



The EleV Program and Systems Change

The vision for the Mastercard Foundation EleV Program, a vision co-created and confirmed with Indigenous youth and communities, is for Indigenous youth to be living ***Mino Bimaadiziwin*** ("a good life" in the Anishinaabe language), a meaningful and fulfilling life consistent with one's traditions and values.

Realizing this vision requires **systems change**: transforming education, training and employment systems based on the direction of Indigenous youth, communities and Nations so that these systems value and embed Indigenous languages, cultures, and worldviews, and support success for Indigenous youth.

But what is systems change? Why is it important to the EleV Program and our Partners? Let's look at an example and then the context for systems change in the EleV Program.

An Example: A Challenge

You begin with the goal of increasing the lower rates of Indigenous youth accessing university. You engage with Indigenous communities on solutions and find out financing is a major barrier. You design a wrap-around scholarship program to increase access for Indigenous youth. After a year of the scholarship program...nothing has changed. Scholarship recipients have a high dropout rate and overall Indigenous enrollment numbers are flat. What happened?

It turns out financing is just one barrier among many different interlocking systems.

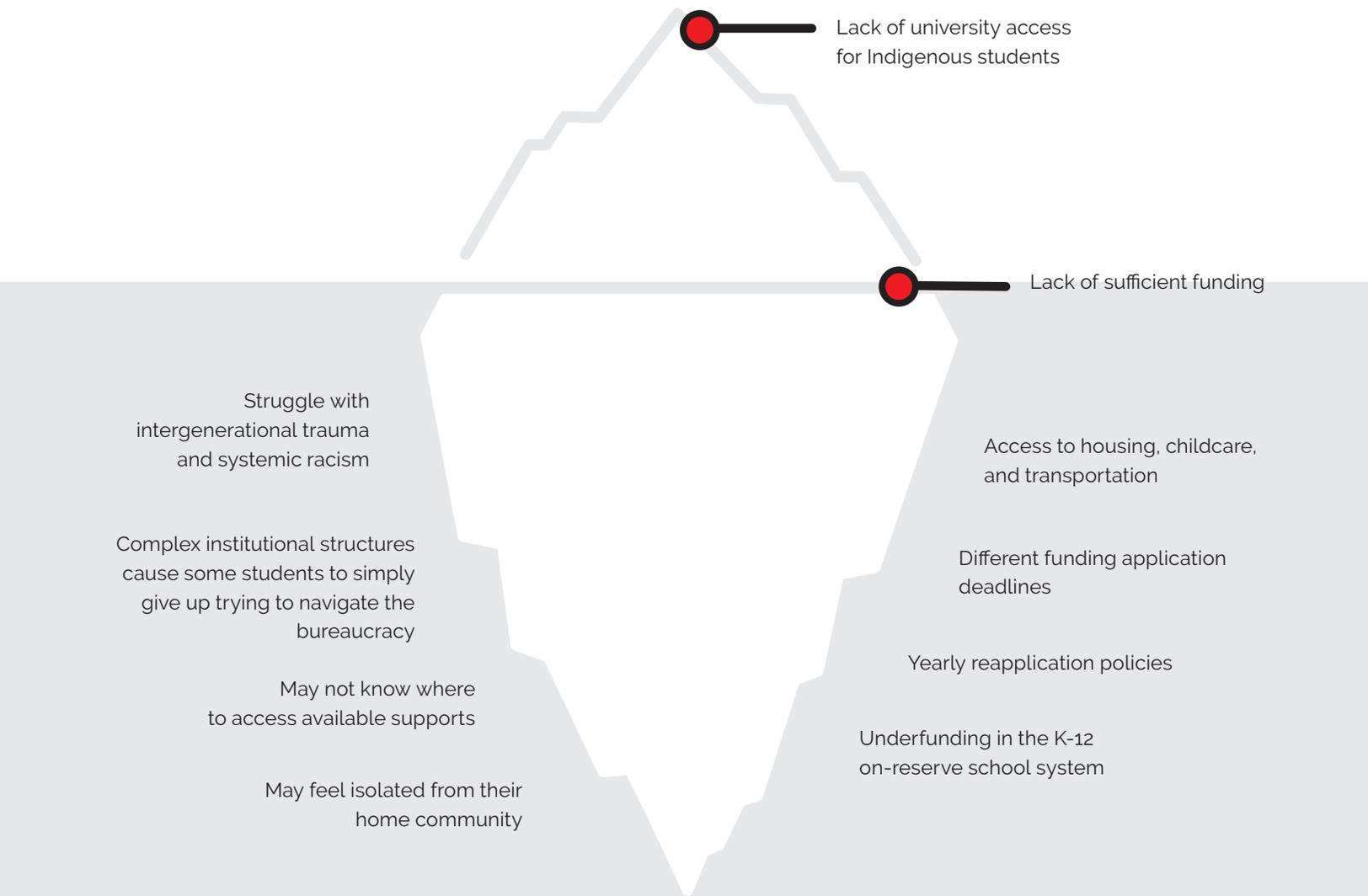
Indigenous students face challenges like access to housing, childcare, and transportation. Their home community may have different funding application deadlines than the university, so they start the semester late and at a disadvantage. Community funding policies – remnants of Indian Affairs-mandated policies – may withdraw funds from a student who is struggling in a class or impose burdensome yearly reapplication policies or other bureaucratic hurdles.

A student may be unprepared for university because of underfunding in the K-12 on-reserve school system. They may face systemic racism in mainstream schools. They did not receive information on the right prerequisites for their program of choice because no one expected them to go to university.

Indigenous students may feel alienated in a Western institution. They may struggle with intergenerational trauma, systemic racism, or feel isolated from their home community. Students may not know where to access available supports.

Complex institutional structures cause some students to simply give up trying to navigate the bureaucracy.

Now, look at these challenges like an iceberg. The lack of university access for Indigenous students is at the top, fully visible above the water line. Just beneath the water, but still visible, is the lack of sufficient funding. But below that, getting deeper, are all the other challenges – broader, submerged, embedded. This is where systems are failing Indigenous students.



An Example: A Solution

Shifting from a *programmatic* approach (scholarships) to a more *systemic* approach requires dedicated learning to fully understand the complex, interlocking barriers facing students. The first step to systems change is building understanding - diving deep into the system and how it functions, and ensuring the voices of those impacted by the system (including those excluded) shape our understanding.

Armed with this understanding, more strategic approaches will reveal themselves. For example, we can work with the institution and communities to make policies more aligned, flexible, student-centered and focused on student success (rather than, say, budget). We can strengthen relationships with K-12 school systems to ensure Indigenous students are supported and guided towards post-secondary education.

We can create a strong network of Indigenous communities and organizations, service providers, and other key partners so youth have easy access to wrap-around supports like childcare, housing, academic coaching, emergency supports, culture, language and Elder supports.

We can work with faculty and Indigenous communities to create more Indigenous content and teaching methods in the classroom, and be ready to address racism. There can be outreach to student organizations to ensure robust processes to support those who are falling behind academically or dealing with health and wellness issues.

Systems change, therefore, goes beyond one institution. It requires a collaborative networked approach that engages many parties - communities, schools, governments, social service providers and more. It means addressing root causes, not symptoms. Further, we need to share our learnings and successes with others so new models, best practices, innovation and transformation can flourish.



Why is Systems Change Important for the EleV Program?

The Mastercard Foundation EleV Program is a commitment to Indigenous youth to help close the unacceptable gaps in education and employment by shifting these systems to better support youth in achieving **Mino Bimaadiziwin**. We've seen programs for Indigenous youth come and go over the years but we've seen little change – except in many cases the gaps have grown bigger.

We stand in support of our Partners to do things differently, to think bigger, to pursue a vision of **transformation** by and for Indigenous youth. This is not about piecemeal change. It's about trying out **new models, new approaches, and new ways of thinking**. It's about continually testing our assumptions and being clear about what is and isn't working.

The Foundation wants to play a role in reconciliation and walking with Indigenous youth as they build a better future. But it is the responsibility of Canadian governments and all sectors of society to support bold approaches found in the vision and values of Indigenous youth, communities, and Nations.

The key to longer-term sustainable change is showing governments, policy makers, and those who can influence and implement change that there are different ways of doing things, ways led by Indigenous people. We will focus our work on this **“demonstration effect”** – working with our partners to share stories of systems change, transformation, innovation, and success. This is work that benefits all of us.

For more information on the Mastercard Foundation EleV Program visit:
mastercardfdn.org/elev

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