



FIRST PEOPLES'
CULTURAL COUNCIL

Repatriation Cost Analysis

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

2025



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Introduction and Context

This paper, the first of its kind, addresses the need to document the costs of Indigenous repatriation.¹ It is a companion report to *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*, which was jointly developed by the First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) and K'yuu Enterprise Corporation.² This 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. This cost analysis was developed by FPCC, a First Nations-governed B.C. Crown Corporation with a mandate to support the revitalization and protection of First Nations languages, arts, and cultural heritage in B.C.

Together with First Nations partners, FPCC has established itself as a leader in developing policies and practices that support B.C. First Nations' Indigenous jurisdiction over their cultural heritage.³ This is a significant undertaking in a province with 204 First Nations and where over 50% of Canada's Indigenous languages are spoken. The tremendous diversity across B.C. First Nations was a key consideration in the development of a framework and model for costing repatriation.

The Ancestors and Belongings stolen and removed under duress from Indigenous communities and held in colonial institutions are a vital part of Indigenous heritage, and their repatriation is crucial to reconciliation and healing.⁴ To date, there is a notable lack of cohesive policy around planning and funding repatriation from public institutions. FPCC and its collaborators recognize the urgent need for adequate funding and other supports for B.C. First Nations to repatriate their cultural treasures. Despite some First Nations having decades of experience with repatriation, the funding available for this work has been insufficient and piecemeal, obscuring the actual costs of repatriation.

This report describes the steps taken to identify the costs of repatriation from the beginning planning stages in communities to long-term caretaking after Ancestors and Belongings are repatriated, and to develop a cost model with the flexibility to account for diversity across B.C. First Nations communities as they undertake the meaningful work to bring their Ancestors and Belongings home.

- ¹ This report uses the term repatriation to describe First Nations-led work to locate, bring home and caretake Ancestors and Belongings removed from communities through colonial theft, violence 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 matrilineal role of Indigenous women in leadership and matrilineal Societies (see First Peoples' Cultural Council, forthcoming, 2024. *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*.)
- ² The First Peoples' Cultural Council (forthcoming, 2024). *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*.
- ³ In this report, the term First Nations refers to one of the 204 First Nations recognized by the B.C. government. Indigenous or Indigenous Peoples refers to Indigenous individuals and groups that may or may not be officially recognized by Canadian or other governments.
- ⁴ For additional background on the broader context of repatriation in B.C., see the reports *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations* (2024), and the *Indigenous Repatriation Handbook* (2019.)



Context

Dedicated funding for the repatriation of Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings from colonial heritage institutions is a relatively recent concept. Prior to 2018, First Nations' repatriation work in Canada was funded largely through in-kind contributions from First Nations communities and piecemeal grants. Even after three rounds of dedicated funding through grants from the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM, 2018), the British Columbia Museums Association (BCMA, 2020) and FPCC (2023), First Nations interviewed about their repatriation goals and needs cited the need for additional funding and support for capacity building.⁵

The lack of adequate multi-year funding is a major impediment for B.C. First Nations in exercising their rights to repatriate and care 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 under the *Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA) in B.C., the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's Calls to Action, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁶

Recent upswells in calls for colonial governments to live up to their moral and legal obligations to facilitate the return of Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings held in public institutions have resulted in changes to the enforcement of repatriation legislation in the United States.⁷ In Canada, First Nations and allied organizations continue to push for the implementation of policies, strategies and provincial and federal commitments to adequately fund comprehensive repatriation.⁸

For governments to meet their obligations to repatriation, and for communities to plan repatriation work, it is necessary to also understand the full extent of the activities associated with this complex work, including community engagement, planning, research, repatriation, and caretaking. The lack of comprehensive funding and support for repatriation to date has meant that the actual costs of this work remain largely undocumented. Funding provided through grant programs is capped and earmarked in ways that pressure First Nations to take a fragmented approach to this work, rather than a strategic, comprehensive approach. Limited grant funding leaves First Nations to chip away at different parts of the work with no guarantee of future funding to complete what they have started.

To date, there are no available tools or examples of cost modelling for community-level Indigenous repatriation in ways that are not linked to finite grant budgets.⁹ This cost analysis is an attempt to address this gap by examining the question: *what does a fully funded, community-based First Nation repatriation program cost?*

To address this question, FPCC undertook research to define repatriation tasks and costs and to develop a framework and flexible cost model that can be used by B.C. First Nations – and by government funders – to delineate the costs of repatriation in B.C. The development of such a framework and costing model aligns with FPCC's mandate to support and advocate for B.C. First Nations' efforts to revitalize and protect their cultural heritage. It is anticipated that this approach to repatriation costing may be of interest to Indigenous Peoples and cultural institutions across Canada as interest in and efforts around repatriation continue to grow.

5 The First Peoples' Cultural Council (forthcoming, 2024). *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*.

6 TRC Calls to Action 67, 68, 77 and 78 relate to actions that support repatriation of tangible and intangible heritage, and UNDRIP Articles 11, 12, 31 and 39 speak to the rights of Indigenous Peoples to repatriate and control their cultural heritage, with financial and other support from States.

7 United States Department of the Interior. December 13, 2023. "Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act." 43 CFR Part 10.

8 The First Peoples' Cultural Council (forthcoming 2024). *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*.

9 Based on internet research on repatriation funding and costs in Canada and abroad.



Approaches and Methods

Approaches

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 costing process was grounded in research conducted for the FPCC report *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations* (the *Stealing to Healing* report), as well as secondary research to determine market wages for personnel, travel and administrative costs. The outcome of this analysis highlighted the wide gaps between the funding made available for First Nations repatriation and the comprehensive costs of this work.

Another approach taken by the research team through this cost analysis was to develop a tool that can be used by B.C. First Nations to plan and budget for multi-year repatriation projects at the community level. Though the five-year model presented in this report is preliminary, the costs and phases informing the model can be used by First Nations to calculate the timing and costs of their own repatriation projects according to their unique needs and situations.

Methods

The FPCC research team relied on the following methods to develop the repatriation cost framework and model:

- ▶ **Secondary research:** The team identified and reviewed available reports describing funding programs, approaches and challenges related to Indigenous repatriation. The *Stealing to Healing* report, which includes data from extensive engagements with B.C. First Nations undertaking repatriation work, was a key document in this review.
- ▶ **Identification of examples of similar frameworks and cost models:** Since no examples could be identified for repatriation-specific cost frameworks or modelling, the research team turned to work by Bliss and Creed (2018)¹⁰ on cost modelling for Indigenous language revitalization programs for inspiration.
- ▶ **Review of budget data from three major repatriation grants** to identify funding requests, activities funded, the number of B.C. First Nations requesting funding for different phases of repatriation work and the gaps between funding requests and allocations.
- ▶ **Review of FPCC grants** to identify projects with repatriation components. This review identified the types of activities proposed, the budgets for these activities and the gaps between funding requests and available funding.
- ▶ **Creation of a database** to cost repatriation tasks associated with the four phases of repatriation work identified in the *Stealing to Healing* report. Using the four-phase model of repatriation work developed in this report, FPCC created a database to cost out the unique tasks and expenses included in each of the four phases.
- ▶ **Peer review** by experts in Indigenous cultural heritage and economics was incorporated into the model and this report to improve confidence and flexibility.

¹⁰ Bliss, H. and M. Creed (2018). Costing Models for Language Maintenance, Revitalization, and Reclamation in Canada. For The First Peoples' Cultural Council.



Guided by these approaches and methods, the 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 and model are presented below, along with an analysis of repatriation costs and a discussion of the variables and considerations to be addressed in order to strengthen the model in the future. Finally, this document includes calls for targeted research to address gaps in knowledge about how the diversity across B.C. First Nations impacts repatriation costs and timelines.

The report also identifies the need to establish and support a provincial-level body of First Nations repatriation experts to lead policy development, support capacity building, facilitate relationships with institutions and provide expertise in research, transport of Ancestors and Belongings, and caretaking. This body of experts could result in cost and time efficiencies, as well as supporting communities in navigating the emotional and spiritual work of repatriation. The call for such a body is also referenced in the *Stealing to Healing* report, and it fits within FPCC's mandate.

The B.C. government has begun to implement this recommendation with the establishment of an Indigenous-led Repatriation Policy Framework Steering Committee (the Committee). The Committee will oversee and provide strategic direction on the design of a repatriation policy framework, along with a workplan and an engagement plan needed to support the framework development. This framework is intended to provide guidance to organizations holding Indigenous Ancestors and Belongings, and to provincial funding agencies. The Committee will also be asked to provide advice on implementation requirements including recommended supports and resources needed for B.C. First Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and organizations with Indigenous holdings to successfully undertake repatriation initiatives. The first meeting of the Committee was held in June 2024 and they will continue to meet for the next two years to develop a repatriation policy framework.



The Repatriation Cost Analysis Framework

The absence of frameworks for repatriation costing meant that the FPCC research team looked to other Indigenous funding 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 repatriation cost analysis.¹¹

Though they are different undertakings, language revitalization and repatriation share some important similarities. For one, both language revitalization and repatriation are carried out by diverse Indigenous communities with varied experiences, capacities and goals. Similarly, these diverse communities may be at different stages of “readiness,” with some communities having developed strong research foundations and strategic plans and processes to guide them, while others are at the beginning of their journey. These considerations are central to the framework for repatriation costing developed for this report.¹²

In addition to funding needs at the community level, structural and institutional supports at the provincial and federal levels will be key to the long-term success of Indigenous repatriation, just as they are for language revitalization. Provincial and federal supports include mechanisms like laws and policies, as well as funding for museums to carry out their obligations related to repatriation, including creating and maintaining inventories of their Indigenous holdings and facilitating access for First Nations. Repatriation-related costs to museums also include hosting visiting Indigenous researchers and facilitating the packing and transport of Ancestors and Belongings to their home communities. While this report is focused on the community-level costs of repatriation, it is important to recognize other costs related to repatriation work and the need to ensure that this work is reflected in institutional budgets, priorities and workplans, as well as being sustainably resourced.

Key Variables and Other Considerations

In developing a framework for understanding the costs associated with First Nations repatriation, it is important to acknowledge that there are many variables and other considerations that impact how First Nations approach and engage in repatriation work. This work is culturally intimate and will look different for each community. Acknowledging the diversity across First Nations through the description of key variables is an important feature of the framework and model; they are meant to be dynamic tools that can be revisited and updated as more First Nations start their repatriation journeys and we learn more about the unique ways they go about locating and bringing their Ancestors and Belongings home.

The following variables were identified as important to consider when costing repatriation tasks over different scales and timelines. These represent gaps in current knowledge about repatriation costs at a provincial scale. In addition, the identification of these variables in the framework allows researchers to target them for future data collection, which will help to refine the model and improve understandings of province-level costs for repatriation. Understanding how variables affect costs at the provincial level can also contribute to knowledge about repatriation costing at national and international levels.

11 Bliss and Creed (2018).

12 This cost analysis is inspired by the multi-dimensional approach to Indigenous language revitalization costing taken by Bliss and Creed (2018).



Geographic Diversity

There is tremendous geographic diversity among First Nations throughout B.C. The location of communities is a factor influencing repatriation work and the costs associated with that work. For instance, rural, isolated communities will have greater costs associated with travel and transportation, access to holding institutions and resources for research. Timelines for repatriation projects may also be longer if it takes more time and effort for rural communities to access resources and build relationships.

Geographic diversity can also refer to the locations of Ancestors and Belongings in institutions in B.C., elsewhere in Canada, the US and internationally. The locations of Ancestors and Belongings can have significant bearing on the costs of repatriating them. For example, the cost to repatriate a Nisga'a pole from Scotland in 2023 was over \$1 million, whereas costs were \$60,000 for a Haida pole repatriated to Haida Gwaii from the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in 2019¹³

Community Size

Like geographic diversity, there are likely to be cost differences for repatriation between small communities versus communities with medium or large populations. Though not in every case, smaller communities may have less capacity to carry out work in terms of numbers of available personnel. Likewise, some medium and large communities have existing resources, like in-community researchers and infrastructure to support repatriation work on larger scales and at a faster pace.

Participation Rates

Not all First Nations are going to prioritize repatriation activities on the same timeline or to the same extent. These differences will affect how repatriation activities are costed over time. Additional data about participation rates is needed to run the model at a provincial level to project repatriation costs for all 204 B.C. First Nations.

Community Capacity

Capacity to carry out repatriation work varies considerably across B.C. First Nations and in different ways.¹⁴ In the context of repatriation work, capacity challenges often manifest in difficulties hiring, training and retaining staff with skills like project management, coordinating community engagement and research. Capacity requirements may also change over time as communities move through different stages of repatriation. Larger communities engaged in other larger-scale projects tend to have more capacity – or the ability to scale up their capacity more quickly – than do smaller communities with fewer resources and less experience with repatriation and related types of work.

Extent of Holdings

Communities with more Ancestors and Belongings to repatriate will incur higher costs and longer timelines for their repatriation work than communities with fewer Ancestors and Belongings to repatriate. Further, while some communities have a good understanding of the extent of their Ancestors and Belongings held in institutions, others have not yet done this research. Additional work to determine the location and extent of B.C. First Nations' holdings will help to hone the cost model. It is also relevant to consider the types and sizes of Belongings to be repatriated. For example, the costs associated with repatriating a large pole or a cultural Belonging of unconfirmed provenance will be greater than the costs of repatriating a basket or drum where provenance has been established. Likewise, the size and type of collection affects costs associated with installation, storage and display.

13 The First Peoples' Cultural Council. (forthcoming 2024). *From Stealing to Healing: Repatriation and B.C. First Nations*. See this report for more examples of repatriation costs to B.C. First Nations.

14 Capacity to plan and carry out repatriation work can also be a challenge for heritage institutions where Ancestors and Belongings are held.



Relationships

Relationships between First Nations and institutions can affect the timelines and costs associated with repatriation. It can take a significant amount of time to develop working relationships based on shared understandings of First Nations' rights to steward and repatriate their Ancestors and Belongings, and institutions' obligations to facilitate this process. These processes can involve the development of formal terms, such as memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to guide these relationships. In situations where established relationships and shared priorities guide repatriation, costs associated with relationship building may stabilize over time. However, in situations where relationships are new, or where they may be strained or slower to develop, the travel and personnel costs to First Nations associated with navigating institutional bureaucracies can add significantly to the costs of repatriation work.

Opportunities for Cost Efficiencies

Understanding where cost efficiencies might exist, particularly in the planning and research phases where communities may combine their efforts and leverage existing institutional partnerships, can also help to hone the model and lower overall repatriation costs. Additional cost efficiencies could also include a shared, designated location for reinterment, as lack of land is an issue for urban First Nations.

Currently, these variables and considerations are not well understood from a cost impact perspective. However, it is likely that after three to five years of funded repatriation work, including support for additional research to address gaps, we will have a better understanding of how the diversity across First Nations impacts repatriation costs at the community, regional and provincial levels. The inclusion of additional data will improve the accuracy and utility of the model.

A Community-Level Approach to Costing

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, rather than costing at regional or provincial scales. Cost modelling at a community level is useful for several reasons:

- ▶ Costing at the community level, rather than at regional or provincial levels, allows for close attention to on-the-ground costs, which will differ between communities and locales. For instance, the cost of travel can vary depending on a community's location, their destination, and seasonal conditions.
- ▶ Community-level costing builds flexibility into the larger model, as specific local costs can be adjusted as needed, based on communities' diverse circumstances (including cultural approaches and protocols), levels of engagement, and timelines. For instance, the model can be adjusted at the community-level to account for communities with different timelines for repatriation projects.
- ▶ Approaching repatriation costing at the community level also supports flexible scaling up, whereby larger-scale costs can be determined using relevant multipliers, like number of projects or number of communities engaged in different phases of repatriation work. When scaling up, it is important to keep in mind that costs may fluctuate year over year depending on communities' specific and shared needs. When in doubt, higher cost estimates should be used when scaling up to ensure full, ongoing support for repatriation projects underway.¹⁵

¹⁵ Care should be taken in applying multipliers to local repatriation costs to elucidate regional or provincial costs, as those costs will fluctuate from year to year depending on the number of B.C. First Nations engaged in specific repatriation phases at any given time.



Accounting for Diversity

Accounting for the diversity of First Nations' experience, capacity and goals is an important component of developing a cost analysis for repatriation. 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 as it gains momentum in B.C. First Nations communities and in the wider public sphere, the FPCC research team developed repatriation cost scenarios for three hypothetical First Nations communities at different stages of "repatriation readiness."¹⁶

Descriptions and assumptions assigned to these three hypothetical communities are based on surveys and interviews carried out as part of research for the *Stealing to Healing* report. They are inspired by the "language readiness" approach taken by Bliss and Creed to account for community diversity in their Indigenous languages cost framework.¹⁷ In addition to taking initial steps toward accounting for diversity in how First Nations are – or will – approach repatriation work, building diversity into the framework and model is a key feature of the flexible model as more data becomes available.

Although the cost model for these three scenarios does not represent the full spectrum of First Nations' experiences with repatriation, it is a solid starting point for understanding and accounting for the complexities and fluidity of this work and for setting the stage for modelling repatriation costs as more data become available.

Community A

This community is at the beginning of their repatriation journey. They require funding and other supports to initiate in-community engagement, to undertake repatriation planning, to build research capacity and to develop relationships with museums and repatriation specialists. Community A is representative of communities who have started preliminary repatriation work, as well as communities who have not yet begun.

Community B

This community has local support and guidance for repatriation and has done some research and work to establish an inventory of the locations and status of their Ancestors and Belongings held outside the community. They may have some limited experience repatriating Ancestors and Belongings. This community requires funding and support for additional research, training for community repatriation specialists, relationship building with museums, transport and caretaking.



16 This exercise was also undertaken by Bliss and Creed to highlight the different costs of language revitalization for communities at different stages of language vitality.

17 Bliss and Creed (2018).



Community C

This community has decades of experience with repatriation work. They have a clear strategic plan, trained staff and good working relationships with museum partners. This community has completed several small- and large-scale repatriations and is interested in continuing this work and in caretaking their Ancestors and Belongings at home. They may have suitable infrastructure, or they may want to construct a museum or cultural centre on their lands, or if they already have a museum or cultural centre, they may want to upgrade their infrastructure.

Using data from past and current repatriation grants and FPCC's Heritage Infrastructure Program, the research team identified the number of B.C. First Nations likely to be at these three different stages of experience – or readiness – in their repatriation journeys. These estimates are based on the number of repatriation grants received through the three dedicated repatriation grant programs (RBCM, BCMA and FPCC.) Percentages were calculated by comparing successful and unsuccessful grant applications for all 204 recognized B.C. First Nations. The data show that:

- ▶ 123 First Nations are likely to be in phases 1 or 2 of repatriation work (**60% of 204**). This includes First Nations who did not apply for or receive grants through existing repatriation grant programs.¹⁸
- ▶ 60 First Nations are likely to be in phases 2 or 3 of repatriation work (**30% of 204**). These First Nations received one grant, indicating some experience with repatriation work.
- ▶ 21 First Nations are likely to be in phases 3 or 4 of repatriation work (**10% of 204**). These are the First Nations who received two grants or more, indicating more experience with repatriation work.

Information about the number of First Nations in each stage of repatriation work can eventually be used to “weight” the cost model to estimate repatriation costs on regional and province-wide scales.

A Phased Approach to Understanding Repatriation Costs

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 in during their repatriation journey, though the ways that they approach each phase will reflect their own laws, protocols, capacity, timelines and aspirations. Some communities may spend years on one phase, while others will move through phases more quickly, especially if they have more experience and/or resources.

For instance, hypothetical Community A, described above, is just starting out in repatriation work and will likely spend several years – or more – working on tasks in phases 1 and 2. In a five-year cost model, most of their repatriation-related costs will correspond with these phases. Meanwhile, hypothetical Community C has an established, active repatriation program and may spend most of their time on work in phases 3 and 4, and their costs will reflect that. In short, all communities engaging in repatriation work over a period of years will engage in tasks from each of the four phases of repatriation work; however, the scale and speed with which they carry out this work will impact their costs.

¹⁸ Note: Phase 1 includes First Nations at the beginning stages of repatriation as well as those who have not yet started this work.



Each phase is associated with a set of specific tasks, shown in Figure 1. Using data from surveys and interviews conducted for the *Stealing to Healing* report, along with budget data from FPCC’s Heritage Infrastructure Program and secondary research to define salaries and travel costs, the research team assigned costs to each task. This resulted in detailed cost estimates for each phase of repatriation work. In turn, these cost estimates were used to generate multi-year repatriation budgets.



Figure 1: The four phases of repatriation work and tasks associated with each.

The cost model developed for this report includes projected repatriation costs over five years for three scenarios representing different levels of community “repatriation readiness.” In theory, this cost model could be extended to 10 or 15 years and beyond with adjustments to the phases and funding needs of communities as they move through the phases of repatriation. Figure 2 depicts the tasks associated with each phase.¹⁹

19 Training and capacity building is included at each phase in the budget.



Cost Distribution across Phases

To conduct this analysis, the research team considered costs associated with different types of work during each phase. Figure 2 provides an overview of the distribution of costs as they align with each phase of repatriation work.

COSTS	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Personnel²⁰				
Program Manager	■	■	■	■
Research & Repatriation Coordinator	■	■	■	■
Research staff (2 part time)	■	■	■	■
Other positions, as needed	■	■	■	■
Repatriation centre personnel			■	■
Training/capacity building	■	■	■	■
Travel				
Relationship building	■	■		
Provenance research	■	■	■	
Negotiation		■	■	
Repatriation			■	
Repatriation transport			■	■
Community Engagement				
Advisory committee	■	■	■	■
Community meetings	■	■	■	■
Interviews with Knowledge Holders	■	■	■	■
Post-Repatriation Care				
Re-burial/interment		■	■	■
Provenance research		■	■	■
Repatriation centre operations			■	■
Equipment and materials				
Office supplies and equipment	■	■	■	■
Software and technology	■		■	■
Food for hosting, guesing, ceremonies	■	■	■	■
Gifts for hosting, guesing, ceremonies	■	■	■	■

²⁰ Personnel costs may also include other positions, such as Educator, Collections Manager, Caretaker, Curator or others, depending on the needs, plans and capacities of different First Nations



Administration				
Administration throughout repatriation phases				
Repatriation centre administration				
Honoraria, ceremonies and other contributions				
Contingency				
Infrastructure				
Office / facility operations (rent or build)				
Custom containers for repatriation transport				
Safe, accessible storage in communities				
Burial/reinterment, i.e., burial vessels, grave houses				

Figure 2: Distribution of costs across the four phases of repatriation.

Figures 3 to 6 present an overview of the projected costs associated with the four phases of repatriation work, along with a depiction of the distribution of costs across tasks in each phase. This projection is based on a moderate-to-large First Nations community with some existing capacity and readiness to engage in repatriation work. As described above, First Nations’ repatriation costs will vary depending on variables like geography, size, capacity, extent of holdings, participation goals and opportunities for cost efficiencies.

Each of the phases and tasks included in the cost analysis was considered as a line-item, with assigned costs informed by grants data on comparable activities and secondary research into the cost of salaries, technology and travel. Personnel costs were estimated using three publicly available tools and publications: the Province of B.C. Salary Lookup Tool; the British Columbia Museums Association 2023 Sector Survey Salary Report and the Government of Canada’s Job Bank salary information tool.

Phase 1: Planning for Repatriation Cost Distribution

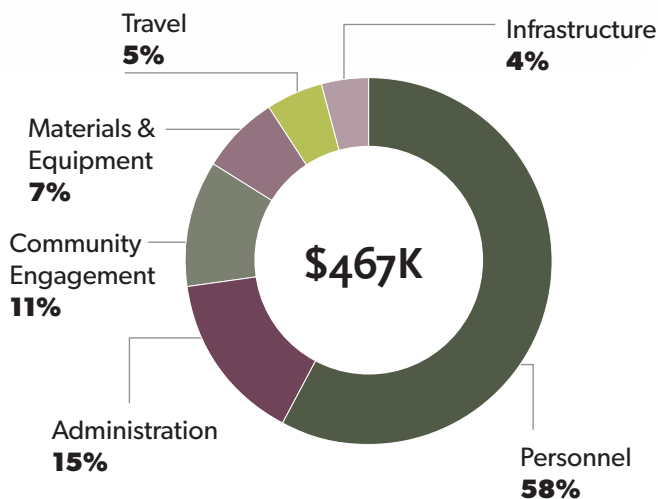


Figure 3: Phase 1 cost distribution.

Phase 2: Preparing for Repatriation Cost Distribution

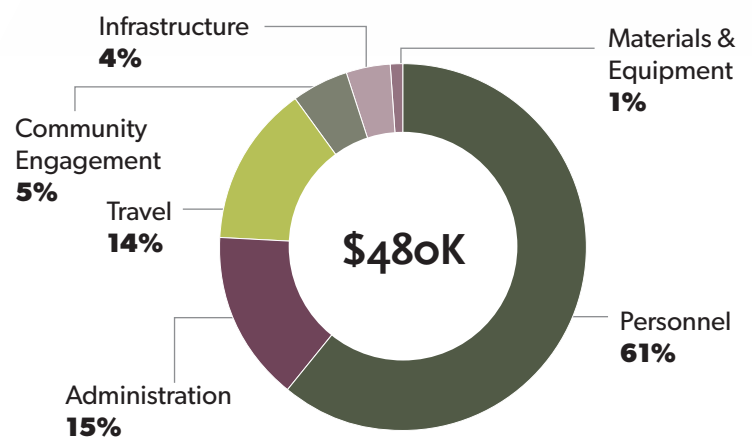


Figure 4: Phase 2 cost distribution.



Phase 3: Repatriation Cost Distribution

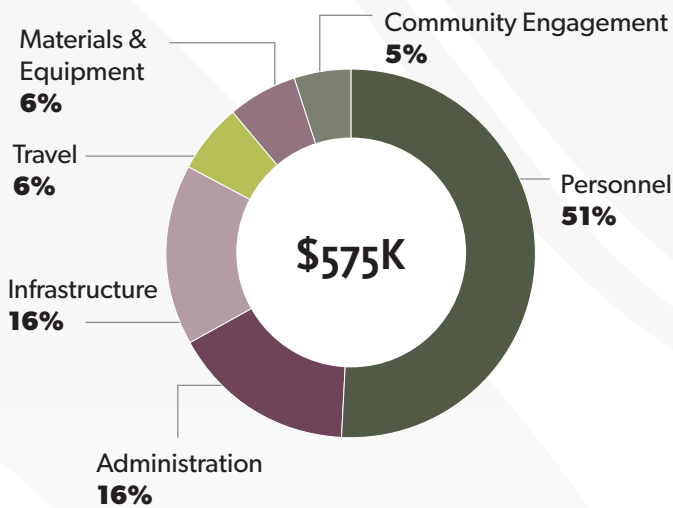


Figure 5: Phase 3 cost distribution.

Phase 4: Caretaking After Repatriation Cost Distribution

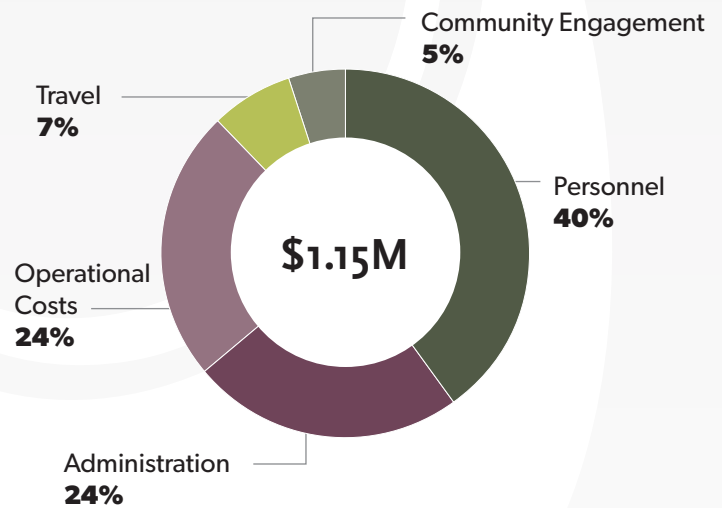


Figure 6: Phase 4 cost distribution.

Professional Wages

It is well-documented that heritage professionals are often underpaid for their work across different jobs in the heritage sector, including in museum work, community outreach, research and teaching.²¹ Further, Indigenous heritage workers are underrepresented in professional training and employment in museums and universities, and Indigenous Peoples as a whole earn less than non-Indigenous Canadians.²² It is important to recognize and name these inequities and their pernicious roots in colonialism and racism.

One of the primary reasons why Indigenous heritage work, including repatriation, continues to be slow-moving and chronically underfunded is the systematic underfunding of Indigenous heritage work and the historical exclusion of Indigenous Peoples from this sector. Too often, Indigenous cultural revitalization work relies on volunteer labour and other in-kind contributions from communities, obscuring the true costs of this vital work.²³ Another factor that contributes to underfunding and exclusion of Indigenous People in the heritage sector are competing priorities that Indigenous communities need to address due to colonial policies and inequities (such as infrastructure, youth programs, etc.), impacting their capacity to participate more fully in the heritage sector.

Including equitable pay for Indigenous heritage professionals in this cost analysis is crucial to understanding the true comprehensive costs of repatriation work. Personnel costs used to inform this cost model align with professional wages, including benefits, for heritage professionals in comparable roles and salaries within the provincial government and within publicly-funded museums.²⁴ 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.

21 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](#)

22 [Report Cover - Workplace Diversity Survey \(in1touch.org\)](#); [Intersectional Perspective on the Canadian Gender Wage Gap \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

23 [Government of Canada Survey of Heritage Institutions: 2021 - Canada.ca](#)

24 Personnel costs for project managers, research managers and researchers were calculated using the following resources: [Salary Look-up Tool - Province of British Columbia \(gov.bc.ca\)](#) ([BCMA 2023 Sector Survey | Salary Report - BCMA \(museum.bc.ca\)](#)); ([Wages for Conservators and curators - Job Bank](#)).



The Repatriation Cost Model

Developing a cost model that accounts for the multiple paths that First Nations may take as they move through the phases of repatriation work is challenging. The cost model presented here is an attempt at striking a balance between the need for rigorous, accurate costing of repatriation work and the need for flexibility in funding models. This is necessary, as First Nations across B.C. are at different stages in their repatriation journeys and have different funding needs based on their experience, capacity and goals.

Understanding the fluidity and diversity of repatriation work over time is key to assessing multi-year repatriation costs. For instance, the five-year costs for a community with extensive repatriation experience may include only Phase 3 and 4 costs, while a community new to repatriation work may spend five years doing work in Phases 1 and 2.

Figure 7 is a visual representation of what such a flexible cost model might look like in practice. It depicts the three hypothetical communities described above to illustrate how different stages of “repatriation readiness” may factor into a five-year cost analysis.

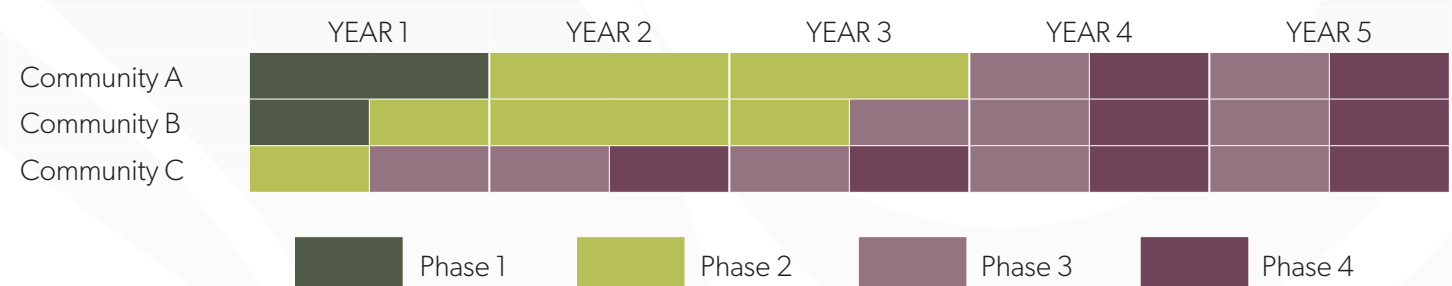


Figure 7: Example of a five-year community-level cost model.

A five-year timeline was selected in this example because it corresponds closely with a four-phase repatriation project, where roughly one phase would be costed over one year. We understand repatriation is a long-term undertaking, and five years will not be long enough for many First Nations to complete their work, even with adequate funding. However, five years of fully funded repatriation work could provide time to assess some outcomes of appropriately funded repatriation work and support the collection of data to address gaps in the funding model. This data could be used to refine the model and advocate for targeted long-term funding for B.C. First Nations to carry on with repatriation.

It is possible to extend the timeline of the model to cost repatriation over 10, 20 or any other number of years. This would require accounting for fixed and variable costs over time (e.g., annual salaries, number of research trips, replacing outdated technology and overhead costs), as well as inflation.



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:

1. Five-year costs at the community level for three communities at different stages of repatriation readiness. This is a costed version of the model shown in Figure 7.
2. Community-level repatriation costs over 5, 10 and 20 years.²⁵
3. Five-year costs for 21 First Nations who are already actively engaged in repatriation work, based on available data.

Cost Projection 1

The first cost projection (Figure 8) shows community-level costs, which vary between First Nations, depending on the types of repatriation work each community undertakes over a five-year period. In this model, community-level repatriation costs ranged from \$3.2 million to \$4 million per community, over five years.

	YEAR 1		YEAR 2		YEAR 3		YEAR 4		YEAR 5	
Community A	\$466K		\$480K		\$480K		\$288K	\$573K	\$288K	\$573K
Community B	\$233K	\$240K	\$480K		\$240K	\$288K	\$288K	\$573K	\$288K	\$573K
Community C	\$240K	\$288K	\$288K	\$573K	\$288K	\$573K	\$288K	\$573K	\$288K	\$573K

Phase 1

Phase 2

Phase 3

Phase 4

Figure 8: Cost projection 1: Five-year cost model.



²⁵ Costs included here do not account for fixed and variable costs or inflation.



Cost Projection 2

The second cost projection (Figure 9) considers community level costs distributed over three different time periods: 5, 10 and 20 years. This reflects the different speeds with which communities will carry out repatriation, due to various factors. Although Figure 9 uses the costs developed for each of the four phases of repatriation work over five years, this cost projection presents a structure and formula for understanding what costs may look like in longer-term scenarios. Once additional data is available, this model can be updated to reflect more accurate costs.

It is also important to note that some repatriation costs are fixed (e.g., technology or one-time travel), while others are fluid (e.g., wages and benefits) and must be re-calculated each year.

	Single community, cost per phase	Per year, over 5 years	Per year, over 10 years	Per year, over 20 years
Phase 1	\$466,838	\$93,368	\$46,684	\$23,342
Phase 2	\$479,775	\$95,955	\$47,978	\$23,989
Phase 3	\$575,395	\$115,079	\$57,540	\$28,770
Phase 4	\$1,145,994	\$229,199	\$114,599	\$57,300
Total	\$2,668,002	\$533,600	\$266,800	\$133,400

Figure 9: Cost projection 2: Distributing costs over 5, 10, 20 years.

Cost Projection 3

The third cost projection (Figure 10) considers the costs of repatriation for 21 First Nations who are already actively engaged in the process. This number of First Nations reflects the 10% of B.C. First Nations communities that have received two or more repatriation grants and are undertaking repatriation activities in each of the four phases of repatriation described above, indicating extensive, ongoing work.

An annual cost of \$688K per community was used as a baseline to model costs across 21 First Nations. This amount is an average annual cost per community, based on the five-year model shown in Figure 8.



Figure 10: Cost projection 3: Repatriation costs for 21 First Nations over five years.



Considering Province-Wide Repatriation Costs

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. One such projection was 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.**²⁶

It is important to acknowledge that crucial gaps in data mean that this cost projection cannot yet account for variation among communities. However, it was useful in highlighting two key points:

1. Even without refined data about communities’ diverse repatriation trajectories, the costs of repatriation across B.C. are immense.
2. To understand how repatriation costs will scale across 204 First Nations, it is imperative to gather additional data to address known gaps.

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 different First Nations will want or require vary according to factors like community size, geographic location and the number of repatriated Ancestors and Belongings. While some communities may envision the construction and operation of cultural centres or museums to safely house their Belongings, other communities may seek upgrades to existing spaces or the installation of high-quality storage and display cases in First Nation administrative offices or other community spaces. Some communities may also seek land for reinterment of Ancestors.

Infrastructure costs are not included in the repatriation costs described above, though operating costs for community-based cultural centres and museums are included in Phase 4. Additional data is needed to understand the specific types of repatriation infrastructure required across B.C. First Nations in order to develop cost projections. The section below describes the types of repatriation infrastructure for which funding was requested through provincial-level repatriation grant programs and through FPCC’s Heritage Infrastructure Program grants.

26 This does not account for the significant costs on museums to support repatriation work. Additional research and cost analysis is required to understand the comprehensive costs to museums to fully engage with First Nations and complete repatriation of their First Nations and Indigenous holdings.



Types of Repatriation Infrastructure

- ▶ **Gathering places** where people can come together to plan and carry out research supporting repatriation. This could take place in existing museums, cultural centres, First Nation administrative offices and community spaces, in new buildings, and on the land.
- ▶ **Buildings, arbours and other places** for ceremonies welcoming Belongings and Ancestors home.
- ▶ **High-quality storage and display infrastructure** for protecting and caretaking Ancestors and Belongings (e.g., cabinets, bentwood boxes, mortuary houses, specialized lighting, pest control.)
- ▶ **Structures able to safely support large cultural belongings** like canoes, carved poles and house panels.
- ▶ **Places and structures associated with reintering Ancestors** and/or caretaking them until they can be reinterred.
- ▶ **Places in communities for sharing** about a community's repatriation journey and other cultural sharing (e.g., a community museum or cultural centre.)

Infrastructure Costs: A High-level Review

A review of funding data from FPCC's infrastructure grant programs over four years shows that:

- ▶ 206 requests for infrastructure funding were submitted.
 - ▶ The total funding requested was \$60.2 million.
 - ▶ An additional \$117.2 million was proposed as in-kind funding by First Nations in their funding applications.
- ▶ 166 (80%) of the 204 proposed projects included infrastructure with components related to repatriation.
 - ▶ Funding requests for repatriation-related infrastructure totalled \$49.6 million.
- ▶ 40 (24%) infrastructure projects with repatriation components were funded at \$10.6 million.

At the time of this cost analysis, data about the comprehensive costs of repatriation infrastructure were limited to grant reports. Further, funding caps limiting the amount of money available to First Nations for infrastructure projects obscure the actual costs of infrastructure needs. This is supported by the fact that proposed in-kind funding for all FPCC infrastructure grant applications over four years (\$117M) was nearly double the amount of the total funding requested (\$60M).



Future Directions

Supporting First Nations repatriation work will not only require 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:

1. The creation of a **province-wide, First Nations council or network of repatriation experts** to lead the creation of legislation and policy around repatriation and to develop and provide training and support for First Nations and holding institutions; and
2. 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. The community costing tool, which FPCC is developing, is described below.

In addition to supporting B.C. First Nations' repatriation work, these initiatives would also support FPCC in gathering data to further refine repatriation cost analyses.

B.C. First Nations–led Repatriation Council

The creation of a B.C. First Nations–led repatriation council is a key pathway for addressing some of the major challenges facing Indigenous repatriation work. This council would be composed of First Nations Elders, Knowledge Holders, repatriation experts, researchers and policy specialists from the 35 First Nations languages spoken in B.C. Together, the council would provide leadership and direction for repatriation in B.C. The council could support research, guide planning and offer cultural supports to First Nations engaging in repatriation activities. It could also advocate for B.C. First Nations and facilitate relationships with holding institutions, as well as working with the Province to lead the development of legislation and policies around repatriation.

A B.C. First Nations–led repatriation council is a practical way to support First Nations' repatriation work, as well as addressing provincial and federal obligations to support this work under DRIPA and the TRC Calls to Action. Further, such an organization could result in cost and time efficiencies through shared training, research and data-sharing initiatives. It would also help to foster a supportive community as B.C. First Nations navigate and lead this important and weighty work.

Some of this work has already begun with the B.C. government establishing the Indigenous-led Repatriation Policy Framework Steering Committee. Although the work has only just started with the Committee, there is potential to grow it into a provincial B.C. First Nation Repatriation Council. This would require leadership, support and sustainable funding to ensure inclusivity of all B.C. First Nation cultures and language groups across the province. Simultaneously, the Canadian Museums Association is working on a national Repatriation Framework, and they have started engagements on this.

Community Repatriation Costing Tool

A community repatriation costing tool is another initiative under development by FPCC. This interactive tool is set to be released in early 2025, and supports communities to calculate costs for their repatriation projects using a worksheet populated with established repatriation phases, tasks and line-item costs. Users can input variables specific to their own projects (e.g., number of staff, research trips, timelines), resulting in an estimate of repatriation costs specific to their community and project. This community costing tool has the potential to be an important component of community-level repatriation planning. It will also facilitate work by communities and FPCC to gather data about repatriation costs to address gaps in the cost model.



Final Remarks

Repatriation work is the work of generations. It honours and fulfils a legacy of the Ancestors. Indigenous People have carried out this work with little or no pay, support or funding. A group of dedicated Knowledge Holders in a First Nations community often work tirelessly to bring home their Ancestors and Belongings. Beyond fulfilling moral, ethical and legal obligations, the benefits of successfully repatriating Ancestors and Belongings are immeasurable for First Nation communities and the public. Some of these benefits include healing, connecting with the past, present and future, revitalizing culture, heritage and language connected to the process and Belongings, and building capacity and leadership to carry out this work.

Together, the *Stealing to Healing* report and this *Repatriation Cost Analysis* report begin to tell the story of repatriation and rematriation efforts since the time of contact and how much it may cost to reconcile these losses. The model and approach presented in this report are not static; they will change and be adjusted as we understand more about the locations of Ancestors and Belongings and the costs of returning them, but 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 go to:

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



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