

***Lessons Learned  
Employment, Labour Market and  
Economic Development Policies,  
Programs and Services  
for Aboriginal Peoples***

**Technical report**

***Evaluation and Data Development  
Strategic Policy  
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# *Preamble*

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) commissioned this report as part of its Lessons Learned series. This series examines past evaluations and research studies and updates them with insights from current literature and expert knowledge. HRDC commissioned this study, which focuses on Aboriginal labour market, employment and training, and economic development policies, programs and services.

The research process involved obtaining evaluation studies from HRDC and several federal departments. The next step reviewed academic literature and studies from Canada, the United States and Australia. This was followed by interviews with HRDC staff and representatives from several Aboriginal organizations. Afterwards, we synthesized the information and prepared a summary of preliminary findings and invited several Aboriginal organizations to participate in a discussion group to verify and expand upon the findings. Following their comments, we prepared a draft final report, which was distributed to those federal departments that provided us with information, national Aboriginal organizations, and selected Aboriginal employment and training agencies. These organizations offered further comments on the draft report and gave us their interpretation of it, such as how the findings affect their organization or community. We have attempted to address and incorporate all comments where possible in this final report.

In all cases, federal departments and Aboriginal organizations agreed with the central findings. Comments dealt with points of clarification and areas for future research and elaboration. Some respondents offered views on the current regional bilateral agreements in labour market development and employment and training. We passed these comments along to HRDC, which, along with Aboriginal organizations, is currently evaluating the agreements.

Throughout this document, the report refers to “*Aboriginal*” people. This refers to all Aboriginal people, including: First Nation communities, Metis people, the Inuit, and Status and Non-Status Indians. We refer to a specific group in some cases.

We have also identified some “*successful*” Canadian Aboriginal communities throughout the report. These cases emerged from the literature review and use diverse definitions of success. We did not conduct a review, or follow-up, to assess the current status of these communities. By the same token, many examples of successful Aboriginal development exist that are not cited in this document.

We thank the many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations that contributed to this Lessons Learned study. Their participation is much appreciated.

# 1. Introduction

The majority of Aboriginal communities across Canada face bleak economic prospects with chronically higher rates of unemployment and social assistance<sup>1</sup> receipt than most other Canadians. Over the past three decades, governments and Aboriginal leaders have used various labour market and business development programs to assist individuals and communities to improve their economic circumstances. Since the mid-1980s, governments introduced numerous Aboriginal-specific policies and programs to bolster economic development and combat unemployment and dependency on social assistance. The objective of this study is to derive a core set of lessons learned from these employment, labour market, and economic development policies and programs.

***Aboriginal communities combat high rates of unemployment and social dependency.***

This study offers insights for government and Aboriginal policy makers and program managers to identify viable long-term employment training and community development policies. The study divides policies, programs, and services according to an *individual* and *community* focus. This presents a clear way to analyse several themes from the point of view of what has and has not worked. Policies and programs with an individual focus concentrate on improving a worker's employability and entry into the labour market. Interventions that are community-oriented deal with business and community development initiatives designed to create employment opportunities. As the report clearly shows, these two strands are essential for securing the economic future of Canada's Aboriginal population.

This report is based on a review of academic literature from Canada, the United States and Australia, (published as a separate document with detailed bibliography) selected federal government evaluation studies and other documents (e.g., research papers), as well as many interviews with federal, provincial, and territorial officials and representatives from national and local Aboriginal organizations. While all the research, especially on the labour market side, does not deal directly with Aboriginal people, it is relevant to Aboriginal policies and program development used in service delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> In Canada, the term social assistance is used to refer to welfare, which is the term more commonly used in the United States. The terms are used interchangeably.

***Current HRDC  
Aboriginal labour  
market programming  
initiatives come up  
for renewal in 1999.***

The Lessons Learned study is timely as Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) programming<sup>2</sup> for Aboriginal people comes up for renewal in 1999.

In addition, in response to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), HRDC recently announced a five-year Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy. Furthermore, as provincial and Aboriginal organizations take on responsibility for labour market programming and employment training, lessons learned from the federal experience are important to help define future directions.

## **1.1 Lessons Learned selects important points from two broad areas of study — economic and labour market**

Examining two such comprehensive domains as labour market and economic development poses certain challenges.

- In Canada, labour market programming has been fragmented and continually changed with the succession of governments. In addition, the nature of programming is reflected in micro-evaluations or studies of individual program components. In contrast, in the United States, many programs from the late 1960s still exist and comparative longitudinal program evaluation is available.
- Responsibility for economic development in Canada rests jointly with the national, provincial, regional and local levels. National economic initiatives involve federal departments such as Industry Canada, while regional development is the mandate of federal agencies such as Western Economic Diversification (WED) and provincial and territorial ministries. Provinces, which are arguably the most important level of government in economic development, usually target their efforts to local and regional economic zones. However, few Aboriginal-specific initiatives exist beyond those funded by the federal level, thus, we concentrated our efforts there.
- Provinces are increasingly important agents in meeting labour market needs. Although the federal government was the lead on the Strategic Initiatives (SI), introduced in 1996, provincial ministries of social services and education jointly executed and administered the programming. That said, it is important to emphasize the pre-eminent

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<sup>2</sup> HRDC labour market and employment-related programming due to end in 1999 includes the Regional Bilateral Agreements, Urban Aboriginal Initiatives, and Aboriginal Strategic Initiatives.



role that provinces play in training and education. Most provinces accredit technical and vocational schools, post-secondary education, and license the trades. Further, provinces deliver elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. It is important to recognize that provinces are increasingly becoming important to expanding and developing new relationships with Aboriginal organizations.

## 1.2 Bridging economic and social policy streams — defining the scope of the study

The Lessons Learned series commissioned two separate studies on Aboriginal human resources development, one focussing on the social aspects and the other focussing on the economic aspects. The latter study is the basis of this report. We do not review social policies in this study unless they are designed to encourage, induce or compel individuals to secure and maintain work.

<b>Aboriginal human resources development includes economic and social aspects</b>	
<b>Economic focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• labour market and employment-related initiatives</li> <li>• community economic development</li> <li>• culture and governance</li> </ul>
<b>Common areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• education</li> <li>• youth</li> <li>• culture</li> </ul>
<b>Social focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• social development</li> <li>• health</li> <li>• child care</li> </ul>

- The study with the economic focus concentrates on labour market as well as on community economic development. Labour market initiatives are interventions designed to train workers and place them in the workforce. These initiatives focus on the supply side of labour market programming. In contrast, community development policies are intended to create employment (the demand side) for those trained workers.
- Culture is also important to program delivery and feeds into a community's move towards economic independence and style of governance. Culture and traditions vary among Aboriginal people, such as the Metis, First Nations or Inuit, whose diversity will influence their community's overall approach to development. Some observers believe

that culture and governance are critical preconditions of Aboriginal community economic development. All studies in community and regional economic development confirm the importance of local leadership and the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural traditions in community development.

- We also do not deal with mainstream social policy, such as the Canada Pension Plan or Employment Insurance benefits. They, in and of themselves, merit a Lessons Learned study. For example, changes have occurred in employment insurance benefits with the intention of altering the focus to individual attachment to the labour market and providing more flexibility in defining employment and training initiatives. It is premature to discuss whether these changes have worked.
- Bridging the purely economic and social policy streams are special issues related to education and youth. We raise those issues when it is appropriate to do so.

Lastly, the focus of the Lessons Learned study is on programs and policies available to the public at large. Numerous employer training programs exist, such as those offered by the federal public service (e.g., Aboriginal Masters Program) and others (e.g., Native Teacher Training), but we exclude these.

### **1.3 Applying the lessons learned from mainstream employment and training programs to Aboriginal populations**

The situation faced by many Aboriginal people in urban Canada is different than that faced by minority populations in any city in North America. While Status Indians in Canada have entitlements, many have migrated from their communities or reserves to urban centres where these rights are limited. In some cases, individuals are worse off than they might have been had they remained on reserve. Many Canadian cities are realizing that there is a serious unemployment problem and are providing social services to a growing segment of the population. Many urban Aboriginal people in Canada, especially native youth, face a bleak employment market. At present, many mainstream employment programs in Canada serve large numbers of Aboriginal individuals and the experience and lessons learned from these training programs are directly pertinent to Aboriginal people. At the same time, mainstream programs have had limited success when applied to Aboriginal populations and little study has been dedicated to understanding how best to design and deliver effective employment training to Aboriginal populations.

## **1.4 The identification of lessons learned drawn from past research and evaluation studies is a challenge**

While the study recognizes that American mainstream and Aboriginal programming is different from Canada's, many lessons on program effectiveness, processes and impacts apply to Canada's Aboriginal population. Most of the federal evaluations we relied upon, such as those from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) and Health Canada (HC), deal predominantly with First Nations.

The Canadian literature on impacts of policies and programs is comprised mostly of independent academic reviews and government evaluation studies (mainly federal). There are a few synopsis reports, usually limited to Lessons Learned studies, on similar programming across jurisdictions. The Canadian and Australian research literature is less coherent than that of the United States, where many studies report in detail on programs.

This document includes all Aboriginals and is conscious of the diversity that exists among Canada's native populations, including those in urban settings. However, fewer evaluations are available to deal specifically with non-status and Metis groups. We relied on recent studies such as the mid-term reviews of HRDC's Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) on employment and training that included these groups.

The literature review found that evaluations in Canada, related to Aboriginal programming, tend to focus on specific programs and policies of the sponsoring department (HRDC, DIAND, etc.). The studies have focussed on measuring outputs (number of interventions, activities, participants), short-term impacts, and assessing delivery processes. Few studies measure long-term outcomes on program participants and even fewer assess the impacts on Aboriginal people generally. We can only speculate about possible reasons for this. For example, programs targeted to Aboriginal populations have been fragmented and change service delivery agents (i.e., program coordinators) on average every few years. Aboriginal programming tends to be divided across several federal departments, thereby requiring interdepartmental evaluations, which have traditionally been lengthy and difficult processes to coordinate. Further, changing delivery agents every three or five years means that no one ever learns how to improve programming. Any lessons are lost as the new trainers must start afresh.

This study reviewed research and evaluation reports from Canada, the United States and Australia. However, the review draws heavily on scholarly literature from the United States. A good reason exists for this.

The Americans have been extensively involved in job development and have been evaluating its successes at the state and federal levels for the past decades. The literature tends to review and synthesize these outcomes, providing useful insights and comparisons. For example, Lalonde (1995) summarized 30 prominent studies of the *Manpower Training Development Act* (MTDA) and in 1996, the General Accounting Office in the United States evaluated a range of training programs under the *Job Training Partnership Act* (JTPA). Such syntheses are much less frequent in Canada and Australia. Some Canadian examples include an evaluation of Employability Improvement Programs (review of three components), a summary of mid-term evaluations of the regional bilateral agreements between Canada and Aboriginal organizations,<sup>3</sup> and this Lessons Learned study. The current Strategic Initiatives projects of HRDC offer another opportunity to synthesize lessons from training.

## **1.5 Historical overview of policy and program developments in Canada, the United States and Australia**

Over the past 30 years, programming aimed at Aboriginal people has evolved from an era where governments only recognized them as one of several disadvantaged groups receiving services through mainstream programs. In the 1980s, governments set aside funding for Aboriginal institutions and community projects, and now, Aboriginals have more control over the design and delivery of their own programs.

Similarities exist among the program approaches used in Canada, Australia and the United States. The use of limited programming, evaluation of specific interventions and certain target groups, as well as the devolution of training to provincial governments and third-party trainers, are all common delivery models. The program evolution in all three countries can be very simply described as follows:

- *Late 1960s* — Governments in all three countries introduced mainstream employment and training programs designed to increase the qualifications of economically disadvantaged people. The focus was exclusively on the supply side and programs targeted the population as a whole.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Synthesis of the Mid-term Reviews of Regional Bilateral Agreements was scheduled to be published in the Fall of 1998.

- *1970s* — Governments recognized that Aboriginal people face unique economic and social disadvantages and encouraged them to access mainstream economic and labour market programs. Again, the supply side was emphasized by facilitating job entry and helping people find work.
- *1980s* — Aboriginal economic development institutions in all three countries emerged with a focus on local development. In Canada, labour market programming specifically for Aboriginal people was defined, such as HRDC's strategy Pathways to Success, which included several employment and training initiatives that were previously part of the mainstream Canadian Jobs Strategy. Economic development initiatives included the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy (CAEDS) involving DIAND, Industry Canada and HRDC. A focus on the special circumstances of Aboriginal people became apparent, as did the recognition that their organizations should play a larger role in program delivery.
- *1990s* — Governments in the three countries are now seeking new partnerships with Aboriginal people through privatization, devolution, or co-management of labour market responsibilities to local Aboriginal organizations. In Canada, the federal government is moving away from the direct design and delivery of labour market programs and transferring responsibilities to other levels of government (provincial and Aboriginal). A new partnership between the federal government and Aboriginal people is evolving through regional bilateral agreements. Increasing the capacity of Aboriginal institutions has become the essential thread for much of the programming.

While Aboriginal organizations acknowledge that they have more control over programming than in the past, they believe existing guidelines and legislation compel them to design the same training concepts that already exist. They believe this is problematic, given the lessons learned identified in this report. Further, it may constrain the integration of training models better suited to Aboriginal cultures.



## ***2. Lessons learned from labour and employment training policies, programs and services***

Over the last 30 years, the results of mainstream labour market and employment training programs have been disappointing. Key lessons tend to be negative and focus on what has not worked rather than on what has. Less is written on Aboriginal-specific labour market and employment training programs. However, many of the lessons from mainstream programs can be applied by Aboriginal policy makers and program designers in developing new programming or initiatives.

### **2.1 Employment and training**

Typical training programs involve various forms of purchased course training, on-the-job training, work experience, life skills training, job search assistance, resume preparation and interview skills. Many of these program components also involve activities such as job placement services, employment assessment and counselling. This study summarizes the lessons learned from employment and training, but does not deal with each of the components in detail. For example, studies of Pathways to Success focussed on the strategy, policy, and processes as opposed to individual program component results.

***Employment and training programs have not led to large increases in earnings or a reduction in social assistance.***

Overall, American studies have found that employment and training programs consisting of classroom, on-the-job training and life skills development do not have a large impact on earnings, nor do they reduce reliance on social assistance. Interventions that tend to be short term in nature do not prevent participants from returning to social assistance after having worked for several months.

In Canada, specific programming has tended to be short term although initiatives such as the Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS) and the Employability Improvement Program (EIP) are composed of multiple initiatives that provide clients with a continuum of services. Past studies have not measured outcomes using indicators that reflect the use of a package of services and progression to the next program component. Cost is a limiting factor, since outcomes must be tracked over several years. Many programs show success within a six-month window, but clients often return to income assistance after a year. Longer term follow-up would properly reveal which programs help clients become truly economically

self-sufficient. An exception is the EIP, which evaluated three of several program components and changes in annual earnings over a 20-month period, taking a longer perspective than most Canadian studies.

In general, Canada's federal government has funded the same basic training programs, and then recycled them under new names. This frustrates long-term effectiveness research, since administrative data are constantly interrupted.

### **2.1.1 Several findings emerge from employment and training programs**

The following is a synthesis of several basic findings relating to design and implementation that emerged from 30 years of mainstream employment and training programs.

- Impacts on job holding and wage increments have been small.
- Gains typically do not result in many welfare recipients moving to total economic independence.
- Many who do move off assistance have a high likelihood of reverting back.
- Wage effects as a result of these interventions are larger for women, closer to zero for men, and often measure as negative for youth. Studies of programs oriented to youth often show lower post-program earnings. Few explanations are available for this except that self-selection and attrition bias contaminate the data.
- Programs that offer financial incentives to displaced workers and welfare recipients also have small benefits in raising incomes. However, the impacts on total welfare payments are minimal.
- Attributes of the individual are critical factors in successful outcomes. This is especially so for their "job readiness" as determined by their level of general education prior to interventions and the amount of time they have been on social assistance.
- Program success, defined as sustained post-program employment and sustained reduction in use of income assistance, has been low because the magnitude of the interventions are small in comparison to the size of the problem. Often, clients face multiple barriers such as lack of education, health and social problems. Further, they typically present extreme educational deficits, little job experience, and highly restricted social relationships.



- The organization of training interventions has often been inadequate and disconnected from the educational system.
- As noted in HRDC's study of Lessons Learned on youth programs (HRDC, 1997), and other literature, preventing premature high school drop out is emerging as the single most important goal in assisting economically disadvantaged youth.<sup>4</sup> Linking vocational training to curriculum and academic studies is important.

### **2.1.2 Formal education is key to employability**

Literature from all three countries clearly demonstrates that a sound academic education is the key to long-term employability. Studies show that skill-specific employment and training programs do not compensate for education deficiencies. As noted in *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan* (DIAND, 1997) the Aboriginal population is young and many individuals are in this precise situation having left school without the necessary skills for employment.

***Short term skills training does not compensate for poor basic education.***

Most employment and training programs have three main weaknesses, particularly when applied to Aboriginals:

- These programs do not provide the sequential learning, nor the essential reading and writing skills derived from years of schooling.
- Limited skills training qualifies the participant for a specific job, but does not support the "jump" to a higher level occupation that offers better pay and security.
- As a result, participants often cannot increase their wage earnings enough to remove the incentive to stay on social assistance. In most jurisdictions, income assistance programs compensate clients significantly more than low wage employment obtained with weak skills.

As noted earlier, some programs such as the Employability Improvement Program offer a continuum of services to clients and are overcoming some of these weaknesses.

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<sup>4</sup> The term youth is broadly defined as studies dealt with various age groups (e.g., 15 to 30 years).

***Vocational/  
occupational and  
school linkages are  
essential.***

The literature states that investment in formal education offers the greatest return to youth. The *Lessons Learned on the Effectiveness of Employment-Related Programs for Youth* (HRDC, 1997), also part of HRDC's Lessons Learned series, confirms that prevention is critical and that more education equals more labour market success. Other studies suggest that cooperative education and summer placements increase graduation rates and that mentoring programs for students are successful in increasing the rate of graduation among disadvantaged youth.

***Partnerships are  
critical in planning  
training programs.***

The literature also shows that formal education should not be separated from vocational and occupational training. However, given that education falls under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government and Aboriginal organizations will need to work with the provinces to develop partnerships to link training and education.

### ***2.1.3 A comprehensive case management approach works well, but is expensive***

***Addressing literacy  
deficits is a  
prerequisite for  
entry into  
employment and  
training programs.***

One program that seems to have worked is Job Corps, established in 1964 in the United States. The program selected participants very carefully and used case management. Its key elements include an in-house setting and a focus on core academic skills. Such a program may be worth considering, providing that it is under community control and respects cultural values. The program worked best with males, as it removed them from poverty and adverse social conditions, and gave them the academic skills to hold a job as well as qualify for additional vocational training.

***An individual case  
management  
approach is  
effective — and  
expensive.***

While individual case management that addresses all aspects of an individual's social, health and educational deficits appears to be promising, the financial implications of such programming are significant. Jobs Corps costs US\$25,000 per participant each year. It is difficult to assess the cost-effectiveness of Canadian programs that have tended to focus on short-term, less expensive training intended to "jump start" an individual into the labour force. Little information exists on clients' progress through a sequence of programs. For example, a client may take a life skills course, be helped by a wage-subsidy program and then receive on-the-job training. These efforts are a substantial investment, but current accountability frameworks and indicators do not capture this information. Accordingly, the literature reveals that these short-term programs have had a low impact.

### ***2.1.4 Training linked to jobs is effective***

***Training that  
responds to  
employment  
requirements is  
effective.***

American studies show that training offered by the private sector has a higher success rate than training offered by the public sector. This is likely because the private employer is training directly for positions within their operations. Individual evaluation studies show that partnerships of

government and business in delivering training programs have proven to be effective. However, care is needed in design and delivery. Understandably, employers are focussed on their business needs and not on the longer term needs of the trainee/employee. They are likely to train for the narrow job skills required at the moment. A reversal in the company's business can provoke a layoff, and the employee may quickly return to social assistance. The study *Wage Subsidies to Encourage the Hiring of Unemployment Insurance Claimants* (Robertson, 1994) shows that the same danger exists with wage subsidies. Once the subsidy has ended, the trainee may revert to assistance.

Key informants also stress the importance of linking job opportunities with training. Those we interviewed said that bulk training purchases (e.g., government-to-government purchase of blocks of training) for Aboriginal clients, which set aside seats in academic institutions or with training contractors, without regard to individual or community needs, were not effective. Mainstream programs prior to Pathways to Success did little to address community needs or the requirements of the larger labour market. Mid-term reviews of selected HRDC regional bilateral agreements and interviews reveal that Aboriginal-controlled programming permits flexibility to purchase and design courses.

The academic literature and these evaluations conclude that those Aboriginal organizations which incorporate cultural traditions and local needs may be better suited to meet the unique labour market demands of the community.

### **2.1.5 Improvement is needed in managing training contracts**

American studies, and some Canadian evaluations such as that of Manitoba's Taking Charge! Program (Prairie Research Associates, 1997) show that training service providers may not be pre-qualified, and are often not required to meet educational standards. Contracting agencies rarely assess services delivered by individual contractors, and considerable potential exists for increased monitoring of these training activities.

Furthermore, service providers may be paid according to the number of people they train, so there is a tendency to "cream" the most job-ready and to neglect the more disadvantaged. What appears to be an effective program because of a high ratio of "graduates" is, in reality, a program acting as an "employment agency," matching qualified workers with employers. Performance measurement is essential to ensure that training benefits the target clientele.

***Bulk training purchases that do not address community and labour market needs are not effective.***

***At present, there is little study on the quality of training.***

In Australia, the Department of Education, Employment, and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) has established performance contracts with private organizations to assess results of training. Service providers are obligated to meet and report on performance standards in service delivery (such as numbers of graduates), and in terms of success rates in helping clientele (such as retention of post-training employment) in their contracts and are assessed against them. In the United States, the *Job Training Partnership Act* (JTPA) required training service providers to report on outcomes, such as a reduction in measured unemployment, increases in earnings and a reduction in long-term welfare dependency experienced by their clients.

To date, this lesson is of particular importance to Aboriginal communities, as HRDC Regional Bilateral Agreements have largely replicated mainstream programming. This may be because they were implemented quickly during a transition period (post-Pathways to Success) or focused on short-term accountability requirements (e.g., three-year agreements). Several key informants expressed concern about trainers' incentives to keep people in courses without knowing whether the training is effective.

In Canada, we have created a vast training industry that stands apart from accredited educational institutions. Much of the training does not evaluate the outputs and outcomes at the individual program component level. Evaluations measure the overall effect of a program that may consist of many interventions delivered by over 50 separate training providers. The impact of an individual service provider's training is rarely examined.

The issue of trainers' certification does not emerge from the literature. By default, many organizations, such as universities, community colleges and vocational schools, are accredited. Private trainers typically are not certified, largely because of the expense involved. Therefore, we have few guidelines on how to contract for these courses and how to manage the diversity of training providers emerging in response to funding opportunities.

## **2.2 Training for displaced workers**

Training programs are used for seasonal and laid-off workers from industrial restructuring. The literature indicates that these programs have higher returns than training for the economically disadvantaged. A key observation is that education plays a critical role in allowing participants to undertake a "career switch" that leads to more work and a boost in income. Since these displaced workers already have this base, Leigh (1990) states that only job-search assistance may be needed for better educated, displaced workers. Education or vocational training is more suitable for those with a limited background or who possess narrow trades skills that have become obsolete. The literature supports the lesson that

***Workers with a strong educational base can better adapt to labour market shifts.***

trainees need a basic educational level to accept technical and vocational training.

## 2.3 Welfare-to-work programs

Legislators from across the political spectrum are feeling pressured to resolve the problem of chronic dependency on social assistance. Welfare-to-work programs are being instituted by governments with the objective of reducing welfare dependency and eliminating disincentives to work.

These programs usually require that participants receiving social assistance participate in job search assistance, workfare (unpaid or community service), or employment and training. Programs are often targeted to single parents. In urban areas, this includes many Aboriginal participants, as is the case with Manitoba's Taking Charge! program.

Studies in the United States show that a modest increase in net income did not encourage many participants to leave welfare. The JOBS, GAIN program (Greater Avenues for Independence) and Project Independence focussed on short-term upgrading to "jump-start" the back-to-work process. Earnings were too small and not commensurate to welfare. One recent study by O'Neill (1997) on the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) states,

*There is no evidence that any of the large number of education, employment and training programs that have been offered or mandated for AFDC clients since 1967 have had a significant impact on the duration of time spent on welfare.*

The literature also notes that partnerships between employers and training service providers often may be used as a process to secure a pool of low-wage workers. In addition, Robertson (1995) notes that wage subsidies offered without training are short-sighted and do not promote long-term employability.

Pressure on legislators to combat chronic welfare has led to strong measures in the United States, such as the recent legislation introducing a three-year limit to welfare. This signals a growing public sentiment that long-term welfare use is unacceptable. The attenuation of welfare rights has also been implemented in Canada, but less severely. Most provinces do require those on assistance, including Aboriginal clients living off-reserve, to participate in job training or other forms of interventions. Failure to comply may result in reduced benefits. Most observers expect these measures to be further tightened over the next few years. The important implication is for Aboriginals living off-reserve, as provincial income assistance is likely to become less available to them in the future.

***Minimal increases in earnings have not provided sufficient incentive to reduce overall dependency.***

***Governments are growing weary of chronic welfare dependency and are taking severe actions in the hope of reducing it.***

On-reserve social assistance recipients may be less affected, as they fall under federal jurisdiction. However, even at this level, welfare-to-work programs are being examined. Little research has been completed in Canada on the impacts of welfare reform. Certainly, the interaction of provincial income assistance and federal (DIAND) social assistance to Aboriginal communities is a crucial and not well understood issue. This is especially true in the Prairie provinces where significant migration exists between rural communities and large urban centres.

Aboriginal communities are also aware of the high social and personal costs of chronic income assistance. Some Aboriginal organizations in urban settings noted that they want to work more closely with provincial governments to reduce the problem. Key informants also suggested that some of the funding for social assistance on reserve might be diverted by the community to support individuals in training programs to reduce long-term dependency.

## **2.4 School-to-work transition**

School-to-work transition programs are designed to bridge formal education with the workplace. Programs include job preparation activities (résumé writing), work placements in business settings through cooperative education programs, and summer student programs. They link vocational and occupational training to the regular curriculum. Studies show that high school students, especially young males, who drop out do so because there is little connection between academic education and occupational preparation.

The *Lessons Learned: Effectiveness of Employment-Related Programs for Youth* (HRDC, 1997) indicates that it is difficult to assess the employment results and earnings effects of school-to-work transition programs. Other Canadian studies indicate that students who received job-related training in school were more likely to continue investing in job-related education once employed.

The *Interim Evaluation of the DIAND Youth Strategy* (Prairie Research Associates, 1997) found that First Nation and Inuit communities are recognizing the importance of these programs. The study identified several successful communities that had a well-defined, in-class curriculum and reflected provincial education standards. These communities were also successful in recruiting a large pool of employers on and off reserve to place their students. These programs are relatively new and it is too early to assess the results. However, students and educators in the study suggested the programs build self-esteem and encourage youth to stay in school, thereby increasing their chances of long-term employability.

***School-to-work transition programs link employment and training to education.***

***Students participating in these programs are more likely to invest in job-related education once employed.***

***With a large young population vital to its future, Aboriginal communities have recognized the importance of these programs and their link to employability.***

In Canada, the school-to-work programs may address some of the criticisms levelled against training and welfare-to-work programs by connecting secondary education to employment and post-secondary education. In a few select cases, this linkage between education and vocational/occupational training exists at the Aboriginal government level. For example, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) is responsible for a community college and a training institute. In addition, FSIN has introduced a school-to-work transition program into some of its communities. This is just one example of school-to-work programming across Canada because most Aboriginal education and training institutions are still in the early development stages.

*Continued  
development of  
Aboriginal school  
systems is  
important.*

## **2.5 Summary of the supply side interventions**

For the most part, programs offered to economically disadvantaged persons have focussed on shorter term interventions aimed at “kick-starting” a person’s career. The evidence shows that these programs have had only modest success. Often, the educational deficits of those on social assistance are profound, and the skills training only allows participants to access low wage and temporary jobs. Many are forced back to assistance when this type of employment ends. This situation applies to Aboriginal people in Canadian urban centres and those living on and off reserves throughout Canada.

The research clearly shows that intensive academic training, such as that offered by Jobs Corps — training that is linked to employment, school-to-work transitions, and training directed at preventing premature school drop out — are the most promising approaches. Increasingly, these initiatives are being linked to community economic development.

Finally, the literature shows that those who are seriously disadvantaged require a sustained and intensive series of interventions. Most Aboriginal communities will not benefit from replicating short-term interventions that have proved inadequate.





### ***3. Lessons learned from economic development policies, programs and services***

One clear lesson emerges from the last 30 years of training — without a job, training does not matter. Programs may place individuals in short-term employment positions, but this is not the same as long-term sustainable employment. Those who are chronically on social assistance find it very difficult to obtain secure employment that matches their skills. This situation applies to many of Canada’s Aboriginal people.

***Without a supply of jobs, training makes little sense for the economically disadvantaged.***

Simultaneously, there is an awareness that conventional skills upgrading and training for those on low incomes must be complemented by a broad program of economic development at the regional and community levels.

Evidence of success in stimulating local economies and creating business and employment growth has encouraged many to try to identify these contributing factors. A message of optimism basically emerges from the community economic development literature and especially from case studies of Aboriginal economic development. Canada’s Aboriginal communities do understand the factors that lead to increased economic activity and can replicate the conditions needed to achieve growth. Models of successful Aboriginal Development do exist in Canada, and each one recognizes that each community is different.

To understand these lessons, it is important to explore several basic issues relating to:

- how the term “community” applies to Canada’s diverse Aboriginal communities
- what we mean by economic — and especially local economic — development
- what Canada’s experience has been with regional economic development
- how the concept of “entrepreneurial community” meshes with techniques that successful Aboriginal communities are employing in Canada and the United States
- finally, what is meant by the term “capacity building.”

### 3.1 Overview of regional economic development policy in Canada

Canada's regional economic policy starts with a basic assumption that can be traced from the nation's inception. Historically, the federal government assumed the role of binding the nation together through a national economic policy. The national railway was the most tangible expression of an infrastructure investment designed to link the country.

In the post-World War II era, increasing awareness of regional disparity in Canada was captured in a process of fiscal federalism. This policy argued that all Canadians should have equal access to health care, education, and welfare no matter where they live. Intervention in the regional disparities culminated in the early 1970s, with the creation of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE). This single federal department addressed regional disparities in income and employment through a variety of infrastructure and business development programs designed to allow Canadians to make a living wherever they reside. This regional policy activism stands in contrast to both present and past U.S. policy that encourages residents to migrate to other regions in search of a better lifestyle. In Canada, the public jointly bears the costs of regional disparities in growth; in the United States these costs are borne by the individual household.

With the dissolution of DREE, the federal government changed its regional development policy. Individual departments were expected to maintain a regional development focus. Federal agencies, such as the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Western Economic Diversification (WED), design and deliver regional programming.

Because of recession and fiscal restraint, the federal government has devolved much of its responsibility for regional economic development to other levels of government, non-governmental organizations and Aboriginal organizations. It maintains federal regional development agencies, such as Western Diversification, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions (CED).<sup>5</sup> Even these agencies have recently lost much of their capacity to directly promote economic activity. For example, most no longer offer loans, but deliver various business development programs and support businesses in their regions. They also "leverage" investment by underwriting the risk of private sector loans. The trend has been a shift to decentralized local community economic development and away from a regional economic policy coordinated at the national level.

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<sup>5</sup> This organization was previously known as the Federal Office for Regional Development in Quebec (FORD-Q).

### 3.2 The notion of what is meant by “community” is broad

Common definitions of community usually focus on a delimited, although not necessarily spatial, group. Community members have a strong sense of loyalty and obligation to the group. Although many people tend to view the Aboriginal population as a homogenous society within a social entity, this is not the case. Many ethnic and language groups exist within their “communities.” This diversity is critically important for how different communities define leadership and governance style. It also influences how programs are designed and delivered.

While the definition of community will depend on the people who consider themselves a part of that entity, four broad types of communities appear to comprise the cultural/ethnic lines that demonstrate the diversity among Aboriginal people.

- *Unconnected or isolated communities* are removed from other centres such as Kitikmeot or the James Bay Cree and Inuit. For example, a northern community may rely on trapping, hunting, fishing, and other natural resources and may have little connection to the modern technological economy. At the same time, remote communities may be able to develop eco-tourism and hunting/fishing resorts.
- *Networks of communities* are able to exploit a common location point, transport system, or regional resources. For example, a First Nation located in southern Manitoba may participate in agri-business. Another may own land at the intersection of roads and be able to create service facilities for the highway traveller. Often, these networks operate within the economic shadow of a metropolis.
- *Urban centres* include Aboriginal people living in cities. Urban communities are comprised of many sub-groups from various locations and ethnic groups. Aboriginal groups in Regina or Winnipeg may select a mainstream development strategy, such as training their young people for employment in a telecommunications call centre or aerospace industry. This represents an economic development strategy designed to raise the capacity of individuals, thereby raising the group’s capacity. It also represents a community development strategy that is not dependent on ownership of land or resources. Worldwide, urban economic development depends on the ownership of knowledge; the ownership of land is secondary.
- *Distinct groups* are set apart by a number of factors, such as culture, language, location, land and tradition. Examples include the Inuit in the

*Different notions of community exist.*

*It is the community that influences the economic development approach best suited to meet its needs.*

eastern Arctic or the Nisga'a of British Columbia, who have negotiated a new territory with control over development and the ability to enter into agreements with other levels of government.

### **3.2.1 Control over resources is essential for local economic development**

***For Aboriginal communities, control over land and resources is a precondition for growth.***

Many American studies on self-governance, and to a lesser extent the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP, 1996), have confirmed that resource control is essential for local economic development. While the notion of “community” need not include a spatial or geographic dimension, this is often not useful for Aboriginal development. Control over land is common to all the success stories of Aboriginal community development *outside urban areas* in Canada and the United States. A land base allows a community to develop resources and raise the capital used to create employment. In Canada, this is achieved through treaty land entitlements, specific and comprehensive land claims, and access to natural resources. In Australia, the federal government is purchasing land for its Aboriginal populations in an effort to compensate for their lack of land base.

The notion of a geographic community is also important in establishing property rights. These rights are basic for a community to enter into contracts with other governments and non-Aboriginal organizations.

In Canada, many legal implications and political considerations exist to establish and settle these rights. These are beyond the scope of this Lessons Learned study. The important idea is that resources (land or natural) are essential for Aboriginal economic development.

Urban Aboriginal development also appears predicated on the control of land. The creation of urban reserves represents a projection of the traditional reserve into an established urban area with pre-existing land ownership rights. In reality, land ownership is not as necessary for economic development in urban areas as are knowledge and expertise. For example, most of the wealth created on the Internet requires no land or equipment ownership — all of that can be leased. The key is to control the knowledge.

### **3.2.2 Success will be uneven**

***As with all communities, some Aboriginal communities will grow, others will not.***

The community economic development literature identifies the factors associated with economic growth (such as access to resources, leadership, infrastructure investment, etc.) However, having this information will not automatically guarantee that the knowledge exists in Aboriginal and comparable communities to change the situation. One should expect to

witness the same general patterns of success and failure within the set of Aboriginal communities as is seen generally.

As economist Thomas Courchene notes, regional policy may interrupt the flow of investment and capital away from poor areas to communities with more economic opportunity. In fact, he argues that regional economic policy actually makes matters worse, and impedes the free flow of resources to areas where their economic contribution is higher. In the extreme, this policy condemns impoverished communities to decline and forces migration to areas of higher economic growth. Courchene reminds us that at certain low levels of resource endowment and extreme remoteness, no amount of entrepreneurship or government money can reverse the community's economic misfortune. In general, however, economic growth favours those areas that have natural resources or access to large markets.

At the same time, new technology can redefine what constitutes a resource. A decade ago, who would have thought that natural scenery and abundant wildlife could support more than fishing or trapping? Now eco-tourism flourishes and can generate significant wealth for a few remote communities. An entrepreneurial attitude, imagination, and choosing the right activity can overcome a poor resource base and remote location. Care is needed, since picking those activities that will be winners is always difficult. The general rule will hold. Few remote First Nations communities will grow, for the same reason that few remote communities in general will experience significant increased economic activity.

In theory, increased communications and high technologies allow communities to prosper away from large urban centres. For example, a range of satellite communities has grown up around Seattle in response to the growth of Boeing and Microsoft. High technology spinoffs can be located well away from the centre, provided that communications links exist. This does not apply to most remote communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. First, these communities do not have the educational levels to support high technology ventures. Second, the communication links to these remote communities are usually poor.

Therefore, it is most likely that proximity to markets and/or control over resources will be a key requirement for Aboriginal community development. A critically important, but exceedingly difficult, task will be to select those communities where training and investment funds will *not* flow. Aboriginal leadership and government planners will find this a challenging problem.

### 3.3 Key factors in community economic development

In his appraisal of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion (DREE), McGee (1992) identified several necessary conditions for regional economic development:

- Local leadership is essential in the form of business and community leaders, and the presence of industry associations willing to take the lead to promote growth.
- The degree of delegated authority must be proportional to the capacity of the community. Community structures must be capable of managing the programming offered by national and regional levels of government.
- A momentum exists in regional development, or in other words, *success breeds success*. Similarly, stagnation creates an inertia that is difficult to overcome.
- Communities with few resources or location disadvantages have not done well.

***Competition exists among communities to attract jobs and revenues that lead to economic development. Each one will use techniques most suited to their circumstances.***

A predominant fact about community economic development is the extreme competition that exists among many regions, provinces, states, cities and communities to attract jobs and revenues. In the modern information economy, wealth is concentrated increasingly in the city where most markets are located. Regions are engaged in a serious competition with each other to attract major corporations. Few cities/provinces do not offer financial incentives to attract employers and jobs.

Three general community development programs are practised in mainstream communities:

- *Chasing/Acquisition* occurs where the community reaches out to attract development and entice employers to relocate. The conventional approach to local economic development in non-Aboriginal communities often uses fiscal incentives to reduce the costs of the relocating company. For example, the telecommunications industry of New Brunswick is widely thought to have resulted from the use of very aggressive tax reductions offered by the provincial government. A provincial government will often offer incentives, such as low interest loans or tax relief, in exchange for an employment commitment.

- *Self Improvement* policies that are designed to make a community more cost effective and competitive. Effectively organizing public services, investing in quality of life, and reducing taxes are examples of this approach. Communities also focus on promoting the growth of their own firms.
- *Knowledge/Information Technology* applies recent advances in management theory to local and community development. Re-engineering, changing leadership styles, and experimenting with various forms of community consensus building are examples of these approaches.

Most communities rely on the first set of techniques, and a few have experimented with the second. Only a few visionaries dabble in the third domain.

In fact, Aboriginal community economic development has little opportunity to use the first technique. Most First Nations, Metis, or Inuit communities cannot give tax breaks to a chemical company. There are exceptions: for example, the Metis Settlements of Alberta have the ability to raise the mill rate. However, successful Aboriginal communities have found ways to attract business. For example, Muskeg Lake Band exchanged a portion of their original reserve for land in an industrial area of Saskatoon to create an urban reserve. The community has since continued to obtain more land through the Treaty Land Entitlement process. By controlling this land, they have been able to engage in joint ventures with non-Aboriginal business.

Two other important issues are raised. The concept of “regions” is broad and includes locales throughout Canada’s provinces and territories where Aboriginal communities are located, as well as those located in southern Ontario. This raises the issue of real development versus a transfer of temporary resources from one region to another. Real development will occur only where there is a growth in the local economy that does not occur at the expense of other regions.

### **3.4 Some specific development strategies may be applied to Aboriginal community development — with care**

While self-governance and leadership are key, several mainstream development policies may be applied to the Aboriginal setting.

### **3.4.1 Using the public sector is a good short-term strategy, but may cause dependency**

Government policy is often based on the notion that redistribution of resources from the centre to regions can induce growth. The public sector itself has been used as a way to develop regional economies. For example, through decentralization, the federal government has opened up defence bases in small towns and has relocated clerical jobs to rural areas. Citizenship processing is now being done in Nova Scotia and a regional tax centre has been located in Winnipeg.

These initiatives do create short-term employment, but as technology progresses and government programs change, the jobs are susceptible to change. Regional tax centres employ a fraction of the workers they did five years ago because electronic filing has reduced the paper burden. Many bands use a commercial centre as a main element of their development plan and rent space to the province or local government. Again, a reversal in public sector processes can result in vacancies and revenue loss. Sometimes downsizing or closing the opportunities reveals dependency that can leave a community worse off. Certainly, the key lesson is that viable growth is always diversified. Also, it is important to accept that individual projects may have a limited lifespan and that value exists in shorter-term projects that employ people. The key idea is that basing a development strategy around a single project, no matter how large, entails risk. The potential for upheaval exists if the venture fails.

### **3.4.2 Combining economic development and human resources development is effective**

Business development that includes a human resource component can be useful for economic development. Industry Canada's Student Connection Program (SCP) and Western Economic Diversification's International Training Personnel Program (ITPP) are examples. Here, the objective is to assist business through wage subsidies to offer a specific business service.

These are more than wage-subsidy programs. The student/trainees are engaged in activities of strategic value to the business. In the case of the Student Connection Program, students assist businesses to become Internet savvy. While students are training businesses to get on the "Net," they are acquiring valuable skills in client service and business management. Similarly, while International Training Personnel Program students help businesses develop an international marketing program, they are expected to become part of the community knowledge base in international marketing.



### **3.4.3 Networks in community development**

Recent research by Harrison and Weiss (1988) has confirmed the importance of “intersecting social and business networks.” Their research shows that communities with a well-developed network of businesses are more likely to generate job leads for prospective employees. An important form of training is learning how to navigate these networks. Usually people with poor education also have poor access to these information networks. As well, social programs with a client-oriented and economic focus, which connect job seekers and employers, are advantageous. The old adage, “It is not just what you know, but who you know,” is strongly confirmed in this research. Community economic development programs should consciously create these networks as a strategy to assist those with low skills.

## **3.5 The entrepreneurial community**

Recent literature in community economic development has identified exemplary cases.<sup>6</sup> These communities seem to have created unique conditions for fostering economic development even where few apparent natural advantages exist.

The term “entrepreneurial community” refers to several distinct community attributes including:

- An entrepreneurial attitude or imagination visualizes how existing resources may be used to create new economic opportunity. Eco-tourism in remote areas is an excellent example.
- A comprehensive perspective exists where the leadership is able to integrate a broad plan to attract and retain business consistent with community values.
- Targeting ensures that development is consistent with existing activity.
- Effective partnerships between private and public interests are fundamental.

In the successful Aboriginal communities identified in the literature, a clear thread can be seen in terms of a leadership that understands how to create a strong climate for entrepreneurship. Also evident is a pragmatism in developing relationships with non-Aboriginal organizations and other levels of government. The notion of success was defined differently in each case examined. Some focussed on the outcomes of training, but most

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<sup>6</sup> These cases are referenced in the Literature Review.

examined the extent to which viable businesses had been established and the numbers of new jobs created within the community. As a review of the lessons learned, this study relies on the existing documentation from diverse sources and could include a follow-up to verify the continued success of these communities. Therefore, we have no way of concluding what the longer term success factors will be.

### **3.5.1 Creating entrepreneurship is not the same thing as self-employment**

*There is a difference between programs for self-employed workers and entrepreneurs.*

Many misunderstandings exist about entrepreneurship, none more pervasive than that it can simply be taught to any individual. Entrepreneurship is based on business savvy, capital, and management of employees. Programs that fund individuals with no previous business skills will not necessarily create entrepreneurs. Many training programs extol the virtues of entrepreneurship. Private training contractors offer workshops, and university MBA programs provide credit courses, to teach students the essence of entrepreneurship. Based on past results, these courses will probably not generate many entrepreneurs. More important than the number of entrepreneurs is their impact in terms of jobs created and revenue generated.

Many entrepreneurship courses simply teach basic business skills such as accounting, human resource management, marketing, etc. These are always valuable and will be needed by all Aboriginal communities.

Entrepreneurs identify business opportunities, mobilize personal and other resources. They take risks and have the imagination to visualize how a new product/service will fill a need. Entrepreneurs are business leaders who hire employees and create jobs. We should draw a distinction between an individual who becomes self-employed as a carpenter and someone who borrows money to create a construction company that will have employees.

In addition, it may be imprudent to provide economically disadvantaged persons who have little experience or education with a small capital fund to set up a business. Such participants usually do not possess business skills before entering such programs, have no access to further capital, and often have extreme demands on any savings they may muster.

The entrepreneurship that is evident in the business creation within successful Aboriginal communities bears no resemblance to the workshop training so popular nowadays. The literature on entrepreneurship and the case studies on successful Aboriginal communities clearly show that entrepreneurial activity emerges when the conditions are right. Effective leadership, sound institutions with integrity, and strong business relations

are needed to create these conditions. Without them, management training — no matter how extensive — will not create new businesses to employ people.

### ***3.5.2 Business support programs based on investment principles are more effective***

Many programs in Canada, Australia and the United States provide support to business through grants and project funds. These types of supports allow businesses to set up shop, expand their markets, or set up necessary infrastructure to attract investment or clientele. Studies in Canada found that funding to support business based on financial and market analysis produced better success rates than past programs, which only had the simple objective of creating jobs. Industry Canada evaluations of Aboriginal Business Canada and their components of the Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy (CAEDS) (Goss Gilroy, 1996) reveal that many assisted businesses retained the same jobs over several years. The programs focussed on funding business sustainability as opposed to simple job creation measures, as had been done in the past. In contrast, evaluations of the Economic Development Agreements between Canada and the territorial governments indicate that project-based business development in the absence of financial and market analysis produces unstable short-term job creation.

It is important to reiterate that any prospective entrepreneur needs key information, such as knowing how to run a business. Essentials for starting a business include:

- Assistance with market research;
- Awareness of regulations;
- Management skills.

Courses in these areas are valuable, but are not the same as trying to teach an individual to be an entrepreneur.

### ***3.5.3 Entrepreneurship flourishes when key conditions are created by the community***

Effective community leaders understand that entrepreneurs flourish when community governments provide the proper environment. As the community development literature shows, this means creating an environment where risk can be managed. This is quite different than creating a risk-free environment, since in those settings, the return is so low, no entrepreneur would be interested.

The Mikisew community in Alberta has stressed exemplary financial management to ensure that government and private non-Aboriginal business have confidence in any business relationship. As an example of this farsightedness, they placed the proceeds of a land claim settlement in a private financial institution, rather than in the band's consolidated revenue. Other bands have attracted non-governmental equity financing for their projects. These examples illustrate environments where investment can flourish because risks are managed. Such contexts are likely to encourage entrepreneurship.

While there is little written on Aboriginal urban organizations and their success, interviews and comments from representatives of Aboriginal organizations reveal that many friendship centres own their buildings, employ many staff, and are involved in numerous business ventures. For example, the Prince George Development Corporation is a major landlord in its city.

### ***3.5.4 Partnerships are important to developing economic opportunities in the entrepreneurial communities***

Successful business development initiatives are often joint ventures between the private sector and Aboriginal communities, however defined, and whatever the economic strategy. Numerous examples exist of successful communities and best practices across Canada and the United States. To illustrate, here are three examples from Canada:

- Mikisew in Alberta entered into a workforce agreement with Syncrude;
- Nine northern First Nations are working with Manitoba Hydro to develop electrical power in the province;
- The development corporation of Skidgate in British Columbia engaged financial lending institutions and other investors to develop a commercial centre.

### 3.6 Key lessons in Aboriginal community economic development

Cornell and Kalt (1998) are at the forefront of understanding Aboriginal economic development in the United States and identify four conditions that:

*taken together, constitute a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for real economic development to take place on a reservation: (1) cultural match with formal institutions, (2) a formal governmental system that provides for a separation of powers, (3) a willingness to specialize and trade “internationally” with off-reservation economies and (4) a modest endowment of either labor or natural resources.*

Canada has notable community success stories. For example, in Skidgate, British Columbia, the band council created an independent development corporation, which created commercial/retail facilities, purchased Crown land to expand the community land, and cooperated with non-Aboriginal businesses and off-reserve organizations to create new educational and medical facilities.

Cornell (1997) notes that three preconditions exist for economic development on reservations:

- First, is “*de facto*” sovereignty in the sense that Aboriginals have genuine control over their own affairs. Aboriginal communities have to be responsible for the design, delivery, and control, of delivery mechanisms for their own interest, and that of their tribal members. Government agencies have different mandates and are external from the community to be able to do this effectively. Only by aligning the consequences of decision with the decision maker will choices become most informed.

Cornell (1997) believes that sound governance precedes economic development, not the reverse. Further, self-government is needed before any economic policies and programs should proceed.

*The change came when, first, the federal government undertook to respect the tribal practice of sovereignty and second, when tribes asserted the powers they supposedly possessed. (Cornell, 1997)*

Cornell (1997) stresses that self-governance does not mean the exclusion of other governments. Every sovereign government needs to have relationships with other orders of government. An effective system

***Aboriginal communities need to:***

- ***align their own culture with governance***
- ***separate business and politics***
- ***trade externally***
- ***have availability and control of labour or natural resources.***

of Aboriginal self-governance needs to relate to other governments and engage in the normal intergovernmental relations required to arrange economic and social services.

- Having the rights and powers inherent in self-governance is not enough. Institutions, such as stability in rule enforcement, as well as processes to adjudicate disputes and enforce contracts appropriate to the bands' situation are also needed. This implies that:
  - Politics must be separated from the process of managing business. The long-term planning is vested in the governing councils, but business with independent (but accountable) boards manage the operations of the firm. The band council deals with longer term planning, but leaves the conduct of the business to the board of directors.
  - The adjudication of disputes is separated from the political process. If the courts and tribunal process are controlled politically, risk-taking is discouraged and joint ventures with outside firms will be constrained.
  - Aboriginal community development needs an effective, professional public service.
  - Stability in funding and developing programs for the longer term are important. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and participants in the Lessons Learned study noted the importance of stable funding over several years. This allows for planning, implementation, and making changes learned from new experiences.
- Cornell (1997) argues that institutions of self-government need to “resonate” with the cultural traditions of the individual band. In some cases, this may mean a hierarchical political process, such as that adopted by the White Mountain Apache Tribe, or a less centralized one such as that of the Sioux of the Pine Ridge reservation. Each band needs to develop its own effective self-governance that wins the allegiance of the people governed.

***Creative and effective leadership is the key to economic development. This requires self-governance.***

The case studies cited in the literature review from Canada illustrate these principles very well. Progressive band leadership and the creation of independent economic development corporations are two vital ingredients. Also important is attention to financial management with a view to creating high levels of confidence with key external organizations, such as private lenders and governments.

### **3.7 Separation of politics and business underpins community development**

The case studies as well as research on the key factors of community economic development demonstrate that politics and business must be separate. This is not just a lesson for Aboriginal community development, but a consistent theme for all communities. When community decisions reflect the interests of a small group, the risk associated with business rises sharply and chokes entrepreneurship and economic growth.

The study found successful Aboriginal communities separated business from politics by creating a development corporation with an independent board of directors. In the evaluation of the Industry Canada component of CAEDS (Goss Gilroy, 1996), those privately held businesses were reported to perform better than band-owned ones. In addition, Aboriginal representatives working with native friendship centres also reported that those organizations work separate from political groups.

### **3.8 Capacity building in the fullest sense**

Over the last five or six years, increased use of the term “capacity building” signals the intent of the Aboriginal leadership and the federal government. Within the context of the Strategic Initiatives and the RBAs, “capacity building” appears to mean the ability to design and administer the training agreements and develop a well-functioning labour training process. Our interviews with key informants show that the term is interpreted widely by Aboriginal and departmental managers.

*The term “capacity building” is broad and includes a range of administrative, business and bureaucratic skills.*

The academic literature does not mention the term “capacity building.” The term is more frequently used in recent Canadian evaluation studies and by key informants interviewed. The notion of capacity building is broad and means many things to different people. Those we interviewed generally use the term to refer to increasing the capacity of the community, as opposed to a few individuals. The concept may be defined as including the following elements:

- creating infrastructure (physical and human);
- designing political processes that focus on the long-term planning for the community;
- nurturing an effective and progressive business community;
- developing business services (legal, research and accountancy) to support the external relationships with off-reserve businesses and governments;

- creating a functional “civil service”;
- fostering a community consensus on growth that is consistent with the historical values of the community.

Clearly, Skidgate, Mikisew, and Muskeg Lake bands, just to name a few, possess these attributes and understand how to create effective and self-sustaining economic development.

Another important factor influencing capacity building is cultural heritage and traditions that are often naturally incorporated into a community’s vision. Community leaders can use culture as a strategic tool to implement this vision and provide feedback to business leaders and boards of directors of development corporations.

### **3.9 Flexible funding arrangements**

*Flexible funding provisions are an effective tool to allow well-managed communities to mobilize resources for development.*

Funding arrangements have considerable potential to support economic development. A flexible arrangement allows community organizations to allocate funding to its own priorities without fitting the spending into preconceived categories. Most First Nations have used Alternate Funding Arrangements (AFAs) to design and implement appropriate employment and economic interventions. HRDC has recently introduced a similar multi-year instrument called the Aboriginal Flexible Funding Agreement (AFFA).

DIAND’s recently conducted review of its evaluations dealing with funding arrangements (DIAND, 1996) over the past decade identified several important lessons:

- local flexibility over fund allocation increases as reliance on contribution agreements decreases;
- ministerial accountability decreases;
- a simple funding process with less red tape reduces workload for government and Aboriginal administrators;
- recent arrangements have evolved and have had a positive effect on band management capacity;
- the quality and quantity of services also increases with more flexible arrangements.

The use of flexible funding arrangements is similar to the business planning models being developed by many governments in Canada.



Increased delegated authority and multi-year plans allow departments flexibility in allocating funds among categories of spending. This is believed to increase efficiency and effectiveness in governance.

Flexible funding arrangements will permit Aboriginal communities to be more accountable to their membership. Ministerial accountability can also be strengthened if the departments work in partnership with government funders. The new partnerships require accountability to all parties involved.



## ***4. General lessons learned***

Many important themes related to policies, programs and services that have both an individual and community focus arise from the Lessons Learned study.

### **4.1 Policy design needs to be coordinated**

Economic development policy in Canada was connected to employment policy through DREE and initiatives such as Community Futures. Since then, there has been a policy shift separating the two. Human Resources Development is not closely linked to regional development agencies. This is especially important because employment and economic development do not occur in isolation.

Shifts in mandates have led to gaps in policy design within and across departments. Key informants believe that there is a need for federal and provincial departments to work together with Aboriginal organizations. This will ensure that Aboriginal labour market and employment policies and programs reflect the holistic approach to community development that has proven to be more effective.

### **4.2 Program delivery is dependent on capacity and skills**

No one model of program delivery stands out above others. Rather, common features influence effective delivery. Studies of initiatives such as CAEDS, the employment and labour programs and the mainstream community economic development literature, identify common factors for success:

- leadership and management skills;
- strong administrative institutions;
- reporting mechanisms to monitor results and make innovations;
- access to other funds and resources;
- flexibility to adapt programs and allocate funds accordingly;
- separation of politics and the institution of business development.

Key informants noted that successful communities usually have existing infrastructures and skill sets that allow them to adapt to continually changing programs. In effect, stability exists to manage future growth. Many Aboriginal communities are just developing such institutions and procedures and it will take several years to achieve the structures that foster economic development and respond to government accountability requirements.

### **4.3 Partnerships are key to employment and economic opportunities**

Partnerships among governments, Aboriginal people and the private sector create economic opportunities that are important for job creation. The pattern of economic/business development determines the set of education and training skills needed. Two lessons emerge. First, economic development and employment training are tightly related. Second, partnerships are instrumental in creating both. The nature of the partnerships between Aboriginal organizations and government have become especially important now that provinces have assumed responsibility for training. The Aboriginal leaders we interviewed expressed concern that provinces do not have protocols for dealing with their communities and that they may apply partnership frameworks that are not compatible with Aboriginal perspectives, needs and development goals.

### **4.4 Funding arrangements have become more flexible**

Funding arrangements, such as HRDC's Aboriginal Flexible Funding Arrangement, guide and help manage program delivery. Terms and conditions that are easily adapted allow Aboriginal organizations to meet community needs. Studies of past funding arrangements reveal that these agreements increase "capacity" as organizations learn by doing for themselves. However, creative funding mechanisms alone are not enough. Several studies of funding arrangements demonstrate that often communities do not use the flexibility accorded them. Experience and strong institutions are also required.

### **4.5 Accountability will be enhanced through results reporting**

Accountability mechanisms exist at various levels of government. The federal government needs to have these in place to demonstrate value for money and be able to document program results. Aboriginal communities tend to focus on community needs and training. Past evaluation studies in Canada have not tracked participants beyond short-term employment and placement, while American studies make extensive use of longitudinal data. Key informants believe "results-based reporting" is important to measuring success, as is documenting the processes and steps taken to get there.

### **4.6 Capacity building**

Communities with strong institutions, a broad base of skills, and a clear separation of administrative and political organizations tend to be

successful in economic and employment development, as well as in other areas such as health care, social policy and education. Governments often approach the development of capacity building as something that can be done in isolation to motivate community economic development. Activities such as training, workshops, job exchanges and information sharing will help Aboriginal organizations. American and Canadian studies, most recently the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996), show that governance at the community level is the key factor for economic and employment development. The central and fundamental lesson is that governments alone cannot push capacity. A community is best able to develop its own vision based on its own principles and cultural traditions. Out of this will flow the sound governance that all agree is the foundation for Aboriginal economic development and prosperity.



## ***5. Areas for future research***

In reviewing studies and discussions with Aboriginal organizations, we identified some key lessons learned and areas where further research may be warranted.

### **5.1 Information on the needs of Canada's urban Aboriginal people is not available**

A central lesson from the study is that little information in Canada exists about training and community development policies and programs directed to urban Aboriginal populations. Representatives from Aboriginal organizations believe this to be an important issue and noted that while up to 70 percent of the Aboriginal population lives in urban centres, they receive a small portion of funding.

A need exists to define the concept of community development and to identify training needs that are unique. The question is simple. Is different programming needed to encourage economic independence among urban Aboriginal populations, compared to non-Aboriginal populations? For example, the representatives we interviewed noted that several First Nation communities provide services to the community members in urban areas. How do these services work together? Are there gaps or duplicate services? Are there differences in content or delivery that increase success rates among urban Aboriginal populations? With the increased funding directed at training Aboriginal populations in Canada's cities, evaluation is urgently needed to shed light on these questions.

### **5.2 Evaluation of Aboriginal programming needs to be expanded**

Evaluation of programs directed to Aboriginal populations needs to cover much of the same ground as programming directed to non-Aboriginal populations.

- Longer term follow-up studies are needed to measure program success for both training and identifying the factors leading to business success.
- While outcome evaluation is important to identify programs that are effective, equally if not more important are formative evaluations that assist organizations to improve design and delivery. Also, it is important to use evaluation processes that examine the root causes of success and failure. It is not enough to simply record that someone failed to secure employment after training; it is essential to understand why by

understanding how his or her individual needs were not addressed in the program.

- One respondent suggested that baseline studies of current businesses (including employment) are needed to identify the current situation and to track economic development.
- Services to support the special needs of Aboriginal students are urgently needed. For example, many students with learning disabilities are dismissed as “slow” in high school, then are given training when they become adults. Earlier intervention would slow the drop-out rate because students with special needs would be identified.

### **5.3 A need exists to examine partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations**

There was considerable response to various cases of success highlighted in the report. Aboriginal representatives identified many situations of working partnerships between different levels of government and among Aboriginal organizations. Urban Aboriginal organizations were more likely to highlight these partnerships, as they do not fall under federal jurisdiction. They interact with municipal, provincial and private organizations for funding and to build upon existing programs. Partnerships are also important to First Nation Communities that want to develop their local economies and expand trade to distant markets.

### **5.4 Concerns exist about HRDC’s regional bilateral agreements**

In the study process, Aboriginal organizations and HRDC departmental staff identified several problems with regional bilateral agreements. Aboriginal organizations, especially Metis and urban organizations, stated that under Pathways for Success, Aboriginal organizations each had a voice on the National Aboriginal Management Board and co-managed programs with the federal government. They believe that, through RBAs, the federal government has decentralized the process, and now deals with each individual Aboriginal community, thereby undermining information sharing, feedback processes and capacity building. We have provided these comments to HRDC, which is currently in the process of evaluating the regional bilateral agreements.



## 6. *Summary*

During the past three decades, government and Aboriginal efforts to bolster employment and economic development have evolved.

Aboriginal-specific programming was introduced in the 1980s, and during the past decade, Aboriginal control over these programs has increased. Prior to this, most Aboriginal people, especially those in urban areas, relied on mainstream programming. There is little literature on Aboriginal programs and policies, but we can apply lessons learned from the mainstream literature available.

For the most part, programs offered to economically disadvantaged persons have focussed on shorter-term interventions aimed at “kick-starting” a person’s career. The evidence suggests that these programs have had only modest success. Often, the educational deficits of persons on social assistance are profound, and the skills training only allows participants to access temporary jobs that pay low wages.

The research demonstrates that the most promising approaches are intensive academic training plus training linked to employment, school-to-work transitions, and training directed at preventing premature school drop out. Increasingly, these initiatives are being embedded within community economic development programs.

The literature indicates that those who are seriously disadvantaged require a sustained and intensive series of interventions. Most Aboriginal communities will not benefit from replicating short-term interventions that have proved inadequate with non-Aboriginal populations.

Community development is essential to the economic advancement of Aboriginal people. The creation of institutions that can encourage entrepreneurship and business management is key to fostering development at the community level. Entrepreneurship cannot be trained, but emerges when individuals and firms can manage risk. Evidence from successful communities, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, shows that political, business and social institutions must be independent. It is also important that businesses within Aboriginal communities be able to effectively partner with non-Aboriginal firms, especially investment firms. Linking human resource development (broadly speaking, this means academic and occupational training) with community development programs has proven to be effective.

Not all communities will succeed. Although imagination and entrepreneurship can overcome a lack of resources and remoteness from markets, the general rule is that control over resources is essential to economic development. Some Aboriginal communities are simply too poor and too remote to expect to become self-reliant in the future. It will be a difficult challenge for Aboriginal leadership and government to decide whether a community can benefit from investment or whether success is unlikely. In the latter instance, initiatives still may be tried, but they will be aimed at achieving other social objectives. Coordination of policy, partnering and flexible funding are all-important aspects of a community development program.

Finally, little research has been done on economic development and prospects for Aboriginal populations in urban areas. Defining “community” is difficult in these settings and most programming does not address the special needs faced by Aboriginal people. Any research needs to focus on long-term outcomes to ensure that we learn key lessons. This applies to Aboriginal communities in and outside urban areas. Also important are formative evaluations to support organizations in improving programming. This is particularly important for basic education, where many Aboriginal children are labelled with learning deficits, not offered special assistance, and then expected as adults to overcome academic deficiencies.

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