



SDG 4 is our global commitment to lifelong learning opportunities and quality education that is inclusive, equitable and accessible for all.



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA

**The Learning
Institute**

Many community foundations are exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their planning, granting, convening, Vital Signs and more. This Fact Sheet is part of a series that focuses on specific SDGs to engage and inspire community foundations of all sizes to deepen their work around these goals.

What is this approach?

Major progress has been made on global education with increased school enrolment rates at all levels, particularly for girls ([source](#)). However, more than half of all children and adolescents do not meet minimum proficiency standards in reading and math and COVID-19 has wiped out 20 years of educational gains ([source](#)). The [targets of SDG 4](#) are a rallying call to reclaim progress on education by ensuring that all girls and boys have access to early childhood education, complete elementary school and achieve numeracy and literacy. The targets of SDG 4 also include improved access and training for work skills, education for promoting sustainable development and closing gaps in educational achievement. Canada is on track to achieving SDG 4, but challenges persist in delivering equitable outcomes for all Canadians, including women, men, Indigenous peoples and Canadians from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The legacy of Canada's residential schools reminds us that our education systems can be a source of harm as well as help and that educating ourselves about Canada's colonial realities, past and present, is an important part of national reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

Canada's approach to SDG 4 is founded on the belief that "education and skills training are essential for Canada's economic and social prosperity, and for the well-being of all Canadians" ([source](#)). In fulfilling their responsibilities with regard to SDG 4, each of the provinces and territories is guided by the [Learn Canada 2020](#) framework developed by the pan-Canadian [Council of Ministers of Education, Canada](#) (CMEC), which acts as the national lead for SDG 4.

Residential Schools

For over 150 years, residential schools operated in Canada. Over 150,000 children attended these schools. Many never returned. Often underfunded and overcrowded, these schools were used as a tool of assimilation by the Canadian state and churches. Thousands of students suffered physical and sexual abuse. All suffered from loneliness and a longing to be home with their families. The damages inflicted by these schools continue to this day.

— [NATIONAL CENTRE FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION](#)

The Learn Canada 2020 framework brings together four educational pillars of early childhood education, elementary to high school education, post-secondary education and adult learning and includes key action areas focused on:

- **Literacy:** Raise the literacy levels of Canadians.
- **Indigenous education:** Eliminate the gap in academic achievement and graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.
- **Post-secondary capacity:** Enhance and stabilize the long-term capacity of post-secondary systems to meet the training and learning needs of all Canadians.
- **Education for sustainable development:** Raise students' awareness and encourage them to become actively engaged in working for a sustainable society.

- **International and national representation:** Speak effectively and consistently for education and learning in Canada in both pan-Canadian and international settings.
- **Official languages:** Promote and implement support programs for minority-language education and second-language programs.
- **Learning assessment programs and performance indicators:** Support the implementation of national and international learning assessment programs.
- **Education data and research strategy:** Create comprehensive, long-term strategies to collect, analyze and disseminate nationally and internationally comparable data.

Canada's approach to SDG 4 incorporates the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) Calls to Action, including eliminating educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians ([Call to Action 7](#)), integrating Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in the classroom ([Call to Action 62](#)) and using education to support reconciliation through teaching Canada's colonial history and the continuing impact on Indigenous peoples ([Call to Action 62](#)). The government's response includes the co-development of a policy to strengthen First Nations primary and secondary education, which will "support First Nations control of First Nations education" ([source](#)).

The Government of Canada recognizes that enhancing Indigenous education is fundamental to renewing Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous children, youth and adults deserve culturally appropriate, high-quality education that meets their needs while respecting Indigenous control.

— [CANADA VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2018](#)



At the local scale, approaches to SDG 4 must support the diverse educational needs of Canadian communities that have different languages, knowledge traditions, cultural backgrounds, urban or rural lifestyles, and employment opportunities and aspirations. There are as many ways of learning and teaching as there are Canadians, and local approaches to SDG 4 take these into account while working to ensure that all community members have the opportunity to learn, grow and flourish.

Local approaches to SDG 4 include:

- Scholarships and bursaries for community members to attend college or university.
- Adult education programs to improve literacy and numeracy.
- Language support and revitalization for speakers of minority languages.
- Programs that provide culturally appropriate forms of education, such as Indigenous teaching and learning approaches.
- Mentoring and after-school programs for students who are struggling or have different ways of learning that are not catered for in mainstream education.
- Truth and reconciliation educational programs that bring awareness of Canada's colonial past and the current legacy and impacts of colonization for Indigenous peoples.
- Early childhood education programs.
- Targeted scholarships to support Canadians who are underrepresented in higher education or in specific fields of education or employment.
- Vocational training programs to help community members transition to emerging industries and take advantage of green jobs.

Why is it important for grantmakers?

SDG 4 is a top priority for grantmakers, which provided over \$2 billion in 2016/2017, the second-highest funding out of all the SDGs in Canada ([source](#)). Quality education has long been a priority for Canadians, and community foundations have responded by providing educational funds, including multiple [scholarships and bursaries](#). These efforts have contributed to Canada being one of the best-educated countries in the world, with strong performance on most SDG 4 targets ([source](#)). However, action on education remains important to grantmakers due to its catalytic role in driving progress on multiple community issues as well as the need to confront the remaining educational challenges of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion:

- **Justice:** The need for education that addresses the legacy of harm done to different groups of Canadians including those who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC) as well as women, newcomers, other minority groups, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and with diverse gender identities.
- **Equity:** Addressing the unfair disparities that still exist in educational outcomes where students from different backgrounds are unable to enter or succeed in the education system due to their race, culture, gender identity or sexual orientation.
- **Diversity:** Education that recognizes and responds to the diverse ways that Canadians learn and live, including different geographies, cultures, languages, generations, learning styles and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Inclusion:** Education that values different knowledge systems and includes different ways of teaching and learning so that all learners can feel like they belong in the education system.

The importance for engaging with these issues can be seen in communities across the country. The discovery of mass graves at the Kamloops and Brandon residential schools shocked the nation, with 65% of Canadians in favour of greater education around the legacy of residential schools ([source](#)).

Indigenous people continue to experience educational inequities with only “44% of First Nations on reserves (age 18-24) having completed high school compared to 88% for other Canadians” ([source](#)). Women and girls have traditionally been excluded from careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), with 70% of STEM graduates being male ([source](#)). Achieving gender equality in education also means addressing the fact that 50% of males receive a post-secondary education compared to 62% of women, while girls outperform boys in reading proficiency by 92% to 86% ([source](#)). Gaps for training in Indigenous language and culture persist ([source](#)), and as the diversity of Canadian students increases so does the need for teachers and teaching methods that can include and support diverse ways of learning and understanding the world ([source](#)). In particular, the TRC Calls to Action commit us to the development of culturally appropriate curricula ([Call to Action 10](#)) and the integration of Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into the classroom ([Call to Action 62](#)).

To achieve inclusive education, policies should aim to transform education systems so they can better respond to learners’ diversity and needs. This is key to fulfilling the right to education. Equity is related not only to access, but also to participation and achievement of all students, with special attention to those who are excluded, vulnerable or at risk of being marginalized.

— [SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 IN CANADA](#)



Action on SDG 4 also presents an important opportunity for grantmakers to accelerate progress across multiple Sustainable Development Goals in their communities. UNESCO recognizes that “increased educational attainment helps transform lives by reducing poverty, improving health outcomes, advancing technology and increasing social cohesion” ([source](#)). SDG 4 also targets the promotion of education for sustainability so that children, youth and adults have the information and skills they need to take action on the SDGs and become

actors for change in their communities. However, a national census of sustainability education found that only “54% of ministries of education and 59% of school divisions in Canada had sustainability-specific policy” ([source](#)). Support for sustainability education presents an important opportunity for grantmakers to advance SDG 4 as well as community action across the goals.

Schools, colleges and universities across Canada are adopting the SDGs and integrating them into their teaching and education approaches. Examples include the work of the [Sustainable Development Solutions Network Canada](#), [Universities Canada](#) and [Colleges and Institutes Canada](#), all of which present opportunities to connect and collaborate on education and action for the SDGs.

Education for Global Citizenship and Sustainability

Global citizenship and sustainability involve reflecting on diverse world views and perspectives and understanding and addressing ecological, social and economic issues that are crucial to living in a contemporary, connected, interdependent and sustainable world. This also includes the acquisition of knowledge, motivation, dispositions and skills required for an ethos of engaged citizenship, with an appreciation for the diversity of people and perspectives, and the ability to envision and work toward a better and more sustainable future for everyone.

— [SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 IN CANADA](#)

There is also [a national movement to bring truth and reconciliation into K-12 education](#), and 80% of universities are either developing or have adopted a reconciliation strategy ([source](#)). CFC has partnered with Universities Canada and Rideau Hall Foundation to launch the [Queen Elizabeth Scholarship](#) program which has provided over \$80 million through 44 universities to support young global leaders to create lasting impacts both at home and abroad.

At the local scale, community foundations are already advancing a range of programs that drive progress on SDG 4 including:

- The Brant Community Foundation’s support for the Indigenous-led [Save the Evidence campaign](#), which seeks to preserve and share the history of the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School, including regular visits from Grade 5 students.
- The County Foundation’s [Youth Learning and Engagement Fund](#) supports a youth-led collective working to raise secondary school graduation rates to the provincial average. The County Foundation also hosts an [Indigenous Reconciliation Award](#) that recognizes efforts to “build a meaningful bridge between the Mohawks of Bay of Quinte and Prince Edward County.”
- Through partnering with the RBC Foundation and CFC, the youth-led [NishIn](#) project is creating a digital platform for Indigenous educators and allies to interact with culturally appropriate resources for teaching reconciliation.
- The Oakville Foundation has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by moving its [Community Classroom](#) program online. The Community Classroom brings together arts, culture, heritage and environmental programs for elementary students free of charge.
- CFC’s partnership in the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge supported the launch of an online learning initiative, the RBC [Youth Powering Community](#), which offers “free, drop-in, online workshops on skills that help youth make changes in areas like health, food security, education, the environment, reconciliation, and more.”

Common principles to get started

Community foundations have a wealth of experience to draw on when addressing SDG 4. Existing scholarship programs and educational partnerships can provide the foundation for granting that addresses the remaining challenges of justice, equity, diversity and inclusion as well as support for sustainability education that can drive progress across multiple SDGs in the community.

01 Learn and understand

- Read the following report to better understand SDG 4 in the context of Canada: [Ensuring Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education: Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Canada](#).
- Use Vital Signs and Vital Conversations to identify SDG 4 educational challenges in the community, including data on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. See the work of the [London Community Foundation](#).
- Meet with Indigenous organizations, activists and community leaders to understand how your foundation could support education for reconciliation in the community. See the work of the Kingston and Area Community Foundation and their support for [Engage for Change; a Reconciliation Journey Project](#).
- Review your scholarship and bursary portfolio, and look at how many of your grants are needs- or equity-based rather than merit-based.
- Learn which schools and organizations are supporting sustainability education and education for reconciliation, and learn what they need to expand their work.

02 Strategic grantmaking

- Support students as they readjust from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their education, and consider targeted grants for students who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, including BIPOC Canadians. See [these examples from American community foundations](#).
- Support education for sustainable development, including after-school programs. See examples of sustainability education at [Learning for a Sustainable Future](#).
- Support Indigenous education approaches, including Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms and extracurricular programs. See the work of the [Wiigwas initiative](#) in Henvey Inlet, and visit the website of the [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation](#) for ideas.
- Ensure that scholarship and bursary selection committees make efforts to include a diversity of Canadians in the selection process, and work to increase the diversity of the selection committees where necessary.
- As well as merit-based scholarships, consider developing equity-based scholarships and providing additional support services to scholarship recipients. See the work of the [Janey Scholars program](#), which addresses multiple barriers to university completion, and review this report on [How Community Foundations Can Transform Students' Lives](#).

03 Collaborate, enable and lead

- Work with schools and other partners to develop mentorship and targeted education programs to support youth who are struggling in the education system.
- Use the SDGs to partner with colleges, universities and schools for action on education in your community. Learn how universities are already working with the SDGs by reviewing this [Universities Canada report](#), and see [this guide from Philanthropic Foundations Canada](#) on how to partner with universities.
- Consider partnering with other organizations for collective impact on SDG 4 such as the work of [local college access networks](#) in the United States, which bring together key community actors committed to “building a college-going culture and dramatically increasing college readiness, participation, and completion rates.”
- Develop partnerships with post-secondary institutions, school boards, schools and community organizations to develop strategic and targeted funds that best meet the needs of learners and the community.
- Use your existing educational partnerships to discuss new programs that strengthen sustainability education and address justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in the education system.
- Support learners to develop their own solutions to educational challenges: see the youth-led projects funded through the [RBC Future Launch Community Challenge](#) and the work of the [Greater Than County Youth Collective](#).

Resource list

Scholarships, Bursaries and Awards

- A 4-page introduction to scholarships and bursaries for community foundations, including their advantages and disadvantages.
- Pages 2-4 introduce key considerations for establishing and running scholarship and bursary programs.

How Community Foundations Can Transform Students' Lives and Delight Donors

- A 6-page overview of how community foundations can leverage existing scholarship programs to increase educational impact and address inequities.
- Page 6 provides key steps for increasing post-secondary attainment.

Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students

- A 142-page report that identifies promising programs, practices and strategies for supporting improved learning outcomes for Indigenous Canadian students.

Grantmakers for Education

- An American website with a range of resources for grantmakers looking to support teachers and learners.
- The Resources page includes a wealth of reports, guides and case studies of effective philanthropy for education.

Learning for a Sustainable Future

- Website for organizations advancing sustainability education in Canada.

Environmental Education in Canada: An Overview for Grantmakers

- An older report from 2006 that provides an introduction to environmental education for grantmakers in Canada.
- Pages 8-10 provide considerations and opportunities for grantmakers.

Reconciliation Through Education

- From the website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation.
- Links to existing education programs that address truth and reconciliation.
- Resources for teachers and learners of all ages.