



Media Release

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Oyateki Partnership brings together three leading institutions to foster System Change in service of Saskatchewan Indigenous Youth

SASKATOON, SK – The Oyateki Partnership is a unique collaboration designed to transform the education and employment systems in Saskatchewan in service of Indigenous young people. Over the next five years, this bold initiative will support 32,000 First Nations and Métis youth: on their path to post-secondary education, throughout their education and training, and as they transition to meaningful employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.

This unprecedented partnership is co-implemented by the Gabriel Dumont Institute (GDI), Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), and the University of Saskatchewan (USask) alongside First Nations and Métis youth, communities, and organizations. The Oyateki Partnership builds on a history of collaboration across the three partner institutions, the unique strengths and relationships that each institution holds, and a strong desire to create a more dynamic, integrated, 'wholistic', and responsive education system that meets the needs of Indigenous youth.

“The Mastercard Foundation has provided us the amazing opportunity to deepen relationships between GDI, SIIT, and USask by engaging in work that transforms educational systems and structures to comprehensively support Indigenous students through their entire educational experience and through to the workforce and careers of choice,” said Jacqueline Ottmann, Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement at USask, “The culturally appropriate programming and initiatives that are identified in the 5-year plan meet the students where they are at and challenges and transforms ineffective pedagogies, methodologies, policies, and practices within our institutions – this is systems change.”

This partnership would not be possible without the generous support of the Mastercard Foundation through its EleV Initiative. EleV, launched by the Foundation in 2017, aims to support Indigenous youth in their pathways through education and on to meaningful work and livelihoods reflecting their values, traditions, and aspirations.

“Supporting success for young Indigenous people means transforming education and employment systems based on the direction of Indigenous youth, communities and Nations,” said Jennifer Brennan, Head, Canada Programs for Mastercard Foundation. “The Oyateki Partnership is truly innovative in that it will deepen collaboration across the institutions to directly meet the unique, diverse, and evolving needs of First Nations and Métis youth and communities and accelerate their success.”

The outcomes of the partnership are ambitious and targeted.

1. Support successful transitions to post-secondary for Indigenous youth.



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2. Increase positive outcomes for Indigenous learners while at post-secondary.
3. Support successful transitions from post-secondary into meaningful careers and work for Indigenous youth.
4. Strengthen coordination, communication, and integration of the post-secondary and employment systems for Indigenous youth.

These outcomes will drive all activities and ensure the development of a truly inclusive system.

Riel Bellegarde, President and CEO of SIIT explains, “As a post-secondary institution governed by First Nations leaders, we take very seriously our mandate to serve First Nations people and communities. This founding belief extends to our partners, GDI and USask. With the support of the Mastercard Foundation, we have the capacity to drive successful outcomes for Indigenous learners across the province. There is no more important time than now for our province and communities to ensure meaningful Indigenous inclusion in the labour force and the economy.”

Indigenous people make up 16% of the total population in Saskatchewan and, since 2006, have grown at a rate four times faster than the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous people in Saskatchewan are also significantly younger, on average, than the non-Indigenous population (28 vs. 41). However, historical systemic barriers have resulted in Indigenous people having higher unemployment rates (~10% higher) and being less likely to have received a post-secondary education than the non-Indigenous population (12% vs. 29%). Despite these realities, Saskatchewan is home to strong, resilient, and culturally grounded Indigenous peoples, Nations, and organizations as well as non-Indigenous allies and organizations committed to furthering reconciliation, decolonization, Indigenization and addressing inequities faced by Indigenous young people. The three partner organizations have been at the forefront of this work. GDI is a Métis-led post-secondary institution, SIIT is a First Nation-led post-secondary institution, and USask is a non-Indigenous university with deep commitments to serving Indigenous learners and communities.

On an individual level, the Oyateki Partnership seeks to improve levels of self-determination among Indigenous young people in Saskatchewan by increasing their engagement with post-secondary schooling and improving educational attainment and labour market outcomes. Achieving these short-term results will positively and meaningfully contribute to the overall ‘wholistic’ health, wellbeing, and socio-economic impacts for Indigenous individuals, families, and communities that will be felt in society.

“The Mastercard Foundation’s investment in the Oyateki partnership is a huge step forward in closing the education gap for Métis youth across the province. For this, we are so thankful. GDI is proud to contribute to this partnership in a way that creates meaningful change in Métis post-secondary education,” said Lisa-Bird Wilson, GDI Executive Director.



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With the agreement signed, [the partners are excited to begin the search for a managing Director for this ground-breaking collaboration.](#) The position offers a singular opportunity for the right change agent. The O'yateki Director will have the resources and support to make a significant difference in the economic and social development of Saskatchewan and provide a template for future change across the country.

The concept of O'yateki as a symbol of this collaboration was gifted to the partnership by Kungsi Connie Wajunta of Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation. O'yateki is a Dakota word meaning: all people together and leaving no people behind. This sense of gathering holds two meanings for this collaboration. Firstly, the three post-secondary organizations come together in their commitment to empowering Indigenous youth. Secondly, this partnership endeavours to bring all people together into self-determination, the invitation of all people to the table, and the elimination of those barriers that keep us apart.

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For more information or to arrange interviews, please contact:

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Attachment: About the Partners



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About the Partners

Gabriel Dumont Institute:

GDI is a Métis-owned post-secondary and cultural institution in Saskatchewan. Since 1980, GDI has prided itself as a conservator of Métis culture and history. GDI includes the Dumont Technical Institute, Gabriel Dumont College, GDI Training & Employment, GDI Press, and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP), GDI provides Métis-specific education programs and services in 13 communities across the province.

GDI is affiliated with the Métis Nation—Saskatchewan (MN–S) and is governed by a 12-member Board of Governors plus a chair who is the MN–S Minister of Education. GDI gives priority to Métis learners, with an impressive student population of over 90% self-identified Métis.

Mastercard Foundation:

works with visionary organizations to enable young people in Africa and in Indigenous communities in Canada to access dignified and fulfilling work. It is one of the largest, private foundations in the world with a mission to advance learning and promote financial inclusion to create an inclusive and equitable world. The Foundation was created by Mastercard in 2006 as an independent organization with its own Board of Directors and management. For more information on the Foundation, please visit: mastercardfdn.org

Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies:

SIIT is a First Nations-governed educational institution. SIIT provides adult learners with academic, vocational, and technical training as well as services and supports for employment and career growth. Indigenous learners are at the core of SIIT, representing over 90% of the student body.

In all things, SIIT is committed to maintaining a First Nations focus and is dedicated to ongoing collaboration with First Nations stakeholders and communities to implement learner-focused strategies. SIIT recognizes a broad array of stakeholders that includes students, job seekers, graduates, instructors, educators, training partners, employers, Elders, First Nations leaders and communities, SIIT staff, management and board.

University of Saskatchewan:

USask is one of the top research-intensive, medical doctoral universities in Canada, and is home to world leading research in areas of global importance, such as water and food security and infectious diseases.

USask advances the aspirations of the people of the province and beyond through interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to discovering, teaching, sharing, integrating, preserving, and applying



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knowledge, including the creative arts, to build a rich cultural community. An innovative, accessible, and welcoming place for students, educators, and researchers from around the world, we serve the public good by connecting discovery, teaching, and outreach, by promoting diversity and meaningful change, and by preparing students for enriching careers and fulfilling lives as engaged global citizens.