

*“Dedicating a lot of time just to untangle the process, the pieces we need to address, and when ... we had to put in a lot of resources to do that. Hopefully, we don't have to do the same next time, but that was the only answer.”*

*“A lot of these small companies just give up because the process looks too complex to even start.”*

**Skilled labour, wages, and retention:** There are talent shortage issues in the industry. According to interview participants, a talent shortage exists in the industries where Mikisew Group is active. That is, they lack qualified individuals with the credentials and experience in the procurement process—this expertise gap results from high staff turnover, intensifying the need to recruit and retain qualified

employees. As the educational requirement increases, staff retention becomes more challenging as highly skilled employees move on to other opportunities, and most staff members who leave to pursue post-secondary education do not return.<sup>46</sup>

**Inflation Rates:** The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated general costs, and inflation soared, reaching a peak in 2022. Characterized by unusually high inflation rates, the economic landscape in rural communities has led to higher costs for materials, insurance, transportation, and hiring skilled workers.<sup>47</sup> While current inflation rates remain steady, they have negatively impacted IECs' operational expenses, particularly through increased prices of goods and services. These inflation-induced cost escalations pose financial challenges and strain IEDCs' financial capacities. According to a Mikisew Group employee,

*"I would say costs a big one. Everybody wants to cut costs, but everything is costing more."*

**Supply Chain Issues:** Mikisew Group still experiences some supply chain issues that began during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, it has been difficult to get necessary and timely supplies due

to gaps in their supply chain that have still not been completely resolved, affecting the business even years later.

**Perceptions About Indigenous Businesses' Competitiveness:** The perception is that Indigenous businesses are more expensive. There is also a perception that Governments are usually looking for the lowest bidders, and IEDCs cannot always offer the same low cost as non-Indigenous businesses because of their higher operational costs, which creates the perception that doing business with Indigenous businesses is prohibitively expensive.

This sentiment is highlighted by a Mikisew Group employee who states:

*"In terms of Indigenous business, a lot of people think that Indigenous businesses are expensive because it's that extra markup to appease the Nation and all that, but that is not necessarily true anymore, and we are trying to change that narrative. You know, we get hired now as Mikisew Group entities for the work that we do, and we are more competitive on the cost side."*

## Suggestions for Improvement

Interview participants offered suggestions to improve the procurement process. Some of the ways include the following:

**Break Down Large Contracts into Smaller Ones:** Large contracts should be broken

down into smaller contracts. Smaller businesses would recognize these contracts as viable opportunities to partake in the procurement process and provide an entry point for future engagement.

46 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2013). *Community and Commerce: A Survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations in Ontario*. <https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CCAB-EcoDevel-Report2013-FA-web.pdf>. Pg. 28

47 Statistics Canada. (2022). *The outlook of rural businesses, first quarter of 2022*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/21-006-x/21-006-x2022002-eng.htm#Rural%20Businesses%20Less%20Likely%20to%20Plan%20to%20Increase%20Current%20Employee%20Wages>

The following statements from the Mikisew Group staff convey this sentiment:

*“Divide the contracts into very small pieces so Indigenous companies or very small businesses can actually come in and get into those opportunities.”*

*“If ISC had given out only one contract across whole provinces. I am pretty sure that Mikisew would [not have] thought about going into delivering health care services. Because ISC divided the contract into different provinces, [it] made the scope easier to bite for small businesses, and companies were able to get in.”*

*“This strategy that ISC adopted in the procurement ... it works out in favour of small businesses to actually be able to respond to it ... Instead of keeping it large ... then small companies will never be able to qualify to get those contracts ... those businesses are actually able to come in and qualify for smaller pieces for now, which gives them the confidence to go for bigger pieces later.”*

### **Streamline the Procurement Process:**

A more streamlined procurement process will make it easier to secure contracts. This simplification would contribute to increased participation in federal procurement. Mikisew Group staff shares the following advice:

*“I think you have to be extremely clear and simplify the process. Don't ask for the same question seven different ways. That confuses people. Ask the question once but make it very clear what you require and all the parts and pieces that go into that response.”*

*“Clarity and straightforward requests would be really beneficial. I think it would help everybody and make the process not only probably smoother and quicker, but everybody would think it was fair and equal across the board.”*

*“Simplifying the process as well ... those ... things alone. I think would massively lead to more participation.”*

### **Businesses Lacking Federal Procurement Skills Should Receive Government Help:**

If businesses could avoid incurring additional expenses by outsourcing help, they would be more interested in participating in the procurement process.

Mikisew Group staff members relay how process challenges can deter businesses:

*“Talking to some of our other partners ... they are looking to find somebody to contract that helps them write those because internally, they're all at a loss. So, it comes at a large cost. Now they're spending large amounts of money to bring in an expert or two to help work through those opportunities, write the proposals in response to procurement opportunities ... and ... if they spend the money and are unsuccessful, it is a waste of money and now that deters them in the future to go through that again.”*

### **Provision of Training Programs and Resources:**

Training and resources should be provided for grant and proposal-writing processes. This support would help remove the burden of hiring external help, which is costly and results in a loss if the procurement is unsuccessful while enhancing the organization's skills and expertise.

**Developing Meaningful Relationships and Collaborations:** There should be a focus on developing more meaningful partnerships and collaborations with Indigenous businesses and communities that benefit a wider range of people rather than always looking for the lowest dollar figure.

*“Focus on assisting First Nation-owned enterprises because the profit from those organizations ultimately go to a much wider audience and essentially helping out the various communities ... It is not to find the lowest cost communities to partner with, but to have more meaningful relationships with communities.”*



# Successes/Opportunities



# Impacts of Procurement on Staff and Business

Procurement plays a significant role in supporting Indigenous economic development. It can be a powerful tool for promoting Indigenous entrepreneurship and business growth, leading to broader socio-economic benefits and contributing to the path to self-determination.<sup>48</sup> The revenue obtained from procurement contracts pays employees working in the organization and contractors who are community members. Procurement is important to Mikisew's business because it creates diverse income streams for the IEDC and strengthens the community's economic standing through a more diversified portfolio that can withstand downturns in one or more industries in which they participate.

Engaging in procurement can also provide revenue for IEDCs to support Indigenous businesses, contributing to Indigenous communities' socioeconomic well-being. Mikisew Group's procurement opportunities allow them to continue their journey toward sustainable growth and value creation for

Mikisew Cree First Nation. They can continue advancing their strategy as they invest in their people, systems, and improved service offerings.<sup>49</sup> In 2022 and 2023, Mikisew added numerous key positions to their management team and made promotions throughout their organization.<sup>50</sup> For its whole workforce, Mikisew Group peaks at about 150 Indigenous employees, averaging 120 total Indigenous employees.

They also expanded their business by making private equity investments, which helped them meet some of their diversification goals.<sup>51</sup> By securing investments, IEDCs can create revenue and economic stability for community members that can last generations. It would be helpful to gain a deeper understanding of how Mikisew Group increased value for its staff and business. This would involve learning about the new senior staff that were added, the number of new positions, and the methods it is using to advance its strategy and enhance its services.

## Skills Development

Mikisew Group invests in the community by hiring community members and providing training for their members to ensure they can meet the needs of a contract position. Sometimes, continuous training is needed for specific positions depending on the contract assignment, and training materials need to be continuously adapted to the trainees. Mikisew Group

has created a talent pool for Mikisew Cree First Nation members to hire from due to their dedication to enhancing the presence of Mikisew Cree First Nation members in their organization.<sup>52</sup> In addition, Mikisew Group provides extensive capacity training through apprenticeships and education grants to staff involved directly in change partnerships and federal procurement

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48 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB). (2021). Reaching 5% and Beyond: A Roadmap to Increasing Federal Procurement from Indigenous Businesses in Canada. Retrieved from <https://nacca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/1.-Procurement-Summary-Paper-Final-English.pdf>

49 Mikisew Group. (2023). Annual Publication: Trait Marketing. <https://traitmarketing.ca/brochures/mikisew-annual-publication-2021/>

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Mikisew Group. (2024). Annual publication. <https://mikisewgroup.com/annual-publication/>



activities. For example, they are currently supporting a community member in getting their Indigenous Master of Business Administration degree. Although we know Mikisew Group provides skills-training opportunities, we do not know how many members of the community have been able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Mikisew Group also provides training through informal knowledge-sharing. Through collaboration and supporting each other, employees can gain expertise and grow within the organization. When partnering with corporations on procurement opportunities, Mikisew advocates for training from within their First Nations membership. For example, the head of strategic partnerships at Mikisew also has a background in accounting and can support his teammate who is in the process of getting

their MBA with some of their requirements. When they are analyzing activities, opportunities, or partnerships, he can provide some of the financial acumen and support.

They also encourage skills development for members who want to pivot or gain more skills. Mikisew Group does this through its Stasis Program, which was mentioned during interviews. This program provides salary matches for community members who want to venture into another field so they don't experience a salary cut during the transition. Mikisew Group recently implemented this program, and we do not have data on its success or the number of staff who have completed it. Future studies with Mikisew Group should investigate the program's benefits from the perspective of staff and/or community members who have completed it.

## Employment Opportunities

Mikisew First Nation encompasses parts of Northern Alberta and the Southern edges of the Northwest Territories. When Mikisew Group has employment opportunities, they reach out to members and give preference to those seeking work. They also offer leadership opportunities for First Nation members, welcome new clients, and offer various professional opportunities for community members and businesses. Through procurement, they create job opportunities for their members by identifying, bidding, coordinating with partners, and winning.

Although most of their procurement employment and contracts are currently temporary, they would like to take on longer contracts to increase permanent employment. That is one of the reasons why diversifying their portfolio is essential. We do not presently know the breakdown of Mikisew's Indigenous workforce or how many community members they have placed in leadership positions. Future studies should investigate Mikisew's impacts on employment within the community.

## Impacts on Community

IEDCs can support the broader community they represent by managing a diverse portfolio of subsidiary businesses. They play a crucial role in increasing economic activity, stimulating local and regional economies, providing quality employment opportunities, and delivering services to their communities that may otherwise

not exist. According to previous research conducted by CCIB, a majority of IEDCs reported that they invested up to 50% of their after-tax revenue earned in the previous fiscal year (in this case, 2019) back into the community. The main benefits of this investment include support for digital infrastructure and employment

income.<sup>53</sup> This aligns with and emphasizes the primary goal of IEDCs: to create a diverse portfolio of businesses that brings about economic development, wealth creation, job creation, and self-sufficiency for the communities they serve.<sup>54</sup> IEDCs also act as key sources of employment opportunities for community members, with many prioritizing hiring and training local Indigenous talent. Previous research by CCIB in 2020 highlighted this strategic hiring focus, which found that the 49 IEDCs that participated in a survey study employed over 12,000 people across their various communities and business ventures.<sup>55</sup> IEDC subsidiary businesses are major contributors to employment for community members and Indigenous Peoples in general. The same research study found that four in ten (41%) businesses have 50% or more employees who are community members, and more than half (57%) of businesses have 50% or more employees who are Indigenous.<sup>56</sup> Though many IEDCs are small, they have the capacity to create long-term revenue-generating enterprises that experience growth and provide opportunities for community members or other business development activities.<sup>57</sup>

## Social Return on Investment and IEDCs

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a methodology that allows a deeper understanding of the social, health, environmental, and economic values created by various factors, including community investment.<sup>58</sup> It is a framework to measure and account for the value created by a program or series of initiatives beyond financial value. SROI measures the change in ways that are relevant to the people or organizations that experience or contribute to it. It documents the narrative of change-making by measuring social, environmental, and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. This data story enables a ratio of benefits to costs to be calculated. For example, a ratio of 3:1 indicates that an investment of \$1 delivers \$3 of social value.<sup>59</sup> This concept is important in the context of IEDCs because it offers an effective means of assessing how the economic activities, portfolios, and various investment positions of the IEDC generate impact and value for the community they are meant to serve. Though not a perfect measurement of the social value attributed to dollar-for-dollar investment, it is increasingly being considered internationally by countries like Australia and their Supply Nation program as a metric for determining the success of targeted Indigenous procurement programming.<sup>60</sup>

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53 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2020). *Aboriginal Economic Development Corporation Capacity*. <https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CCAB-Report-1-web.pdf> pg. 26

54 Huber, P. (N.D). (2024). *Indigenous Community-Owned Business: An Overview*. Industry West Magazine. <https://industrywestmagazine.com/features/indigenous-community-owned-business-an-overview/>

55 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2020). *Aboriginal Economic Development Corporation Capacity*. <https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CCAB-Report-1-web.pdf> pg. 4

56 Ibid. Pg. 11

57 Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (2015). *Community and Commerce: A survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations*. <http://www.nadf.org/upload/documents/community-and-commerce-final-report.pdf>. Pg. 2

58 Appendix social return on investment (SROI) (n.d). [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/eurasia/Appendix-SROI-methodology\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/eurasia/Appendix-SROI-methodology_ENG.pdf) pg. 1

59 Cabinet Office of the Third Sector. (2012). *A guide to Social Return on investment*. [https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/aff3779953c5b88d53\\_cpm6v3v71.pdf](https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/aff3779953c5b88d53_cpm6v3v71.pdf) pg. 8

60 Supply Nation. (2018). *The Sleeping Giant: A Social Return on Investment Report on Supply Nation Certified Suppliers*. <https://supplynation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Sleeping-Giant-Report.pdf> pg. 3

During our interviews with employees at Mikisew Group, we learned that they are already using a metric like SROI analysis to assess the value of their own economic activities.

*“Economic development for the community is invaluable since it provides opportunities to nation members as well as provides the Nation with funding to plan and execute strategic goals such as education, housing, and Elder care.”*

*“To measure what we are doing to support the community on these items, we have developed a tool to better understand how much economic impact the organization has brought to the Nation. It is a KPI called the direct economic indicator.”*

Although this study did not analyze Mikisew Group’s SROI, it might be beneficial to introduce this methodology in future research on the effectiveness of procurement in enabling meaningful community investment.

## What Mikisew Group of Companies is Doing

Efforts to reinvest IEDC earnings back into the community are reflected in the business activities at the Mikisew Cree Group of Companies. Information gathered from our interviews with their executive team shows that in the 2023 fiscal year, they contributed more than \$20.5 million in net economic benefit to the Mikisew Cree First Nation, an increase from \$18.6 million, or approximately 10.2% from the year prior. This contribution includes lump sum donations of up to \$165K to various initiatives, including Mikisew Cree First Nation Training and Development and Mikisew Cree First Nation Youth & Elder Programming to support various community needs, as well as direct

payments to community members and funds to support the day-to-day operations of the First Nations’ public administration. Throughout our interviews with Mikisew Group staff members, we gained insight into what the community investment process looks like from start to finish.

*“When opportunities for investment or support arise, we meet with community leaders to determine the direction.”*

*“When profit is generated, we sit down with the board of directors to decide how much is distributed back to the community based on community needs. Ultimately, we will distribute lump sums back into the community. The community will then determine how the money is spent or allocate it to certain programs, services, or projects.”*

*“The community makes the decisions on where to invest money. We wouldn’t necessarily tell the community where to invest that money unless it is a direct investment they are requesting our assistance with.”*

*“This allows us to create something that will last for generations to come and helps find secure investments that will last, creating employment and cash flow into the community.”*

Our interviews with Mikisew Group staff members indicate they have established a pipeline for reinvesting in community development. This collaboration and coordination allow them to use feedback from the community to direct or guide how the business invests and what socioeconomic factors they might need to support through revenues generated by their portfolio of activities. Indigenous entrepreneurs and IEDCs will continue to innovate to help communities attain self-sufficiency.

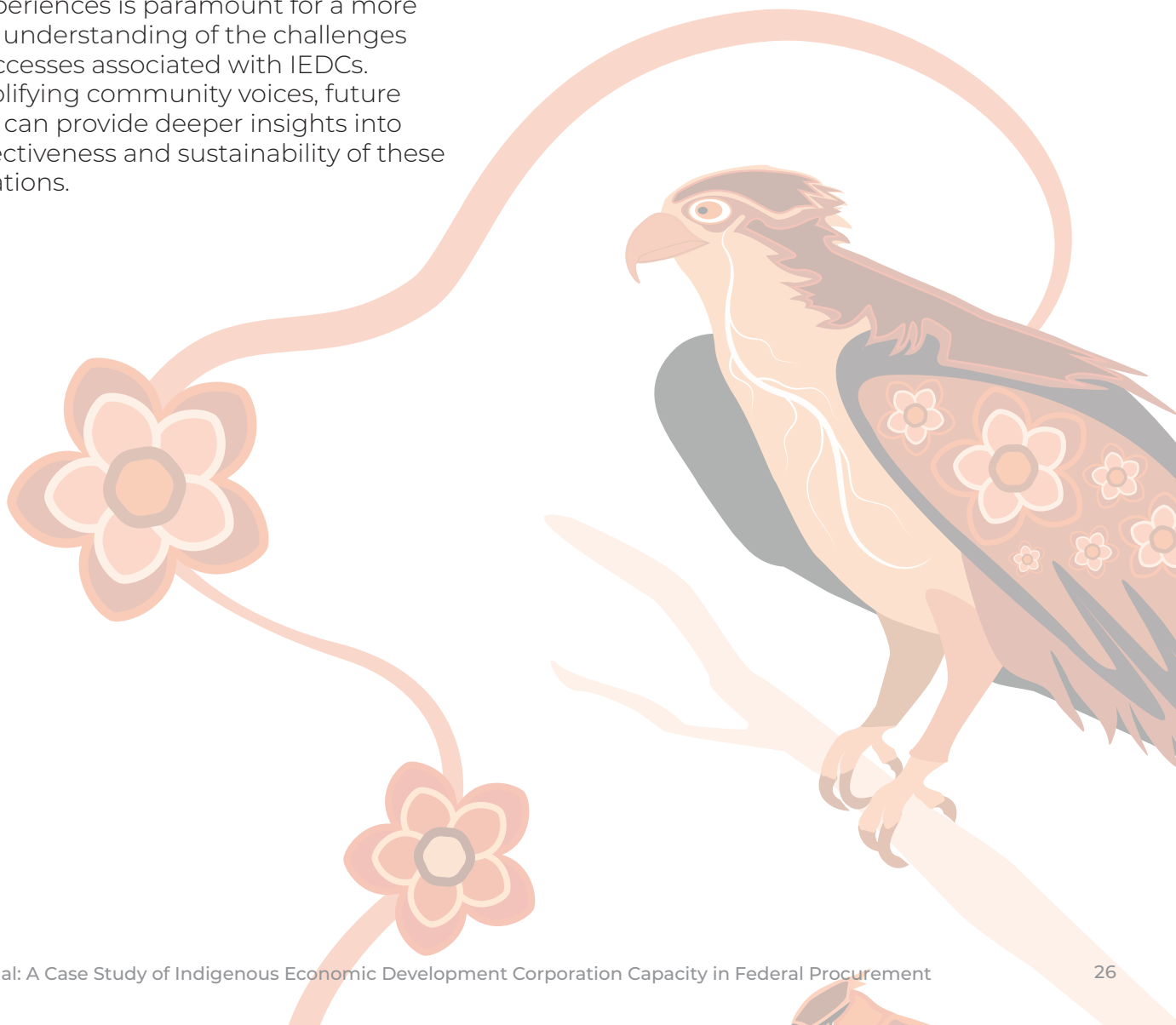


## Conclusion

This research has shed light on the capacity of IEDCs to take on procurement and use it to promote the community's prosperity and well-being while encouraging their right to self-determination. By examining the operations and impacts of Mikisew Group and its partnerships, we have highlighted their potential to stimulate local economic development and build capacity for their staff and the Mikisew Cree First Nation members they represent.

While our insights underscore the significance of IEDCs in promoting Indigenous self-determination, supporting community development, and attracting financial investment, it is evident that future research should adopt a more inclusive approach that encompasses a diverse range of perspectives and lived experiences. Direct engagement with Indigenous communities to capture their perspectives and experiences is paramount for a more holistic understanding of the challenges and successes associated with IEDCs. By amplifying community voices, future studies can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness and sustainability of these corporations.

Therefore, even though this research project highlights the positive impacts of IEDCs on Indigenous economic growth, there is still much to explore. Future research should be predicated on methodologies that embrace a community-centered approach that includes wellness, prosperity, and quality of life. This approach would allow us to gather a more comprehensive understanding of Indigenous economic development and pave the way for possible policy recommendations and further delineation of best practices.



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# Appendix

# Mikisew Cree Group of Companies: Joint Venture List

## DESIKA<sup>61</sup>

- **Description:** Environmental consultancy firm forged through a partnership between Advisian, the global advising arm of Worley, and the Mikisew Cree and Fort McKay First Nations. Desika unites science and engineering with land knowledge and cultural perspectives to provide sustainable solutions for industrial clients in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. They offer the following services:
  - Geoscience
  - Decommissioning
  - Restoration
  - Water resources, treatment, and advisory support

## M2<sup>62</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with Mammoet Canada, Mikisew Cree First Nation has partnered to offer tailor-made heavy lifting and transport solutions. The parties have combined technical expertise, extensive industry contacts, specialized equipment, and greater local Indigenous employment. They provide the following services:
  - Heavy lifting and transport services
  - Pilot truck service (supporting Mammoet wide loads)
  - Equipment rental and material management (lift products)
  - Factory to foundation/logistics
  - Plant turn-around and shutdown maintenance
  - Continuous outlook for new business
  - Site-wide construction services/modular construction
  - Relocation and decommissioning of installation

61 Mikisew Group. (2024). Desika. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/desika-group/#>

62 Mikisew Group. (2024). M2. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/m2/#companies-list>

## MIKISEW CONETEC<sup>63</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with ConeTec Investigations Ltd., an international full-service mining, geo-environmental, and geotechnical site investigation contractor, Mikisew Group offers the following services:
  - Tailings, geotechnical, and environmental in-situ site characterization services
  - Rotary, sonic, and auger drilling services
  - Ground improvement services
  - Other services complimentary to the equipment and expertise of the partnership

## MIKISEW TRANSDEV<sup>64</sup>

- **Description:** Mikisew Group has partnered with Transdev to deliver safe, exceptional, and reliable passenger transport solutions under the banner of Mikisew Transdev, formerly Mikisew First Canada. They excel at helping their clients determine the most efficient and effective ways to safely move their people between Fort McMurray, aerodromes, works sites, and camps throughout Northern Alberta. They offer the following services:
  - On-site passenger transportation
  - Highway coach services between sites and Fort McMurray
  - Turn-around transportation
  - Expert maintenance on heavy and light-duty vehicles
  - Planning and scheduling expertise

## MIKISEW INLINE<sup>65</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with Inline Group, Mikisew Inline offers geotechnical field services, materials testing, and surveying services throughout the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, serving the energy, mining, power generation, and infrastructure sectors.

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63 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew ConeTec*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/mikisew-conetec/#companies-list>

64 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew TransDev*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/transdev/#companies-list>

65 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew Inline*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/mikisew-inline/#companies-list>

## MIKISEW INTERNATIONAL SOS<sup>66</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with International SOS, an internationally renowned medical services and solutions provider, Mikisew International SOS has become one of the most diversified providers of industrial health and emergency services to the resource sector. Their offerings include the following:
  - An integrated model of EMS, fire, rescue, and clinical services that provides cost efficiencies and flexibility to meet changing needs.
  - A world-class occupational case management service that helps manage and reduce recordables.
  - As the global leader in integrated services, we provide a depth of services and experience that ensure the expected reliability of a partner.

## MIKISEW LANDING<sup>67</sup>

- **Description:** Mikisew Landing Limited Partnership is a collaboration between Executive Flight Centre and Mikisew Group that brings together a unique consortium specializing in aerodrome operations management. Among their primary offerings are the following:
  - Passenger check-in security screening
  - Industrial charter operations
  - Ground handling & baggage handling
  - FBO services
  - VIP services
  - Aircraft fueling, aircraft de-icing, aircraft marshaling, and aircraft hangar space.

## MIKISEW MISTRAS<sup>68</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with Mistras/OneSource, Mikisew Group has a wide range of integrated offerings, including mechanical services, primarily utilizing rope access, engineering, and more. This unique partnership combines innovative services, products, technologies, mechanical integrity (MI) expertise, NDT services, and proprietary data analysis software to deliver their customers a comprehensive portfolio of solutions.

66 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew International SOS*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/international-sos/#companies-list>

67 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew Landing*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/landing/#companies-list>

68 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew Mistras*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/mikisew-mistras/#companies-list>

## MIKISEW NORTH AMERICAN<sup>69</sup>

- **Description:** Specializing in heavy construction and mining, the Mikisew North American partnership promises to deliver their clients superior results from start to finish. They offer their clients many services, including:
  - Constructability reviews
  - Budgetary cost estimates
  - Design-build construction
  - Project management
  - Contract mining (drill, blast, excavation, and haulage)
  - Pre-stripping / pit pioneering
  - Overburden removal and stockpile
  - Muskeg removal and stockpile
  - Site preparation (drill, blast, excavate, fill, grade, piling)

## MIKISEW SODEXO LP<sup>70</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with Sodexo, Mikisew Group provides remote facilities management services, including but not limited to camp and catering, housekeeping, janitorial, maintenance laundry, and support services.

## MIKISEW WAIWARD<sup>71</sup>

- **Description:** Through a partnership with Waiward, the Mikisew Group of Companies has worked to serve clients' industrial construction and maintenance requirements. Their main product and service offerings include the following:
  - Construction services
  - Maintenance services
  - Fabrication services

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69 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew North American*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/north-american/#companies-list>

70 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew Sodexo*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/sodexo/#companies-list>

71 Mikisew Group. (2024). *Mikisew Waiward*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/company/waiward/#companies-list>

Through these JVs, Mikisew Group can solidify its market presence through an expanding portfolio of services while also working to scale and build capacity for entry into new sectors. These JVs also generate significant revenue for the IEDC, with data

collected from interviews with executive staff indicating that these ventures return hundreds of thousands of dollars for capital reinvestment. In some circumstances, the company and Mikisew Cree First Nation may receive millions of dollars.

## Mikisew Group of Companies: Investment Portfolio

### ALBERTA POWERLINE

- **Initial investment date:** 2019
- **Shareholder amount/ position:** 5.8%
- **Description:** This investment is part of an opportunity for Indigenous communities along the Fort McMurray West 500-kV Transmission Project Line to collectively acquire up to 40% of the asset. In total, seven Indigenous communities participated in the opportunity. This deal marks a major diversification of Mikisew Group's traditional investments. It allows them to be part of a low-risk project on traditional territory that will provide a steady cash flow for the next 35 years.<sup>72</sup>

### ATHABASCA INDIGENOUS INVESTMENTS

- **Initial investment date:** 2022
- **Shareholder amount/ position:** 11.57% collective non-operating interest in seven Enbridge-operated pipelines in northern Alberta for \$1.12 billion.
- **Description:** Landmark equity partnership between Enbridge and several Indigenous communities, including Mikisew Cree First Nation, that sees them have a minority ownership position in several of the largest crude oil pipelines in Northern Alberta's oil sands. These assets are underpinned by long-life resources and long-term contracts, which provide highly predictable cash flows.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Electricity Canada. (2019). *Alberta Powerline Builds Canada's Longest 500-kV AC Transmission Line*. <https://www.electricity.ca/programs/centre-of-excellence/alberta-powerline-builds-canadas-longest-500-kv-ac-transmission-line>

<sup>73</sup> Athabasca Indigenous Investments. (2022). *Indigenous Communities and Enbridge Announce Landmark Equity Partnership*. <https://athabascaindigenousinvestments.com/indigenous-communities-and-enbridge-announce-landmark-equity-partnership/>

## ML FILTRATION

- **Initial investment date:** 2020
- **Shareholder amount/ position:** In 2020, Mikisew Group acquired minority ownership of the company and, in 2023, moved to purchase a majority ownership position.
- **Description:** JL Filtration is Alberta's leading filtration equipment provider, as well as rentals and field services. Integrating Mikisew Group and JL Filtration presents a unique opportunity for a new and diverse market.<sup>74</sup>

## PROVEO

- **Initial investment date:** 2022
- **Shareholder amount/ position:** Majority
- **Description:** This is an investment into the innovative confined space solutions industry. Proveo focuses on remote confined space monitoring and ventilation systems. Proveo's technicians remotely monitor hazards, climate, and air quality through specialized technology designed and developed in-house.<sup>75</sup>

## THEBACHA

- **Initial investment date:** 2017
- **Shareholder amount/ position:** 15%
- **Description:** Mikisew Cree and Fort McKay First Nations joined forces to buy a minority shareholder stake in Suncor's East Tank Farm development, resulting in one of the largest and most significant business transactions in Indigenous history. Economic benefits from this partnership will enhance infrastructure development, social programs, education, and training in all Mikisew Cree First Nation communities for generations to come.<sup>76</sup>

Through this portfolio of investments, Mikisew Group has secured profitable returns that support the success and growth of the Mikisew Cree First Nation. These investments often promote capacity building in private equity and infrastructure while aligning with the company's mandate to support responsible and sustainable investment practices that positively impact the community where they are made.

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<sup>74</sup> Mikisew Group. (2020). *JL Filtration: Investment in Alberta's leading provider of filters and filtration systems*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/investments/jl-filtration/>

<sup>75</sup> Mikisew Group. (2022). *Proveo: Investment into innovative confined-space solutions*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/investments/proveo/>

<sup>76</sup> Mikisew Group. (2017). *Thebacha: Building capacity through a groundbreaking partnership*. <https://mikisewgroup.com/investments/thebacha/>





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