

## Indigenous firm blazes a path as a Government of Canada supplier

Creative Fire, an Indigenous-owned professional services firm and creative agency, has seen its business grow and thrive in recent years. This is partly as a result of becoming a supplier to Canada's largest buyer, the federal government. "Working with the Government of Canada, across multiple departments, was a big goal for us," says CEO Leanne Hall. "We knew it would take effort, but we were determined to make it happen."

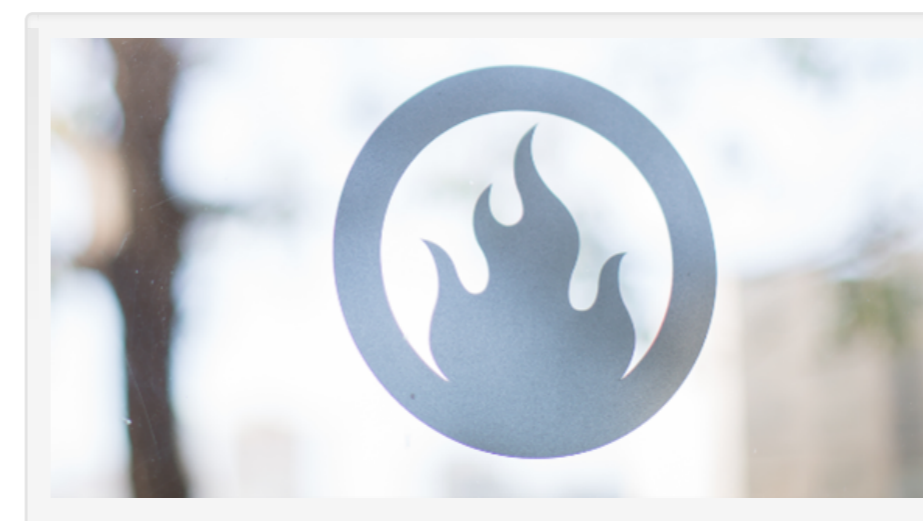


For Creative Fire, selling its services to the federal government is not just a smart business strategy but a benefit to Canada's Indigenous communities. The firm has a significant employee and supplier base with Indigenous, Métis and Inuit backgrounds. Moreover, 100% of its net profits are returned to the English River First Nation, which owns the business, to advance community priorities and objectives. "The reason my team gets out of bed every morning is because of the positive impact we have on Indigenous communities and their economic prosperity. Supplying the federal government increases our impact," explains Hall.

The journey that Creative Fire took can inspire other Indigenous firms to take advantage of the opportunities available. The Government of Canada aims to award a minimum of 5% of federal contracts to Indigenous businesses. As well, Procurement Assistance Canada is a program led by Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) that helps small and diverse businesses navigate the federal procurement process. Its tools, resources and services are available to all firms looking to learn more about doing business with the government. According to Hall, these supports were a game-changer for Creative Fire. "Engaging with them got us on the right course."

### Kindling the flame

In November 2020, Hall received an unexpected call from a federal department preparing a campaign about the roll-out of Covid-19 vaccines for Indigenous communities. "They needed culturally-appropriate material, like images of Indigenous people in face masks." That kind of work is entirely in Creative Fire's wheelhouse. On the consulting side, the company helps organizations develop reconciliation action plans and connect with Indigenous communities, but its creative arm specializes in design, marketing and communications.



"We were ready to assist, but we weren't part of a federal supply arrangement or a standing offer," Hall says. The company could only take on the work as a [low dollar value procurement](#). "It was a very small contract. We took it mainly to learn about working with the government and encourage vaccine uptake."

Once the door was open, Creative Fire continued to deliver contracts of this nature for a range of federal departments and Crown corporations. "Through these engagements, we both increased and demonstrated our capabilities, but we realized that there are opportunities for Indigenous businesses to play a key role in significant government initiatives and to win bigger contracts, so we assembled a team to get us there."

Making the first move wasn't difficult. On social media, Hall and the team came across a former Indigenous entrepreneur who now works for Procurement Assistance Canada. "He's a champion for our community, dedicated to bridging the gaps between the federal government and Indigenous businesses." He directed Creative Fire to the events and services available through Procurement Assistance Canada, including webinars for Indigenous businesses. "They provided a safe environment for us to learn, and we made it a priority to attend as many webinars as we could, on various subjects, starting in May 2022," says Hall.

She notes that these events enabled the team to figure out the federal procurement process step by step, "from obtaining security clearance to registering as a supplier, getting on supplier lists, finding contracts we're qualified to deliver and putting together a bid. The events were also a good place to network. We made valuable contacts, including an independent proposal writer with whom we later consulted."

When the team attended an in-person session, they discovered the value of the one-on-one consultations offered by Procurement Assistance Canada. "There was a group session with keynote speakers, as well as staff from Procurement Assistance Canada talking to individual business owners. One of the representatives approached us and asked: how can we help you be successful? We were invited to reach out to him with any questions, and he became a great point of contact for us, always ensuring we had the right information."

This collaboration and the company's efforts have paid off. Creative Fire is now the Indigenous agency of record for several federal organizations, as well as a pre-qualified supplier in a number of Government of Canada supply arrangements. "We've built the knowledge, networks, services, teams and systems to partner with the government," says Hall, "and that will help drive our success now and into the future."

### Fanning the flame

Based on Creative Fire's achievements, Hall recommends that other Indigenous firms explore the idea of doing business with the federal government. "We know from facilitating a roundtable with 400 Indigenous entrepreneurs seeking to work with the government that there is interest in the community. There is also a perception that it's daunting, but that wasn't our experience. It takes time, but the federal government is committed to supporting Indigenous businesses through this process and to partnering together. The future looks bright. I think we'll start seeing more Indigenous businesses becoming prime federal suppliers."



Check out [Creative Fire](#) and visit [Canada.ca](#) for details about [procurement support for businesses](#), including a [calendar of events](#). To read other articles about PSPC, go to [Our stories](#), where you can see how Procurement Assistance Canada is [increasing supplier diversity with a coaching service for businesses](#).

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