



FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

Repatriation Cost Analysis

A Framework and Model Developed by
the First Peoples' Cultural Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2025



Introduction and Context

This Repatriation Cost Analysis (RCA) report addresses the need to document the costs of First Nations repatriation.¹ It is a companion report to *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*, which was developed by K'yuu Enterprise Corporation with support from the First People's Cultural Council (FPCC).² The RCA report is focused on the repatriation of Ancestors and Belongings by First Nations in British Columbia (B.C.), though the framework and model developed here may be of interest to Indigenous Peoples across Canada and internationally.

The Ancestors and Belongings stolen and removed under duress from communities and held in colonial institutions are a vital part of First Nations' heritage, and their repatriation is crucial to reconciliation and healing.³ The lack of adequate funding is a major impediment for B.C. First Nations in repatriating and caring for their Ancestors and Belongings. Provincial and federal funding for repatriation is imperative and a tangible way for governments to fulfil their obligations to First Nations; however, the lack of comprehensive funding and support for repatriation to date have meant that the actual costs remain largely undocumented.

This RCA report describes the steps taken to delineate repatriation tasks and costs, and to develop a framework and flexible cost model that can be used by B.C. First Nations and by funders to understand the costs of repatriation. This information is crucial to advocating for and securing comprehensive funding and support for this important work.

Approaches and Methods

FPCC approached this repatriation cost analysis as an opportunity to take a nuanced look at the tasks involved in repatriation work at every phase and to put real-world costs to those tasks. The following methods were used to develop the repatriation cost framework and model:

- ▶ Secondary research on repatriation tasks, costs and challenges
- ▶ Identification of examples of similar frameworks and cost models
- ▶ Review of budget data from three major repatriation grants in B.C.
- ▶ Review of FPCC grants data
- ▶ Creation of a repatriation costs database
- ▶ Peer review

Guided by these approaches and methods, the FPCC research team developed a **framework** and **model** to document the five-year costs of First Nations repatriation at the community level and beyond.

- ▶ **The framework** presents an approach and a structure for accurately estimating the costs of First Nations repatriation in B.C.
- ▶ **The model** is a flexible tool for calculating repatriation costs at the community level and beyond.



The Framework for this Repatriation Cost Analysis

The absence of existing frameworks for repatriation costing meant that the FPCC research team looked to frameworks and models in adjacent fields. The excellent cost model for Indigenous language revitalization developed by Bliss and Creed in 2018 for FPCC was particularly helpful, and elements of this approach and model were adapted for use in the development of the RCA.⁴

While this report is focused on the community-level costs of repatriation, it is important to recognize that the costs and work of repatriation must not be borne by First Nations communities alone. For repatriation to be successful, this important work must be supported in the budgets, priorities and workplans of the heritage institutions where First Nations Ancestors and Belongings are held. Federal and provincial laws and policies are also key to moving repatriation forward in B.C.

Key Variables and Other Considerations

Many variables impact how First Nations approach and engage in repatriation work. Recognizing the diversity across First Nations through the delineation of key variables is an important feature of the framework and model. The following variables were identified as important to consider when costing repatriation tasks. These variables reflect gaps in current knowledge and highlight areas where additional data is needed to estimate repatriation costs at different scales.

- ▶ Geographic location of communities and cultural institutions
- ▶ Community size
- ▶ Participation rates
- ▶ Community capacity to undertake repatriation work
- ▶ Extent of Ancestors and Belongings held in institutions
- ▶ Relationships between First Nations and institutions
- ▶ Opportunities for cost efficiencies

Given the locally grounded, multi-year nature of repatriation work and the need for First Nations to lead this work, the FPCC research team decided to approach repatriation costing from a community-level perspective. With additional data, the framework could be extended to regional and provincial scales.

Accounting for Diversity

To begin to account for First Nations' diverse repatriation trajectories, and to address the pressing need to understand the real costs associated with this work, the FPCC research team developed repatriation cost scenarios for three hypothetical First Nations communities at different stages of "repatriation readiness."⁵

- ▶ **Community A** is at the beginning of their repatriation journey. This hypothetical community represents approximately 60% of B.C. First Nations in 2024.⁶
- ▶ **Community B** has local support and guidance for repatriation and may have some limited experience repatriating Ancestors and Belongings. This hypothetical community represents approximately 30% of B.C. First Nations in 2024.
- ▶ **Community C** has decades of experience with repatriation work. They have a clear strategic plan, trained staff and good working relationships with museum partners. This hypothetical community represents approximately 10% of B.C. First Nations in 2024.



Phases of Repatriation

The *Stealing to Healing* report describes the four phases of repatriation work and the specific tasks associated with each phase. These are phases that all First Nations will engage with, though the ways that they approach each phase will reflect their own laws, protocols, capacity, timelines and aspirations. Using data from the *Stealing to Healing* report, along with data from FPCC’s grant programs and secondary research to define salaries and travel costs, the research team assigned costs to each task, resulting in cost projections for each phase of repatriation work.⁷ Projections assume a medium-to-large First Nation community with some existing capacity and readiness to engage in repatriation work.



Figure 1: The four phases of repatriation with tasks and cost projections.

The Repatriation Cost Model

The cost model presented in this report attempts to strike a balance between the need for rigorous, accurate costing of repatriation work and the need for flexibility in funding models. Understanding the fluidity and diversity of repatriation work over time is key to assessing multi-year repatriation costs. Figure 2 visually represents what such a flexible cost model might look like in practice. It depicts the three hypothetical communities described above to illustrate how different “repatriation readiness” stages may factor into a five-year cost model.

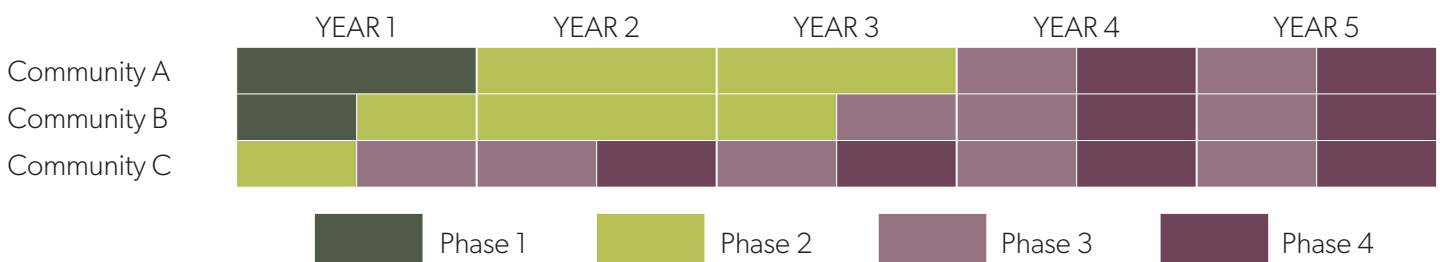


Figure 2: Five-year repatriation cost model.



Applying the Flexible Cost Model

To test the functionality and flexibility of the model, several initial projections were run to determine repatriation costs in different scenarios, including the following:

- ▶ Five-year costs at the community level for three communities at different stages of repatriation readiness.
- ▶ Community-level repatriation costs over 5, 10 and 20 years.⁸
- ▶ Five-year costs for 10% of B.C. First Nations who are already actively engaged in repatriation work.

During the development of the model, the FPCC research team ran several other cost scenarios to test its flexibility and to identify additional gaps to be addressed, including a five-year cost model for 204 First Nations across B.C. This model was “weighted” to account for First Nations at different stages of repatriation work. Using existing grant data, this model considered that 60% of First Nations were in the beginning stages of repatriation, 30% had some experience, and 10% were actively engaged in repatriation programs. This exercise projected a cost of **nearly \$663 million over five years to fund repatriation for all 204 B.C. First Nations**, highlighting the immense costs of repatriation.⁹

Infrastructure Costs

In addition to the costs associated with the four phases of repatriation work, repatriation also requires significant infrastructure. Like repatriation activities, the types of infrastructure that support repatriation will vary according to factors like community size, geographic location and the number of repatriated Ancestors and Belongings. Additional data is needed to understand the specific types of repatriation infrastructure required across B.C. First Nations in order to develop cost projections.

A review of data from infrastructure grants in FPCC’s Heritage Program over four years shows that:

- ▶ 206 requests for infrastructure funding were submitted, totaling \$60.2 million.
- ▶ 166 (80%) of the 206 proposed infrastructure projects included repatriation components, totaling \$49.6 million.
- ▶ 40 (24%) infrastructure projects with repatriation components were funded at \$10.6 million.

Note: Professional Wages and Equitable Remuneration

Across the sector, heritage professionals are often underpaid, including in museum work, community outreach, research and teaching.¹⁰ One of the primary reasons that Indigenous repatriation continues to be slow-moving is the systematic underfunding of Indigenous heritage work and the historical exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from this sector. If repatriation is to be successful for B.C. First Nations, holding institutions and the wider public, the work involved needs to be fully and fairly resourced.



Future Directions

Supporting First Nations repatriation not only requires funding, but also practical tools and guidance from experts to build local capacity to plan and carry out the work. Two initiatives that could help to address these needs are:

- ▶ The creation of a **province-wide, First Nations council or network of repatriation experts** to lead development of policy and legislation, and to provide training and support to First Nations.
- ▶ Development of a suite of **tools for communities to guide repatriation work**, including costing tools, a strategic planning toolkit, a centralized repatriation database and educational resources.

Final Remarks

The model and approach presented in this report are not static; they will be updated as we understand more about the locations of Ancestors and Belongings and the costs of returning them. The data are clear: there is an urgent need for sustainable, equitable and long-term funding to support the substantial costs associated with B.C. First Nations-led repatriation. We call on federal and provincial governments to commit sufficient funding for First Nations repatriation work in B.C. This is a concrete and necessary step toward fulfilling colonial governments' obligations to B.C. First Nations, and is crucial to supporting First Nations' capacity to repatriate their Ancestors and Belongings and to care for them in ways that foster the revitalization of their cultural heritage.

kinana'skomitin – thank you

To learn more about the FPCC Heritage Program and additional FPCC Programs, Resources and Initiatives please visit:

www.fpcc.ca | www.firstvoices.ca | www.maps.fpcc.ca



Endnotes

- 1 Repatriation describes First Nations-led work to locate, bring home and caretake Ancestors and Belongings removed from communities through colonial theft and under duress. The term repatriation is also sometimes used to describe the return of Ancestors and Belongings to Indigenous Peoples with an ancestral connection that honours the role of Indigenous women in leadership and matrilineal societies.
- 2 First Peoples' Cultural Council (forthcoming, 2024). *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*.
- 3 For additional background on the broader context of repatriation in B.C., see: *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations* (2024), and the Indigenous Repatriation Handbook (2019.)
- 4 Bliss, H. and M. Creed (2018). Costing Models for Language Maintenance, Revitalization, and Reclamation in Canada. For the First Peoples' Cultural Council.
- 5 This exercise was also undertaken by Bliss and Creed (2018) to highlight the varying costs of language revitalization in communities at different stages of language vitality.
- 6 Based on an analysis of existing repatriation grant data.
- 7 At the request of First Nations advisors and experts, we researched and applied the real wages paid to First Nations professionals engaged in repatriation and museum-related work. If we were to adjust the wages of this cost model to reflect professional standards and equitable remuneration, the costs would increase substantially for each phase.
- 8 Costs included here do not account for fixed and variable costs or inflation.
- 9 This does not account for the significant costs to museums to support repatriation work. Additional research and cost analysis are required to understand the comprehensive costs to museums to fully engage with First Nations in repatriation.
- 10 Personal communication with heritage professionals in B.C. and beyond. See also: [chpcrp12-e.pdf](#) ([ourcommons.ca](#)); *Low Pay in the Culture Sector Hurts Artists—and Audiences – Canadian Art*; See also examples from the U.K. and the U.S.: *Are workers being priced out of heritage? - Museums Association*; *Data Study 2023 – Findings: Pay and Promotions – Museums Moving Forward*





FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The First Peoples' Cultural Council

1A Boat Ramp Road
Brentwood Bay, B.C.
Canada, V8M 1N9

Phone (250) 652-5952
Fax (250) 652-5953
Email info@fpcc.ca

www.fpcc.ca

