

2024 Cando Economic Developer of the Year Award Winner: Individual Category

Lisa Grant, Haisla First Nation

Lisa Grant has dedicated her career to preserving and supporting various aspects of her Indigenous heritage. Her journey began at the age of 18, working with Indigenous youth at a treatment center. She later expanded her efforts by engaging with youth through sports, eventually transitioning into the corporate world to continue making an impact.

In 2011, Lisa embarked on a new educational journey after relocating to her husband's hometown, where she was unable to secure a position in the youth care field. Today, she holds dual master's degrees in business administration, specializing in executive management and global management. Lisa also co-developed the graduate-level certificate in Indigenous economic development in collaboration with Royal Roads University and a colleague from the Haisla Nation.

Lisa is Heiltsuk on her mother's side and Gitga'at on her father's. Her father, a hereditary chief, was raised deeply rooted in traditional knowledge, which he has passed down through generations of oral storytelling—a practice Lisa continues to cherish and absorb to this day. Her mother, one of fourteen siblings, grew up in a large, tightly knit family supported by many adoptive relatives who enriched their community bonds.

"Our success as a community lies in paving the way to improve our lives—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually—to the best of our abilities. By doing so, we empower every member to realize their potential and tackle challenges on their own. True success creates a ripple effect; the more of us who dedicate ourselves to growth, both personally and collectively, the more that positive impact will flow through our communities, shaping a brighter future for generations to come," she said.

"Few things are more fulfilling than using your education to create a brighter future for your community."

Lisa now serves as the Business Development Manager for yáqw'a Development Corporation, an organization dedicated to advancing the economic growth of the Haisla Nation. In 2014, Lisa married her husband at a beautiful ceremony in Honolulu, Hawaii. Shortly after, she promptly applied for a band transfer at the earliest opportunity.

Lisa has always been driven to achieve her best, shaped by the unwavering belief instilled in her from a young age that higher education was non-negotiable. Looking back, she feels deeply grateful to her parents, crediting their guidance for much of her success today.

Her parents also created an alcohol-free home, a choice that profoundly influenced Lisa on a fundamental level. Their steadfast support has been a constant throughout her life—from her early days as a preemie, born 11 weeks prematurely, to her incredible accomplishment of earning not one but two master's degrees.

Lisa served as an advisor for Rio Tinto in the areas of community engagement and communication, where she played a key role in supporting the Haisla Nation in organizing blanket exercises to share cultural teachings. These exercises were held in Kitimat, Haisla, Keman, and Montreal, offering an invaluable opportunity to educate participants about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. By bringing Haisla community members and Rio Tinto employees together for these sessions, it created a thoughtful and impactful approach to fostering mutual understanding and cultural awareness.

While working at Rio Tinto, Lisa came across an opportunity for a Business Development Manager position with the Haisla Nation. With her ongoing education in business, she felt it was the perfect next step. She began the role in October 2020, right in the midst of the pandemic—a challenging time, but one that proved instrumental in her professional growth.

In this role, Lisa has been able to leverage her master's in global management, along with her prior education, to make a significant impact. One of her key achievements involved auditing a property management company that was underperforming, ultimately saving the Haisla Nation thousands of dollars annually. She also co-developed the graduate certificate in Indigenous economic development in partnership with Royal Roads University, demonstrating her dedication to fostering meaningful change. While working full-time, she successfully completed her master's in business administration with a focus on executive management, exemplifying her commitment to both professional growth and impactful leadership.

Lisa played a pivotal role in the CEDI two-year partnership between the Haisla Nation and the District of Kitimat, serving as a liaison to strengthen relationships and identify common ground between the two organizations. For 13 months, she served as the interim Deputy Chief Administrative Officer for Development, overseeing critical areas such as economic development, education and training, environment, fisheries, and lands.

During her tenure in executive management, Lisa represented Haisla Nation at the HaiSea tugboat naming ceremony in Turkey — a significant milestone for the Nation.

She also spearheaded efforts to pass six organization-wide information management policies and led the acquisition of the Sunrise General Merchandise Store. She played a key role in negotiating with the Government of British Columbia on the First Nations Direct Award Forest Tenure Opportunities (FTOA) and the Forest Consultation and Revenue Sharing Agreement (FCRSA).

Lisa was instrumental in the creation and launch of yáq a development corporation, a project that took two years of strategic planning and officially launched in April 2024. She initiated a campaign to name the corporation and design its logo, incorporating name and logo suggestions directly from Haisla members. Additionally, she facilitated the rebranding of Sunrise General Merchandise Store, which was renamed Gizua Market, complete with a new logo inspired by submissions from Haisla Nation members.

Her outstanding contributions to Indigenous economic development earned Lisa the Indigenous Economic Developer of the Year Award from CANDO, presented in Calgary in the fall of 2024.

On a personal note, Lisa's passion for growth and following her heart drives her accomplishments. In September 2024, she and her husband, Jason, purchased Terrace Refillery, now rebranded as Northwest Refillery Inc., in Terrace, BC. This eco-conscious business invites customers to bring their own containers—jars, shampoo bottles, and more—to refill with environmentally friendly products, promoting a sustainable lifestyle.

Lisa's dedication to community, innovation, and sustainability continues to shape her remarkable journey.