

NEWS RELEASE

First Nations generating billions in revenue, often from sources other than natural resources

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For immediate release

VANCOUVER—First Nations across Canada are generating billions in revenue for themselves—and not only from natural resources, finds a new study released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“First Nations are finding new and unique ways to generate income for their members that don’t necessarily rely on natural resources,” said Tom Flanagan, Fraser Institute senior fellow, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Calgary and co-author of [Bending the Curve: Recent Developments in Government Spending on First Nations](#).

The study estimates that the 516 First Nations for whom we have data now generate more than \$3 billion annually in own-source-revenues—money First Nations earn for themselves rather receive from government. By comparison, government transfers to these same First Nations totaled \$5.5 billion in 2015/16.

The average own-source revenue total for these 516 First Nations (about 80 per cent of all 618 First Nations in Canada) was \$5.9 million in 2015/16. The oil-rich Samson Cree Nation in Alberta generated the most—\$97 million in own-source revenues including \$59 million from natural resources.

But natural resources are not necessary for First Nations to generate sizeable own-source revenues. In fact, of the 10 First Nations that generated the most own-source revenue in 2015/16, the Samson Cree is the only one that relied more on natural resource revenues than other sources of own-source income.

Instead, many First Nations are increasingly involved in entertainment and hospitality ventures (casinos, hotels, restaurants) and land development projects including shopping centres, industrial parks and residential housing.

For example, Membertou First Nation in Nova Scotia, with its shopping and hospitality facilities outside Sydney, generated \$38 million in own-source revenue from sources other than natural resources in 2015/16, and only \$3 million from its fishery operations.

Moreover, the Chippewas of Rama First Nation in Ontario generated \$46.3 million in 2015/16, due in part to its casino near Orillia. None of the Chippewas’ own-source revenue came from natural resources in 2015/16.

“First Nations across Canada have found multiple paths to financial success. When Indigenous communities are successful economically, their members can prosper and see their living standards improve,” Flanagan said.

“Policymakers should look for ways to support and encourage First Nations to generate more of their own income instead of relying on government transfers.”

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