

## **Grant Application**

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## **Organization Description**

The Environmental Defence organization is the chosen organization/charity to be aligned with for this grant application. Environmental Defence advocates for a safe climate, healthy communities, and clean water across Canada by working with the government, industry, as well as individuals. For the last 40 years, the organization has worked on many levels (municipal, provincial and federal) to tackle climate change and create a clean economy by defending our freshwater sources, create sustainable communities, put an end to plastic pollution, and reduce the amount of toxic chemicals Canadians are exposed to (Environmental Defence, 2024).

Their mission is to create meaningful change that lasts. This is why they work with the government by encouraging the enactment of policies that protect the health and environment of Canadians. They also aim to build a prosperous economy that is clean, which is where their work with the industry comes in. Their involvement at the municipal level lies in their efforts to empower Canadians to take action in their daily lives to achieve the same goals the organization is working towards. The main vision here is a near future where Canadians are guaranteed to live and thrive in a healthy environment that is protected for many generations going forward (Environmental Defence, 2024).

To achieve this vision, Environmental Defence has values that they stick by which allow their actions to have the biggest impact possible. The organization works with all kinds of political leaders because their aim is not advance the goals of a particular political party, but rather create a world future generations of Canadians can live and prosper in. They also ensure that their work is not only factual based on research, but also relevant in terms of the issues that matter to Canadians. The research is occasionally done by the organization itself, and if not, it is based on peer-reviewed science and experts that know which threats are worth tackling and what

solutions are the most effective. They also ensure that they do not participate in unlawful activities, which they are transparent about as an organization (Environmental Defence, 2024).

The impact Environmental Defence has had on communities so far includes helping move the *Climate Aligned Finance Act* to the next stage of the Senate process, strengthening Canada's *Environmental Protection Act* to better protect Canadians in relation to toxins, and the rejection of gas expansion by three municipalities, leading to the increasing procurement of renewable energy. Since their involvement in environmental issues, the federal government has mandated 100% zero-emission vehicle sales by the year 2035, announced a plan which requires major retailers to decrease their use of plastic packaging, and released regulations which limit methane pollution from the gas and oil sector. Though these are just a few of their accomplishments, their website includes annual reports of their impact and the changes they've made presented in detail (Environmental Defence, 2024).

In collaboration with Environmental Defence, this grant application requires funding from The First Nation Adapt (FNA) Program, which provides support to First Nations communities south of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel. Among other aspects, this program targets water source vulnerabilities and risks to cultural sites through adaptation projects aim to better the way of life in First Nations communities (Government of Canada, 2023).

## **Needs Statement**

The United Nations General Assembly in 2010 recognized the basic human right to clean water and sanitation. This means that every human has the right to a sufficient, continuous water source that is safe to use, acceptable, accessible, and affordable for both domestic and personal use. Despite this, 40% of the world population is affected by water scarcity. Within this violation of the United Nations recognized rights to water and sanitation lies Canadian First Nations communities and their lack of clean, safe drinking water. Many Indigenous groups in Canada are living in third world conditions despite being in a first world country. Even though Canada has the world's third largest freshwater reserves, 618 Indigenous communities do not have access to safe drinking water, which has been an ongoing issue for decades (Yenilmez, 2022). In 2018, there were 174 drinking water advisories issued across 100 First Nations communities to signal unsafe water consumption. It is important to note that a single drinking water advisory can result in up to 5,000 individuals without access to clean drinking water (The Council of Canadians, 2024). The deficit in funding for the maintenance and operation of functioning water systems within these reserves is also at fault for these horrible conditions.

While progress has been made in recent years to reduce this number of drinking advisories, 73% of First Nations' water systems are at medium or high risk of being contaminated. We can still count 32 long-term, meaning over more than a year's time, drinking water advisories on 30 different reserves. Some of these advisories date back over 25 years, such as the Neskantanga First Nation, a community 450 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, Ont., which has been dealing with their advisory since 1995 (The Council of Canadians, 2024). Many in this community have never experienced a time where their tap water was safe to drink. People from this community must drive out every other day to the airport to obtain cases of bottled water for their personal and

domestic uses. The chief wants to use these resources sparingly by focusing on the kids, elders, and medical clients, but the community centre, police and nursing stations, band office, school, and rest of the families need it as well (Casey, 2024).

Chief Moonias of the Neskantaga First Nation has personally experienced and can vouch for the effects the water his community is being supplied. If water is consumed straight from the tap, individuals are hit with immediate nausea, followed by headaches and indigestion (Casey, 2024). Showers using the water leaves people itchy, with scabs, sores, and eczema eventually breaking out. Many of the residents refuse showers completely because of this, reports the First Nation's health director Sharon Sakanee. The water crisis also leaves many with mental health problems such as anxiety and loss of trust stemming from unstable water sources. The crisis is found to affect the community's environment as well because empty plastic water bottles are so numerous that they cannot be properly recycled, dotting every part of the land. When the Canadian Press visited the community in the summer of 2023, Neskantaga residents reported to them that water continues to be their biggest worry, taking over every part of their lives (Casey, 2024).

Though some communities are currently living in inhumane conditions due to lack of accessibility to clean drinking water, others are at risk of irreversible damage if action isn't taken soon. Line 5 is a 70-year-old pipeline that travels through First Nation territories in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ontario. This pipeline is owned and operated by Enbridge, a Canadian company, and is used to transport up to 23 million gallons of natural gas liquids and crude oil on a daily basis from the west to the east of the country (Woodhouse & Brooks, 2023). Indigenous communities on either side of the border have asked for the decommissioning of the pipeline in order to protect their human rights, considering a Line 5 oil spill would ruin the Great Lakes' freshwater source. Not only would this impact the culture and livelihood of Indigenous

communities in both Canada and the United States, but it also threatens the clean, safe drinking water of over 40 million people. These waters and lands sustain more than 50 Tribal and First Nations of Anishinaabe, and enabling and supporting this pipeline poses a serious threat to their way of life and their rights (Woodhouse & Brooks, 2023).

As mentioned previously, progress has been made in terms of lifting long-term water advisories. For most of the last decade, more advisories have been lifted than added. Exceptions to this are the years 2020 and 2024 where we can see two more added advisories compared to the number of lifted advisories (Government of Canada, 2024). Seeing how the lack of accessibility to clean drinking water negatively affects countless individuals in various life aspects, working towards lifting all drinking water advisories and upholding functioning water systems should be of utmost importance. The groups that are in need of this change are the Indigenous communities who do not have access to clean drinking water for various reasons. Geographically speaking, communities in Ontario seem to be the most affected, notably ones situated near the Great Lakes.

### **Project Description**

Through the efforts of Environmental Defence, the proposed project aims to provide clean, safe drinking water to Indigenous communities in Ontario. This project will be comprised of multiple actions that will work together to achieve this goal successfully.

Ending long-term drinking water advisories is one of the ways Indigenous communities can be assured access to clean drinking water. The process to do so is complex and requires First Nations communities to collaborate with the Government of Canada. Depending on the cause of water advisory, solutions may range from repairing/replacing infrastructure, to providing additional training and assisting water monitoring (Government of Canada, 2021). Feasibility

studies are needed when the advisory is caused by a problem with existing infrastructure. These problems include distribution line breaks, poor infiltration/disinfection in water treatment, as well as equipment failure. An assessment is then needed to find out the root cause of the issue, which is conducted by a consulting engineer the First Nation hires (Government of Canada, 2021). Options to improve drinking water are then analyzed, which usually goes one of two ways: upgrading or repairing the existing infrastructure or treatment plant in question, or building an entire new water treatment plant. Each community requires its own unique solution based on the age and condition of the existing infrastructure, the extent of required repairs, as well as the cost analysis surrounding building and operating the infrastructure.

Once a solution has been agreed upon, specialists and contractors must be hired as required depending on the project (Government of Canada, 2021). The infrastructure must then be designed, and a project manager hired to orchestrate the following steps to take. The construction and logistics must be planned and tendered, the deadlines must be identified, and construction must be monitored. Once these steps have been completed and the process is over, tests must be conducted to ensure that the water is, in fact, safe to for drinking and usage. This is done collaboratively by the environmental public health officer, the system's operator, and the public works manager. If the water passes the tests, the environmental public health officer can then recommend to the chief and council of the community that the advisory is safe to be lifted (Government of Canada, 2021).

Along with ending long-term drinking water advisories, other actions will be taken to ensure proper water management through this project. Not only will investing in water and wastewater infrastructure be beneficial, but keeping these systems running and properly staffed will decrease the chances of them deteriorating, and therefore failing the communities they are

meant to serve. Supporting on-reserve community infrastructure projects will aid in building a sustainable foundation and increasing safe access to drinking water for generations of Indigenous communities to come.

Another side to the project, as expressed earlier in the needs statement, is the shutdown of the Line 5 pipeline that poses a threat to the Great Lakes as well as Indigenous communities surrounding it. Though one may be concerned about where Line 5's contents will go, there are other lines surrounding it that have the same trajectory, which are not operating at full capacity. Line 78 is an example of a newer, more reliable pipeline that can make up for the shortfall the closure of Line 5 would cause (Woodhouse & Brooks, 2023).

When it comes to the actual closure of Line 5, it would first require physical abandonment. This would involve clearing, grading, removing soil, remediating and reclamation in order to restore the land to its original state, if possible (Government of Canada, 2023). This reclamation will need to be monitored, as the Canada Energy Regulator demands companies report this process until the area is deemed satisfactorily reclaimed. This process involves companies (Enbridge in this case) to safely eliminate any potential contaminants as the pipeline or segments of it are being removed. Once the pipeline is fully abandoned, monitoring and reporting continues to be required by the companies involved. This is the case because on the occasion that concerns about drainage or land subsidence are raised by Indigenous Peoples, landowners, or the public, companies are responsible for responding adequately and taking action if necessary (Government of Canada, 2023).

This project will target Indigenous communities in Ontario that lack accessible clean drinking water, as well as those that are at risk of losing this right because of the Line 5 pipeline. A primary focus will be put on communities who have the lengthiest long-term water advisories,



and once their issues are resolved we will work towards the rest of the communities. Once communities in Ontario have been taken care of, the same steps can be used in other regions of Canada, to ensure that all Canadian residents have their attributed right to water for whatever purpose they choose or need.

### **Expenses Narrative**

A portion of the funding for this project will be allocated to preliminary research in order to assess the communities that are most in need of the project's plans. Because this is a sector that the federal government neglects, the statistics and research are not always fully accurate in terms of the wants and needs of Indigenous communities. The research will aim to tackle the discrepancies that may lay in the statistics we are presented, in order to properly direct our actions to those most in need.

Most of the funding will be used in staffing people in different areas of the process. When it comes to ending long-term water advisories in Indigenous communities, the multi-step process requires many positions in different fields to be filled. Consulting engineers are first needed to assess the root cause of the issue and the extent of the damages. Specialists and contractors must be hired to get the solutions up and going. Finally, project managers are essential to monitor the process and make sure everything is being executed in an efficient and timely manner. All of these positions are each as important as the other, and they are all required on every site the project will tackle, which is why it represents a big portion of the funds.

Because the communities in need of this project are scattered across the province, some of the funding will be reserved for travelling, whether this be by air or other ways. Travelling must be done initially to assess the situations in each community, and the required staff must then be

brought to the needed locations. Within the travel sector of the budget, accommodation for staff who must stay in these regions for long periods of time is considered as well.

Lastly, the remainder of the funding will be used to shutdown Line 5, in order to ensure its surrounding Indigenous communities' viability. Not only will the budget be allocated to the staff needed for this grand of a plan, but also the machinery required to physically take down the structure. The reclamation of the land after the fact will also require a great deal of funding in order to get it back to a similar state as its surrounding environment.

### **Impact Measurement**

The project's impact will firstly be measured through the number of long-term advisories being lifted. Once an advisory ends, it would mean that every step of the process was properly executed, making the project a success. However, in recent years, as water advisories have been lifted, numerous ones have been announced. The project will only be declared a success if more water advisories are lifted than created, because this would mean the efforts to end the advisories are greater than the deterioration of current water systems and infrastructures on Indigenous reserves.

As mentioned previously, lifting water advisories is one part of the issue, but maintaining the systems once they've been rehabilitated is what matters in terms of longevity of the effects of the project. Continual testing of water from rehabilitated systems will be required, and the recurring passing of these tests will signify the project's significant impact on Canada's Indigenous communities, declaring it a success.

The shutdown of Line 5 in a timely and minimally catastrophic way will also deem the project as being successful. Once having restored the land and saved the surrounding

communities, environment and water sources from potential ruin, the project will have completed what it is set out to do.

Environmental Defence will be fully satisfied with having reached the goal the project intends on reaching when every Indigenous community in Ontario has access to clean drinking water, and no longer has to worry about the future of their water sources. Achieving this would mean restoring the UN's recognized human right to water and sanitation that every Canadian is entitled to, and that Indigenous Peoples have been denied for much too long.

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