



Inuit Nunaat Fund Theory of Change

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Prepared by Co | Evaluation Lab





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Theory of Change: Purpose and Process

This Theory of Change (TOC) was developed to help the Inuit Nunangat Fund (INF) connect its activities and principles to the outcomes and impacts it seeks to achieve. It provides a framework to link expected impacts to specific activities, connect values and principles to actions, and examine assumptions about how change happens. This process ensures that INF continues to learn and can assess whether its work is producing the intended results.

The TOC was developed in partnership with Co|Evaluation Lab between May and November 2025. Co|Evaluation Lab conducted a document review of strategic planning documents, Advisory Council meeting notes, and grantee partnerships in addition to interviews with INF staff, Advisory Council members, and grantees, followed by a validation workshop with Advisory Council members and several rounds of revision. This collaborative process grounded the framework in lived experience and ensured it reflects how change actually occurs in practice. The TOC is intended to be a living framework, to be reviewed and revised as INF continually reflects upon and deepens its learning, relationships, and practice.

For INF's purposes, a *Theory of Change* differs from a *Story of Change* in utility and format. The TOC provides a structured, linear model that outlines the logical pathways from actions to impacts—it is useful for reflection, learning, and evaluation. The Story of Change, developed as a next step, builds on this foundation by illustrating the same relationships through a narrative and/or visual. Unlike the structured and often linear format of a Theory of Change, it allows for greater flexibility to reflect the complexity, interconnectedness, and a more holistic view of how change unfolds in practice.

The first two sections of this document contain a high-level overview of the TOC, including a visual representation and a brief narrative summary.

The following section explores each element of the TOC in greater depth. While these components are presented in a linear sequence for clarity, it is important to recognize that these relationships are dynamic and interconnected in practice.

Narrative Theory of Change

The Inuit Nunaat Fund (INF) exists to strengthen Inuit self-determination by investing in the relationships, knowledge, and practices that sustain Inuit life, histories, and values across the Arctic. Guided by Inuit principles and ways of knowing, INF works alongside communities to build a future that centers Inuit culture and identity through the practice of Inuit-led philanthropy.

At the foundation of INF's work are **shared values**, **trust**, and **relationships**. Donors, the Advisory Council and INF staff come together in a governance model grounded in consensus, collaboration, and inclusivity. This foundation ensures that funding is accessible, flexible, and responsive to the pace of community life rather than the demands of outside systems.

INF puts its values into practice across its three funding program areas – Inuit Fellowships (for individuals), Inuit Self Determination Fund (for organizations), and Learning and Exchange (through gathering) – utilizing the following approaches:

- **Centering community-defined approaches** that recognize communities as the experts of their own needs, priorities, and definitions of success.
- **Reducing disparities** by removing systemic barriers and expanding access to funding for remote and historically underserved communities.
- **Reducing burden** by minimizing administrative and reporting demands so that resources and energy can focus on meaningful work.
- **Supporting organizational sustainability** and resilience through long-term, flexible funding that enables reflection, growth, and intergenerational leadership.
- **Strengthening collaboration and solidarity** through gatherings, cross-border partnerships, and shared learning rooted in Inuit values and collective purpose.

These approaches strengthen the impact and sustainability of community-led initiatives. By investing directly in communities, INF channels resources toward priorities defined by Inuit themselves and supports organizations to plan, adapt, and grow at their own pace. This flexibility enables grantees to increase sustainability and focus resources on the areas that matter most to their communities. As these

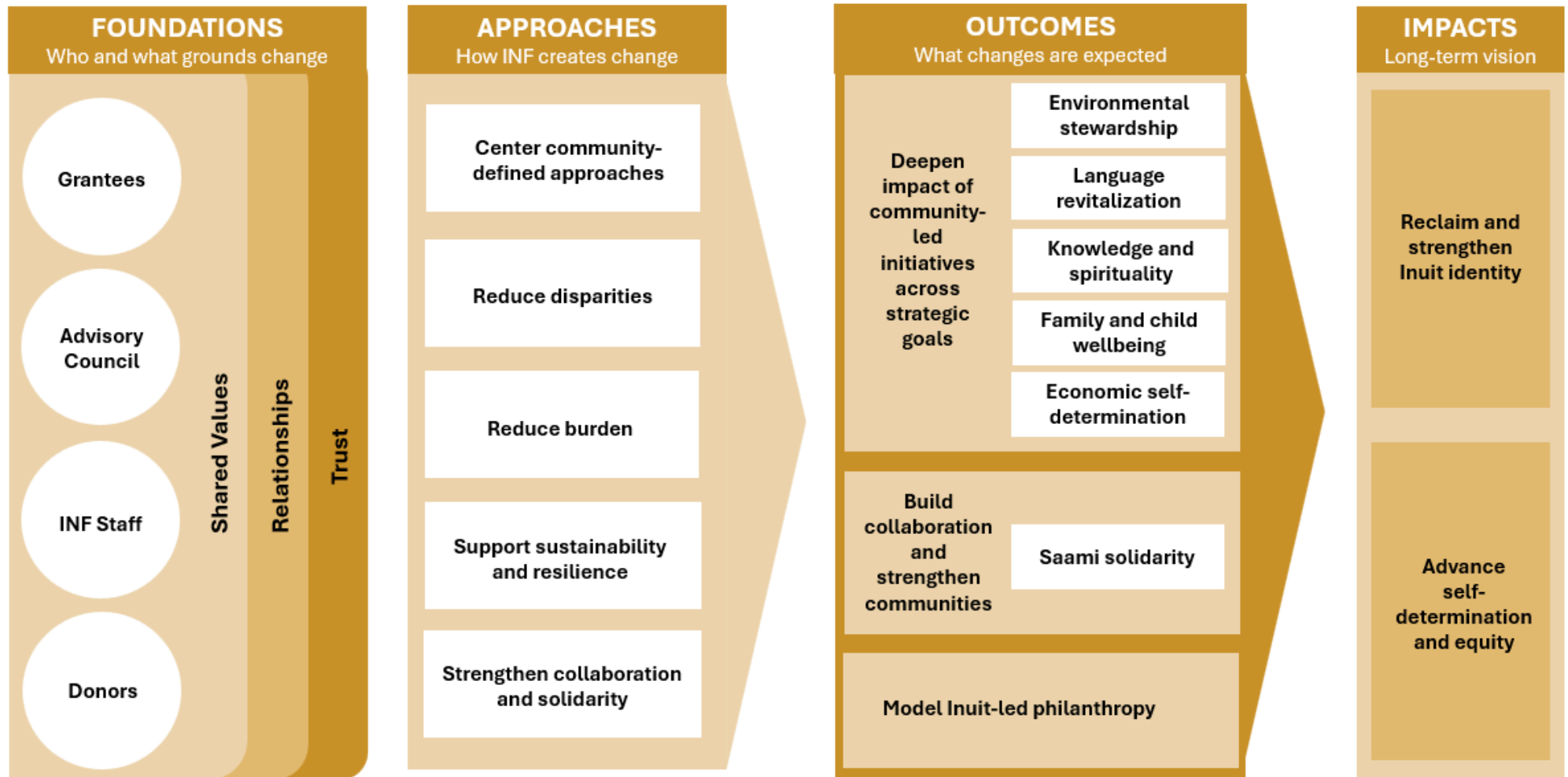
initiatives deepen their impact, they generate tangible outcomes across INF's strategic goals:

- **Supporting language revitalization** across generations and regions strengthens collective Inuit identity, pride, and community belonging and expands access to education, services, and traditional knowledge.
- **Upholding Inuit knowledge and spirituality** in research, cultural practice, and education reinforces collective identity, supports community wellness, and grounds decision-making in Inuit worldviews.
- **Strengthening families and child wellbeing** by supporting Inuit child-rearing practices and intergenerational care ensures children and youth grow up safe, grounded, and supported.
- **Advancing Inuit-led stewardship** of land, sea, and air promotes food security, ecological balance, and community well-being. It provides opportunities for intergenerational knowledge transfer, local land-based employment, and Inuit leadership in co-management and policy.
- **Expanding economic self-determination** through locally-driven livelihoods and investments in small Inuit-owned businesses and cooperatives reinforces reciprocity and reduces reliance on external economies.

At the same time, INF advances broader systems-level change by fostering collaboration, learning, and **solidarity across Inuit Nunaat** and with Saami communities. Through trust-based relationships, gatherings, and knowledge exchange, INF connects people and organizations working toward shared goals. This collective learning builds the foundation for a philanthropic system that reflects Inuit values and ways of knowing—one that measures success by relevance to community rather than external standards.

Over time, these interconnected pathways lead to transformation across both community and systems levels. The reclamation of Inuit identity, language, and knowledge further strengthens self-determination and equity. As self-determination grows across scales—from families and organizations to communities, governance, and philanthropy—systems themselves begin to shift. The result is enduring change across Inuit Nunaat: a future where Inuit leadership, knowledge, and values guide the path forward, and communities continue to define what it means to thrive on their own terms.

Visual Theory of Change



For a more detailed TOC visual, see Appendix A.

Theory of Change Components

Foundations (*who*)

Grantees

INF funds community-driven, Indigenous-led organizations and individuals doing strength-based and self-determining work in their communities to build a collective voice and thriving future. INF strives to support those who are most in need and have been historically underserved in philanthropic funding.

Advisory Council

The Advisory Council is made up of Inuit representatives and one Sapmi member with deep cultural knowledge and lived ties to their communities. They carry a shared history and vision, and an inherent understanding of community needs and values across Inuit Nunaat. Their role is to guide INF staff, ensure resources are aligned with the INF strategic priorities, and uphold Inuit values at the heart of decision-making.

INF Staff

INF staff are the bridge between communities, Advisory Council and donors. They are responsible for stewarding governance objectives as they manage the operational and grantmaking aspects of the organization. The staff work in a collaborative leadership model that combines community, cultural and philanthropic experience.

Donors

INF works with donors who understand that Inuit themselves know their own needs and priorities and are willing to entrust decision-making around the allocation of resources to them. Donors are informed and aware of Inuit histories, cultures, languages, lands, and waters, and align with the values, mission, vision, and goals of the INF and Advisory Council.

Foundations (*what*)

Shared Values

Shared values within the INF reflect a collective understanding of Inuit strengths, histories, and priorities. These values provide the foundation for relationships built through the INF and guide how the Fund operates and makes decisions. This means communities do not need to justify or prove why their work is important – it is inherently understood. Centering reciprocity, spirituality, kinship, and balance, INF honors community knowledge and advances a shared vision of thriving Inuit futures.

Trust

Trust is both a principle and practice. It is rooted in shared histories forms the basis of flexibility and autonomy. Trust is extended to grantees by default, recognizing they are best positioned to define and lead initiatives in their communities. At the same time, advancing a trust-based approach means building strong relationships with organizational partners. INF recognizes that trust is multi-directional and actively works to earn and maintain trust through transparent, relational, and reciprocal practices.

Relationships

The importance of relationships is central to everything INF does. By cultivating and supporting relationships of respect and reciprocity among staff, the Advisory Council, grantees, communities, and donors, INF strengthens solidarity across regions. Relationships are built on trust, shared values, and kinship and grow through collaboration, shared learning, and collective ceremonies. They ensure decisions remain grounded in Inuit values and create the networks necessary to sustain collective movements. INF also recognizes the inherent right of Inuit to maintain and develop familial and kinship relations for spiritual, cultural, political, economic, and social purposes, facilitating these connections while upholding transparency and respect for conflict-of-interest principles.

Approaches

Center community-defined approaches

Communities hold the knowledge and experience to best identify and define their own needs, priorities, and success. Supporting community-defined approaches shifts power and fosters strength- and desire-based work. It supports solutions rooted in Indigenous knowledge, community leadership, and long-term sustainability.

How INF centers and supports community-defined approaches:

- **Diverse types of funding support** provide stability for core operations and space for capacity building, new ideas, and expanding initiatives.
- **Flexible reporting** allows communities to define their own outcomes and measures of success rather than focus on external performance indicators.
- **Multi-year funding** aligns timelines and resources with the natural rhythm of community priorities and seasonal cycles, supporting more effective use of funds and greater long-term impact. It also creates space for reflection, learning, and adaptation over time.

Reduce disparities

Traditional funding structures often exclude remote or under-resourced organizations through eligibility limits and administrative burdens. Grounded in a trauma-informed approach, INF acknowledges historical and lived experiences of trauma and provides the time and space to build trust and navigate challenges. INF operates independently of government and political systems to avoid reproducing status quo power dynamics and support those long underserved by philanthropy.

How INF reduces disparities:

- **Diverse funding programs** expand eligibility beyond non-profits. These include Inuit Fellowships (for individuals), the Inuit Self Determination Fund (for organizations), and Learning and Exchange (through gathering).
- **Simplified application and reporting processes** that accommodate different formats and modes of communication, alongside support from INF staff, respect diverse communication styles and reduce administrative barriers.

- **Interpreter and translation services**, as well as external communications available in English, Kalaallisut, and Inuktitut Syllabics, support linguistic inclusion across Inuit Nunaat to ensure INF reaches the widest set of potential partners doing self-determining work in their communities.
- **An Advisory Council with shared values and lived experience** makes funding recommendations to ensure proposals are not dependent on external data or literature to justify and legitimize community needs, advancing equity by supporting initiatives with deep local relevance and limited research capacity.

Reduce burden

Smaller community organizations often operate with limited capacity, further strained by administrative and funding demands. Reducing administrative burden and supporting organizational capacity allows organizations to focus their time and energy where it matters most.

How INF reduces burden:

- **Hands-on support from INF staff** during application and reporting reduces technical and administrative burden.
- **Flexible reporting focused on community-defined objectives** reduces burden by eliminating data collection and reporting that don't serve community priorities, allowing efforts to focus on measures that organizations can use to reflect, learn, and adapt.
- **Multi-year funding** provides stability, reduces time spent seeking and reapplying for funding, and allows work to follow the natural pace of community priorities and seasonal cycles.

Support organizational sustainability and resilience

For community-led initiatives to thrive, they need more than short-term project funding—they need time, space, and support to grow in ways that reflect their values and realities. Supporting organizational sustainability means investing in the long-term health, resilience, and leadership of organizations so they can continue to evolve, respond to changing needs, and carry their work forward over time.

How INF supports organizational sustainability and resilience:

- **Safeguarding support and resources** help partners develop and strengthen policies rooted in Inuit values that protect participants (especially youth) from harm and protect cultural knowledge and intellectual property by upholding consent, recognition, and valuing knowledge keepers and community interests.
- **Investment in youth engagement** and mentorship builds capacity and provides pathways to intergenerational knowledge transfer and long-term leadership. This simultaneously builds a sense of purpose and belonging for youth who gain more social and cultural connections as they contribute to a communal cause.
- **Connecting grantees and donors** provides opportunities for longer-term sustainable funding.

Strengthen collaboration and solidarity

Transformative change takes time and grows through relationships, shared learning, and collective effort. Long-term, trust-based relationships help build resilience across regions, strengthen networks of support, and sustain momentum toward Inuit self-determination. Creating spaces for collaboration reinforces solidarity within and beyond Inuit Nunaat and contributes to lasting systems change.

How INF strengthens collaboration and solidarity:

- **Learning and Exchange** grants support in-person and virtual gatherings, mentorship, and cross-regional collaboration. These gatherings, shaped by Inuit and grounded in place, foster cross-regional connection and collaboration in ways that reflect community-defined goals and visions for the future.
- **Cross-border initiatives with Sámi** and other Indigenous Peoples foster collective advocacy and visibility in circumpolar and international spaces, deepening solidarity across Indigenous movements.
- **A growing community of practice** creates space within INF for Inuit-led knowledge-sharing, reflection, and peer learning through gatherings, webinars, and ongoing exchange among grantees, partners, and staff.

Outcomes

Deepen impact of community-led initiatives

By investing directly in community-led initiatives, INF channels resources toward community-defined priorities and long-term sustainability. Flexible, multi-year funding enables grantees to plan, adapt, and grow at their own pace and vision. These investments strengthen organizational capacity, reduce administrative burden, and support deeper, longer-lasting community impact.

As a result, community-led initiatives generate meaningful and measurable outcomes across INF's strategic goals:

- **Language revitalization:** Language initiatives strengthen pride and confidence in Inuit identity, deepen intergenerational connections, and expand access to education and services in Inuit languages. Revitalizing language sustains traditional knowledge systems that, in turn, reinforce participation in cultural activities, harvesting, and conservation.
- **Environmental stewardship:** Community-led conservation strengthens Inuit leadership in co-management and policy while creating youth employment and leadership opportunities. Stewardship initiatives support intergenerational knowledge transfer, land-based learning, and improved protection of healthy ecosystems. Together, these outcomes enhance food security and wellness through harvesting and time on the land.
- **Knowledge and spirituality:** Upholding Indigenous knowledge and spirituality through shared ceremonies and practices strengthens collective identity, belonging, and community wellness. When these worldviews are integrated into education and research, Inuit knowledge guides local and regional decision-making. Sustaining this knowledge through the teaching and practice of stewardship and harvesting further enhances ecosystem protection, food security, and community wellbeing.

- **Family and child wellbeing:** Culturally grounded supports foster holistic child development—meeting emotional, spiritual, physical, and cultural needs. Children grow up in safe, nurturing environments rooted in Inuit values, building resilience through intergenerational mentorship and relationships.
- **Economic self-determination:** Sustainable small businesses and traditional livelihoods strengthen economic independence. When Inuit-owned enterprises thrive, youth gain skills for both traditional and modern economies. Local resource circulation reinforces reciprocity and reduces reliance on external systems, advancing community-driven development.

Build collaboration and strengthen communities

Through its grantmaking and programs, INF brings together grantees, Advisory Council members, donors, and staff to learn from one another and build shared purpose. Convenings, gatherings, and cross-regional exchanges connect similar initiatives across Inuit Nunaat, reinforcing collaboration, solidarity, and collective action. These relationships strengthen the foundation for systems-level change rooted in Inuit values and advance INF's sixth strategic goal:

- **Solidarity across Inuit Nunaat:** Cross-regional gatherings and shared advocacy strengthen ties between Inuit and Saami communities, fostering learning, revitalized cultural practices, and collaboration among emerging leaders. Growing solidarity enhances collective visibility and joint advocacy in circumpolar forums.

Model Inuit-led philanthropy

INF models a way of giving and receiving grounded in Inuit values, relationships, and self-determination. By showing that trust-based, flexible, and community-defined funding leads to meaningful outcomes, INF demonstrates the strength and viability of Indigenous-led philanthropy guided by reciprocity. Grantees' reporting on community-defined outcomes affirms their relevance and, over time, shifts power to communities as funders recognize these measures as valid and meaningful indicators of success.

Impacts – Pathways to systems change

Reclaim and strengthen Inuit identity

Through funding that supports language revitalization, cultural practices, and intergenerational knowledge transfer, INF helps communities build on the strength of Inuit ancestors and celebrate who Inuit are. These efforts nurture pride, belonging, and confidence in Inuit-led futures while creating space for hope—seeing the impact of positive change and imagining what is possible. By engaging youth and mentoring the next generation of leaders, the Fund sustains cultural continuity and reinforces a shared vision for thriving communities across Inuit homelands.

Advance self-determination and equity

INF strengthens self-determination at the individual, familial, and community levels by supporting Inuit to define and lead their own paths forward. Through flexible, trust-based funding, the Fund helps rebuild families and kinship ties, restore balance, and uphold shared responsibilities to one another and to community. These relationships of reciprocity and care form the foundation of equitable systems where every person is valued—both as an individual and as part of the collective.

By addressing historic inequities and reducing barriers to access, INF shifts decision-making and resources back to Inuit communities. This creates conditions for lasting systems change—where governance, programs, and philanthropy are guided by Inuit values, cultural strength, and mutual respect.

Appendix A: Detailed Theory of Change Visual

