

---

## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2008LCS0021-001765  
Nov. 18, 2008

Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services

### **\$22.5 MILLION TO HELP CONNECT FIRST NATIONS**

VANCOUVER – To help bridge the digital divide for First Nations, the provincial government is providing \$22.5 million for broadband connectivity, announced Labour and Citizens' Services Minister Iain Black today with First Nations leaders.

“Although British Columbia is already one of the most connected jurisdictions anywhere, this is the first program primarily focused on connecting First Nations to the province and the rest of the world,” said Black. “Connectivity is vital for all First Nations communities to increase participation in today’s economy and enjoy the benefits that Internet access can bring.”

Of the 203 First Nations in British Columbia, about 85 currently have broadband access to the Internet. The Province is committed to helping First Nations build the connectivity infrastructure required to reach all of their communities.

“Today’s funding announcement will provide a much-needed boost in closing the connectivity gap that exists for many rural and remote B.C. First Nations communities,” said Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Leadership Council. “First Nations see high-speed broadband as a tool to revitalize, protect and preserve First Nations languages and cultures, while improving access to education, health and economic opportunities.”

“The First Nations Technology Council is encouraged that this government recognizes the tremendous need to bridge the digital divide for First Nations communities,” said Norm Leech, chair of the First Nations Technology Council. “This funding supports the Technology Council’s mandate to represent the interests of First Nation communities in the advancement of technology.”

The Province, through Network BC, has granted the All Nations Trust Company (ANTCO) \$17.5 million to create a connectivity fund and \$5 million for a capacity-building fund. These funds will assist ANTCO and its First Nations partners to initiate a multi-year project to build connectivity infrastructure and develop digital literacy and technical skills programs.

ANTCO, an independent Aboriginal-owned financial institution, will administer the funds in partnership with a project steering committee and the First Nations Technology Council.

“We are pleased that this government is progressive and visionary in recognizing the significance and importance of First Nations having access to Internet connectivity,” said Ruth Williams, CEO of ANTCO. “As an Aboriginal financial institution owned by 200 Aboriginal shareholders, we are delighted to be involved in this exciting initiative.”

The importance of providing broadband connectivity to First Nations communities in British Columbia was identified in the Transformative Change Accord. In November 2005 the Province, the Federal Government and the Leadership Council representing the First Nations of British Columbia signed the Transformative Change Accord to close the social and economic gap between First Nations and other British Columbians, and establish a new relationship based upon mutual respect and recognition.

Media      Rob Duffus  
contact:    Communications Director  
              Ministry of Labour and Citizens'  
              Services  
              250 387-3134

For more information on government services or to subscribe to the Province's news feeds using RSS, visit the Province's website at [www.gov.bc.ca](http://www.gov.bc.ca).