ASSESSING THE BUSINESS INFORMATION NEEDS OF ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURS
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

REPORT

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REPORT

Prepared for:
Western Economic Diversification Canada
and the BC Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture

By: Kelly Vodden, Anne Miller and John McBride
With: Jean-Claude Ndungutse, Terry Robertson,
Stephen Ameyaw and Kim Donovan

Simon Fraser University
Community Economic Development Centre

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Western Economic
Diversification Canada

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ministry of Small Business,
Tourism and Culture

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of Aboriginal Entrepreneurs
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Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

In February 2000, Western Economic Diversification, with the British Columbia Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, funded the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University to conduct a study to: "determine the business information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers[1], and to assess the degree to which new business tools are needed, or existing tools can be modified."

The ability to access and utilize business information has become critical for all entrepreneurs in order to operate in an increasingly challenging and competitive business environment. This is equally true for the growing numbers of Aboriginal British Columbians who have chosen self-employment as a route to financial independence and economic revitalization within their communities.

Methodology

An extensive research process, involving eight key phases, was undertaken in the completion of this study. Primary data was collected from over 250 Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers through: informal provider interviews; provider inventory interviews/questionnaires; entrepreneur interviews/questionnaires; provider surveys; entrepreneur focus groups; provider focus groups; provider follow-up interviews. This was supplemented by literature review research, a thorough scan of available programs, tools and services, and ongoing input from an Advisory Committee comprised of service providers. In the end, analysis of the data collected yielded valuable insights into the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC and gaps in the current system for information service delivery. This analysis led to a number of recommendations for improvement.

Findings and Conclusions

The Aboriginal Entrepreneur

BC, along with other Canadian provinces, is experiencing a rapid rate of growth in Aboriginal entrepreneurship. Many of these entrepreneurs are under the age of 30, motivated by a desire for financial independence, seeking new markets (including exports), and operating out of their homes (particularly on-reserve). Many are increasingly responsive to the changes occurring in the economy and in society. BC's Aboriginal entrepreneurs are a diverse group, operating within a wide range of industry sectors, both traditional and non-traditional. Key sectors include fishing, forestry, arts and crafts, retail, construction, tourism and hospitality, and other services (including consulting and professional services).

Through an analysis of the characteristics, situations and challenges of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC, three key points about the context in which Aboriginal entrepreneurs operate were raised, each

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[1] Service providers include the following categories of organizations providing business information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs: federal and provincial departments and agencies, Aboriginal governments, intermediaries, business associations, corporations/private sector, education and training organizations, and associations of service providers.

with implications for the provision of information tools and services. First, Aboriginal entrepreneurs operate within a complex and changing environment, both in the marketplace and in their own communities. Changes of significance include a growing Aboriginal population, movement from rural, on-reserve areas to urban, off-reserve settlements. Levels of health and education, while still well below Canadian averages, are improving. Changes in the legal and political environment have also taken place that have increased access to natural resources, purchasing power and employment opportunities in Aboriginal communities. To respond effectively, providers and entrepreneurs must stay informed of the changing business environment.

Second, there is an urgent need for economic development within Aboriginal communities. While this emphasizes the importance of services that help lead toward economic self-reliance, the current socio-economic conditions in Aboriginal communities are linked with a host of other issues that providers must be aware of and prepared to offer assistance with. These include basic education needs, health and family issues. Providers must take a holistic approach, encompassing these factors, to assisting individuals to meet their personal and business goals.

Third, Aboriginal entrepreneurs face many challenges as they strive to establish and grow their enterprises, including: difficulty accessing capital; geographic and social isolation in rural and on-reserve locations; economic leakage from Aboriginal communities, exacerbated by a growing but still weak private sector; and, finally, lack of acceptance, respect and support in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Additional implications for provision include the importance of information support and assistance in the areas such as financing, marketing, building community support and understanding of culturally related issues.

<u>The Information Needs of Aboriginal Entrepreneurs</u>

The results of this research have identified a number of key information needs, both in the content provided and in the ways business information is dispersed. The most important types of information content for Aboriginal entrepreneurs include: financing options, business planning, information that is specific to Aboriginal business, accounting and financial management, information about government programs, markets and marketing. First Nations taxation is also an important area, along with information on suppliers and distributors, banking, legal and home-based business information.

Entrepreneurs point out that information, accompanied by education and skills training, is required at both the start-up and ongoing operation stages of a business. To address issues of self-confidence and self-esteem, start-up entrepreneurs, and those considering getting into business, often benefit a great deal from learning about case studies of successful Aboriginal entrepreneurs. During on-going operations, respondents wanted information on trends and potential new opportunities. Needs were also identified with regard to skill development, particularly in the areas of marketing, research, financial management, and use of Information Technology tools.

Entrepreneurs noted strong preferences among delivery methods and sources of information, many of them reflecting a fragile sense of confidence, particularly during the initial stages of business development. These individuals preferred to get information in person and/or in seminars, and most often sought out information from familiar "safe" environments at home and in their communities. Print materials are also found to be useful, particularly when used in conjunction with personal assistance and/or a workshop format. Although lagging well behind one-on-one assistance,

seminars and print materials, many showed interest in the Internet as a source of information for the purposes of research, marketing, mentoring and communication.

Currently Available Information Programs, Tools and Services

A wide variety of organizations are involved in providing information support to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in British Columbia. Over 200 were identified for the purposes of this study. These include government agencies and departments, both federal and provincial, and Aboriginal governments, often through Tribal Councils and Economic Development Officers (EDOs). Research results show that intermediaries such as Aboriginal Capital Corporations, Community Futures Development Corporations and Aboriginal Business Development Centres play a central role in the delivery system. Intermediaries often offer services at the local level on behalf of provincial and national organizations and governments. The private sector, along with education and training institutions such as colleges and universities, offers potential for partnership and support through training, management and technical assistance.

Tools and services currently available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers cover a wide range of topics and are presented in a variety of media. Among the many methods used to deliver information are: one-one-one counselling, print materials, telephone and fax, seminars, workshops and conferences, mentoring programs and the Internet. Entrepreneurs most often receive information in person through a walk-in resource centre or office, followed by telephone, classroom learning, Internet and extension workers. Providers rely heavily on print materials to disseminate information. Forums, workshops and classroom training sessions are the next most common methods used to deliver information. Reflecting entrepreneurs' preferences for one-on-one assistance, coaching and mentoring follows these other methods in frequency of use. Providers suggest that funding limitations impact their ability to offer more personalized attention.

The available information and information delivery services are primarily oriented to the start-up entrepreneur, with few programs targeted to businesses once they are up and running. Business associations, mentoring and networking, however, play a key role in supporting the established entrepreneur. The most common types of information provided include: 1) how to start a business and business planning, 2) financing, 3) contacts and directories, 4) government programs and services.

Finally, research results demonstrate that relationships among those organizations that provide information tools and services can significantly impact the effectiveness of their delivery. Clearly, positive provider relationships, through information sharing, coordination and a "client-centred" approach contribute to improved services. Yet lack of communication and negative relationships lead to competition among providers and an inability and/or unwillingness to provide necessary referrals, among other consequences. Three types of relationships are discussed: 1) funding relationships; 2) service delivery partnerships; and 3) referrals, along with overall communication and coordination among providers. Although examples of partnerships and collaboration have been provided, it is clear that providers and entrepreneurs have serious concerns about the continuing effects of funding cutbacks and the lack of inter-agency cooperation and communication.

<u>The Gaps</u>

Research findings indicate gaps in three areas: business information content, delivery of information services by service providers, and communication among government agencies, service providers, Aboriginal entrepreneurs and communities.

Gaps in Content
A wide range of materials is currently available from service providers on topics required by the Aboriginal entrepreneur. In particular, areas such as entrepreneurial assessment, business planning, and government programs are well covered. Gaps in information content identified include: comprehensive, Aboriginal-specific financing information, marketing, available information products and services, along with training and education programs, where to go for mentoring, business incorporation options and confronting challenges associated with culture and community. Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers are also missing information on the "business" and economic traditions of First Nations cultures, current success stories of Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and an understanding of the role to be played in the future by Aboriginal entrepreneurship and economic development. Information pertaining to certain sectors within the Aboriginal economy, such as professional services, retail, construction and real estate development, is also lacking.

Those who were already established required more information on: sources of capital, new business opportunities and changes in the business environment, including regulatory changes, new government programs, and other information often gleaned from informal networks, as well as service providers. Those that were intending to expand wanted information on issues such as new markets and personnel management. Respondents emphasized the need for service providers to focus more on "aftercare" to ensure the on-going success of the entrepreneur and the business.

In some cases, such as Aboriginal taxation, government funding programs and business planning, information is available but not well utilized by the entrepreneur. The gap, in these cases, is more perceived than real. This may be because the format in which the information is delivered and/or presented is inappropriate. More often, however, it is because entrepreneur, and even service provider, awareness of the information product or service is low. Low awareness of available programs, services and tools for business information among both entrepreneurs and service providers was found to be a significant barrier to information access.

Gaps in Service Delivery
Entrepreneurs expressed a strong preference for one-on-one business counselling for assistance with business planning, financing and start-up. Yet service providers are often either not willing or able, due to limited resources, to take the necessary time to provide one-on-one mentoring and support. In addition, once entrepreneurs had received start-up financing, they stated they were often "left to drift." Entrepreneurs also expressed a need to become a part of networks that offer support, provide information, and connect them with their peers, mentors and the non-Aboriginal business community. Yet formal business networks are weak among Aboriginal entrepreneurs. The need for enhanced service in each of these areas was clearly identified.

Research findings also identified the need for service providers to build effective relationships with Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Study results demonstrate Aboriginal people interested in business information will go to familiar and approachable individuals and delivery agents to get it. It was reported there was a lack of respect and understanding by some service provider personnel of the

unique challenges, abilities and circumstances of Aboriginal entrepreneurs, the important role entrepreneurs play in the mobilization of the Aboriginal economy, and the importance of that economy to BC. According to entrepreneurs, lack of understanding sometimes results in cultural insensitivity, and even racism. Creating a climate of acceptance and encouragement among service providers is deemed to be very important.

A related issue is the lack of support that entrepreneurs receive from their own communities. It is reported that community members often resent entrepreneurs for going into business, and thus, it is difficult for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to find moral support or business loyalty on-reserve. A climate of acceptance for the entrepreneur and a strategy of on-reserve economic development must be encouraged. From the entrepreneur's perspective too, there is a need to understand the community and cultural issues that interfere with entrepreneurial success, and to address these issues. Aboriginal entrepreneurs living off-reserve often feel even more isolated – both from their home communities and in their urban environments. Once again, the importance of networks within this context was emphasized. Other segments of Aboriginal society with unique challenges and needs with respect to business development include youth, displaced workers, women, and Métis. Results indicate that further attention is needed to the needs of the latter two groups.

Entrepreneurs living in remote, rural communities face their own set of challenges. Access to information service appears to be poor in several regions throughout the province. Within the regions, northern and remote areas are particularly underserved. While information technology offers potential for entrepreneurs in these areas to access information, particularly where other forms of support are weak, in many cases entrepreneurs do not have the communications infrastructure or skills to access web-based information tools. On the other hand, while urban entrepreneurs may have better access to providers and technology, there is a great need to strengthen support networks.

Finally, capacity building is required among service provider workers and organizations. Entrepreneurs indicate that service could be improved if staff were more knowledgeable of their businesses, of available resources and of the First Nations context. Organizations require access to resources, improved hiring policies and programs for monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery on an ongoing basis.

Gaps in Communication
According to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, many Economic Development Officers (EDOs) and community-based organizations are isolated and cut off from information sources. Thus, they are less productive, and need to be brought into networks that supply them with information, training and support. Gaps in communication were identified between government agencies, between service providers and government, and between the providers themselves. An integrated strategy is lacking for the acquisition of funding and distribution of information to support Aboriginal entrepreneurs and Aboriginal economic development in BC. In order to enhance the information, opportunities and support necessary, and to contribute to improving the climate in which Aboriginal entrepreneurs operate, more effort should be invested in building networks and partnerships among providers.

The Recommendations

To address the content gaps discussed above, a set of "top ten" tools recommendations are made. These include: Aboriginal specific financing, marketing and home-based business materials, a directory of programs, products and services for the Aboriginal entrepreneur, a database of, and support materials for, business mentors, a comprehensive Aboriginal Business Development web site, the provision of electronic support tools, workbooks and workshop materials on business research techniques, as well as assessing the health of your business and of the changing business environment (for the established entrepreneur).

Recommendations for improvements to service delivery include increased provision of aftercare services, extension of service in remote and urban areas that may be under-served and attention to unique groups whose needs have not been fully addressed (e.g. women, Métis). Initiatives to build the capacity of service provider workers and of entrepreneurs to access web-based information tools are also suggested, along with measures to increase cross-cultural understanding and build support for Aboriginal entrepreneurs within their own communities.

Finally, a consensus emerges from the results of this research that there is a need for a unified vision of support for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and Aboriginal economic development in BC. There are key pieces of content that can be developed for delivery, and changes in the way in which service providers deliver their services that can and should be made. However, the main message from the consultations is the need to create and sustain effective networks. This includes the need to:

➢ coordinate the strengths and resources of all the government agencies,

➢ design a coordinated Aboriginal economic development strategy for BC, recognizing diversity and involving Aboriginal communities and service providers who deal directly with Aboriginal clients in the development of such a strategy,

➢ communicate that strategy widely, including communication with mainstream institutions and society, and

➢ create partnerships and networks among providers and entrepreneurs to more effectively share information and deliver services.

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Glossary of Acronyms

ABC	Aboriginal Business Canada
ABDCs	Aboriginal Business Development Centres
ABDI	Aboriginal Business Development Initiative
ABNAs	Aboriginal Business Network Advisors
ABSN	Aboriginal Business Services Network
ACC	Aboriginal Capital Corporation
AHRDAs	Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements
AtBC	Aboriginal Tourism BC
AWC	Aboriginal Women's Council
BC	British Columbia
BDB	Business Development Bank of Canada
CANDO	Council of the Advancement of Native Development Officers
CAP	Community Access Program
CBSC	Canada/BC Business Service Centre
CED	Community Economic Development
CEDC	Simon Fraser University Community Economic Development Centre
CEDOs	Community Economic Development Organizations
CESO	Canadian Executive Services Organization
CFDCs	Community Futures Development Corporations
CIBC	Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
DIAND/INAC	Department of Indian and Northern Affairs
EDOs	Economic Development Officers
FEDNOR	Federal Economic Development Initiative in Northern Ontario
FCs	Friendship Centres
FNES	First Nations Employment Society
FNLA	First Nations Agricultural Lending Association
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
IHA	Indian Homemakers' Association of BC
NEDC	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corporation
NITA	Native Investment and Trade Association
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
REACH	Regional Access and Community Help
SFU	Simon Fraser University
WCB	Workman's Compensation Board
WD	Western Economic Diversification Canada
WESBC	Women's Enterprise Society of BC

Accompanying Documents

1. *Aboriginal Economic Development in Canada and BC - A Literature Review*
   Anne Miller and Kelly Vodden

2. *Facilitating Aboriginal Entrepreneurship: A Review of Best Practices, Notable Practices and Next Practices*
   John McBride and Jean-Claude Ndungutse

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1. Introduction

In January 1998, the Government of Canada outlined its commitment to strengthening Aboriginal communities and enhancing Aboriginal capacity for economic growth and development through *Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. A year later, in April 1999, the Government announced the *Aboriginal Business Development Initiative*, a clear outcome of the approach outlined in *Gathering Strength,* aimed at delivering support and resources to encourage Aboriginal entrepreneurship.

A number of institutions, including federal and provincial governments, non-profit agencies and Aboriginal organizations are involved in the provision of support for Aboriginal entrepreneurs in urban, rural and remote areas. In British Columbia, Western Economic Diversification (WD) is one of the federal agencies responsible for the development and delivery of information services in support of entrepreneurial development and small business assistance at the community level. Other key government agencies sharing this mandate include Aboriginal Business Canada, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, the British Columbia Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture and the British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

Yet, despite efforts to provide support in the area of Aboriginal business development, including recent federal government initiatives, many of the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs are not being met. Significant population growth, the absence of employment opportunities and continued uncertainty over natural resources and land claims underscore the need to develop economic capacity within Aboriginal communities and to improve the delivery of small business support to Aboriginal entrepreneurs across British Columbia.

Aboriginal entrepreneurs require information and skills to increase their ability to successfully plan and grow their businesses. Indeed, the ability to access and utilize information services has become critical for all businesses in today's knowledge-based and increasingly competitive economy. Yet, there are indications that Aboriginal entrepreneurs in both rural and urban areas are generally less aware of, and encounter greater difficulty in accessing and using business information, services and training.

In recognition of the need to provide better support to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, WD, in partnership with the Ministry of Small Business Tourism and Culture, commissioned Simon Fraser University to identify the business information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and develop recommendations for improving the delivery of support to entrepreneurs.

This study examines the level of Aboriginal entrepreneurial activity in British Columbia and the challenges experienced both by entrepreneurs and those involved in the delivery of business services. It also aims to evaluate existing tools, services and programs available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and to identify where additional resources are required or existing tools can be modified. Finally, the study identifies opportunities for cooperation among institutions delivering services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and presents recommendations for priorities and action.

2. Project Methodology

2.1 The Research Team

2.1.1 Simon Fraser University Community Economic Development Centre

The Community Economic Development Centre (CEDC) was established in 1989 at Simon Fraser University to bring university resources and talents together to further the understanding and practice of CED. The Centre grew out of active support of over fifty faculty members across many departments, as well as many community groups outside the university. The Centre's goal is to encourage accountable, sustainable and appropriate CED in British Columbia.

The Centre provides research, training and advisory services to the CED sector in BC and elsewhere, through a team of associates drawn from the university and CED practice. It is actively involved in community-based projects throughout the province. The Centre offers a growing website of permanent resources (www.sfu.ca/cedc/), project and research outreach, a 30-credit Post-Baccalaureate CED Diploma, a 19-credit Undergraduate CED Certificate, a professional development program, distance education options and graduate student supervision.

The Centre's objectives include collaborating on CED projects in partnership with communities and agencies outside the university, and in facilitating effective use of the university's resources and expertise in responding to requests for assistance on CED problems.

Within all projects, the CEDC engages the most appropriate individuals in carrying out its mandate. The CEDC research team responsible for this study represented a wide range of backgrounds and expertise, both applied and academic, in the areas of Aboriginal development, project management, CED study and practice, needs assessment and instrument design. CEDC research team members included:

> Kelly Vodden, Project Manager, Principal Researcher
> Anne Miller, Research, Analysis and Writing
> John McBride, Advisory Committee Liaison and Focus Group Coordinator
> Terry Robertson, Coordinator, Product and Service Inventory and Assessment
> Stephen Ameyaw, Faculty Advisor
> Jean-Claude Ndungutse, Research Assistant
> Darcy Mitchell and Ramsay Farran, Survey Design
> Eric Griffiths and Margo Guertin, Database Design
> Christina Lai and Kim Donovan, Data Entry, Administrative and Secretarial Support

2.1.2 Research Partners

It was recognized at the inception of this study by the CEDC and the project funders that for the research to be successfully carried out, with meaningful results, it would be necessary and appropriate to partner with Aboriginal organizations in the completion of the project. This would ensure Aboriginal input through participation in interviews, surveys and focus group sessions, but

also sustain active participation throughout project design and implementation. It is our belief that no one knows the situation better than the one who lives it.

Aboriginal organizations have played an important role as members of the research team in two ways: a) through their direct involvement in conducting aspects of the research on a contract basis; and b) through their participation on the Advisory Committee. The membership and role of the project Advisory Committee is described below.

Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations was contracted to complete entrepreneur surveys and telephone interviews, a significant component of the data collection phase of the project. The organization also assisted with the organization of consultation/focus groups held in the Kamloops area. Key project staff included:

> Geri Collins, Project Manager
> Dale Tomma, Interviewer
> Arthur Frost, Interviewer

Entrepreneur interviews were also conducted in the North Island region by Lillian Hunt, Inner Coast Natural Resource Centre, Alert Bay.

In addition, assistance with the organization and logistics associated with regional focus groups was received from the Aboriginal Business Development Centre (Prince George), Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation (Vancouver and Ladysmith), and CFDC of 16/37 (Terrace). Assistance with Lower Mainland focus groups was also provided by the First Nations Employment Society (Vancouver).

2.1.3 The Advisory Committee

The establishment of an Advisory Committee, including Aboriginal service providers and government agencies charged with implementing study results, has been an essential step in the research process. The Committee was established early in the project with input on Committee membership from Aboriginal financial institutions and sponsoring agencies. The Committee included Aboriginal service providers from regions across the Province, along with partnering government agencies (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Advisory Committee Membership[2]

Name	Organization	Region
Geri Collins	Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations	Okanagan (Kamloops)
Ray Gerow	Native Economic Development Advisory Board, Aboriginal Business Development Centre	Cariboo (Prince George)
Wayne Gray	Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation	Lower Mainland (Chilliwack)/Vancouver Island (Ladysmith)
Bill Guerin	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada	Federal Government
Peggy Hartman	Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corp. (NEDC)	Vancouver Island (Port Alberni)
Greg Hazel	Tribal Resources Investment Corporation (TRICORP)	North Coast (Prince Rupert)
Linden Pinay	First Nations Employment Society	Vancouver
Don Ross	Ktunaxa-Kinbasket Tribal Council	Kootenays (Cranbrook)
Tammy Schulz	Department of Western Economic Diversification Canada	Federal Government
Laurie Turta	BC Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture	Provincial Government
Alan Widdows	Aboriginal Business Canada, BC/Yukon Region, Industry Canada	Federal Government

In addition to interim communications, a series of three Advisory Committee meetings were held throughout the project (February, May and June, 2000) to: 1) review the terms of reference for the study, deliverables, proposed timeline and methodology, and the roles, responsibilities and membership of the Advisory Committee; 2) review the results of the data collection phase of the study once completed; and 3) discuss recommendations and implementation steps after completion of the draft final report.

Advisory Committee members assisted with the research process by providing suggestions for participants and contact information for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers to complete questionnaires and/or participate in focus groups. The Committee also provided comments on evaluation criteria, entrepreneur and service provider questionnaires, the product and service inventory (provider list and database fields), draft literature review, survey and focus group data, initial recommendations and the final report draft. Finally, as mentioned above, several of the Advisory Committee members and their organizations assisted with logistics and organization of regional consultations and focus groups.

CEDC researchers also worked collaboratively throughout the project with Western Economic Diversification Canada as both a project funder and member of the Advisory Committee. In

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[2] The Research Team would also like to thank Matt Vickers, formerly Senior Manager of Aboriginal Banking, Royal Bank for his input as a member of the Committee during the early phases of this project.

particular, Program Development Officer Tammy Schulz played a key role, along with Angie Driscoll, who provided assistance with focus group sessions and web site testing.

2.2 Literature Review

Literature review research has been used to complete three key aspects of the study:

1. Identification of services and tools/products, and the development of a set of criteria for evaluating these existing tools and services;
2. An overview of the Aboriginal economy and Aboriginal entrepreneurship in BC (e.g. sectors, size, growth, trends, challenges and opportunities) and the implications for service provision; and
3. Identification and review of "best practices" in the provision of business information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

A supplementary review of Aboriginal learning styles provided background for evaluation and guided recommendations pertaining to content and delivery of information products and services. Results of literature review research have been incorporated throughout the report that follows. In addition, two stand-alone reports: *Aboriginal Economic Development in Canada and BC - A Literature Review* and *Facilitating Aboriginal Entrepreneurship: A Review of Best Practices, Notable Practices and Next Practices* have been prepared.

2.3 Inventory of Products and Services

The methodology employed to collect information for the product and service inventory involved three stages. First, a review of documents and web sites, as well as informal telephone interviews of key providers recommended or known to the research team, were completed to develop an initial list of service providers, tools and products (see Appendix 1 for a list of individuals interviewed). This initial inventory focused primarily on the names of service providers, their organization type and contact information. The initial list of providers was circulated to Advisory Committee members and additional names were provided (see Appendix 2 for a list of all BC providers identified).

Second, a database of providers was designed using Microsoft Access. The fields included in the database include: a) organization name; b) organization category (e.g. government, intermediary, corporation/private, sectoral organization); c) clientele served; d) information provided by information type and stage of business development; e) media and methods of access used; f) delivery and funding agencies; and g) contact information.

The third stage for this aspect of the project was data collection. This involved a telephone survey of 287 organizations identified to gather the information necessary to complete the inventory data fields referred to above. A fax-back form was provided as an alternative response mechanism. Where available, print materials about the various organizations were also requested.

After a minimum of three attempts to reach each provider, a total of 107 database survey forms were completed. Information from print materials gathered enabled the research team to complete

(or partially complete) an additional 60 inventory forms. The final inventory includes 167 organizations. See Appendix 4 for a summary of the results of this inventory research.

2.4 Entrepreneur Survey

An essential step in determining the information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs has been surveying BC's Aboriginal entrepreneurs themselves. An entrepreneur survey was developed by the SFU team, with input from the Advisory Committee, in early March. The survey was distributed to entrepreneurs by fax, mail and in person. Entrepreneurs who had not responded then received a follow-up phone call from an interviewer asking if they would prefer to respond to the survey by completing and returning it themselves or through a telephone interview. The Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations conducted the majority of the interviews.

The sample of entrepreneurs who were asked to complete the survey, by telephone or in written form, was drawn from a number of sources, including directories of Aboriginal entrepreneurs published by the Native Investment and Trade Association, BC Hydro and the Northeast BC Aboriginal Business Association and Advisory Committee recommendations. Respondents were selected to reflect a range of business types and locations in the respondent mix. Further, entrepreneurs were selected from a range of sources to avoid the potential problem of respondent bias toward any one particular service type or organization. However, due to the voluntary nature of survey completion, the number of respondents per region was not necessarily proportionate to regional demographics.

To supplement responses received through this method, team members attended several events where entrepreneurs were invited to complete surveys. These included a workshop on e-commerce in Vancouver, as well as conferences on tourism and non-timber forest products on Northern Vancouver Island. Finally, participants of the entrepreneur focus groups (see below) were surveyed. In total, 102 entrepreneurs completed surveys. See Appendix 6 for a report on entrepreneur survey results, including respondent profile data.

2.5 Service Provider Survey

A mail-out provider survey was subsequently conducted. This survey was intended to solicit information from all service providers, including those who were not asked or able to participate in the regional focus groups. This survey allowed providers to offer input into the study beyond the basic information requested in the inventory survey form. The survey provided the research team with more in-depth information on topics such as relationships between organizations and business information tools considered to be most useful. In total, 39 responses to this survey were received. See Appendix 8 for a report on survey results.

2.6 Consultations/Focus Groups

Consultations and focus group sessions with both entrepreneurs and service providers were held in five locations throughout BC. These sessions provided an opportunity to explore issues in more depth such as the challenges facing service providers and entrepreneurs. Focus groups also allowed participants to share their recommendations for improved business information products and

services. The sessions were designed to ensure that input was received from across the province. In each region a minimum of two consultations were held, one with service providers and the other with entrepreneurs, with an average of 8-10 participants in each group. A particular goal of each session was to solicit specific input on web sites, interactive tools and publications currently available.

Both print and web-based information tools were evaluated. Tools were selected based on an initial evaluation by the research team and provider recommendations. Print tools evaluated included:

> *The Enterprising Spirit: Interactive Business Planner*

> *The Basics: Business Planning Handbook*

> *The Entrepreneurial Spirit: An Introduction to Entrepreneurship, Business and Financial Management for Aboriginal Entrepreneurs*

> *Solutions for Small Business: Exploring Business Opportunities*

> *Solutions for Small Business: Business Planning and Cash Flow Forecasting*

The web-based tools evaluated were: *Interactive Business Planner* and *The Small Business Workshop* from the Canada/BC Business Service Centre Web Site, and the prototype national Aboriginal Business Services Network (ABSN) web site (under development at the time of report preparation). Participants were also provided with a list of over 30 web sites related to Aboriginal business and asked to evaluate those they were familiar with or any others they chose to review.

The schedule of consultation/focus group activities was as follows:

April 10	Vancouver	Entrepreneurs
April 11	Ladysmith	Service Providers
April 12	Vancouver	Service Providers
April 18	Prince George	Entrepreneurs & Service Providers
April 19	Kamloops	Entrepreneurs & Service Providers
April 20	Vancouver	Entrepreneurs
April 25	Terrace	Entrepreneurs & Service Providers
May 1	Ladysmith	Entrepreneurs

In total, 46 entrepreneurs and 42 service providers participated in the focus groups. Appendix 10 provides a summary of focus groups results. All research instruments, including focus group questions, are also included in the appendices.

2.7 Follow-up Service Provider Interviews

Finally, an additional eight interviews were held with providers to seek further information on services and organizations identified as potential "best practices". These cases were identified by entrepreneurs, other providers and through the literature review. Providers were asked about the unique aspects of their tools and services, client success rates and methods used to monitor the quality and effectiveness of their service (see McBride and Ndungutse, 2000).

2.8 Summary

In summary, an extensive research process was undertaken involving eight key phases, outlined in Figure 1, following. In addition to literature review research and ongoing Advisory Committee input, data was collected from the primary sources listed in Table 2:

Table 2: Sources of Responses

Instrument	# of Respondents
Initial informal provider interviews	12
Provider inventory interviews/questionnaires	107
Entrepreneur interviews/questionnaires	102
Provider surveys	39
Entrepreneur focus groups	46
Provider focus groups	42
Provider follow-up interviews	10
	358[3]

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[3] This does not constitute 358 individual respondents as some entrepreneurs and service providers both completed surveys and participated in focus groups and/or interviews. An estimated 250 individuals (providers and entrepreneurs) participated over the course of the research.

Figure 1: The Research Project

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                              ┌─────────────────────┐
                              │ 1. Initial Research │
                              │       Design        │
                              └─────────────────────┘
                                        │
                              ┌─────────────────────┐
                              │ 2. Advisory         │
                              │ Committee           │
                              │ Formation           │
                              └─────────────────────┘
                                        │
                              ┌─────────────────────┐
                              │ 3. Review  &        │
                              │ Revision of Design  │
                              └─────────────────────┘
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- Literature Review → BC Providers → Aboriginal Entrepreneurs → Aboriginal Learning
- Product & Service Inventory → Initial Inventory → Database Design → Inventory Survey
- Provider Survey
- Entrepreneur Survey
- Focus Groups → Vancouver → Ladysmith → Prince George → Kamloops → Terrace
- Best Practices Review → Literature → Interviews

4. Data Collection

5. Data Entry & Analysis

- Key Themes
- Entrepreneur Needs
- Current System
- Evaluation (Gap Analysis)

6. Advisory Committee Input & Review

7. Recommendations & Report Writing

8. Final Review & Report Dissemination

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2.9 Challenges

Before turning from methodology to study findings, it is worth noting some of the challenges associated with conducting a research project of this nature. First, many Aboriginal communities, as well as other communities across BC, have a sense of being "over-researched" and all too often, studies and consultations have been conducted with little involvement from those being studied. Research undertaken creates expectations that are often not met, ending in few concrete results for the communities involved. The research team has endeavoured to address these concerns through meaningful and ongoing participation of Aboriginal service providers, as described above, and through the presentation of realistic recommendations that reflect the needs and concerns articulated to us. Achieving satisfactory response rates under these circumstances required both persistence from the researchers and cooperation from the respondents, for which we are grateful.

Second, the geographic distribution of Aboriginal entrepreneurs across the province presents its own challenge. By holding focus groups in five BC regions, on the coast and in the interior, in the north and south, we have benefited from the points of view of business people from many different areas and perspectives. This has been supplemented with survey research in areas beyond the vicinity of the five communities visited.

Not only are Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers widely distributed across the province, but there are many different players involved in complex arrangements of delivery partnerships, referrals and funding support. Government programs and personnel are changing on an ongoing basis, making the system of service delivery to Aboriginal entrepreneurs difficult to describe and any description that is derived, in danger of quickly becoming outdated. Nonetheless, we have attempted to describe this system in Section 5 of the report that follows.

Finally, in some cases research and statistical information concerning Aboriginal peoples in BC, and Aboriginal entrepreneurs, in particular, has been found to be limited, contradictory and even inaccurate. As one entrepreneur described: "Demographics for First Nations are fragmented, with too many different sources. Statistics are outdated or unavailable." Statistics Canada Census data represents the most comprehensive source of statistical information available, yet 77 reserves in Canada were not enumerated in the 1996 Census. In Aboriginal communities that were enumerated, it is expected that the undercount is significant, due to mobility factors (e.g. seasonal work in the resource sectors) and limited willingness to participate. Previous studies on Aboriginal entrepreneurship in Canada have been primarily national in scope and provide limited information about the British Columbia situation. Further, careful attention must be paid to the definitions of "Aboriginal" used in these studies. Among other factors, the use of varying definitions has resulted in inconsistencies between research results. Wherever possible, deficiencies and inconsistencies in the information, either primary or secondary, have been outlined below and in the documents accompanying this report.

A word of caution is also in order regarding the analysis and interpretation of the survey, and to some extent, the focus group results. While every effort was made to ensure clarity of questions, interpretation of survey questions by respondents is a subjective activity, and it is difficult to verify how questions have been interpreted (for instance, "Internet" and "email" may be interpreted as different or the same, depending upon one's familiarity with and use of information technology).

3. Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in BC

The following section provides some background on the context in which Aboriginal entrepreneurs operate, particularly noting changes in Aboriginal communities such as population growth, migration and improvement in health and education. Other factors influencing Aboriginal economies are also outlined, including economic diversity, regional variation and legal and political change. Finally, characteristics of Aboriginal entrepreneurship in BC are described, including rates of growth, profitability, ownership, motivation, key industry sectors, markets, financing and the challenge of creating community acceptance. In each of these areas, implications for the provision of business information services are explored.

3.1 The Aboriginal Population

3.1.1 Growth

According to the 1996 Census, there were nearly 800,000 Aboriginal people living in Canada, 140,000 of them living in BC. They represent nearly 4% of the British Columbia population overall, and in many of the rural regions, the percentages are significantly higher (for example, 27% of the total BC population resides in the North Coast region).   Due to census research undercounts the total Aboriginal population figures reported are lower than the actual figures, which are expected to exceed 142,000 in BC (BC Stats, 1998). With almost 18% of the total Aboriginal population of Canada, BC is home to Canada's second largest Aboriginal population, only a margin below Ontario. Furthermore, one-third of all First Nations Bands in Canada (or 197 out of 609 bands) and 72% of Canadian reserves (or 1650 out of 2300 reserves) exist in BC (BC Stats, 1998).

As a result of an increasing life span for Aboriginal peoples and a high fertility rate among Aboriginal women, the population figures are expected to increase rapidly and consistently over the next two decades, to a projected population of almost one and a half million in Canada by 2021. Not surprisingly, given this growth rate, the Aboriginal population is on average ten years younger than the Canadian population as a whole. In fact, one half of the Aboriginal population is under 25 years of age, compared with less that one third of the general population in this age group. Each geographic region of BC generally reflects this trend.

3.1.2 Migration

We are witnessing a trend of First Nations peoples in BC moving from on-reserve and rural residences to more urban areas located off-reserve (DIAND, 1999). Greater employment opportunities in cities and increased mobility of First Nations peoples, particularly among the young, are contributing factors. Today, more than 55% of Aboriginal peoples live in urban areas, with slightly more women than men choosing this option. According to the 1996 Census, 44% of registered Indians live on reserve. "Non-registered Indians" tend to live off-reserve. These general trends hold true for every district of BC with the exception of the Nechako region, where slightly more Aboriginal people live on-reserve than off-reserve.

In BC, one-half of the Aboriginal population lives in the province's two most urban regions, Vancouver Island/Coast and Mainland/ Southwest[4]. The North Coast and Thompson-Okanagan follow as the regions with the highest Aboriginal populations. In these regions as well the majority of the Aboriginal population now lives off-reserve. The Nechako and Vancouver Island/Coast regions have the highest proportions of Aboriginal peoples living on-reserve.

3.1.3 Health and Education

Health and education have been ongoing issues of concern within Aboriginal communities in Canada. Although education levels are higher among those living in urban areas, these levels are still on average well below the Canadian population (e.g. 20% of the Aboriginal population has less than a Grade 9 education, compared with 12% of the general population). There is optimism that this gap is closing as more Aboriginal youth are completing high school and pursuing higher education. Aboriginal adults are also returning to school to pursue employment and training programs at a far greater rate than other Canadians (DIAND, 1998).

Although life expectancy for Aboriginal Canadians has also increased, chronic health problems far greater than those of the general population continue to exist. Diabetes and heart disease figure prominently among the adult population and are expected to increase. Infant mortality is twice that of the Canadian average, and Aboriginal youth and young adults face their own unique health issues associated with a persistence of poverty, frustration, lack of recreational and work opportunities and separation from parents. Young families face concerns related to a basic quality of life, particularly single parent families living in urban areas. Many of these families are headed by women who assume both care-giving and financial responsibilities alone, with limited financial and emotional support (RCAP, 1996). Over 46% of Aboriginal children live in single parent families in the Greater Vancouver Regional District (IHA, 2000).

Closely linked to issues of physical and mental health is the economic well-being of Aboriginal Canadians. First Nations peoples are under-represented in the Canadian workforce. Unemployment rates among First Nations are more than double that of the general population, and even greater for those living on-reserve (Statistics Canada, 1991). This situation seems to be escalating. DIAND (1997) predicts that by 2010, rates of dependency on government transfer payments (i.e. social assistance and employment insurance) will have increased by more than 50% among the Aboriginal population. Low incomes, a growing need for employment due to a young and growing population, depletion of natural resources, poor infrastructure and geographic location are among the other factors that contribute to a general state of poor economic health in many Aboriginal communities.

3.1.4 Implications for Information Services to Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Demographic and migration trends highlight the growing importance of some segments within the Aboriginal population, such as youth, single parents and those living in urban, off-reserve communities. Special attention must be paid to the unique circumstances and needs of these groups. The high incidence of single parent families in an urban setting, for example, has significant implications for the ability of these parents to pursue self-employment, the form of business that might be most appropriate to accommodate their particular needs, and/or to participate in further learning opportunities. This also has implications for the types of support needed for urban single

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[4] Due to the availability of statistical information, which was required to conduct regional analyses, British Columbia Development Regions were selected as regional boundaries for this study. Refer to Figure 2 below for a map illustrating these regions.

mothers starting new businesses or returning to work. (e.g. need for childcare within business incubator facilities, home-based business options and/or social and business support networks).

At the same time, more than 40% of Aboriginal people in British Columbia remain on-reserve and in rural areas. As a result, these individuals and communities face their own unique challenges that must be taken into account, including geographic isolation from providers of information services and resources. Further evidence of the diversity within the Aboriginal population and communities in BC that must be recognized, is the variation from region to region – in population, in urban vs. rural concentrations, and, as will be discussed further below, in the nature of their economies.

With respect to education levels, providers of information services to Aboriginal peoples must be aware that a significant portion of their clientele are likely to have low literacy and education levels. Providers must be capable of meeting the needs of both these clients and those with more advanced levels of education, reading and comprehension. Alternative ways of teaching and learning may be more effective in some cases. Goss Gilroy (1996) suggests, for example, that while post-secondary education can enhance the chances of business success, hands-on learning through mentors in Aboriginal communities can be an equally effective method of teaching skills relevant to entrepreneurship.

A review of literature on Aboriginal learning styles offers some guidelines in developing and offering learning programs for Aboriginal students (see also Appendix 18). The literature suggests that Aboriginal peoples tend to learn in unique ways. They have traditionally learned through story telling, through interacting with people and things, through taking time to reflect upon what they are learning and through controlling their own learning. Of utmost importance, however, is the need to regard learning, not as a distinct activity, but as an integral part of the learners' lives and culture. The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (George, 1994), for example, emphasizes that literacy programs must enhance self-esteem, leading to empowerment and thus to self-determination.

Finally, demographic, economic and health indicators point to the urgent and growing need to provide economic development and strong support structures in Aboriginal communities in Canada and in BC, where these needs are greatest. More specifically, health and family concerns mean that business information providers must be prepared to refer clients to appropriate sources of support in these areas, taking a holistic approach to assisting the Aboriginal entrepreneur.

3.2 The Changing Aboriginal Economy

3.2.1 Diversity

In general, First Nations economies are mixed economies, consisting of goods and income from four sources: domestic production and informal economic transactions, wage labour, transfers payments and enterprise/self-employment (Elias, 1995). Aboriginal economies in Canada are diverse and reliance upon each of these income sources varies greatly. All are important, however, and mutually supportive as they help to sustain local economies and communities. BC communities are no exception. In many BC communities, child and elder care, hunting, fishing, gathering and other informal economic activities continue to supplement cash incomes (See Miller and Vodden, 2000). There is also considerable variation within the wage and enterprise segments of Aboriginal

economies. In particular the importance of various industry sectors and enterprise types varies from region to region, and from community to community within a region.

<u>3.2.2 Regional Variation</u>

In British Columbia, primary industries, along with public sector employment, dominate both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal economic scene in all regions that are predominately rural. The major urban centres of Vancouver and Victoria are generally more economically diversified and are stronger than others in tourism, retail, hospitality and personal service industries. Primary sector dependence is highest in the Nechako and Northeast (Peace River) regions (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: BC Regional Map
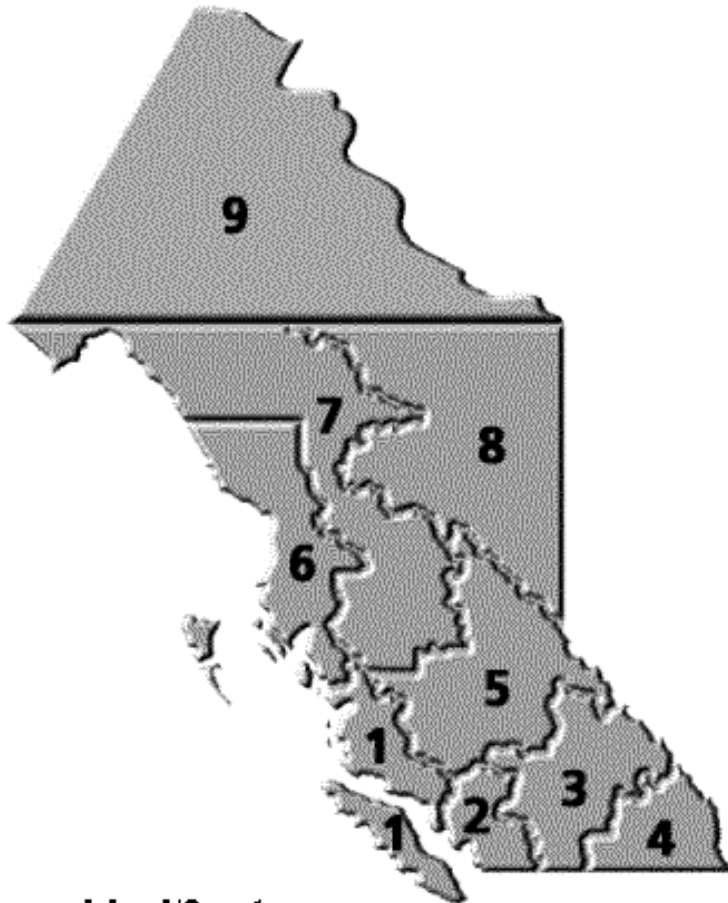
1 Vancouver Island/Coast

2 Lower Mainland/Southwest

3 Okanagan

4 Kootenay

5 Cariboo

6 North Coast

7 Nechako

8 Peace River

Within all regions, however, some areas exhibit higher levels of both primary dependence and Aboriginal population than others. For example, the Mount Waddington and Central Coast Regional Districts, within the Vancouver Island/Coast region are areas with high Aboriginal populations and 24-27% primary sector dependence, despite a more diversified economy for the region as a whole (Vodden, 1999).

Variations from region to region are significant not only in terms of economic sector but also regarding other factors that impact economic well-being, such as availability of education and health services, transportation and communications infrastructure See section 4.2.2 for a discussion on challenges related to Internet use, particularly in rural regions.

3.2.3 Legal and Political Change

Despite the importance of the primary sectors in rural areas and the importance of land and resources to Aboriginal peoples, First Nations have historically been underrepresented in these sectors, in terms of both employment and business ownership[5]. Recent changes in the legal and political landscape, however, are resulting in enhanced access to natural resources for Aboriginal peoples within their territories. Significant advancements in the struggle for recognition of Aboriginal rights and title have been precipitated by Supreme Court decisions such as the Calder case of 1973, which recognized that Aboriginal title was rooted in the historical settlement of and use of traditional land. The BC treaty process was subsequently launched. As of June 2000, 51 First Nations had become involved in the resulting negotiations (BC Treaty Commission, 2000). Furthermore, in 1990, the Sparrow decision ruled that the Aboriginal right to fish is preserved in the Canadian Constitution. The decision has since been applied to other resources, including wildlife, forests and water.

In 1997, the landmark Delgamuukw decision endorsed Aboriginal peoples' long-standing title to traditional lands, stating that in the absence of treaties, Aboriginal title had never been extinguished in Canada, that infringements of Aboriginal rights must be justified and compensated for and that Aboriginal groups must be consulted about decisions that may infringe upon Aboriginal title (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1998). The implications of this decision are not yet fully understood. However, they are expected to have extensive ramifications for the treaty process, monetary compensation, business opportunities and for the way that Aboriginal peoples, governments, business and the public interact with each other. Legal issues are expected to remain important in the years ahead. These changes have brought not only increased negotiation power for First Nations, but also a degree of economic uncertainty as negotiations continue.

Government responses to these legal precedents have had some positive results for Aboriginal economies. Policies and programs such as the federal Aboriginal Procurement Program, First Nations Forestry Program, Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy and Aboriginal Business Development Initiative have provided employment and opportunities for Aboriginal entrepreneurs, although insufficient to meet the urgent and growing need.

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5 The exception to this in British Columbia is the fishing industry. While First Nations people have experienced displacement from commercial fisheries (Scow, 1987), their participation remains significant. In 1995, Aboriginal peoples represented 29% of those employed in the salmon fishery, for example (Gislason et al, 1996).

3.2.4 Purchasing Power and Economic Opportunity

One indication that the situation is improving within Aboriginal economies, related to the changing environment described above, is the increase in revenues of Canada's First Nations peoples. In the five years prior to 1991, the purchasing power of First Nations peoples in Canada increased by 150% to over $11 billion, offering the potential to stimulate both consumer and investor activity.

Seeing a rich market for their products and services, external agencies and corporations have responded to these financial gains, by creating Aboriginal strategies, Aboriginal hiring policies, and other measures. This has created opportunities for partnerships, new markets and employment for Aboriginal peoples.

Without a strong private sector, particularly on-reserve, a significant weakness in Aboriginal economies in the past has been in the form of economic leakage. Not only have significant natural resources left their territories, but residents of First Nations communities, whether by choice or necessity, have spent significant portions of their financial resources in other non-Aboriginal communities (RCAP, 1996). First Nations have much to gain, then, by investing in themselves, through "plugging the leaks" of this additional capital from First Nations communities, by creating Aboriginal businesses that serve both local and external markets. This is one of a host of motivations leading to growth in entrepreneurial activity within First Nations economies.

3.2.5 Implications for Information Services to Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Information providers must be aware of trends affecting the Aboriginal economy, which include changing demographics, growing local markets, increased access to natural resources, increased political bargaining power, increased purchasing power and public awareness of Aboriginal issues and culture. These trends have resulted in opportunities for Aboriginal entrepreneurs that range from forestry-related joint ventures and enterprises to construction and cultural tourism. Service providers can then assist entrepreneurs in becoming more aware of these trends and the associated business opportunities. Entrepreneurs in BC confirm that these trends are important and have identified "staying on top of things" as an important information need.

3.3 Aboriginal Entrepreneurship

3.3.1 Growth

While research on Aboriginal entrepreneurship in BC is particularly sparse, several recent studies provide a profile of activity across Canada. It is clear that entrepreneurship is seen as an increasingly viable avenue for individual and community self-reliance among the Aboriginal population of Canada and BC. Over the past decade the number of Aboriginal entrepreneurs has been growing two and a half times faster than Canadians at large. Although there are still relatively fewer self-employed Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal Canadians, this gap is likely to continue to narrow, as strong growth in entrepreneurship is expected to continue among the Aboriginal population (Goss Gilroy, 1996).

With an estimated 4,715 Aboriginal entrepreneurs, BC has the highest number of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in the nation (Micro-Economic Policy Analysis Branch and Aboriginal Business Canada, 1998). Nearly one quarter of all of Canada's Aboriginal entrepreneurs operate their businesses within this province. According to national research, these enterprises are much more

likely to be male-owned, although some sources report that female ownership is growing at a greater rate (see Miller & Vodden, 2000, regarding conflicts among sources on this subject). The number of young entrepreneurs is also growing. For the rapidly expanding population segment under 25 years of age, twice as many Aboriginals as Canadians in general are taking this route. Nearly 19% of Aboriginal entrepreneurs are under 30 years of age (Crone, 2000). Crone suggests these businesses tend to be off-reserve and in non-traditional sectors, be more likely to grow and owners are more concerned with profitability than those operated by older entrepreneurs.

3.3.2 History

While growth in Aboriginal entrepreneurship is a relatively recent phenomenon, it is worth noting that there is a history of self-employment among First Nations in British Columbia. In particular, Rolf (1978) documents the involvement of Aboriginals in the nineteenth century as trappers and traders, independent contractors, owners of mills, logging companies, fishing vessels and agricultural enterprises. Rolf and others also document, however, how many of these ventures were "legislated out of business" in the decades that followed (Newell, 1993; Scow, 1987; Weinstein and Morrell, 1994). The entrepreneurial spirit demonstrated today, therefore, is both new and revived.

3.3.3 Profitability, Ownership and Business Motivation

There is tremendous diversity among BC's Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Motivations for engaging in entrepreneurship vary among businesses, with older business owners reported to be more interested in economic stability for themselves and their communities. Younger entrepreneurs are considered to be more interested in making a profit. This research, however, suggests that more established Aboriginal entrepreneurs are also concerned with financial viability and independence. Results show that a majority of entrepreneur survey respondents (72%) - ranging from those that have been in business for five years or more to those planning their new businesses - are motivated primarily by the desire for financial independence. Approximately one-quarter are interested in fulfilling the needs of their community (e.g. greater self-reliance) and creating employment. Although most Aboriginal businesses are small to medium in size (less than 20 employees), many contribute further to their overall economy and community by hiring employees. Others, like non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs, have chosen self-employment for self-fulfillment, to "do what I love", and because they have been displaced from other industries such as fishing and logging.

These motivational characteristics also play out in business ownership structures. Authors such as Newhouse (1999) and Anderson and Bone (1999) point out that, in some cases, Aboriginal entrepreneurs and communities have a tendency to engage in collective ownership structures such as joint ventures, co-ops and Band or Tribal Council ownership. Tribal or band-owned businesses can create opportunities for "spin-off" businesses such as contracting and supply industries. They also create jobs and may provide a training ground for those inclined towards business, enhancing the likelihood of success of these ventures (McBride & Ndungutse, 2000).

Despite these potential benefits, only seven Development Corporations and other Band or Tribal Council businesses were surveyed in this study, and only slightly more were family owned businesses. Some First Nations have had limited success with government or community-run enterprises, citing reasons such as "politics (that) get in the way" or lack of management expertise, and are thus turning to the individual entrepreneurship model (Vodden, 1999). Others are engaging in a combination of strategies and business structures (McBride and Ndungutse, 2000). See Section 5.1.3 for further discussion on findings related to Aboriginal-controlled Development Corporations.

Sole proprietorships are by far the dominant ownership type (67% of survey respondents in this study and 75% in the 1998 Caldwell and Hunt study, vs. 54% of the general business population). Aboriginal peoples are less likely to be part of a business partnership than Canadians in general. Yet while joint venture operations were not specifically included in the study, numerous examples of joint ventures between First Nations and the private sector in BC can be found, particularly in the forest sector (Smith, 1999; Cassidy and Dale, 1988). Based on study findings, the prevalence of joint ventures and partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal firms and organizations appears to be increasing, along with interest in non-Aboriginal corporations in the Aboriginal economy.

While most Aboriginal businesses are profitable (60% according to one estimate), many earn very low annual incomes, lagging well behind the Canadian average (Caldwell and Hunt, 1998). Some studies suggest that rural and on-reserve businesses are more likely to experience closures, losses and lower incomes than urban, off-reserve businesses. However, others suggest that high success rates are experienced in Aboriginal renewable resource-based and agricultural enterprises (Ai et al, 1998; Goss Gilroy, 1996; Myers, 1999).

Many on-reserve businesses are home-based, and in BC, slightly more businesses are located in urban rather than rural settings (Micro-Economic Policy Analysis Branch and Aboriginal Business Canada, 1998). Of survey respondents in this study, however, 52% were located on-reserve and 48% off-reserve.

3.3.4 Key Sectors of Business Activity

Several sources (including this study, a review of loans made by the First Citizens Fund in British Columbia and a 1999 WD survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Officers[6]), suggest that the most significant industry sectors in the Aboriginal economy in BC are: tourism and hospitality, fishing, forestry, arts and crafts, retail (e.g. "gas bars and corner stores"), agriculture, construction and related trades, and service (including consulting and other professional services and automotive repair and personal services, such as health and fitness). Other less dominant, but nevertheless important, sectors include real estate development, transportation and manufacturing. Survey responses reflected a wide variety of business types ranging from participants in these major sectors to specializations, including an ethno-botanist, janitor, wholesaler, residential recycling and silk-screening services[7].

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[6] This survey on its own should not be considered conclusive, as the response rate was limited. However, findings do supplement and support other sources.

[7] Study respondents: 16 - Tourism and hospitality; 16 - Professional Services- accounting, resource management, small business consultant, finance, research etc.; 14 - Arts and Crafts; 12 - Forestry; 11 - Consulting Services; 10 - Construction/building trades; 8 - Retail; 6 - Transportation (e.g. trucking); 6 - Manufacturing/value-added; 4- Fishing; 4 - Agriculture; 4 - Automotive repair/service station/wrecking; 1 - Gaming and Other: Ethno botanist; Film and video; Health and fitness; Janitorial; Multimedia Developer; Pressure washing; Residential Recycling Service; Silkscreening; Web pages; Wholesale.

A sectoral breakdown of loans to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC made through the First Citizens Fund provides additional insight. In total 23% of loans have been made in the retail sector, followed by 19% in agriculture, 14% in forestry, 9% in construction, 8% in service, 6% in tourism, 3% in real estate and in automotive and 2% in manufacturing.

Finally a WD survey of EDOs in BC highlighted the following sectors of importance: logging, gas bars, grocery/corner stores, silviculture, sawmills and shingle mills, construction, arts and crafts, tourism and hospitality (e.g. restaurants and accommodation), printing, transportation, guiding, security, agriculture (ranching, hay sales, fruit and wine production), education, property development and management.

While primary industries have traditionally been dominant in British Columbia and remain important, industries such as tourism, business and personal services, construction and building trades are becoming increasingly significant. The housing requirements of a growing Aboriginal population, along with the need to upgrade on-reserve housing and infrastructure, have created business opportunities for Aboriginal entrepreneurs in the construction and building trades. Responding to a growing demand for unique tourism experiences, more than 250 Aboriginal firms in the tourism industry now exist in BC (DIAND, 1996). Along with the tourism and hospitality industries, consulting and professional services were the most common type of enterprise among entrepreneurs surveyed, showing an increase in the knowledge-based sectors in BC's Aboriginal economy. These services included accounting, resource management, small business consulting, finance, research and others, and were present in all regions. The sectoral breakdown in British Columbia, therefore, is not unlike that in the rest of Canada, as described by Ai et al (1998). It is also important to keep in mind that a strong underground/informal economy exists, that is not recorded, particularly within sectors requiring manual labour and in areas such as provision of food, firewood, child and elder care.

Some variation in sector significance does occur from region to region. The Island/Coast region demonstrates evidence of high tourism activity, for example, and the Thompson-Okanagan, of agriculture. In addition, several respondents had set up enterprises in the high-tech field, such as computer-based and multi-media businesses related to web site design, film and video production. These enterprises tended to be located in the Lower Mainland. Property management and development is also concentrated in urban areas. Additional research and/or consultation with Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers in each BC region are needed to gain a clearer understanding of the key sectors in each. (For more detail on business activity by sector and region refer to Miller and Vodden, 2000).

3.3.5 Markets

Previous research has shown that Aboriginal entrepreneurs often rely on their local community and Aboriginal clients as the primary market of their goods and services (RCAP, 1996; Caldwell & Hunt, 1998). Ai et al (1998) estimate, however, that 20% of Aboriginal businesses in Canada are engaged in exporting. Furthermore, Caldwell estimates that for 6% of Aboriginal businesses, export markets are their primary source of business (higher than the export reliance of Canadian businesses in general). The *Aboriginal Export and Trade Directory* provides a directory of over 100 Aboriginal businesses active in international trade. This study supports the literature in showing that exporting is gaining importance, with 27% of survey respondents indicating some export activity. Although 53% of entrepreneurs surveyed indicated that their businesses are located on-reserve, less than 10% rely primarily on on-reserve markets. However, growing Aboriginal markets have not been ignored. Over 50% of respondents serve a customer base that is both on and off-reserve.

Aboriginal business is not only growing but becoming more sophisticated. Aboriginal entrepreneurs demonstrate an awareness of marketplace trends that have affected both their business types (e.g. tourism growth) and markets. Growing interest in exporting, for example, reflects growing

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Each of these sources has limitations (e.g. sample size or bias due to the availability of other financing sources, particularly in certain sectors such as tourism, agriculture or forestry). However, together they provide a picture of the key sectors in which Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC are active.

international interest in Aboriginal art and culture. Nearly one-third of Aboriginal businesses surveyed are using the Internet to market their products. Over half are seeking new markets and, many are changing their product and service mix to respond to new realities such as societal change (health and environmental consciousness, "awareness and respect for Aboriginals") and increased competition in a global economy.

3.3.6 Financing

Financing business ventures is a unique challenge for the Aboriginal community. One reason is due to the Indian Act, which prohibits Aboriginals from using their land as collateral or equity. Further, there are few financial institutions in rural, on-reserve locations. Despite these challenges, many entrepreneurs do use mainstream private sources such as banks and trust companies for financing. Others turn to Community Futures, Aboriginal Development Corporations, and government agencies as sources of capital. First Nations have also established and encouraged a wide variety of Aboriginal owned and controlled financing options such as micro-lending, a national bank, loan funds, peer lending and Aboriginal Capital Corporations. First Nations entrepreneurs, it seems, tend to rely more on equity (e.g. personal investments) than debt to finance their ventures (Caldwell and Hunt, 1998).

Banks have attempted to increase their accessibility to Aboriginal peoples through developing services such as Aboriginal Banking Internet Sites, hiring Aboriginal personnel, and setting up government-supported loan guarantee programs. While the financing requirements of Aboriginal business are not the subject of this study, the issue was repeatedly raised as a barrier to success for both new and established enterprises.

> "Without my full-time (day) job, I would not be able to succeed in
> my business venture. I need more equipment, but I am maxed out
> financially. I hear of people getting grants for business expansion,
> start-ups, etc. but I can't (get them)."

Further, there is a strong link between financing and the provision of business information services since many agencies provide technical assistance and information as well as loans (see Section 5). In fact, financial institutions represent a unique opportunity for partnerships within the private sector due to their mutual interest in the success of the entrepreneur. Finally, entrepreneurs identify a need for improved information on financing options (see Section 6.5 below).

3.3.7 The Challenge of Community Acceptance

In addition to the challenges of financing, finding new markets, and factors related to operating in a remote location, politics and racism are barriers to business success noted by Aboriginal entrepreneurs in this study and others. Respect, cooperation and commitment to support Aboriginal business, according to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, is difficult to establish within either their own culture or mainstream culture.

Within their own communities, entrepreneurs often face resentment from other community members, as well as conflicts between cultural traditions and requirements of business operation. Success as entrepreneurs, it seems, can breed resentment, as is indicated by comments like: "They think they are better than everyone else". The generation and accumulation of money can conflict with norms of social position and the tradition of sharing. Obligations to support extended family,

attend cultural events and permit employees to do the same were other examples of culturally-related challenges cited by respondents in this study. Some entrepreneurs further reported that their status (e.g. their family or culture, such as Métis) impacts their ability to garner community support, particularly from the leadership. For businesses reliant upon local markets in particular, creating community support is critical.

Some businesses obtain community support by starting enterprises that respect the environment and result in minimal cultural disruption, or what Begay & Kalt (1997), Myers (1999) and others refer to as businesses with a "cultural match", or practicing "culturally appropriate" development. This in turn emphasizes the importance of CED planning processes in Aboriginal communities that involve community members in the determination of what is "culturally appropriate" in their particular circumstance.

Outside of their Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal entrepreneurs report difficulties in garnering respect and credibility as business people due to stereotypes and racism. "The political bias against Indians in our community is like a wall…We are treated like second class citizens". First Nations traditions of trade and entrepreneurialism often go unrecognized. These attitudes damage self-confidence among new and prospective Aboriginal entrepreneurs. It is clear that relationships are key to promoting understanding and respect, yet, according to survey results, Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC do not tend to participate in business organizations within the larger business community (see Section 4.2). Respondents also do not tend to be members of local boards or charities, which is a means by which non-Aboriginal business people typically attempt to build community acceptance and support.

3.3.8 Implications for Information Services to Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

The characteristics of Aboriginal entrepreneurship and Aboriginal entrepreneurs shed light on the types of information that are required to enhance business success rates, about the targets of information products and programs, and about the strategies and tools with which programs are offered. Aboriginal youth, for example, are clearly an important and growing target group. Others include Aboriginal women, workers displaced from traditional resource sectors and home-based businesses. Still others are educated individuals entering professional and high technology sectors. As well, the diversity of business sectors in which entrepreneurs are active implies a need for a wider range of information tools suited to those operating within the full range of key sectors. Additional areas of importance highlighted by a review of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC and the challenges they face include: financing alternatives, marketing, building community support, understanding of culturally-related challenges, business structures and incorporation options (e.g. community enterprise, joint venture, sole proprietorship).

3.4 Section Summary

The aim of this chapter was to develop clear background knowledge of the Aboriginal entrepreneur, the central subject of this inquiry. Through analysis of relevant literature, supplemented by primary research findings, we have examined the characteristics, situations and challenges of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and Aboriginal entrepreneurship in BC.

The following key characteristics of Aboriginal entrepreneurs have been identified:

➢ Rapid rate of growth in Aboriginal entrepreneurship

➢ Increasing number of entrepreneurs under 30 years of age

➢ Motivated by the desire for financial independence

➢ Tendency towards sole proprietorships

➢ Trend toward partnering and joint ventures

➢ Significant number of home-based businesses, particularly on-reserve

➢ Active in a wide range of industry sectors. Key sectors include fishing, forestry, arts and crafts, retail, construction, tourism and hospitality, and other services, including consulting and professional services

➢ Increasingly responsive to the changes occurring in the economy and society

➢ Increasing export activity and use of the Internet for marketing

These entrepreneurs face many challenges as they strive to establish and grow their enterprises, including:

➢ Difficulty accessing capital (often reliant on equity financing)

➢ Geographic and social isolation in rural and on-reserve locations

➢ Support for and connections among urban entrepreneurs

➢ Economic leakage from Aboriginal communities, exacerbated by a weak private sector

➢ Lack of acceptance, respect and support in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities

This profile of Aboriginal societies, economies and entrepreneurs highlights a number of key implications for the development and delivery of business information tools and services. First, research indicates that Aboriginal entrepreneurs are operating within a complex and changing environment both in the marketplace and in their own communities. Changes of significance include a growing Aboriginal population, 50% of which are under the age of 25, movement from on-reserve, rural areas to urban, off-reserve settlements, and levels of health, education and economic well-being that are improving but remain unacceptably low. Changes in the legal and political environment have helped to increase access to natural resources, purchasing power and employment opportunities in Aboriginal communities. Providers and entrepreneurs must be prepared to stay on top of this changing business environment.

Second, there is an urgent need for economic development. While this emphasizes the importance of services that help lead toward economic self-reliance, the current socio-economic conditions in Aboriginal communities are linked to a host of issues. Providers must be aware of these issues and prepared to offer assistance. These may include basic education, health and family issues. Providers must take a holistic approach to assisting entrepreneurs in meeting their personal and business goals.

Third, it is clear that BC's Aboriginal entrepreneurs are a diverse group. A number of special target groups can be identified, each with their own unique information needs. They include: single, urban parents (particularly women), youth, those in remote rural locations, displaced workers, and home-based businesses. Providers must recognize the diversity of circumstances within and between communities, including varied access to technology, skills, education, and industry sectors of importance.

Additional implications for provision include the importance of personal interaction and assistance in the areas of financing, marketing, building community support and understanding of culturally-related challenges, business structures and incorporation options.

4. The Information Needs of Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in BC

The following section outlines the information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in British Columbia in terms of both the types of information they require (content) and the ways in which they prefer to receive it (delivery methods and agents).

4.1 Content

Entrepreneurs surveyed indicate that there are a number of key areas where business information is required. A summary of these areas is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Respondent Information Needs by Information Type

Information Type	% Requiring In Start-Up	% Requiring In On-going Operation
Financing options	80	68
Business planning	77	51
First Nations specific	59	-
Accounting & financial management	58	50
Government programs	54	-
Markets/marketing	54	55
Suppliers/distributors	52	-
Taxation/First Nations taxation	50	55
Banking	45	41
Legal/legislation	42	41
Home-based business	42	-
Business management – general	42	43
Mentors	34	27
Business structure	31	-
Business location	27	18
Women entrepreneurs	25	-
Human resources	23	22
Partnering and joint ventures	15	19

Source: Entrepreneur Survey

4.1.1 Requirements for Business Start-up

Many of the information needs revealed through the survey and focus groups related to initial start-up orientation, training and support of new entrepreneurs. These needs ranged from an awareness of the strengths and gifts they bring to business as Aboriginal peoples (including success stories from others in their field) to more specific "how to" information about business start-up and operation itself.

Lack of confidence or self-esteem was referred to as a barrier for Aboriginal entrepreneurs particularly in the pre-start-up and early stages of business development. It was suggested that

information about Aboriginal business knowledge, through case studies of successful Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and an assessment of individual entrepreneurial skills could help to address this barrier. Several entrepreneurs suggested that it would be useful if "mentors that have succeeded in business could hold seminars for the new entrepreneurs."

Other information requirements for those starting up, according to survey respondents, are: information on financing and business planning, accounting, financial management, markets/marketing, government programs, taxation, suppliers and distributors, banking, general business management practices and legal/legislative issues. A high percentage of respondents required information with a particular focus, including information that was related specifically to Aboriginal entrepreneurs, as well as to women entrepreneurs and home-based businesses, in their start-up phase. Nearly one-third of survey respondents had sought information on business structures. A limited number also required international marketing information.

4.1.2 Education and Skills Development

Although survey and focus group respondents were not asked about training needs specifically, many mentioned them, noting the need to acquire both information and skills together as necessary aspects of developing personal and community capacity for entrepreneurship. Focus group participants reported that Aboriginals do not have the educational levels to provide the breadth of knowledge and confidence that non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs start with. Improving basic education levels is considered critical to creating a level playing field with non-Aboriginals. Clearly, though, many Aboriginal people are ready to pursue further training and education to address this gap. DIAND (1998) reports that adults are engaging in employment and training programs at a rate three times that of the general population. Several survey respondents noted that lifelong learning is indeed important to the success of entrepreneurs, beginning with youth. "(We need to) empower youth…and work with universities to bring education to communities".

Participants revealed more specifically what they needed to learn and how that education or training could be offered. Particular training interests identified in the survey included how to use the Internet, with approximately half of the survey respondents not currently using the Internet indicating that they did not use this tool because they needed more training to use it effectively and to conduct searches. "If you don't understand search mechanisms, it means you are still in a dependent relationship." Other topics requiring training included developing stronger research, marketing and financial management skills. Interview and survey respondents also indicated that information is required on the education and training programs that are available in the province, such as financing and those particularly relating to entrepreneurial skills.

4.1.3 Ongoing Business Information Requirements

According to respondents, access to pertinent information and skills development are also important once a businesses is up and running. Providing good follow-up and on-going support can make the difference between business success and failure, particularly in the early years of operation. Entrepreneurs report that continuing contact with providers, through site visits, seminars, trouble-shooting sessions or other ways of keeping in-touch would be encouraging. Helping entrepreneurs overcome difficulties associated with family and community, anticipating and addressing cash flow and income deficiencies, or analyzing new business opportunities can be key to ongoing business survival.

Some established entrepreneurs want better information on where and how to engage in mentoring, partnering and networking relationships. Others are looking for specific information pertaining to business operation such as accessing suppliers and distributors, insurance, accounting, exporting, promotions, licensing and harvesting, payroll and employee training. Financing, government programs, marketing, business planning and management and taxation also remain important as information requirements after start-up. In fact, the importance of marketing and taxation information increased for the businesses surveyed as they became established, as did information on general business management and joint venturing/partnering (see Table 3).

Once established, many businesses were keenly aware of the changes taking place in their economies and markets. They wanted to become more capable of adapting to these changes and dealing with slowdowns in sector economies. They were also eager to explore potentials in new areas such as culturally based enterprises, eco-tourism, e-commerce, web-based business and cooperative marketing. In short, they need to be able to keep up to date regarding trends and new opportunities, and to be able to respond accordingly. "We need information on how to find market changes to be able to advertise in more successful areas," remarked one respondent.

4.1.4 Unique Groups with Unique Information Needs

Research findings point out that the information needs of entrepreneurs tend to vary according to a number of factors and that each of these factors demand consideration in the design and delivery of information products and services. As previously discussed, two differentiating factors are the length of time a business has been in operation and, often related to this, their stage in the business cycle (e.g. pre-start up, start-up, established businesses, businesses seeking to expand and/or diversify). Other differentiating factors highlighted by the research results are gender, age, location, ancestry/culture and business sector. The information needs of these groups tend to vary both in content and in delivery methods.

Women

> "I delivered a workshop … and there was one Aboriginal women in my class. She did very well with the news release assignment and afterward I went up to her and praised her. The women responded with the comment that it was very scary for her to leave the reserve and do this workshop. It was the first time she had."
>
> Service Provider

In *The Road Less Traveled* (Ai et al, 1998), study findings suggest that Aboriginal women face unique challenges and situations and may benefit from additional business support services tailored specifically to their needs. These findings include:

➢ Female owned businesses were more likely to fail, doing poorly by comparison to those owned by males (Other studies suggest that husband/wife partnerships are the most likely to succeed.)

➢ Females were more likely to start businesses before the age of 35. Female Aboriginal business owners were more concentrated in retail, tourism, business/financial services and

> manufacturing sectors. Some of these sectors were generally less profitable for Aboriginal companies.

➢ Female owners tend to engage in businesses in marginal sectors and rely on local markets and are less willing to seek government help than male owners.

Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in Canada indicates a growing trend towards female participation in business enterprise, confirming that the sharpest growth in Aboriginal self-employment is among Aboriginal women - over double that of the national average (Micro-Economic Policy Analysis Branch and Aboriginal Business Canada, 1998). Yet Aboriginal women, particularly single mothers in urban areas, are challenged to find adequate, affordable childcare while they work. As RCAP states: "…child care is as much an economic development issue as a social one. Child care is an integral factor in an individual's road to self-reliance and in community economic development and health" (p.66).

Some focus group respondents suggested that Aboriginal women are a very empowered group of entrepreneurs who do not require special programs: "All you need to do is get out of their way". They argue that women account for a significant percentage of the management and leadership in Aboriginal communities and, therefore, are well equipped with the skills required for success: "They are more organized, goal oriented, have a game plan". Other women, however, reported clear barriers to their success. They report having been dispossessed of their status, and their traditional role in the community. Other women face an uphill struggle to be taken seriously, by both Natives and non-natives: "People want to talk to the male owner", or "(The) husband has to co-sign the loan application". They rely on their husbands for transportation, and struggle with child-care and family issues.

One-quarter of the entrepreneurs surveyed sought information specific to women in business when they were starting their enterprise. Although the gender of respondents is not known, this is likely to represent a very high percentage of female respondents, offering further evidence of the need for products and services tailored to the unique needs of this group.

The importance of considering context stands out when examining the information needs of women. Clearly, women entrepreneurs need more than information. In order to run their businesses or participate in relevant training, peer support, social support services and childcare facilities are vital. However, providers must understand these special needs and be prepared to offer referrals to sources of assistance that can best deal with these issues.

In the early 1990's, Economic Development for Canadian Aboriginal Women, Inc. (EDCAW, 2000) reported the findings of research into the business needs of Aboriginal women in Canada. The most significant needs found, seen as fundamental to business success, were in business planning, financial management and marketing. The report offered specific recommendations for addressing these needs, which can inform information providers who serve the population of women surveyed in this study.

Two of the main recommendations were in the areas training/information provision and networking. In terms of information and training, the EDCAW study recommended that training and informational resources in financial management and sales be offered and that a program guide be developed which would help Aboriginal women to evaluate business financing options. The

study also recognized the need for networking of Aboriginal businesswomen with key players in the economic development arena, with other Aboriginal businesspeople and with other Aboriginal women, in particular. It was believed that these stronger links would help to initiate discussions around pooling resources to address common concerns, would improve information distribution channels, would allow women to share their business experiences and, thus, would enhance the success of such ventures.

This study reiterates these same needs, and others. Along with marketing and financing, study results indicate that issues of importance for Aboriginal women include overcoming stereotypes, and balancing the demands of business, caregiving and family and community life considerations. (For example, the need for childcare within business incubator facilities, for home-based business options and/or for social and business support networks).

Youth

In addition to the unique needs of women, Aboriginal youth also have particular concerns. Aboriginal youth experience their own unique challenges and represent a substantial portion of the "target market" for any product or service aimed at Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Statistics Canada (1998) reports the rapid growth in the Aboriginal population, with one in three First Nations Canadians today under 15 years old, compared with one in five non-Aboriginals.

With a burgeoning youth population at the threshold of launching careers, work opportunities for Aboriginal youth are a paramount consideration. It is clear that entrepreneurship is becoming a popular work alternative for young Aboriginals. In 1996, the proportion of Aboriginal self-employed workers between the ages of 15 and 24 was far greater than the national average. In fact, Crone (2000) notes that the incidence of entrepreneurs under 30, who were Aboriginal, was nearly double that of Canadians in general. Young Aboriginal entrepreneurs are particularly interested in innovation, finding new markets and using information technology, thus services suited to their needs must address these topics and utilize information technology as an important delivery mechanism (Ai et al, 1998; Caldwell and Hunt, 1998).

Unfortunately, this population exhibits a higher than average incidence of poverty, school drop out rates, unemployment and substance abuse (DIAND, 1998; RCAP, 1996), issues that unquestionably impact entrepreneurial development and success.

Urban/Rural – Off-reserve/On-reserve

As described in Section 3 above, an increasing number of First Nations people are moving from rural, on-reserve areas into urban, off-reserve environments. This situation has both positive and negative implications for the success of the business. Some outcomes of this relocation to urban areas for Aboriginal entrepreneurs include:

➢ First Nations in urban areas are likely to have fewer familiar sources of support (that which is preferred),
➢ Technology in urban areas is more readily available
➢ Entrepreneurs have direct access to larger markets
➢ There is greater activity in sectors such as high tech and property development.

Notwithstanding the movement to urban areas, more than 40% of Aboriginal people in British Columbia remain on-reserve and in rural areas. These individuals and communities face their own

unique challenges that must be considered, one of the greatest being geographic isolation from the providers of information services and resources. Thus organizations such as "CFDCs for a rural point of contact are important" to the rural Aboriginal entrepreneur.

Additional challenges for the entrepreneur in rural regions include coping with the economic uncertainty associated with communities dependent on the primary resource sectors, along with access to supplies, markets, and educational institutions. Lack of infrastructure, whether communications (e.g. telephone and Internet connections), health care facilities or transportation routes (e.g. roads, docks), is another barrier faced by remote BC communities.

Other
Focus group and survey results indicate that the Métis, too, are a distinct group with disadvantages. Some Métis respondents commented that, in general, "Métis businesses have not received support from the Aboriginal community". "Non-registered Indians" who tend to live off-reserve, experience many of the same challenges of other urban and off-reserve Aboriginals discussed above. Finally, workers displaced from traditional fishing and forestry sectors and disabled entrepreneurs are identified in the literature as groups with unique needs and challenges.

4.1.5 Sectoral Requirements

Information needs particular to various sectors is an area requiring further investigation. The entrepreneurial survey and literature review confirm that the main business sectors of Aboriginal entrepreneurship include: tourism and hospitality, fishing, forestry, arts and crafts, retail (e.g. "gas bars and corner stores"), agriculture, construction and related trades, and service (including consulting and other professional services and automotive repair and personal services, such as health and fitness). Other important sectors include real estate development, transportation and manufacturing.

Entrepreneurs suggested that they often require information that is quite specific to their sector (e.g. harvesting regulations in the forest industry) and that sources of information must either be from the industry itself, stressing the importance of business networks, or from a provider with particular knowledge and/or experience in their field.

Figure 3: Main Business Sectors of Entrepreneurs Surveyed
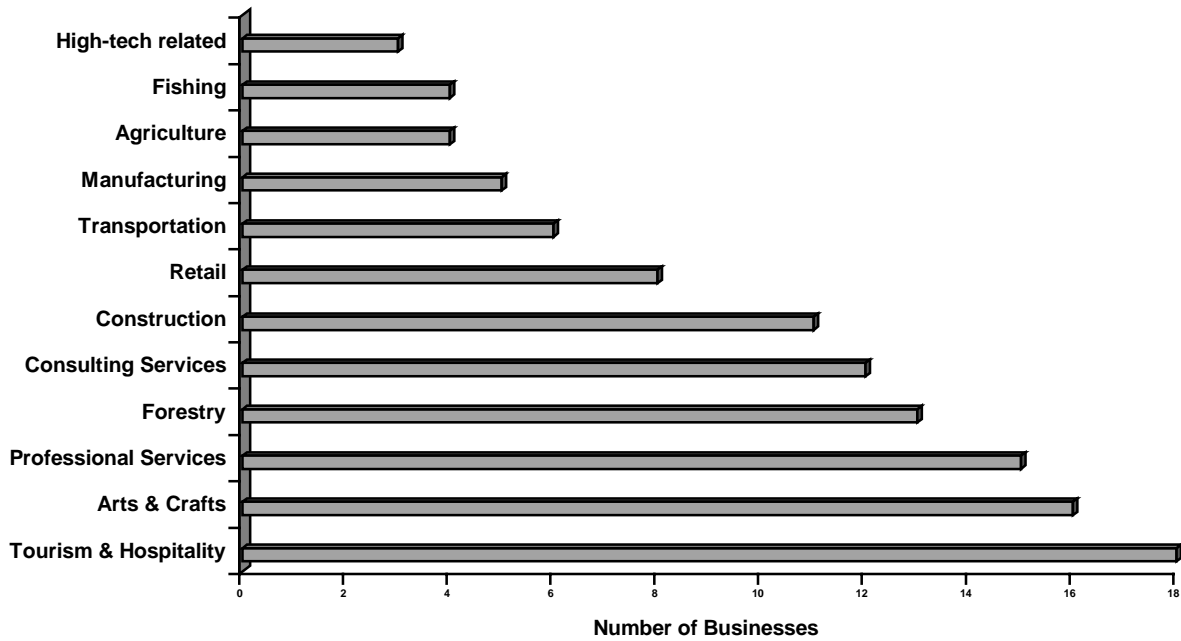
4.2 Delivery Methods and Models

4.2.1 Key Success Factors

In addition to the content of informational materials required by Aboriginal entrepreneurs, survey and focus group results compellingly point out several factors that significantly impact the ability to access, acquire and use these materials. These factors include good working relationships within a comfortable, respectful environment, accessibility in person and in a nearby location, awareness of the availability of materials, programs and services, knowledgeable assistance and high quality, affordable, Aboriginal-focused information (see Table 4).

The most significant criterion for useful information is that approachable individuals with sound business knowledge and experience provide it. Entrepreneurs indicate that it is the local level, particularly from friends and business people, where they prefer to turn for information support. For many, the costs of materials are a critical factor to be considered as well.

The theme of comfort and respect was repeated consistently in the surveys and focus groups. Respondents noted repeatedly that they highly value approachable individuals and a welcoming, friendly atmosphere, where they are treated with respect and as equals. Several noted that this is one area where providers could improve. Providers and programs, then, should be sensitive to the unique issues, protocols and values of First Nations people, have an understanding of the

environment in which Aboriginal entrepreneurs operate and are most comfortable, and knowledge of the unique ways that Aboriginals learn.

Table 4: Key Determinants of Useful Information

Entrepreneurs find information most useful that is:	Percent of respondents
1) provided by people knowledgeable about the business	76
2) provided by approachable individuals	61
3) inexpensive or free	60
4) provided specifically for Aboriginal entrepreneurs	53
5) provided in a friendly, welcoming environment	52
6) easily accessible in person, in or near their community	43
7) of high quality	42

Source: Entrepreneur Survey

4.2.2 Preferred Delivery Methods

One-on-one Counselling and Assistance
Survey respondents also indicated their preferences for various delivery methods. As Figure 4 clearly points out, most respondents indicated a strong bias for one-on-one interaction, seminars and personal assistance, reflecting the importance of individual attention - particularly in the beginning stages of setting up a business. Service providers in focus groups corroborated both the entrepreneur and service provider survey results, indicating that the preferred way for entrepreneurs to access business information is: "on their turf, face to face, with a mentor, in print and in training programs where those people just beginning are in groups. At the entry level, the comfort level is important" (see Appendix 10).

Print Materials
Print material was seen as both appropriate and useful, but users wanted material, whether print based or web-based, to be relevant, generally in simple language, quick and easy to use and available both publicly (e.g. through a library or CFDC) and privately (available at home or for purchase). It was pointed out that both web and print materials are best used in concert with one-on-one personal assistance. Furthermore, print materials should reflect varying educational and literacy levels and preferred learning styles (see Appendix 18).

Particular feedback about print materials focused on both the technical aspects of presentation and the content. Criticism about print materials currently available ranged from small font that was hard to read and absence of a table of contents, to documents that were too long or too complex and pages that were too busy (see Appendix 13). Others noted that a workbook style is useful in helping entrepreneurs acquire and apply information to their particular situation.

Figure 4: Preferred Delivery Methods & Models
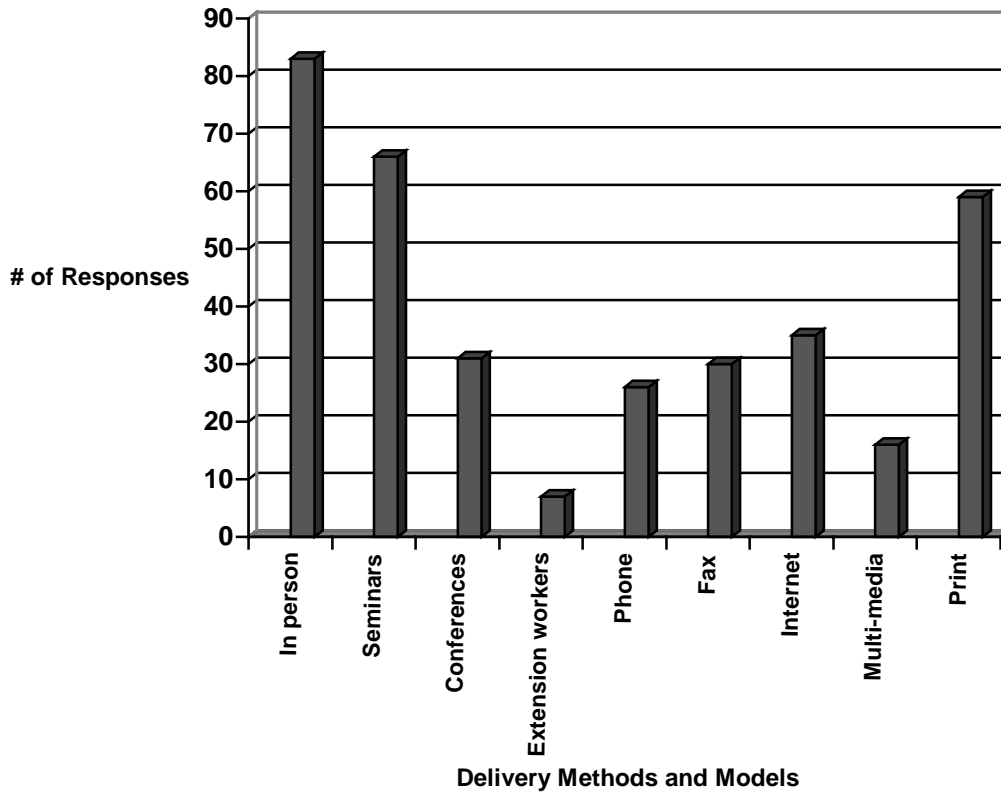
The Internet as an Information Tool

Approximately one-third of respondents also mentioned the Internet, conference, phone and fax as preferred means of gaining knowledge and information. Respondents varied considerably in their use of the Internet as a tool for accessing business information. In total 54% of respondents use the Internet. This is a considerably higher level of use than demonstrated in previous studies (e.g. 40% of those surveyed by Goss Gilroy (1996), 22% by Caldwell and Hunt (1998), and less than 25% according to CANDO/Consilium (1998). This difference may reflect a trend of increasing connectivity and Internet use in Aboriginal communities. Two federal programs, introduced under the *Connecting Canadians* strategy, have facilitated this increase in use: SchoolNet, which has placed computer terminals and website connections via satellite in all First Nations schools under federal jurisdiction in BC, and Community Access Program (CAP), which has helped established public sites in 35 First Nations communities across the province (see Appendix 15 for details). Aboriginal youth are being exposed to information technology and are utilizing information technology and the Internet at a much higher rate than other age groups of the Aboriginal population. Research results also suggest that Internet use is higher in urban regions such as the Lower Mainland than in others such as the Cariboo and Vancouver Island/Coast.

Those who use the Internet use it to communicate via email (92% of those who use the Internet), access information for their business research (44%) and market their products and services (52%). It was pointed out that computers also could provide mentoring opportunities through web-based connections. It was noted that Internet-based research and communication could be particularly useful to rural entrepreneurs who are limited by long distances from their markets and from

information and learning sources, a potential emphasized by other recent studies as well (e.g. Micro-Economic Policy Analysis Branch, 1998). Entrepreneurs and communities (whether Aboriginal or not) that do not create capacity to use the Internet, they point out, run the risk of "falling further behind and becoming even more marginalized" (Halseth and Arnold, 1997, p.49).

The literature suggests that information technology is underutilized among Aboriginal entrepreneurs in Canada due to inadequate funds, skills and infrastructure to support the technology. The results of this study confirm that this is also the case in British Columbia. Of respondents who were currently not using the Internet, nearly two-thirds felt they would require training to do so. Many others do not have the necessary equipment and/or find Internet use to be time consuming. Those in rural and remote areas also have higher costs associated with connectivity (i.e. long distance, ISP charges) (CANDO/Consilium, 1998). For 25%, the reason cited for not using the Internet is that the connections in their community are poor.

To ensure equal access and widespread use of the Internet as a tool for information delivery, entrepreneurs and service providers need to acquire the necessary information technology tools (e.g. software, equipment), training, technical support and adequate infrastructure, particularly in rural and remote areas, where many still rely on radio phones. For those who do not have the Internet in their home or business, public facilities with computer access are necessary. In the meantime, alternative methods, such as one-on-one counselling, workshops, telephone service and print materials remain critical.

4.2.3 Sources of Information

Aboriginal entrepreneurs called for information to be in the hands of the users themselves. That is, entrepreneurs would prefer that information and programs be devolved to the regions and delivered in their communities in order to be most effective. They indicated a strong preference for going to familiar people in their families or communities to get information and assistance. The source of information most used by entrepreneurs was family and friends, followed by business people in their community (see Table 5).

Outside of this familiar circle, the CFDCs, particularly Aboriginal CFDCs, followed by public agencies, and Aboriginal Capital Corporations were the sources of information most often turned to, along with private services such as banks, accountants, insurance agents and lawyers. Although entrepreneurs expressed a preference for local service delivery ("service should be provided through the local office where they actually care about the clients"), only 10% had turned to their Band office or Economic Development Officer[8] for information. The tendency to seek assistance from various types of organizations varies by region, as does both availability and quality of service. Variations in regional coverage are discussed further in section 6.

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[8] This finding should be qualified by saying that some ACC staff are also the local EDOs and that due to limited funding some communities are not able to hire EDOs that entrepreneurs can turn to for advice. See section 5.1.1 for further discussion on findings pertaining to EDOs.

Table 5: Preferred Sources of Information

Preferred Sources of Information During Business Start-Up	Percent of Respondents
Friends and family	57
Business people in my community	48
CFDCs	33
Aboriginal CFDCs	29
Government agencies	25
Accountant/insurance agent/lawyer	14
Bank or credit union	14
Aboriginal Capital Corporations	13
Trade or professional organization	12
Band administration office	11
Economic Development Officer	10
Friendship Centres	9
Chamber of Commerce	9
Community Development Corporation	5

Source: Entrepreneur Survey

Both focus groups and surveys recognized the talent and potential within the Aboriginal community, but noted that all too often, low self-confidence hinders efforts to move forward with entrepreneurial plans. In part this may explain why many go to familiar people in their communities for information and prefer comfortable, welcoming environments and processes that encourage relationship building and cooperation.

Business Networks

> "Entrepreneurial mentorship programs are important. Networking with existing Aboriginal business people is motivational. A luncheon program is a good model."

Given that 86% of entrepreneurs surveyed indicated that networking with other businesses was "very important" or "important", it is clear that networking is seen as a very valuable method of obtaining business information. These networks are critical to understanding the requirements of business start-ups, understanding the local business environment, sharing information on programs, markets, and facilities, maintaining relevant, up-to-date information, and receiving moral support. Further, there was recognition that web-based networking of entrepreneurs, both among Aboriginals and with non-Aboriginals would be a valuable way to share information, and could limit the effects of racial or gender discrimination.

Notably, although they believe business networks could be very useful to them, more than three quarters of respondents were not connected to any business networking group or association. Few belong to organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce (less than 10% of respondents were members) or Trade Associations. Only slightly more respondents participate in Aboriginal-specific business networks.

Certain overall factors were also mentioned in terms of their importance to the success of businesses. Communications and distances from markets were seen, by far, as the most important contributors to business growth and success. Both of these factors indicate the need to maintain strong networks among the many stakeholders, and strong links with markets, particularly for entrepreneurs residing in rural and remote areas. If the previously discussed barriers can be overcome, information technology represents the potential to address these communication needs.

Figure 5: Importance of Factors Limiting Growth and Success

Order of importance: high - low
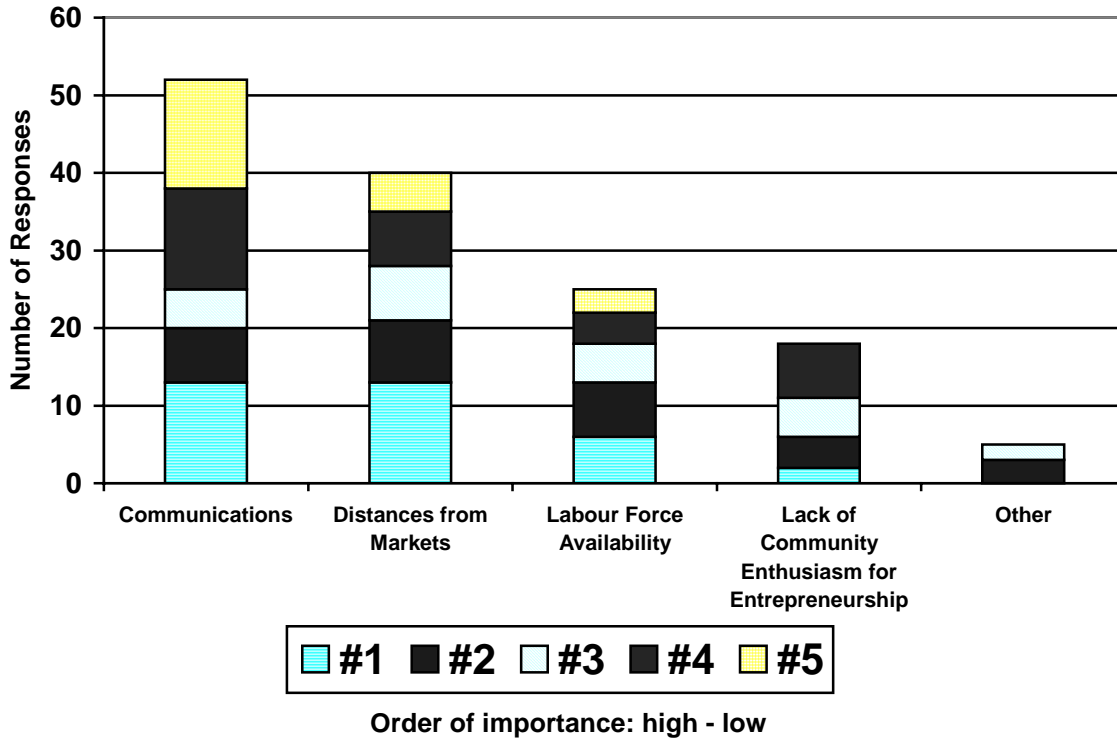
4.3 Section Summary

The results of this research identify a number of key information needs, both in the content of information provided and in the ways business information is dispersed. The most important types of information content for the Aboriginal entrepreneurs surveyed included: financing options, business planning, information that is specific to Aboriginal business, accounting and financial management, information about government programs, markets and marketing. First Nations and business taxation is also an important area, along with information on suppliers and distributors in their industries.

Entrepreneurs point out that information, accompanied by education and skills training, is required at both the start-up and ongoing operation stages of a business. To address issues of self-confidence and self-esteem start-up entrepreneurs, and those considering getting into business, often benefit a great deal from learning about case studies of successful Aboriginal entrepreneurs. During

on-going operations, respondents wanted information on trends and potential new opportunities. Needs were also identified with regard to skill development, particularly in the areas of marketing, research, financial management, and use of Information Technology tools.

Entrepreneurs noted strong preferences among delivery methods and sources of information, many of them reflecting a fragile sense of confidence, particularly during the initial stages of business development. These individuals preferred to get information in person or in seminars, and most often sought out information from familiar "safe" environments at home and in their communities. Print materials are also found to be useful, particularly when used in conjunction with personal assistance and/or a workshop format. Although lagging well behind one-on-one assistance, seminars and print materials, many showed interest in the Internet as a source of information for the purposes of research, marketing, mentoring and communication from remote areas.

5. The Current System: Providers, Tools, Services and Relationships

The current system for meeting the information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs is made up of three key components: 1) the various organizations that provide information to the Aboriginal entrepreneur; 2) the tools and services they provide; and 3) the relationships between service providers that ensure services are delivered in an integrated and coordinated manner. The following section describes each of these components of the delivery system, as they currently exist in British Columbia. Compiling an inventory of service providers, programs, services and information tools has proven to be a very valuable aspect of the research project. The results of this inventory work are summarized below. A detailed listing of providers can be found in Appendix 2, programs and services in Appendix 11, and information products or "tools" in Appendix 12.

5.1. The Service Providers

There are a wide variety of individuals and organizations involved in Aboriginal economic development in British Columbia, ranging from individual start-up entrepreneurs to large, well-established firms, along with all levels of government and a host of organizations established to facilitate Aboriginal economic development, all or in part through the provision of information to entrepreneurs. The activities of these organizations are summarized below. It should be emphasized, however, that although formal provider organizations, and the entrepreneurs themselves, are the focus of this study, research results clearly show that informal local networks of friends, family and business people in the community are also key providers of information.

The intent of this section is to describe the formal organizations that provide information and technical assistance to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. In total, more than 200 service providers were identified during this study. Information on 167 of these organizations was collected through a "Provider Inventory" survey. The survey was conducted to gather the following categories of information on each organization: organization name, organization category, clientele served, information provided by topic and stage of business development targeted, media and methods of access used, delivery and funding agencies, and contact information. Responses were compiled in a Provider Inventory database. Results of the inventory demonstrate that organizations are providing information on a range of topics, and through a range of delivery mechanisms, as discussed further below.

Five major categories of service provider organizations were initially identified:
1) government agencies and departments;
2) "intermediaries" - non-government organizations established to provide information services to Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs;
3) private sector (corporations);
4) industry organizations and other business associations (many of which are sector-specific); and
5) training and education organizations offering programs and services aimed at Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Through the inventory research a sixth category of organization was identified - organizations formed to support the service providers themselves (rather than entrepreneurs directly), whose products and services in turn benefit the entrepreneur. See section 5.1.6 below for examples.

Of the existing service providers, it is the government agencies and intermediaries (particularly CFDCs, ACCs and Business Development Centres) that are most significant, in terms of use by entrepreneurs seeking information. EDOs are the most significant in terms of the total numbers in the province and the number of communities in which they are present. A summary of the organizations included in the Provider Inventory is provided in Table 6 below, followed by a description of the activities and major players in each of the six categories of service providers.

Table 6: Service Providers by Organization Type/Category

	Type	Category	Number
1.	Government:	Federal agencies/departments	11
		Provincial agencies/departments	6
		EDOs[9]	71
2.	Intermediaries:	Aboriginal capital corporations	7
		AHRDA holders/societies	12
		CFDCs	34
		Friendship centres	11
		Other[10]	9
3.	Private sector:	Aboriginal corporations[11]	6
		Crown corporations	3
		Financial institutions	2
		Other	2
4.	Sectoral[12]		22
5.	Educational/training institutions		4

Source: Service Provider Inventory

5.1.1. Government Agencies and Departments

Federal and Provincial Governments
Both the provincial and federal governments have a host of different programs which support economic development, and entrepreneurship in particular, in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In total, more than 80 programs of relevance to Aboriginal entrepreneurs were

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[9] Only 23 EDOs responded to the survey. However, in order to complete an analysis of service delivery by region, key providers that had not responded but were known to be in operation, were included in the inventory (organization name, category, location and clientele). This included EDOs, CFDCs and ACCs. Of 76 EDOs originally identified, 6 positions were vacant or no longer providing EDO services. An additional EDO, not included on the original list (e.g. not funded by DIAND), was later added.
[10] Includes organizations later classified as category 6 – Organizations of Service Providers.
[11] Aboriginal and financial corporations exclude those already listed as intermediaries (e.g. ACCs).
[12] Several organizations indicated they were providers of sectoral information as well as fitting one of the other categories. Therefore, these numbers total a figure greater than the 167 organizations included in the inventory.

identified during the course of this research. Each of these is described in Appendix 11[13]. More than 50% of these programs are targeted specifically to the needs of Aboriginal peoples.

The main source of federal support for First Nations enterprises is Aboriginal Business Canada (ABC). Through ABC, Industry Canada offers financial and technical support (lending and business services) to Aboriginal business. Other significant federal players include: Indian and Northern Affairs, which provides funding for service providers (e.g. Economic Development Officers) and entrepreneurs as well as a range of print materials; Western Economic Diversification; the Canadian Forest Service; Human Resource Development; Department of Foreign Affairs and others.

The Province of BC provides information support primarily through the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and BC Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture. Other agencies, such as the Northern Development Commission and crown corporations, such as Fisheries and Forestry Renewal BC, also play a role. The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs' First Citizen's Fund was established in 1969. The Fund offers both a Business Loan Program for new and expanding businesses and enhancement of management skills. "Aftercare" advisory/support services are provided to the entrepreneur by contracted service provider organizations. These services are paid for through a borrower's fee (Bowie, 1994). A program sponsored by the BC Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, called "Visions for the Future", is directed specifically at Aboriginal youth. Through a series of conferences, this program aims to help youth develop career plans and to explore job training and educational options.

These programs provide a range of benefits for entrepreneurs including financing, training (of either the entrepreneur or their staff), workforce recruitment, marketing assistance, access to markets (e.g. exporting, government purchases), or business information. Others provide broad economic development benefits or cover several of these areas (see Tables 7 and 8 below).

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[13] This list is focused primarily on programs for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and is not exhaustive. There are several excellent guides to government funding programs (e.g. Industry Canada's *Your Guide to Government of Canada Services and Support for Small Business*) that provide descriptions of programs for small business and contact information.

Table 7: Federal Agencies[14] Offering Programs in Support of Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Program Type	Enterprise Financing [15]	Human Resource Develop't	Marketing/ Market Access	Business Info. & Advice	Sector-Specific	Target Group Specific	General Support [16]
Agency							
DIAND	*	*	*		*	*	*
Industry Canada	*		*	*	*	*	
HRDC		*			*	*	*
WD	*				*	*	*
Forest Service					*		
DFO					*		
NRC	*			*			*
Public Works			*				
Revenue Canada				*			
Foreign Affairs			*				
Canadian Heritage					*	*	
Agri-Food					*		
Arts Council					*		
Status of Women						*	
Farm Credit					*		
BDB	*			*			

Source: Review of Programs and Services (Appendix 11)

Many of these programs provide benefits specifically to businesses that are either within a priority industrial sector or operated by someone within a target group of special interest (e.g. women, youth, Aboriginals living off-reserve etc.). There are, for example, a significant number of programs targeted to the fisheries and agri-food sectors (14), forestry (11), arts (5) and technology-based enterprise (ABC Innovation Program, along with several others providing support for research and development activities). Programs are also available to support tourism and communications ventures. Many of these sector-specific programs are primarily intended to provide funding. Others offer information, networking opportunities and employment training as well.

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[14] Including Crown Corporations

[15] "Enterprise Financing" and "Human Resource Development" categories exclude financing and training programs targeted to specific groups or sectors, which are included under the categories "Sector-Specific" or "Target Group Specific".

[16] Programs may cover more than one of the program areas.

Table 8: Provincial Agencies Offering Programs in Support of Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Agency	Enterprise Financing	Human Resource Development	Marketing/ Market Access	Business Info.	Sector-Specific	Target Group Specific	General Support [17]
Small Business, Tourism and Culture				*		*	*[18]
Aboriginal Affairs	*					*	*
Northern Development Commission				*			*
Agriculture, Fisheries and Food					*		
Community Development, Cooperatives and Volunteers	*						*
Information, Science and Technology	*						
Fisheries Renewal BC					*		
Forest Renewal					*		
BC Hydro	*	*	*				
BCR Group	*		*				

Source: Review of Programs and Services (Appendix 11)

Among the programs intended to serve specific target groups, seven serve the youth segment (see Table 9). Women's organizations benefit from two programs, off-reserve and/or urban Aboriginals from three others and, finally, one Heritage Canada program addresses the specific needs of Métis/Non-Status Native peoples. Current programs for women, urban and Métis/non-status First Nations, however, are not specifically oriented to business development but instead are support organizations that work on behalf of these groups on a number of fronts, including employment and economic development.

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[17] Programs may cover more than one of the program areas.
[18] One Stop Business Registration provides information on licensing requirements etc. but also provides the service of being able to apply directly through the system.

Table 9: Government Programs for Youth

Aboriginal Specific	General
Visions for the Future	Western Youth Entrepreneurs Program
First Nations and Inuit Youth Business Program	YouBet!
ABC Youth Entrepreneurship Program	Urban Youth Entrepreneurship Initiative
Young Canada Works (urban Aboriginal placements)	

Source: Review of Programs and Services (Appendix 11)

Government programs with a primary focus on providing business information include Canada/BC Business Service Centre, Revenue Canada taxation seminars for Aboriginal business, National Research Council's technical and business advisors and Aboriginal Business Canada's non-financial development support services. Other program types also have business information aspects. At a minimum, information is provided about their particular program. The business information provided in conjunction with financing programs appears to vary widely. While some financing agencies simply provide information on their particular financing program (e.g. guidelines, application forms), others provide assistance with business planning, aftercare follow-up and even ongoing mentoring relationships.

Aboriginal Governments
Aboriginal governments can play a significant role in supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurship in their communities. In many Aboriginal communities, particularly those that are remote from other services, Band and Tribal Council offices are the principal location for service delivery and information dissemination. However, there is considerable variation among the individual First Nations and Tribal Councils across the province in their level of activity in providing information products and services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Information services to entrepreneurs are provided in large part through Economic Development Officers (EDOs), primarily funded through DIAND, and Development Corporations. Of the 76[19] EDOs in the province initially identified by DIAND, 23 EDOs responded to the inventory survey, indicating that they were providing support services to entrepreneurs and 6 positions were found to be either vacant or no longer serving entrepreneurs.

In some cases, EDOs play an active and important role in business development in their communities and even provide assistance to entrepreneurs from neighbouring communities. Anecdotal accounts were shared in focus groups of particularly effective EDOs to whom providers and entrepreneurs from their communities and other areas regularly turn for assistance. Many entrepreneurs, however, expressed reservations about EDOs and about assistance obtained through Band offices in general, saying, "They have never been a source of help" or "The band office is a dead end".

In part, variations in EDO activity are due to wide variations in funding. EDO funding levels are calculated based on population size. Of 126 organizations receiving funding as of June 2000, nearly 44% had received less than $20,000, while 11 organizations (9%) received more than $100,000 (DIAND, 2000). There has been a trend toward individual Nations requesting that they receive their funding directly and, therefore, away from the model of EDOs serving larger areas (e.g., at the

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[19] Out of 197 First Nations and 31 Tribal Councils in BC, a total 125 of Nations, 11 Tribal Councils and 3 Aboriginal Capital Corporations in the province received DIAND funding in 1999 to assist with CED activities (DIAND, 2000). Of these, 76 were thought to have EDO staff offering services to entrepreneurs.

Tribal Council level) (Hooper, 2000). Some providers raised criticism that very little can be accomplished with the levels of funding received by small communities and the ways this funding is distributed:

> "CEDO funding is INAC's largest (in dollar terms) program. However it is not effective because the funds go to each band and no one gets much."

Some First Nations with limited EDO funding, however, have developed active economic development and entrepreneurial support programs by leveraging other sources of funds (see funding relationships below).

Other factors influencing the level and effectiveness of EDO activity include EDO knowledge and capabilities, along with the information resources available to them. Some, for example, receive training and information support through the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO), a national association of EDOs. However, an informal survey of EDOs conducted in 1999 by the Canada/BC Business Service Centre indicates that many EDOs in BC are not CANDO members (CBSC, 1999). A recent CANDO study also found that there appears to be a high turnover rate of EDOs, further slowing their efforts, and that there is a broad difference among EDOs in their capacity to assist entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs also noted that some EDOs require more training in the provision of information. Turnover may be one contributing factor as the knowledge gained through professional development activities and accumulated experience is lost as individual EDOs leave their positions. Further, some EDOs clearly do not feel they have access to the information resources they need. As one EDO remarked "Nobody provides us with any information at all". Through an initiative of CANDO and WD, however, 197 EDOs across the province will receive computers, software and the delivery of training modules with the intent of creating a network of EDOs who can utilize the Internet and business based information to assist their communities and entrepreneurs.

Finally, EDO activity varies according to the level of political support received from band leadership. In some cases, First Nations leaders (e.g. Band Council and administration) are reported to discourage rather than encourage entrepreneurship, particularly for those who are not "well-connected". As one entrepreneur explained: "You have to be in the right family – it is who you know. There is favouritism and politics on the reserve." In other cases, the leadership is simply not taking an active role in promoting self-employment. The case of the Tseil-Waututh First Nation (Burrard Band), whose membership has chosen economic development as a vehicle to help realize self-government, demonstrates that some Nations have strived to create a climate in which entrepreneurs can be successful. Leaders and officials of the Tseil-Waututh actively encourage entrepreneurship through a positive philosophy, member involvement in CED planning, band-owned enterprises with spin-off business opportunities for members, and sound accessible business expertise for entrepreneurs with a business idea (see McBride and Ndungutse, 2000).

Information on the activities of Development Corporations within this study is limited. Among 39 Aboriginal Development Corporations identified as being previously in operation from a recent directory of Aboriginal organizations in BC, 18 had telephones that were not in service and, therefore, may have moved or are currently inactive. Three were not surveyed independently as their representative also serves as an EDO. Nineteen did not respond and only 4 completed the inventory form. One additional Development Corporations was identified (Khowutzun Development Corp.). Examples of the activities of Development Corporations in BC, however,

include pursuing contract opportunities in the forest industry, providing season start-up capital for commercial fishermen, and providing entrepreneurial services (offered in conjunction with ACCs and Aboriginal CFDCs). Further research into the activities of Development Corporations in BC and the fate of those no longer active may provide useful insights.

5.1.2. Intermediaries

Research results show that intermediaries are the core of the service delivery system in BC (see relationships between providers in Section 5.3). They offer direct, personal assistance to the entrepreneur in or near their community and also, often, have strong links to governments. These intermediary organizations include Community Futures Development Corporations (including three Aboriginal specific CFDCs), Aboriginal Capital Corporations, Aboriginal Human Resource Development organizations (AHRDAs), Friendships Centres, and other societies that provide information support directly to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. This category can be further divided into those who serve Aboriginals specifically and those that are providers to the general population, including Aboriginal peoples. Of the 73 intermediaries surveyed, 41 were "Aboriginal-specific".

Aboriginal Capital Corporations
Aboriginal Capital Corporations are Aboriginal-owned and controlled lending institutions offering loan guarantees, operating loans and technical and advisory services. There are 33 Aboriginal Capital Corporations (ACCs) in Canada with seven of these in BC, averaging $5 million in revolving loan capital each. Advice is provided on business planning and funding programs available to entrepreneurs. ACC loan officers also provide referrals to other sources of information and expertise. Survey responses indicate that ACCs are used most frequently in the Lower Mainland and are considered one of the most useful sources of information in this region. ACCs in BC include: All Nations Trust Co. (Kamloops), First Nations Agricultural Lending Association (Kamloops), Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corp. (Port Alberni), Native Fishing Association (Vancouver), Bella Bella Community Development Society (Waglisla), Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation (Chilliwack), and Tribal Resources Investment Corp. (Prince Rupert).

Community Futures Development Corporations
CFDCs are operated by community-based boards with the purpose of promoting, coordinating and facilitating economic development initiatives, including support for entrepreneurs. CFDCs provide assistance with starting a business and preparing a business plan, loans to small business, "pathfinding" to government programs and services, as well as self-employment and business training such as marketing, bookkeeping and computer literacy (BC CFDC Association, 2000). CFDCs, based in rural areas, also offer programs for target groups such as women, youth, entrepreneurs with disabilities and displaced forestry and fisheries workers.

Aboriginal specific CFDCs provide loans and business support targeted to Aboriginal communities in 13 communities across Canada, including three in BC: Sto:lo (Chilliwack), Central Interior First Nations (Kamloops), and Nuu-Chah-Nulth (Port Alberni). Aboriginal CFDCs have developed programs such as peer lending, cross cultural training and Artisan's showcases to meet the unique needs of their client base. Some non-Aboriginal CFDCs also serve significant Aboriginal populations (e.g. 16/37 in Terrace and Haida Gwaii).

A regional analysis of where entrepreneurs seek information shows that CFDCs are popular across most regions. In some areas where Aboriginal-specific CFDCs exist, these organizations were considered the most useful source of information. In the Okanagan and Cariboo, for example,

entrepreneurs surveyed are more likely to refer others to Aboriginal CFDCs for assistance than any other type of organization.

Aboriginal Business Development Centres

Several organizations have developed what has been coined Aboriginal Business Development Centres (ABDCs), a walk-in "one-stop-shop" concept for access to support and financing for small business. Existing centres include the Central Interior First Nations in Kamloops and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corporation in Port Alberni. All Aboriginal CFDCs and ACCs offer financing and business support services, although to varying degrees, and therefore can be thought of as ABDCs. However, respondents report that CFDCs and ACCs tend to specialize in advisory support services and financing respectively. What is preferred is both functions offered in one location. As one provider put it "put an ACC and an Aboriginal CFDC together and you've got a winner". Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corporation is the only organization in the province that is both a CFDC and an ACC. The organization is therefore able to offer a wide range of services, including financing, training, one-on-one counselling and aftercare in the form of ongoing counselling and annual on-site visits (McBride and Ndungutse, 2000).

While two of BC's newest ABDCs offer information and assistance, they do not offer direct access to financing. The Prince George Aboriginal Business Development Centre is neither an ACC nor a CFDC. Small Business Advisors provide clients with advice and referrals and help clients deal with all the barriers to success they may encounter. They coordinate and cooperate with a number of local agencies to serve clients, but do not have direct access to financing. A similar initiative is now underway in downtown Vancouver, although its programs and clientele differ once again from those of other centres. First Nations Employment and Enterprise Centre serves off-reserve clients in Vancouver and Burnaby. Located in Downtown Vancouver, the Centre provides a range of programs and services for the unemployed, including self-employment assistance and enterprise development. Assistance to small business includes: mentorship, Internet access, "One-Stop-Business Registration" (OSBR), a business resource centre, seminars on small business development, and marketing and promotion of small business through the Internet.

Aboriginal Human Resource Development Organizations (AHRDAs)

Through contract arrangements, (Regional Bilateral Agreements) Human Resource Development Canada has transferred federal funding and responsibility for human resource development activities to 12 regional Aboriginal Human Resource Development organizations (AHRDAs) across the Province, in both urban and rural areas. These organizations generally have limited involvement in business development but do refer clients to other agencies and organizations and support self-employment training initiatives (See Appendix 11).

Friendship Centres

Friendship Centres have traditionally focused on social programs and support for Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve. Although generally less active in the area of entrepreneurship than some of the other organizations discussed above, some friendship centres have delivered small business workshops and many act as referral agents to other agencies. The Port Alberni Friendship Centre, for example, provides a *Youth Entrepreneurship Program Video*. Also, through a program called *RavenTech*, BC's 24 Friendship Centres have embarked upon a program to install hardware and provide Internet connectivity at each location. Within this program, youth 'TEC' representatives are trained and offer on-site technical assistance, training and assistance for clients learning to access to the Internet, including entrepreneurs who want to access business information on-line.

Other Societies

Other non-profit organizations directly providing information services and support in the province include: the Canadian Executive Service Organization, an organization offering counselling and mentoring services; the Aboriginal Women's Council which provides its members with "*The Spirit Lives*", an entrepreneurial business kit and website to assist youth and women starting home-based businesses; Women's Enterprise Society and the Native Investment and Trade Association (NITA), which hosts conferences on business-related topics, funds research and publishes a range of useful materials. See Appendix 11, Section C for a description of services provided by various intermediaries, including those referred to above.

5.1.3. Private Sector Services

As discussed in Section 3, given First Nations' growing control over resources, lands and capital, there has been an increasing interest within the private sector in catering to Aboriginal markets and in forging partnerships with Aboriginal businesses and communities. This has resulted in joint ventures, increased banking services for First Nations, and the establishment of Aboriginal departments within some firms, including those that provide business information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. While the role of the private sector was not formally included in this study, the research team did take a cursory look at some examples of private sector involvement in recognition of their already important and increasing involvement in the provision of information.

Several Crown corporations provide information, funding and market opportunities for Aboriginal business. BC Hydro, for example, has established an Aboriginal Relations department through which they publish a newsletter, an Aboriginal Business Directory and a guide to applying for their Aboriginal Business Program, which provides funding for business development. Banks such as CIBC provide many services for Aboriginal business, including business and commercial services and are increasing the number of branches and outlets in First Nations communities. The bank also partnered with Simon Fraser University to deliver a series of small business training workshops in Aboriginal communities. Financial institutions represent a logical partner in the provision of business information to the Aboriginal entrepreneur as such services, provided in conjunction with financing, help to increase the likelihood that loans are repaid and service costs can therefore be recovered.

Private sector consulting firms also provide fee-for-service advice to entrepreneurs and produce valuable publications. One good example, called *First Nations and Canadian Taxation*, was produced in 1996 by KPMG Aboriginal Services Group. Finally, Aboriginal owned businesses also serve the Aboriginal business community, including Community Development Corporations offering information and technical assistance for community members and a growing number of firms in the professional services sector (accountants, small business consultants, etc.) owned by Aboriginal entrepreneurs themselves.

There is diverse opinion regarding the usefulness of various private sector providers, with attitude and respectfulness toward the Aboriginal entrepreneur being the key differentiating factor. Some focus group participants felt that banks, for example, were unapproachable and that attitudes and stereotypes mean "it is often problematic to identify oneself as Aboriginal" when dealing with these institutions. On the other hand, another focus group participant felt that "Van City peer lending (is) very respectful of First Nations".

Service providers also cited materials and web sites provided by private firms as useful to their clients. Several providers surveyed indicated that they often refer clients to private sector service providers for information, when they are unable to provide it themselves. These incidents occur most often in the area of banking (26 responses), but also in financial management (11 responses), legal (6 responses), and taxation (7 responses).

5.1.4. Sector-Specific and other Aboriginal Business Associations

A range of Aboriginal business associations exist across BC and Canada (with BC membership). Many of them are specific to a given sector; others are regional in focus. The Northeast British Columbia Aboriginal Business Association, based in Fort St. John, for example, maintains a database of Aboriginal businesses in the Northeast region that meet the legal requirements of doing business in key industries. The Association also provides assistance to contractors preparing bid applications for federal and provincial purchasing programs, along with referrals to other organizations including lending agencies, insurance, accounting and business development assistance, one-on-one assistance with business plans, training, and marketing assistance (corporate customer contact).

To take advantage of the growing interest in cultural and heritage tourism the Aboriginal Tourism Association of BC was formed to organize and promote the province's Aboriginal tourism industry. In the agriculture sector the First Nations Agricultural Lending Association (FNLA) provides access to financing and agricultural training. The Consortium of Indigenous Arts is currently developing information and curriculum to re-establish traditional artistic disciplines and to establish standards for the Aboriginal arts industry in BC and Canada. Other sector-based networks and association include the Intertribal Retailers Association of BC, National Aboriginal Forestry Association, BC Aboriginal Fisheries Commission; Native Brotherhood of BC, Canadian Aboriginal Minerals Association and the Canadian Aboriginal Science and Engineering Association, which holds biannual conferences and provides for training partnerships and government funding for Aboriginal professionals to begin their own business. Other Aboriginal business associations, such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and National Aboriginal Business Association, serve businesses in all sectors and regions.

Mainstream business associations have also begun to reach out to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. The BC Chamber of Commerce, for example, passed a resolution in 1998 that promotes an outreach program to Aboriginal small business, encouraging relationships, mentoring and the facilitation of partnerships with non-native business owners. However, the program has not yet been established (Editor, 1999). As previously mentioned, study results show that connections between Aboriginal entrepreneurs and these organizations are generally weak.

5.1.5 Education and Training Institutions

Educational institutions such as universities and colleges also offer potential for partnerships and support for Aboriginal entrepreneurs through training, management and technical assistance. Universities in BC currently involved in these activities include the University of British Columbia First Nations Commerce program, the SFU CEDC, SFU Continuing Studies Department and the University of Victoria School of Public Administration. Community Skills Centres and colleges such as University College of the Cariboo, Chemainus Native College, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and North Island College also play a role, offering programs relating to small business start-up and management.

Like the private sector, educational and training institutions did not fall directly within the terms of reference this study. Nevertheless, they play an important role in providing skills and information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in the province. Respondents suggested a need to develop a listing of training and educational programs relevant to entrepreneurs in the province. CANDO's *Aboriginal Education Opportunities Manual* is a useful resource on this subject.

5.1.6. Organizations of Service Providers

A sixth category of organization identified during the course of this research is those organizations formed for the purpose of supporting service providers. While not serving entrepreneurs directly, these organizations facilitate cooperation, support, and information sharing for service providers, thus contributing to their quality of service and to the provision of information to the end user. Examples of such organizations include the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO), the Association of Aboriginal Financial Institutions, the National Association of Aboriginal Capital Corporations, and the Community Futures Development Association of BC.

5.2 Existing Programs, Services and Tools – An Overview

The previous section described the network of organizations that provide business information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC. Here, the programs, services and tools through which they disseminate this information will be outlined.

Information products and services currently available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers cover a wide range of topics and are presented in a variety of ways, through different media and types of services. More than 170 print publications, 10 interactive tools, and over 100 web sites pertaining to Aboriginal entrepreneurship have been identified in this research, along with workshops and conferences covering topics as diverse as e-commerce for Aboriginal Business to preparing a cash flow or retaining employees (see Appendix 12 for a listing of available information tools).

5.2.1 Delivery Mechanisms

Providers supply information to entrepreneurs through a range of services and delivery mechanisms. According to an inventory of programs and services (see Appendix 11), information services offered by BC providers include:

- ➢ Technical assistance/advisory services ("one-on-one")
- ➢ Mentoring
- ➢ Provision of print materials (e.g. brochures, newsletters)
- ➢ Organizing and hosting seminars, workshops and conferences
- ➢ Development/maintenance of pertinent web sites
- ➢ Telephone assistance
- ➢ Fax back service (e.g. question and answer)
- ➢ Pathfinding and referrals
- ➢ Training
- ➢ Internships and job placements

➢ CED planning assistance
➢ Access to Internet/computer labs
➢ Access to databases and libraries
➢ Career planning
➢ Networking
➢ Chat lines and email lists

Facilities such as resource libraries (frequently provided by CFDCs), computer labs with Internet access, and, in one case, a business incubator are also offered by some providers to facilitate information access and delivery.

Most Common Ways of Accessing Information
Survey results show that entrepreneurs currently receive their information most often by walking into an office or resource centre, once again reflecting their bias toward individualized, in person assistance. The second most common way they currently receive information is by phone, followed by classroom learning, Internet and extension workers (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Most Common Ways Entrepreneurs Access Information
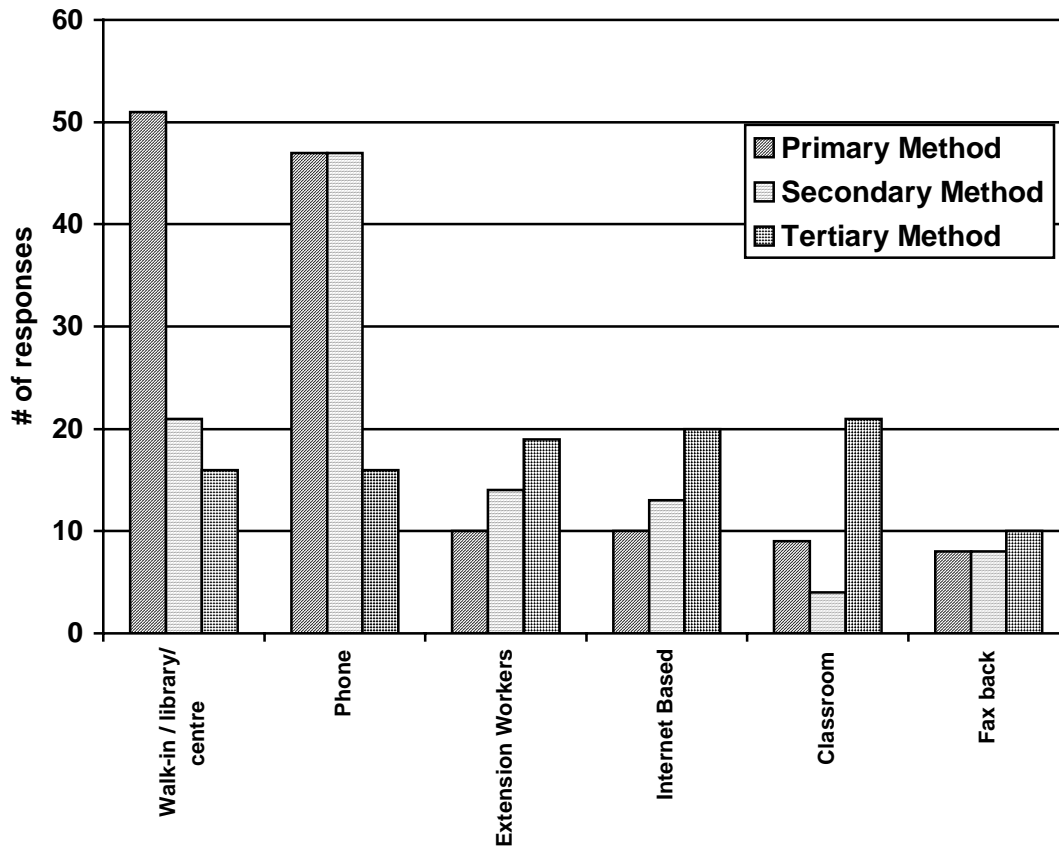
Most Common Ways of Providing Information

Provider responses suggest that once an Aboriginal entrepreneur visits a business resource centre or contacts their office by phone, providers rely heavily on print materials to disseminate information. Forums, workshops and classroom training sessions are the next most common methods used. Despite entrepreneurs preferences for one-on-one assistance, coaching and mentoring follows these other methods in frequency of use (see Figure 7).

Print tools come in a range of formats, including newsletters, magazines and periodicals/journals, brochures, reports and papers, handbooks, workbooks, and full-size books. Brochures are a common way of describing government programs and the services offered by providers. A number of newsletters and magazines are available that offer valuable case studies and a way of "staying up to date" for the provider and the entrepreneur.

Figure 7: Primary Media Used by Providers to Relay Information
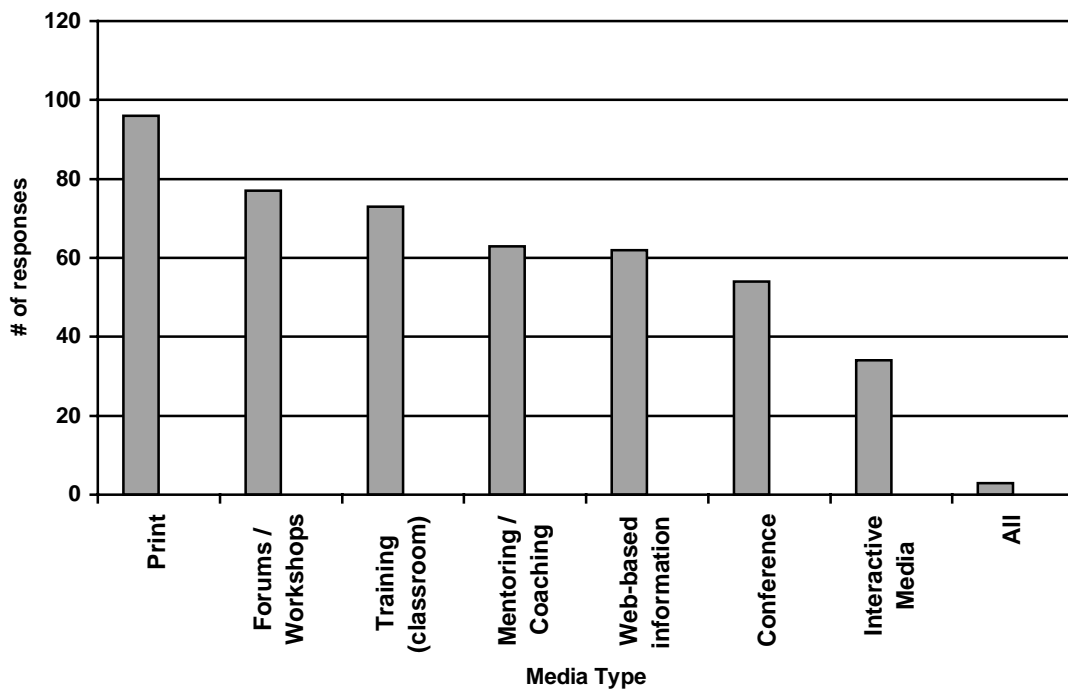
Workshops, seminars and conferences are also popular tools, representing a way of presenting information to multiple clients and to encourage networking and discussion among individuals at a similar stage in the development of their enterprise or idea. CFDCs have taken a leadership role in developing entrepreneurial training sessions. In total, more than 30 different seminars and workshops are offered by CFDCs in their respective regions. Topics include: basic bookkeeping, credit and collections, marketing, business communications and many others. Pre-entrepreneurial training is also offered. Revenue Canada provides Aboriginal Small Business Information Seminars, informing providers and new or prospective Aboriginal businesses on rights and obligations under the customs, excise, GST and income tax legislation and about services available to them. The BC Ministry of Small Business Tourism and Culture uses workshops and conferences as a method of introducing Aboriginal youth to entrepreneurship as a career option, and for business training for

those who do choose this route. Finally, provincial and national organizations such as NITA, Aboriginal Tourism BC, Canadian Aboriginal Minerals Association and Canadian Aboriginal Science and Technology Association host conferences on topics of interest on a regular basis.

While not the most frequently used method, many organizations agree that one-on-one counselling is deemed to be the most effective. Most intermediaries and many government agencies offer some form of personalized assistance to the entrepreneur. The degree to which this is possible is limited, however, by time and resources. Some EDOs and Aboriginal CFDCs suggested that it is necessary to spend considerable time with some individuals, guiding them in their business plans, producing pro forma and financial data, discussing ways to resolve problems. Technical assistance is also combined with other methods.

Volunteer mentoring programs are one way that providers have addressed the need for ongoing, one-on-one support. Seven organizations with formal mentoring programs were identified (with one, INAC's First Nations and Inuit Youth Business Program, delivered through a number of Aboriginal intermediaries throughout the province). They include: INAC, CESO, the Canadian Youth Business Foundation, Women's Enterprise Society, Ministry of Small Business Tourism and Culture (YouBet!), Business Development Bank of Canada, and Forest Renewal BC (value-added program). These initiatives match entrepreneurs with volunteer advisors who have business experience, frequently within their industry. Some CFDCs and business associations also facilitate mentoring relationships through formal programs or informal networking opportunities. Finally, entrepreneurs rely heavily on other business people for information, suggesting that in some cases Aboriginal entrepreneurs initiate their own mentoring and information sharing relationships in their communities.

A comparison of Figure 6 and Figure 7 suggests that while a significant number of providers are making information available to entrepreneurs through the Internet, only a limited number are using this as a primary or secondary method of accessing information. Although most providers have developed their own web sites, many expressed limited enthusiasm for the Internet: "We may eventually set up a terminal for access by entrepreneurs who are further along, but we find that sitting down and talking to them works best".

About half of the focus groups respondents, however, indicated that the Internet was good source of up to date information, and many feel it is invaluable for reaching international markets. They realize, however, that both connection to the Web and workshops/training to prepare for its use will be necessary. A study by CANDO found that "participants from urban, rural, and remote regions agreed on the importance of equal access to the Information Highway for *all* Aboriginal businesses, no matter where located. They stressed that rural and remote communities must have equal access to modern telecommunications services, including the Internet. *"This is probably the single most important underlying theme of the research results"* (CANDO/Consilium, 1998, p.xi.).

Aboriginal service providers in BC are increasingly looking to computers and the Internet as a tool for providing information to clients, for training staff as well as clients, for business research, and for marketing. This trend to greater use of information technology is exemplified by the use of the Internet and REACH training by Aboriginal Business Development Centres in Prince George and Vancouver. Also, as mentioned above, BC Friendship Centres have embarked upon a program to install hardware and Internet connectivity at each location. Finally, the CANDO 'TEC' project seeks

to place up to 197 Internet access and support sites with EDOs in communities throughout BC. The CBSC survey (1999) found that most providers had a computer and good computer skills.

While providers are getting connected, challenges remain in equipping users with the necessary skills but also in funding and appropriately locating Internet access facilities. Halseth and Arnold (1997) point out the difficulties of providing open-access Internet use and, for non-profit organizations, of finding ways to subsidize operating costs and hardware replacement after the initial start-up cost has been incurred. One potential model, as mentioned, is the SchoolNet BC program, which offers the potential for providing entrepreneurial training and information for youth in First Nations schools (see Appendix 15).

Finally, there are a limited number of interactive and multimedia tools being used and developed, particularly for entrepreneurs in their early stage. These include on-line self- assessment quizzes and business planners. Also available is the *The Spirit Lives* - a video/workbook/workshop combination produced by the Canadian Bankers Association, along with two government-sponsored Internet delivery tools for business information and registration: "REACH" (Regional Access and Community Help) and OSBR (One-Stop Business Registration). Both are located in offices across the province (primarily CFDCs and government agents), including Aboriginal Business Development Centres in Vancouver and Prince George.

In 59 sites across BC entrepreneurs can register a business name, apply for PST and GST accounts, payroll, WCB and more through the OSBR system. Registrations are completed through a computer, with a telephone help-line also available. Through REACH, participating service providers and their clients can access the resource base of the CBSC, including:

> ➢ a collection of BC trade shows, regulations, business associations, etc.,
>
> ➢ the vat of information in Ottawa that includes: federal departments, crowns, business related programs,
>
> ➢ a library of over 6,000 books that has evolved over the years,
>
> ➢ recommended websites and print materials for: regulatory and legal information, funding and financing information, contacts and directories, and marketing,
>
> ➢ BC and StatsCan statistics, and
>
> ➢ publications that the CBSC sells/and or distributes for free, in the same format as its hardcover equivalent.

Three of six business planning tools reviewed by the research team and focus group participants were interactive in nature. Again, it was suggested that these tools are most effective when used in combination with one-on-one support.

5.2.2 Information Content

Content by Stage of Business Development
For more than 80% of providers surveyed, the primary demand for their information services comes in the early stage of business development, with individuals requiring "Introduction to Entrepreneurial Concepts", followed by "Training and other Start-up Support" for those that are slightly further along in pursuing their business idea. Therefore, information content and services are

primarily oriented to the start-up entrepreneur. Only three organizations indicated that their primary focus was businesses in their growth phase. For most organizations, "Aftercare" is their third area of priority.

A range of information tools and services exist for pre-entrepreneurial and business planning phases. Interactive entrepreneurial self-assessments are available, for example, through WD and the Business Development Bank. Pre-entrepreneurial training is offered through some CFDCs and provincial youth programs offer introductions to entrepreneurialism as a career option.

Six print and interactive tools for business planning were reviewed during the course of the research. Two are produced and delivered by Aboriginal intermediaries: Tale'awtxw Aboriginal Capital Corporation's self-assessment and business plan development tool and CFDC of Central Interior First Nations' *The Basics: Business Planning Handbook*. Both contain Aboriginal-specific content and were deemed highly appropriate for the beginning entrepreneur.

The CBSC's Interactive Business Planner, WD's *Solutions for Small Business: Start-up Kit* and *Business Planning and Cash Flow Forecasting* document, Canadian Bankers Association's *The Entrepreneurial Spirit* manual, and CBSC's *On-line Small Business Workshop* are additional examples of resources recommended by providers and available to the start-up entrepreneur.

Overall the content of these information tools was rated highly by focus group participants. Government publications, however, do not have Aboriginal-specific content and, in some cases, tools were considered too generic, too "boring", hard to read (e.g. small font), or too complex/advanced. The *Entrepreneurial Spirit* manual and Interactive Business Planner are well suited to the entrepreneur with some previous business experience or knowledge. Captus Press's *Aboriginal Small Business and Entrepreneurship in Canada* also provides an excellent overview of all aspects of business management and planning, along with sources of support and Aboriginal case studies. This comprehensive but lengthy document is best used in conjunction with classroom training or as a resource manual for the new and established entrepreneur.

In general, there are significantly fewer programs, services and tools targeted to established entrepreneurs interested in maintaining or growing their businesses. Trade magazines and newspapers were recommended by respondents as tools for "keeping on top of things". The publication *Solutions for Small Business: Exploring Business Opportunities* was reviewed as a tool for those seeking to diversify or expand into new areas. However, content of this nature was found to be limited. A second publication that may be useful to review is *Strategies for Success: Workbook to help you create an action plan for growing a business*, available through CANDO. Others tools and services of use to the established entrepreneur include programs, web sites and publications on the subject of exporting and workshops on topics such as marketing and bookkeeping that are of use to both new and existing entrepreneurs. Business associations perform a valuable aftercare role and provide industry information of use to the established entrepreneur on an ongoing basis through newsletters and events. Mentoring programs are available that offer ongoing support for enterprises in their early years and one ACC, the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corp., conducts annual site visits to their clients' place of business, a model others suggest should be utilized more often. Finally, for recipients of financing through BC's First Citizen's Fund, aftercare assistance is available through contracted providers. Although there are some resources, therefore, for established entrepreneurs they are varied in their availability and only partially address the needs expressed by this group of entrepreneurs.

Content by Subject

According to respondents the most common types of information currently provided are:

1) government programs and services;
2) information on how to start a business and business planning;
3) financing;
4) contacts and directories; and
5) information specific to Aboriginal entrepreneurship (overlaps with others).

Information on business management, government regulations and registration, and markets is also being provided. A review of the information tools distributed by providers demonstrates that sector-specific information is also widely available. A breakdown of print materials identified by subject is provided in Table 10.

Table 10: Print Tools by Subject[20]

Subject	# of Publications Listed
Business planning/start-up	13
Government programs[21]	20
Financing	11
Marketing	–[22]
Contacts/directories	9
Sector specific	46
Taxation	10
Partnerships/joint ventures	6
Legal	6
Home-based business	1
Aboriginal women in business	3
Business growth/maintenance	2
Aboriginal business – general	22
Entrepreneurship – general	3
Business ethics	2
Entrepreneurship and the role of First Nations governments	5
CED planning and business development	4
Provider services available	10
TOTAL	173

Source: Tools Listing (Appendix 12)

Of over 100 respondents to the provider inventory survey, 43 provide sectoral information (see Figure 8 below). Forestry and tourism is the sector for which the most information is currently

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[20] Clearly this scan did not include all publications pertaining to small business. Instead publications used and made available by the organizations and agencies currently serving Aboriginal entrepreneurs in the province were focused upon.

[21] Includes materials relating to youth programs. No other materials specific to youth were identified.

[22] The only publications with marketing material that were identified, related specifically to the art sector and an export directory.

available (e.g. # of publications and providers disseminating information in these fields). Sector-specific business planning tools are available for each of these industries. A significant number of resources also exist pertaining to the fisheries and arts and crafts sectors. Other industries, including mining, oil and gas, agriculture, construction, manufacturing, gaming, retail and finance are also covered to a lesser extent. One organization stands out as a provider of information on sectors within the Aboriginal economy – Native Investment and Trade Association (NITA). NITA has held conferences on a variety of sectors of interest within the Aboriginal economy from which proceedings are available. In other cases sector-specific associations and programs are the providers of information (e.g. AtBC, First Nations Forestry Program, Intertribal Retail Association). Despite the importance of the service sector, and consulting and professional services in particular, no programs or materials targeted to this segment were identified.

There is little consistency, however, in the information available across sectors – a benefit of the Canada / BC Business Service Centre (CBSC) sector-specific small business sourcing guides model. CBSC guides include business information relating to the sector and point to additional information resources such as trade shows, associations, books, magazines, videos, and government services. With the exception perhaps of the tourism and forestry business planning manuals produced by AtBC and the First Nations Forestry Program, which were not reviewed, no equivalent resource exists specifically for Aboriginal business (e.g. with Aboriginal case studies, unique cultural, legal and taxation issues, etc.).

Figure 8: Numbers of Organizations Providing Sector-Specific Information
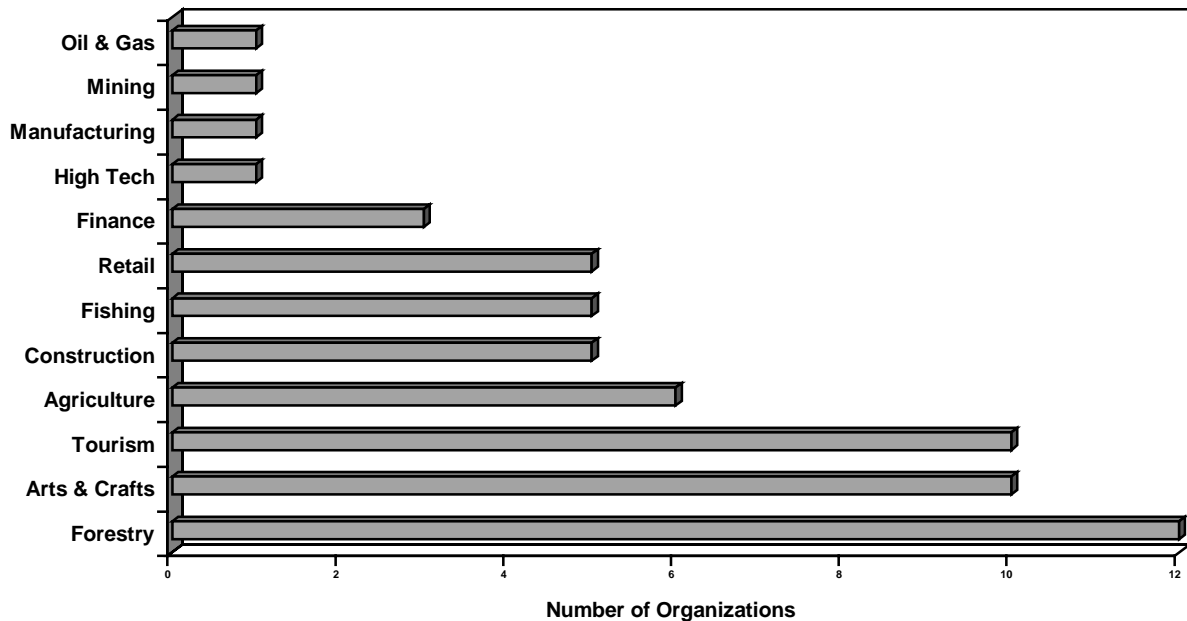
More than 75% of service providers (or 76 organizations) offer information on government programs and distribute information about these programs in the form of brochures, directories and referrals or direct access to government offices and web sites. With the large number of government programs that exist, tools that present all of the funding opportunities available in a summary form

and in a format that allows the entrepreneur to easily identify programs of relevance to their business are especially important. These include directories of government programs (of which there are several) and linked web sites – web sites that offer links to various program web sites from one central location. Examples of this include the CBSC web site (www.sb.gov.bc.ca), the most highly recommended web site by providers, and the Aboriginal Resource Guide (www.Aboriginalresourcenet.com). The advice of providers who are knowledgeable about the various available programs is also important in pointing entrepreneurs in the right direction amongst the wealth of material available and in helping them "patch together" a financing strategy. See Appendix 12 for a listing of "pathfinding"/linkage sites.

Information available on financing ranges, once again, from one-one-one advise from providers, government program brochures and directories and web sites of financial institutions to papers such as the one produced by All Nations Trust "What a Lender Looks For" and generic books discussing financing options. NITA has also published a series of conference proceedings on the subject. No single comprehensive resource on financing for Aboriginal entrepreneurs, however, was identified.

Based on a scan of available tools, marketing information (aside from that included in business planning and other general publications) appears to be limited to what is presented in workshop format and publications relating to exporting. However, CFDCs offer a range of workshops on marketing topics such as basic marketing, advertising and promotion, market research, database and Internet marketing.

One possible exception is WD's *Solutions for Small Business: Home-Based Business Manual,* which was suggested as a tool with good marketing content. The 23-page publication outlines the basics of marketing for the beginner. It is well written, understandable, includes examples and case studies. However, the booklet is not titled as a marketing document, and it is generic, lacks graphics, and requires improvement to its layout. Research skills and imaging were not considered to be covered adequately, nor was the development of a community marketing strategy, including the importance of word of mouth and maintaining a good relationship with the community (see Appendix 13). This is also the only publication for home-based business identified, again not specific to the Aboriginal entrepreneur. Other generic publications about home-based business are available on the market, however, that could also be considered for adaptation.

Numerous tools for contacts and directories exist, including business directories, directories of government programs, web site links, and CSBC guides and resources. Referrals to other contacts were also noted as a service well provided by the organizations that supply information to entrepreneurs. Aboriginal business directories have been prepared in some regions (e.g. the Northeast), and two province-wide directories have been found to be useful tools (published by NITA and BC Hydro). Several directories of government programs and agencies and of Aboriginal organizations exist, but none specifically listing tools and services for Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Along with trade publications, directories and the CBSC Small Business Sourcing Guides are useful for locating suppliers and distributors, an information need in high demand according to entrepreneurs surveyed. One weakness mentioned was the need for greater capability for electronic networking among contacts.

Taxation is another critical area of information for Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Printed taxation materials range from introductory brochures to quarterly and semi-annual newsletters to conference proceedings and a 100-page guide *First Nations and Canadian Taxation* published by KPMG (being

reprinted at the time of report preparation). Other private firms such as Deloitte and Touche also provide taxation documents. Finally, information is available on-line through the Indian Taxation Advisory Board and by phone or in a workshop/seminar format from Revenue Canada.

Other topics of importance include accounting and financial management, legal and banking information. Referrals from providers to the private sector, including accounting, legal and banking professionals are a common source of information on these subjects. However, some CFDCs have developed workshops on topics such as bookkeeping and credit and collections, and several publications covering legal issues were identified.

Interest was also expressed by a number of respondents in information on business structures and incorporation options. BC's Centre for Community Enterprise provides information on questions related to business structure for community enterprises in various articles and publications. *Development Corporation Basics: A Workbook* introduces key questions to be considered by First Nations organizations and governments when selecting a business structure. The Northern Development Commission has developed joint venturing workshops and various organizations such as the Canadian Cooperative Association provide information on this model. The National Aboriginal Business Association is developing a manual for successful business partnerships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. A CANDO text also provides partnership cases studies. For the individual entrepreneur WD's *Solutions for Small Business: Resource Guide for British Columbia Businesses* outlines the advantages and disadvantages of sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation, limited company and business cooperative as business structures. Again, no Aboriginal-specific tool describing each of these options was identified.

As previously mentioned, numerous programs exist for youth, and for Aboriginal youth in particular. A number of information tools specific to this segment have also been developed, including program-related materials available in print, the Port Alberni Friendship Centre's Youth Entrepreneurship Program video, and the Aboriginal Youth Business Council website.

There are a number of Aboriginal Women's Organizations in BC including the Aboriginal Women's Council (AWC), The BC Native Women's Society and The Indian Homemakers Association of BC (IHA). These organizations currently are engaged in a limited but apparently growing level of activity in the area of entrepreneurship. The AWC assisted in the development of *"The Spirit Lives"* video and has used it in workshops. They have also recently sponsored a workshop featuring the stories of successful women entrepreneurs. The IHA has initiated a proposal, in partnership with the International Centre for Sustainable Cities, to develop a "Mother Centre" for Aboriginal mothers in East Vancouver that would integrate children's services with training and micro-enterprises within one building.

In 1994, WD undertook research that indicated gaps in access to finance and services for women entrepreneurs in western Canada. As a result, WD established a loan and services program for women entrepreneurs, delivered through The Women's Enterprise Society of BC (WESBC). WESBC is responsible for the delivery of a lending and service program for women entrepreneurs in BC. Although the WESBC serves Aboriginal women as clients, it has not specifically designed products or programs to meet the needs of this population. Over the past four years, only 10 loans have been made to Aboriginal women (4% of their loan portfolio).

The needs of displaced workers and entrepreneurs with disabilities also require content, delivery and presentation tailored to their particular concerns. Some service providers are responding to these special needs. Although the subject of entrepreneurs with disabilities was not highlighted by this research, services available to this group include:

➤ The CFDC of Cowichan Region, which published a "Crossroads" book for entrepreneurs with disabilities to help them become self-employed or job-ready;

➤ The CFDC Alberni Clayoquot, which carries a large selection of Braille business material;

➤ The CFDC Central Okanagan, which has adapted materials by incorporating larger print; and

➤ WD, which supports programs to deliver business services and loans to entrepreneurs with disabilities through several CFDCs, along with VanCity and Pacific Coast Savings Credit Unions in metropolitan Vancouver and Victoria, respectively.

Displaced workers are served by various programs, including those offered by Forest Renewal BC, Fisheries Renewal BC, and HRDC. Programs often include career counselling and retraining assistance, with financing and business counselling available through CFDCs and other organizations providing programs and services on behalf of these agencies.

Respondents suggest that Métis face special challenges, particularly in gaining acceptance and support within the Aboriginal community. However, no programs, services or materials designed particularly for the Métis entrepreneur were identified.

Differences in products and services available across regions and between urban and rural areas are discussed in Section 6 below.

Finally, in response to the need for creating a positive on-reserve climate for entrepreneurship to thrive, several publications and workshops offered by the Centre for Community Enterprise offer promise, including *TAKE CHARGE! How to Make Economic Development Work for Your Band* and *Venture Development Basics* (previously mentioned), along with *What Can Tribes Do*? from Harvard University in the US.

The type of information that entrepreneurs can access tends to vary by organization type, as illustrated by Table 10 below. Government agencies, for example, tend to provide information on government programs, regulations and contacts, and funding (some of which is sector specific). Business planning, management, financing and government programs are the areas where CFDCs tend to focus.

Table 10: Numbers of Organizations Providing Various Types of Information

Information Type	Fed'l	Prov'l	EDOs	CFDCs	ACCs	AHRDAs	FCs	Corps.	Total
Gov't Regulation	5	1	11	18		6	2	3	46
Bus.Planning	3	2	17	28	2	6	4	8	70
Bus. Management	2	2	6	25		2		5	42
Gov't Programs	7	4	18	24	2	8	7	6	76
Financing	4	4	8	27	3	3	4	7	60
Marketing	4	1	8	20	1	5	1	3	43
Contacts/ Directories	5	2	13	17	1	8	3	4	53
Aboriginal-specific	3		14	12	1	7	7	4	48
Sector-Specific	5		7	22	1	5	2	1	43

Source: Provider Inventory

New Directions in Service Delivery

Demonstrating their awareness of the needs of their clientele, BC providers continue on an ongoing basis to develop new programs and services to better address the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs. A selection of the new developments planned for the upcoming year include: Aboriginal lending circles/peer lending, web sites (new and/or improved on-line service), modification of existing programs for youth, joint venturing workshops and partnering materials, more one-on-one counselling, site visits and field monitoring, more local workshops and trade shows, creation of a small business incubator facility, business courses and training plans. The proposal to develop a "Mother Centre" in East Vancouver, an adaptation of a model that has proven effective in other countries, provides an excellent example of the innovation in service delivery being practiced in the province.

5.3 Provider Relationships

The relationships among the array of information providers and the entrepreneurs themselves are complex and multi-faceted. Relationships between providers and entrepreneurs can be described in three ways: where entrepreneurs turn for assistance, what services they receive when they arrive and their perception of the quality of service once it is received. The degree to which entrepreneurs turn to the various provider organizations has been outlined in Table 10 above. The services provided to entrepreneurs by these organizations have also been discussed. Entrepreneur perceptions of service quality are described in Section 6 below.

Relationships among the providers themselves are also critical. Best practices research and feedback from providers and entrepreneurs themselves emphasize the importance of communications and positive working relationships among all organizations dealing with the Aboriginal entrepreneur. Three key types of provider relationships can be identified: 1) funding relationships, 2) service delivery partnerships and 3) referrals, the first two of these being particularly common between governments and intermediaries. Each of these relationship types, as well as the general subject of communication and cooperation between providers, is discussed below. Again, the intermediaries, many regionally-based, tend to be central to these relationships – particularly as a bridge between the local and provincial/national levels. Figure 9 provides an illustration.

Figure 9: Provider Relationships

National/Provincial

Regional

Local

First Nations/ EDO's

Gov't -Prov'l -Fed'l

$$, Referrals & Information

CFDC

$$, Referrals & Information

Friend- ship Centres

Nat'l & Prov'l Orgs.

ACC'

ABDC'

Local Business

Libraries, Colleges

The Entrepreneur
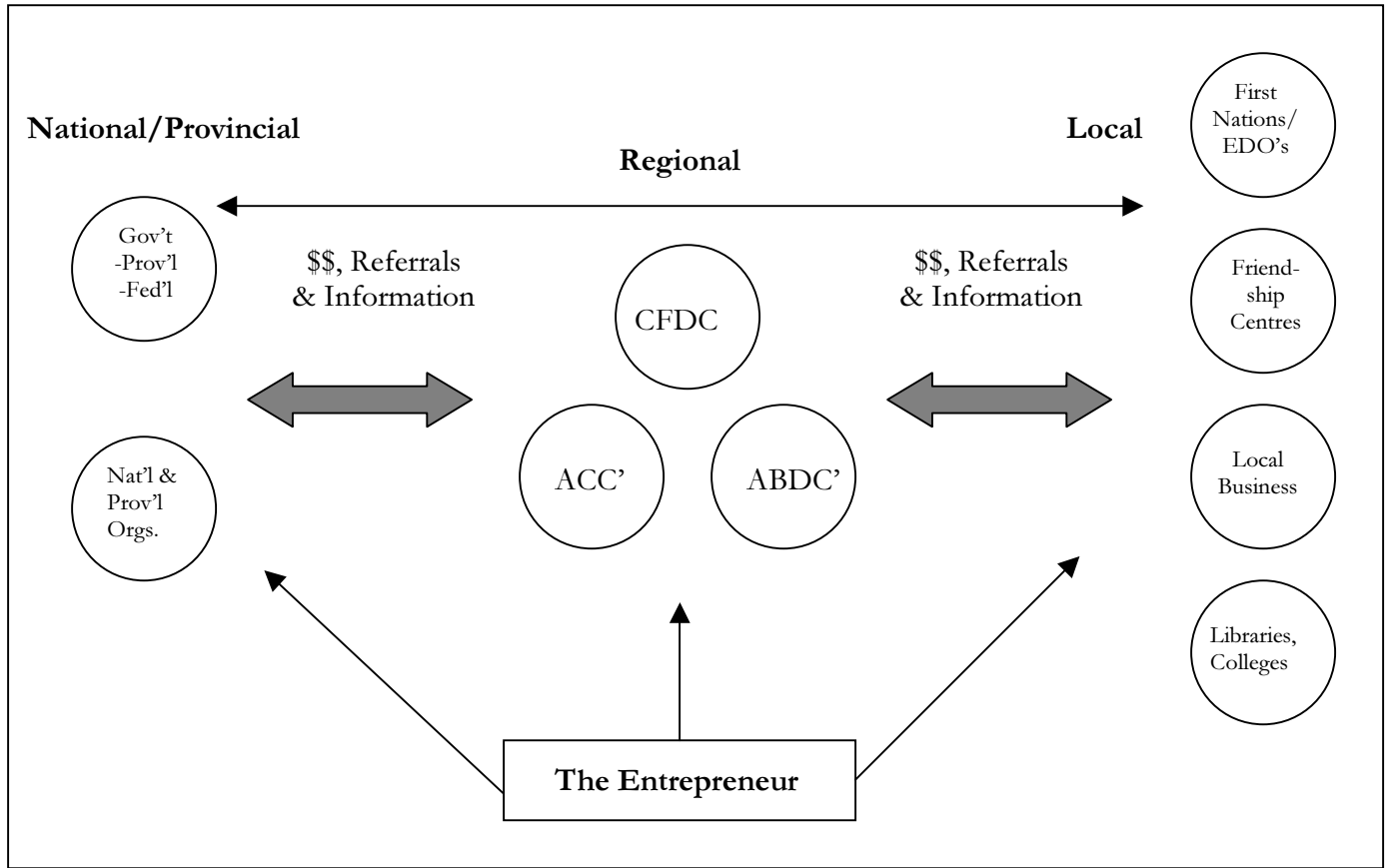
5.3.1 Funding Relationships

A key relationship among agencies and organizations is the relationship between agencies that provide funding and those that receive it. The example of EDOs and the impact of DIAND funding on their effectiveness discussed in Section 5.1 provides an example of both the importance and the complexities of funding relationships. Additional examples of funding relationships include federal financial support for CFDCs through WD (as well as program-related support from other agencies such as Forest and Fisheries Renewal), for ACCs through Aboriginal Business Canada and DIAND, and for AHRDAs through HRDC. See Table 11 for an illustration of service providers who receive funding and those who distribute it.

Table 11 illustrates that some providers rely heavily on one funding source (e.g. AHRDAs), while most have developed a range of funding partners. Government agencies are the most common funding source, particularly DIAND. However, some providers generate their own revenues, or a portion of them, through memberships, fee-for-service or, in the case of some Development Corporations, their own business ventures. First Citizens Fund aftercare services are paid for through a borrower's fee. Others enter into partnerships with the private sector. First Nations Employment Centre, for example, has partnered with a number of private sector organizations to deliver small business training (see McBride and Ndungtse, 2000).

Table 11: Funding Relationships

Receiver	Government of Canada	HRDC	WED	DIAND / INAC	CIDA	DFO	ABC	Government of BC	Small Bus. Tourism & Culture	Min. of Comm. Dev.	First Citizens Fund	FRBC	FsRBC	Self Funding	Donations	Partnerships	ACC's	CEDTAP	First Nations
ABC	x																		
Federal Agencies	x																		
Provincial Agencies								x											
EDO's		x		x				x			x	x	x				x	x	
CFDC's		x	x			x						x	x			x			
Friendship Centres	x	x		x				x			x				x				
AHRDA's		x																	
ACC's	x			x			x								x				
PGABDC		x		x							x	x							
Development Corps	x			x			x	x			x				x		x		x
Private Sector															x				
Ab. Business Associations	x		x	x			x	x	x	x					x				
Women's Organizations	x		x	x			x	x											
CESO				x	x											x	x		

Source: Provider Inventory[23]

Clearly, funding arrangements are critical to every provider agency, influencing program priorities and choices, reporting requirements (or lack of), relating in turn to monitoring and the quality and effectiveness of service, and ultimately determining viability of each organization and the available services in a community or region.

Funding relationships are undergoing significant changes as Aboriginal economic development programs are hit by cutbacks in funding, and responsibilities are devolved to Aboriginal communities. For example, in 1995, Industry Canada, whose mandate includes the Aboriginal Business Canada program, received a 42.5% or $532 million dollar cutback. ABC funds were cut by $25 million dollars over four years (50%) (Plant, 1995). As a result, ABC found it necessary to limit spending to four strategic areas: innovation and technology development; trade and market expansion; Aboriginal tourism; and youth entrepreneurship. Another example of funding changes has been the transfer of DIAND funds for CED to individual Nations, as discussed above.

Survey respondents and focus group respondents conveyed their concerns about the impacts of these changes, exacerbated by rising demand for services as the number of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in the province continues to increase. The following comments reflect such concerns:

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[23] Although not referred to by survey respondents, WD also provides funding for ACCs through the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative.

"The Business Development Bank …has been cutting back on their staff and service…They now have no coordinator and do much less than they used to."

"Service providers are being pushed to the limit with time and budgets."

Recognizing the need to invest more rather than less in this area, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) recommended investing up to $2 billion more per year for the next 20 years in capacity building and economic development by Aboriginal people (Anderson & Bone, 1999). The Commission recommended a focus on economic development as one of the top priorities for spending over the next five years, including multi-year agreements to transfer resources from the federal government to First Nations for economic development, improved access to capital, establishment of an Aboriginal economic development institute within the national Aboriginal university, improved business services and entrepreneur support and more focused employment development initiatives (Newhouse, 1999).

In May 2000, DIAND Minister Robert Nault announced a $75 million increase in departmental funding for strategic economic investment, with further increases for the future, stating that "unless a major shift in focus takes place" he would "continue to be the head of a social assistance agency (DIAND, 2000)." Entrepreneurs and service providers in BC argue, however, that these federal initiatives have yet to translate into increased dollars in areas where they are most needed, particularly funding for one-on-one business support for entrepreneurs.

5.3.2 Service Delivery Partnerships

Another important form of relationship between providers is the service delivery partnership. In most cases these are linked to funding relationships and are formed between provincial and federal governments and regional or community-based delivery organizations (intermediaries). CFDCs, for example, deliver a range of programs at the local level on behalf of provincial and federal agencies such as Western Economic Diversification, Forest and Fisheries Renewal BC and receive funding to do so (see Table 11 above). Similarly, they deliver information and support services as well as financing on behalf of Aboriginal Business Canada and First Citizens Fund.

DIAND delivers its First Nations and Inuit Youth Business Program through the National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association, which designs and manages the program. The program is then delivered by individual ACCs. In yet another example, the Business Development Bank has entered into a service delivery relationship with the Canadian Executive Services Organization (CESO) to provide the mentoring aspect of their Growth Capital for Aboriginal Business program.

Aboriginal organizations and governments also engage in partnership arrangements amongst themselves, with Tribal Councils, Development Corporations, CFDCs and others.

Some entrepreneurs in the focus groups provided some insight into the nature of these relationships, particularly noting their concern that duplication of services that can lead to competition and reduces the effectiveness of service provision. Service delivery partnerships and referrals, discussed below, help to facilitate cooperation and reduce competition among providers.

5.3.3 Referrals

Referrals are key to making entrepreneurs aware of the resources that are available to them. An analysis of the pattern of referrals once again demonstrates the importance of intermediaries, particularly CFDCs, ACCs and Business Development Centres. These organizations not only serve as a regional point of contact and delivery agent for senior governments, but also as a source of information to which local organizations such as EDOs and Friendship Centres can point their clients for assistance. When one type of organization does not have the expertise or tools to provide information requested by an entrepreneur, the ability of the service provider to refer that entrepreneur to an individual or organization who *can* help them is a highly valued service. This practice is often referred to as "pathfinding". More than 40% of the agencies surveyed refer people regularly to others for assistance and, on average, organizations receive nearly 30% of their clients through referrals from others.

While local organizations frequently refer individuals to an intermediary, intermediaries rely on local organizations to increase awareness of their products and services. Intermediaries also refer clients to other information sources, although less frequently, such as professional and private services in their area (e.g. lawyers, accountants) or senior government program and departmental staff. As an example, Table 12 below demonstrates the range of organizations that refer clients to CFDCs for business planning assistance, but also the organizations to which non-Aboriginal CFDCs send their clients for advice and support. In many cases non-Aboriginal CFDCs refer Aboriginal clients to Aboriginal organizations. As a respondent from CFDC South Fraser explained: "As there are very specific issues that arise when looking at lending options for Aboriginal persons, we rely very heavily on the experts at the Sto:lo office." Note the high activity among the CFDCs, both as receivers of referrals and as referring agents.

Table 12: Referrals

Initiator \ Receiver	ACC's	WD	Development	Consultants	CESO	CBSC	CFDCs	Library / Internet	ABC	PGABDC	Financial Institutions
CFDCs	*	*	*	*			*	*		*	
Provincial Agencies	*					*	*	*			
AHRDAs				*			*		*		
Friendship Centres					*		*			*	
Financial Institutions							*				
Federal Agencies						*					
First Nations Governments							*			*	*
Other:				*	*						
Corporations			*					*			

Source: Provider Survey

<u>5.3.4 Communication and Cooperation</u>

With this number of organizations and the array of relationships between them, clearly communication and coordination is critical. This was confirmed by research results. As one provider remarked:

> "There is competition between service providers. How can there not be when we are all struggling for the same scarce money and there are wide overlaps in mandates, functions and clientele?"

Cooperation is, however, increasingly being facilitated among Aboriginal service providers and among non-Aboriginal service providers by associations of service providers such as CANDO (among EDOs), the Association of Aboriginal Financial Institutions (among ACCs and Aboriginal CFDCs), and the CFDC Association (among CFDCs, primarily with a non-Aboriginal focus). Examples can also be found of cooperation between senior governments and Aboriginal organizations, primarily in the form of consultation, funding and service delivery partnerships. The Native Economic Development Advisory Board, for example, was formed by the Province of BC to provide policy, program and service advice to provincial ministries and work in partnership with the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to "ensure that Aboriginal economic development initiatives are achieved in an environment of mutual respect and understanding" (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 2000). Members include representatives from the Aboriginal business community.

Cooperative endeavours are also occurring among providers at the local level to coordinate service delivery and develop common strategies. For example, a community process called *"Collaborative Visions"* has been launched in Kamloops to bring together community and government stakeholders to talk about unmet needs in the area of Aboriginal human resource development. The region's AHRDA and CFDC of Central Interior First Nations are both involved. In Prince George, the Prince George Aboriginal Business Development Centre makes it a priority to ensure staff are aware of, and in communication with, the other service providers in their community so that they are prepared to offer advice and/or referrals on any issue the entrepreneur might face.

Despite these models and initiatives, overall there appears to be little communication and collaboration among government providers, or among the following types of providers: government and non-government, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, among intermediaries, and between intermediaries, provincial and national networks and organizations. Further, lack of coordination between government agencies was reported as a barrier for entrepreneurs seeking information and/or start-up funds, and for intermediaries wishing to diversify their funding base. Entrepreneurs report that referrals within government are poor and providers add that lack of interagency communication and cooperation serves as a barrier to establishing the type of "one-stop-shop" service entrepreneurs need. They report, for example, that the approach to funding Aboriginal organizations is inconsistent and fragmented.

A meeting of Aboriginal Economic Development Organizations in Western Canada held in December 1998 provides a good example of networking among a range of providers. Representatives from a number of Aboriginal economic development organizations, including Aboriginal Capital Corporations, CFDCs, Development Corporations, and economic development officers, were brought together in a one- day session to provide input regarding federal initiatives

aimed at enhancing Aboriginal economic development. A similar event was held in October 1999. These events are examples of the kind of networking, joint planning and information sharing that must be encouraged and facilitated if the problems outlined above are to be addressed.

5.4 Section Summary

Throughout this chapter a wide variety of organizations involved in supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurs in British Columbia have been identified. These include government agencies and departments, both federal and provincial, and Aboriginal governments, often through Tribal Councils and Economic Development Officers (EDOs) providing assistance to entrepreneurs within their communities. Clearly, these levels of government play a major role in supporting Aboriginal enterprises by providing information, financial resources, and technical assistance to Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Research results show that intermediaries such as Aboriginal Capital Corporations, Community Futures Development Corporations and Aboriginal Business Development Centres play a central role in the delivery system, particularly those with a specific mandate to serve the Aboriginal entrepreneur. They offer loan guarantees, provide technical and advisory services, refer clients to the appropriate resources, help in preparing business plans and provide access to a walk-in resource centre. Other intermediaries such as the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Organizations (AHRDAs), and Friendship Centres support self-employment training initiatives, deliver business training workshops, and act as referral agents to other agencies. Intermediaries often offer services at the local level on behalf of provincial and national organizations and governments. The private sector, along with education and training institutions such as colleges and universities, also offer potential for partnership and support through training, management and technical assistance.

Tools and services currently available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers through these avenues cover a wide range of topics and are presented in a variety of media. Among the many methods used to deliver information are: one-one-one counselling, print materials, telephone and fax, seminars, workshops and conferences, mentoring programs and the Internet. Entrepreneurs most often receive information in person through a walk-in resource centre or office, followed by classroom learning, Internet and extension workers. Once an Aboriginal entrepreneur visits a business resource centre or contacts their office by phone, providers rely heavily on print materials to disseminate information. Forums, workshops and classroom training sessions are the next most common methods used to deliver information. Despite entrepreneurs' preferences for one-on-one assistance, coaching and mentoring follows these other methods in frequency of use.

Information content and services are primarily oriented to the start-up entrepreneur, with few programs targeted to businesses once they are up and running. Business associations, mentoring and networking, however, play a key role in supporting the established entrepreneur. The most common types of information provided include: 1) how to start a business and business planning, 2) financing, 3) contacts and directories, 4) government programs and services.

Finally, research results demonstrate that relationships among those organizations that provide information tools and services can significantly impact the effectiveness of their delivery. While positive provider relationships contribute to improved services through information sharing, coordination and a more "client-centred" approach, lack of communication and negative relationships lead to competition among providers and an inability and/or unwillingness to provide

necessary referrals, among other consequences. Three types of relationships have been discussed: 1) funding relationships; 2) service delivery partnerships; and 3) referrals, along with the overall subject of communication and coordination among providers. Although examples of partnerships and collaboration have been provided, it is clear that providers have serious concerns about the continuing effects of funding cutbacks and the lack of interagency cooperation and communication.

6. Evaluation of the Current System: Strengths, Gaps and Areas for Improvement

6.1 Business Information Services

- One Element of A Community Economic Development Strategy

Before proceeding to evaluate BC's information services for Aboriginal entrepreneurs it is worth reiterating that the provision of information is only one element of the overall system for assisting Aboriginal entrepreneurs and encouraging development in British Columbia's Aboriginal economies. Successful economic development is dependent on a suite of support services. Other components of a system of provision must include financing, education and training, resource management, community planning, community support, and technological and community infrastructure, among others (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Selected Components of Aboriginal Economic Development
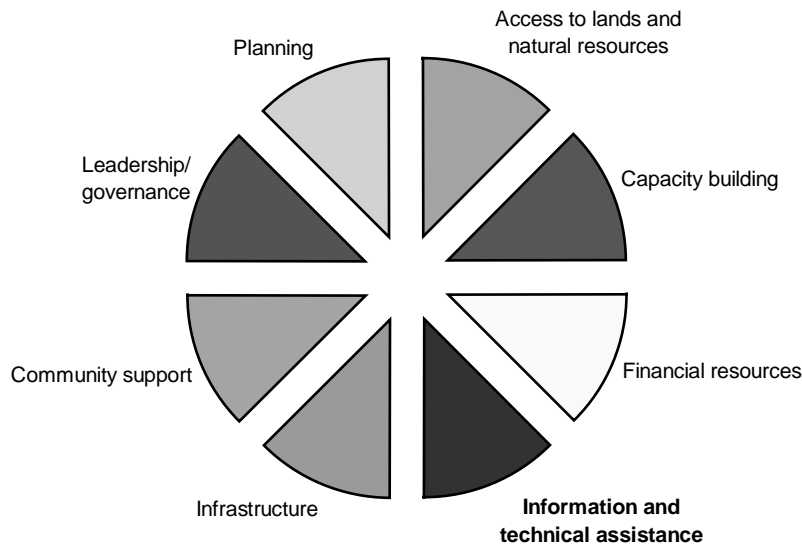
Also important are factors that may not be directly apparent as related to economic development, but that greatly impact the chances of success and information needs of the would-be entrepreneur. The RCAP cautions us that, in providing for unmet needs, we must not overlook "the fact that economic development is the product of the interaction of many factors – health, education, self-worth, functioning communities, stable environments, and so on" (RCAP, Vol.2, chap.5). These factors both influence and are ultimately influenced by the delivery and acquisition of information products and services, and therefore must be recognized and considered as part of provision.

Providers, and those who evaluate and support their efforts, then, must maintain a holistic picture of the entrepreneur and the context in which he/she operates, a context that is complex and dynamic. The importance of understanding context in the design of programs and services can be illustrated through the example of information service provision in the Central Coast Regional District. In Bella Coola, there is no Aboriginal-only intermediary organization, although there is an active EDO and a non-Aboriginal CFDC. Less than 100 miles away, Bella Bella has an Aboriginal ACC. It would be tempting to recommend that the ACC encourage Aboriginals in Bella Coola to use their services, rather than local ones that are non-Aboriginal. Yet this suggestion would fail to take into account that they would be dealing with cultural differences between nations that do not have a tradition of collaboration, and with communities that are separated by water. Transportation between the two "neighbouring" villages requires a trip by boat of up to eight hours. Further, many community members no longer have access to a boat due to downturns in the fishing industry. Taking these local circumstances into account, it would seem more feasible to increase the capacity of the non-Aboriginal CFDC to serve the Aboriginal clientele in their community. This concept is now becoming a reality as new partnerships and a process of "sustained dialogue" are underway between the Nuxalk and the CFDC (Markey et al., 2000). This case provides a vivid illustration of the importance of context and how each situation is unique. We must be careful not to make sweeping conclusions about the presence or absence of programs, Aboriginal-specific organizations, the functions of various organizations or about the impact of certain factors on the various entrepreneurial groups, sectors or regions.

At this point, it should be noted that several information and service gaps identified in this research could be regarded as either real or perceived. We refer to real gaps as those identified by entrepreneurs, but for which we have found no available matching information. Perceived gaps, on the other hand, refer to the gaps in information pointed out by entrepreneurs and for which we have found corresponding information available. These latter gaps then indicate a lack of awareness of information, or information that is presented in a format that is not accessible or usable. Differentiating between the two has direct implications for the ways in which these gaps are addressed.

6.2 Criteria for Evaluating the Effectiveness of Business Information Services

The previous sections have provided a description of the information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and the system of providers, tools and services that has been put into place for meeting those needs. A comparison of the findings presented in these two sections (entrepreneur needs vs. products and services now provided) has formed the basis for an analysis of the gaps that exist within the current system of information provision. However, it is not sufficient to merely identify gaps and areas needing improvement. It is also useful to identify strengths that can be built upon. The gap analysis presented in this section represents an important step in our final goal of recommending how best to address the expressed information needs of BC's Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

The findings of this study have demonstrated that monitoring the effectiveness of information products and services is an important process in a number of ways. It can help providers to identify ways that they can better serve their clients. For those who support providers (either through direct funding or service delivery partnerships) or develop and distribute information products, it provides a measure of the effectiveness of resources spent. Scarcity of financial resources was frequently referred to as a barrier to improving services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Therefore ensuring

dollars are spent in the best way possible is critical. One focus group respondent advised: "Find ways to fund service providers based on satisfactory service delivery".

Monitoring can also help to demonstrate where further support is needed and can encourage accountability. Evaluation of products and services should be conducted on a regular basis using agreed upon measures of effectiveness. Conducted in an ongoing manner, rather than at the completion of a project, monitoring allows adjustments to be made along the way to form the best possible service and product.

Study findings suggest that monitoring methods are often ad hoc and incidental, lacking thorough preparation and consistency among providers. Two-thirds of providers surveyed, for example, stated that they monitor the success of their clients after service. Within these cases, some were able to provide success rates, but did not state how they monitored success. Other responses were more informal (e.g. "Most are still in business. Some drop out mid-way"). Further discussion among providers on this subject is needed to develop and then apply on a regular basis a methodology for performance evaluation and ongoing improvement of service delivery.

In order to examine the strengths and weaknesses in the tools and services currently offered in British Columbia, a set of evaluation criteria was developed at the outset of this study. These criteria, along with indicators and measures for evaluating performance, were developed based on researcher experience, input from service providers and literature review (e.g. studies of a similar nature). The result is the evaluation model presented in Table 13 below. Research results have confirmed that each of these criteria is important and have helped to refine appropriate measures and indicators of effectiveness. The criteria chosen fall under these five major categories:

1) **Information content and presentation:** type and quality of content and presentation of information to entrepreneurs at various phases of business development, and for those with unique requirements based on gender, age, location, culture or sector.
2) **Access:** issues such as regional coverage, costs, available infrastructure, product format and requisite skills that influence the Aboriginal entrepreneur's ability to access information products and services.
3) **Awareness:** the degree to which Aboriginal entrepreneurs are aware of information, products, programs, support and services that are available for their use.
4) **Service:** the level and quality of service provided by agencies and organizations, including issues such as time spent with clients, expertise, attitude/approach of staff, staff familiarity with Aboriginal issues and range of services available.
5) **Relationships and networks:** the relative strength and effectiveness of networks and relationships among all stakeholders, including among entrepreneurs themselves, among providers, between entrepreneurs and providers, and between entrepreneurs and their community.

Indicators and measures for applying these criteria are detailed below. It is important to note that these indicators and measures represent a model for monitoring and evaluation. In most cases, including this study, it will not be possible to gather information on each of the indicators and measures outlined. Providers and others responsible for monitoring must select the most appropriate and feasible indicators for their purposes based on factors such as resources available for primary research, the availability of information and organizational priorities.

Table 13: A Model for Assessing Effectiveness of Service Provision

Criteria	Indicators and Measures				
1. Content & presentation	**a. Comprehensive-ness**	**b. Modes**	**c. Relevance**	**d. Usability**	
	-degree to which program addresses all stages of the business cycle *- degree to which program addresses various sectors* *-comparison of content offered with content requested* *-degree to which the needs of women and other unique groups are met*	*- range and variety of presentation methods* *-degree to which modes reflect Aboriginal learning styles*	*-meaningful content as determined by users* *-degree to which materials reflect education and literacy levels of clients*	*-degree to which material is readable and understandable as determined by users* *-degree to which users have the requisite skills and access to technology to use information*	
2. Access	**a. Proximity/ regional coverage**	**b. Cost**	**c. Time required**	**d. Knowledge/ skills required**	**e. Information technology**
	- analysis of access points relative to residences of clients *-analysis of services available on/off reserve*	*- relationship between requests and actual purchase* *-feedback from clients* *-information available in a range of formats with low/no cost options*	*- feedback from clients* *- monitoring of time required to access info. (see also 3a)*	*- # and type of requests for instruction* *-noted cultural barriers* *-educational & literacy levels* *-computer literacy*	*-availability of technological infrastructure, such as phone lines, computers, ISPs* *-ratio of ownership of equipment to # of clients* *-incidence of free access*
3. Awareness	**a. Use of facilities/ services/tools**	**b. Entrepreneur knowledge/ awareness**	**c. Provider knowledge/ awareness**	**d. Community knowledge/ awareness**	
	- # of client inquiries *- # of workshop attendees* *- # of products distributed*	*- focus group and survey research* *- number & types of queries to service provider* *- referrals by other entrepreneurs*	*- focus group and survey research* *-referrals made and received* *-feedback from clients*	*- involvement of schools, band councils, community groups* *-advertising in community media* *-inquiries to community businesspeople*	

Criteria	Indicators and Measures				
4. Service	**a. Response time**	**b. Range of services**	**c. Staff & board capacity**	**d. Staff approach/ conduct**	**e. Support to service providers**
	-processing time *--# of outstanding requests* *-length of time requests are outstanding*	*-degree to which services match the unique population served* *-degree to which the following are offered:* *-mentoring* *-coaching* *-role models* *-training* *-information brokering* *-degree of overlap& duplication among delivery agents* *-type and degree of aftercare and monitoring of success*	*- formal qualifications in business and CED* *- relevance to requests (e.g. appropriate knowledge and/or experience)* *-degree of cultural sensitivity as determined by surveys, focus groups, feedback sheets etc.* *-composition of board- ratio of Aboriginal members* *-type of relevant knowledge and experience on the board*	*-interviews with staff to ask what they do well, need to improve* *-feedback, surveys and focus groups with clients regarding provider attitudes* *- repeat visits/ trends in use*	*-#s of requests by service providers for support* *-types of support needed by service providers, such as information, funding, marketing, referrals* *-degree to which requests are met*

5. Relationships & networks	**a. Provider to provider relationships and networks**	**b. Business/provider/ community relationships**	**c. Business to business networks**
	-degree to which providers share resources *-presence of formal and informal networks among providers* *- number and nature of provider associations* *- joint events/provider conferences* *- -# of clients who come through referrals* *- degree to which providers collaborate on initiatives to eliminate overlap* *- government processes to involve providers in program and policy design*	*- community awareness of provider services (e.g. market surveys, referrals received from the community)* *- ccustomer loyalty for Aboriginal business* *- volunteer input in provider activities* *- Band Council support for providers and businesss ventures*	*-types of connections linking entrepreneurs to business circles* *- Aboriginal participation in non-Aboriginal business associations* *- # and membership of Aboriginal business associations* *- frequency of "information sharing" events (e.g. luncheons, conferences)* *- participation in electronic netoworks* *- incidence of mentoring (formal and informal)* *- incidence of trade between Aboriginal firms* *- partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business*

6.3 Content and Presentation

6.3.1 Content

Gaps in content can be identified through a comparison of the content needed as expressed by entrepreneurs and that which is currently provided (sections 4 and 5). An analysis of available products and services reveals that among the products and services offered, there is wide variety of content, quality and formats. Providers have generally met the demand for the most commonly requested types of information (e.g. government programs and business planning), with a range of information tools available on these subjects. Survey results show, however, that entrepreneurs feel there is a lack information on several other topics.

Gaps, both real and perceived, that were identified by entrepreneurs in both surveys and focus groups are outlined in Table 14 below. Information gaps were identified for both start-up and aftercare stages of business development, for unique groups and for specific sectors.

Table 14: Information Needs Identified

Information Needs	Real	Perceived
Knowledge of their own talents, expertise and Aboriginal business history	*	
Business planning		*
Aboriginal taxation		*
Insurance		*
Business structure and incorporation options (including joint ventures)	*	
Business trends: "what is hot, and what is not"	*	
Competitive pricing/marketing	*	
Regulations covering WCB, and approvals for business start-up		*
Business registration		*
Demographics/statistics for First Nations (fragmented, unavailable)	*	
Government information on how contracts and licenses are awarded (e.g., Federal Procurement Program)		*
Strategies for dealing with changes in the economy (e.g. fishing industry)	*	
Mentorship opportunities	*	
Knowledge of other First Nations businesses		*
International marketing/exporting		*
Harvesting, licensing restrictions		*
Training options	*	
Aboriginal home-based business	*	
Financing	*	
Funding sources		*
Research and search skills	*	

Gaps in Information Particular to Start-Up
Several real gaps particular to business start up were identified, including information on business structures and incorporation options (e.g. community-run venture vs. sole proprietorship, partnership, joint venture), financing, marketing, home-based business and financing. More significantly, however, Aboriginals have a desire for "knowing our own talents (and) understanding our long and successful business history", information that is "the most important and for which we have the least awareness". This information about Aboriginal business success stories is considered

critical to overcoming barriers associated with low self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, many entrepreneurs during start-up (and afterwards) wanted materials that were "Aboriginal specific". In many cases, these were difficult to find.

Similarly, in the area of financing, a resource is needed that incorporates all of the financing programs available for Aboriginal businesses, including loans and grants and their funding agencies, as well as private sector investment and partnership options. It is confusing to determine what funding is available, for what purpose and how various sources and types of financing can be combined. One organized source of this information, including case studies of how other entrepreneurs patched together various programs to meet their needs, is needed.

Our analysis shows that materials on marketing that are orientated to Aboriginal entrepreneurs are also needed. General information on basic marketing concepts, especially important during start-up, is widely available. Yet materials should be adapted with strategies to reflect the realities of the Aboriginal entrepreneur, whose market is often local. Other topics such as trade with other Aboriginal nations, communities and firms are also unique but not covered in the existing materials reviewed.

Gaps were found as well in provision of information around legal/registration issues and business structure options. Availability of information on insurance and business licence fees for both on-reserve and off-reserve is poor. Materials are also needed that identify the questions and choices that must be made regarding business structures and forms of incorporation.

Home-based business is a trend and an attractive option for many Aboriginal entrepreneurs, particularly women raising a family. In fact, 42% of entrepreneur survey respondents indicated that they required information on home-based businesses during start-up. While some materials, such as a manual produced by WD, are available to entrepreneurs, little Aboriginal-specific information is available on this subject.

Funding sources for Aboriginal entrepreneurs were noted to be difficult to find in the initial stages of business development, although the inventory of tools noted several excellent guides to government funding available. This suggests that there is an awareness and/or presentation problem relating to these materials. Service providers play an important role in assisting entrepreneurs to locate their way through the host of programs available.

Gaps in Aftercare - Information for the Established Entrepreneur
Providers and entrepreneurs consistently report that programming is heavily weighted in favour of start-up of operations. The on-going development of businesses receives conderably less attention. Aftercare is an area with the least resources and the gap most mentioned by established Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Yet maintaining existing businesses is critical, particularly during early development stages when so many small businesses result in failure. One focus group participant provided a perspective of the importance of aftercare: "It's not the number of businesses you help to start. It is the number that you help establish."

Many entrepreneurs feel abandoned once they have received their start-up financing. They need on-going support for their ventures well beyond the initial first stage. During the development stages of their businesses, many entrepreneurs expressed a need for more information on several issues, including: how to find other sources of income, spin-off business opportunities, new markets,

regulation changes, new programs, and other information often gleaned from informal networks and service providers. Those further on in their development, with established expanding businesses wanted information on new markets, personnel management and other issues related to expansion. As one participant observed: "I am unaware of any programs that are out there to help me and my business grow". Another stated, "For existing businesses, we need seminars/workshops on strategies required to deal with changes in the economy". It was also suggested that mentoring could be used to address this gap. This service is often attached to loans that are offered, not usually offered independently.

Unique Groups with Unique Needs
As previously discussed, First Nations' women, Métis, urban residents, displaced workers, entrepreneurs in specific sectors, handicapped entrepreneurs and others often require programming developed or adapted to their distinctive situations and needs. In some cases these unique needs have been addressed to a large extent (e.g. youth) but in others a concerted effort is required to extend programs and services to these groups.

While few programs, services or tools specific to the circumstances faced by Aboriginal women have been developed to date, there are a number of organizations that could be involved in extending programming designed to address the needs of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs, including Aboriginal women's organizations in BC. The Aboriginal Women's Council and Indian Homemaker's Assocation, for example, indicated some interest or previous involvement in this area. The Women's Enterprise Society of BC (WESBC) is responsible for the delivery of a lending and service program for women entrepreneurs in BC. However, WESBC has not tailored its materials and service delivery products or programs to meet the needs of this population. Over the past four years, only 10 loans have been made to Aboriginal women (4% of their loan portfolio). We see again that the potential for networking stands out both as a source of information and as a means of support for women entrepreneurs dealing with unique challenges. Conferences and workshops have been used to provide networking opportunities.

It is clear that the expanding youth population is recognized and that programs are being developed to address their needs. Several programs exist for youth in a variety of formats and settings. If appropriate, many of these programs and materials could be adapted to meet unique needs of other groups.

Without exclusive affiliations with either the First Nations' community or the non-Aboriginal population, the Métis are often faced with unique challenges. There are indications that they may face prejudices and lack of support from both populations. A recent forum on Aboriginal youth entrepreneurship also suggests that business programs must be extended to serve the Métis population (Anne Noonan & Associates, 1999). However, the specific challenges Métis face and potential solutions require further investigation.

According to a regional analysis of service provision (see 6.4.1) the urban population, along with many rural, remote communities and regions, also seem to be under-served. This was deemed to have more to do with access to service than the types of programs and materials available. Therefore, the degree to which the needs of these groups are met is discussed below.

Finally, displaced workers and entrepreneurs with disabilities also require content, delivery and presentation tailored to their particular concerns. Some service providers who are currently responding to these special needs. However, again, programs are not Aboriginal-specific.

Special programs are generally developed in a site-specific and sometimes ad hoc manner to address the identified needs of each organization's clientele. This is an area that may benefit from greater integration among providers, sharing of knowledge and materials and forward planning to address the needs of segments of the Aboriginal community deemed to be of special significance or having unique information and service requirements.

Sectoral Information

A comparison of sector-specific information supplied by service providers (See Figure 8) and main business sectors represented by entrepreneurs (Figure 3), indicates strong matches within some sectors and some potential gaps in others. For instance, the numbers of organizations providing information related to forestry, arts & crafts, retail, construction, tourism and fishing seem to closely match the numbers of businesses surveyed whose primary operations are within these various sectors. In particular the tourism sector is reported to be well-served.

There seem to be, however, some potential gaps in provision within other sectors. Although several businesses indicated that they are involved in professional services, consulting services, and fewer are involved in transportation, agriculture and high-tech, there seems to be large gaps in corresponding provision of such sector-specific information. The areas of consulting services and professional services, strongly represented in the study, leave questions about the sectoral focus of such services.

The retail industry is another area needing more attention. Although one retail association (Intertribal Retailers Association of BC) exists for Aboriginal entrepreneurs, its mandate is primarily one of lobbying. The construction sector, transportation, manufacturing and real estate development also all lack sufficient information to assist the Aboriginal entrepreneur involved in these sectors. Clearly, this is an area needing further investigation. Furthermore, focus group participants reflected an interest in and an awareness of a strong future in eco-tourism, web-based business and e-commerce. It would be important to delve further into the sector-specific needs of consulting and professional service businesses.

6.3.2 Presentation

Entrepreneurs' comments provide indications of presentation issues that must be addressed. One issue has to do with language used in materials. As one provider described, business information is often "too dense (with) big words, more than they can cope with". Some entrepreneurs, on the other hand, were comfortable with advanced and comprehensive materials. Consideration must be given to the fact that users may vary greatly in their entry-level knowledge of the subject, as well as in their literacy levels and preferred learning methods. A range of materials is required, along with providers knowledgeable about what materials best suit a given situation.

Another issue is the means through which new material is presented. Presentation of materials was adequate in print formats, particularly during start-up, but entrepreneurs called for workshops and personal attention along with the materials. Many find it difficult when handed a manual and told to complete a pre-business assessment, or a business plan, on their own. A workbook style, with assistance was preferred but not always available.

Entrepreneurs differ in their proficiency in using information technology. For first-time users, simple presentation is crucial on web-based tools. Respondents suggested that sites could be better organized, with links to save search time, with graphics that do not take long to load and with a minimum of government sponsor logos up-front. Web sites should also be more comprehensive. The need for a web site with a full range of information on Aboriginal business was identified.

6.4 Access

6.4.1 Regional Coverage

An analysis of providers present in each region and of entrepreneur responses on a regional basis, highlights some potential weaknesses in regional coverage. It is important to note that, due to the availability of statistical information, provincial Development Regions were used for the purposes of regional analysis in this study. Some providers have since indicated that in many cases these regions are not appropriate in scale to their service areas that may be based on territorial or other boundaries. Appropriate boundaries for future regional analysis should be agreed upon.

All Development Regions appear to have a range of service providers, and thus Aboriginal entrepreneurs can potentially access service at some level within all regions. Also, all regions have service providers that target a variety of entrepreneurs: Aboriginal only, both Aboriginal and the general public, those living both on and off reserves, or those living on reserve only or off reserve only. Finally, all regions have service providers which supply the types of information most required by entrepreneurs, presented in a variety of forms. This includes extension workers. At least one provider in each region reported to use extension workers as a delivery method. However, it is not known to what extent they are used or what specific areas they serve.

Given entrepreneur preferences for "walk-in" service, the location of service providers is a key factor in the accessibility of information. In general, entrepreneurs tend to rely upon intermediaries (preferably Aboriginal focused) for assistance in larger centres, on EDOs on-reserve and on Friendship Centres and other organizations in urban areas where no Aboriginal intermediary exists. On a regional basis, there appear to be gaps in EDO and Aboriginal intermediary activity in some areas. An analysis of Aboriginal population to service provider ratios (considering Total population/ Total number of delivery organizations, Total Population/number of intermediary respondents, and Total Population/Aboriginal only service providers) suggests gaps in regional coverage, particularly in the Lower Mainland, North Coast, Vancouver Island/Coast and the Northeast. The Okanagan region appears to be well served compared to all other regions.

Given the substantial Aboriginal population in Vancouver, population to provider ratios in the Lower Mainland and in Greater Vancouver in particular are high. These entrepreneurs, however, have greater access to government and private services not available in rural regions. The North Coast and Vancouver Island have low numbers of Aboriginal intermediaries but a significant number of EDOs. A thorough evaluation of the level of service in these regions would require a more detailed examination of EDO activity. Due to low population numbers, the Kootenays has a low ratio of total population to total service providers and intermediaries. However, there are no Aboriginal-only intermediaries active in this region. Similarly, there are no Aboriginal intermediaries in the Nechako or the Peace River (Northeast). Both the Nechako and Kootenays have active EDOs and Development Corporations, although significantly fewer EDOs than other regions as

well. The Kootenays provides a demonstration of the complexity of determining the level of service for Aboriginal entrepreneurs in each region. While there are three CFDCs in the Kootenays, they report a low service rate of Aboriginal entrepreneurs. (Two of three CFDCs indicated they serve only one Aboriginal client per month on average). One Kootenay CFDC is reaching out to the Aboriginal community by developing an Aboriginal lending circle. While this study points to potential gaps, consultation at the local/regional level is required within all regions to determine if service is adequate in these areas and, if not, what opportunities exist to improve service.

Within each region, there are Districts and communities, many of them remote, which may not be well served by providers in regional centres. For example, in the far north of BC, beyond Fort Nelson and Stewart, the communities of Atlin, Lower Post, and Good Hope Lake are far removed from service providers in both BC and the Yukon. Service to these communities requires special consideration and provider outreach programs. Similarly, while there are a number of Aboriginal intermediaries serving some areas of the Vancouver Island/Coast region, others such as Northern Vancouver Island and areas of the Central Coast (as previously discussed) appear to be under-served. Also, within this region the urban centre of Victoria has few Aboriginal-specific walk-in business services. Similar discrepancies in the level of service within regions can be highlighted in all other regions as well. Refer to Appendix 17 for further details on regional service and gaps.

6.4.2 On-reserve/Off-reserve

Sixty-four percent of provider inventory respondents target both on and off reserve clients, 22% on reserve only and 17% off reserve only. In some off-reserve areas, entrepreneurs find that their access to service is limited if they live off reserve: "I find that unless you live on a reserve, the bands and other Aboriginal agencies are not very helpful". In general, off-reserve entrepreneurs appear to be under-served.

On the other hand, those living on reserve also feel isolated from services: "I would like to see Aboriginal business agencies more accessible. (I) would like to see business development on reserves," stated one entrepreneur. On-reserve service is varied in kind (although often EDOs) and effectiveness and, according to entrepreneurs, needs improvement in many areas. As with regional coverage above, accessibility to various programs and services varies from community to community.

6.4.3 Cost

Although cost was mentioned as an important factor for 60% of the Aboriginal entrepreneurs surveyed, the costs of currently available products and services were not considered to be prohibitive. Many materials and advisory services are currently available at little to no cost, particularly those offered through government or government-supported agencies. In fact, some of the most useful materials provided had little or no cost involved. Cost was raised as a barrier to Internet use in remote areas.

6.4.4 Knowledge/skill

Although it seems that users have, for the most part, the requisite knowledge and skills to use the materials, some access difficulties were mentioned relating to the readability of materials. In addition, respondents expressed a need for training in the use of computers, including access to the Internet. The federal Aboriginal Procurement Strategy Program in particular was mentioned as a program that is inaccessible and difficult to comprehend: "(This program) is very inaccessible to

First Nations. It is difficult to understand how it is applied and varies with the departments involved. The web site is insufficient, not easy to access". Barriers also exist relating to research skills and experience using the Internet.

6.4.5 Information Technology

It is clear that Information Technology (IT) use is greatest within urban areas, yet there are indications of interest within several other regions and settings. Entrepreneurs see potential for using the Internet for information dissemination, mentoring, marketing, further learning and research. However, currently limited or poor infrastructure, training and technical assistance, along with high cost, restrict access to web-based tools for many in outlying regions. These technological and management issues must be addressed if the Internet is to be relied upon for information delivery and other preferred uses.

Overall, information products and services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC are relatively accessible, offering low cost options and coverage of some kind in all regions. However, several areas for improvement have been identified, particularly with regard to regional coverage and overcoming cost, skill and infrastructure-related barriers to Internet use.

6.5 Awareness

6.5.1 Entrepreneur Awareness

The discussion of content brought out the issue of entrepreneurs' awareness of programs and services. Entrepreneur interviews and focus groups indicate that awareness of available products and services is poor and could be significantly improved through marketing, networking and communication efforts. Over 60% of entrepreneurs surveyed indicated that lack of awareness of where to go for assistance was the reason they had not been able to access the information they required. Evidence that an awareness problem exists is revealed in the perceived need for information on Aboriginal taxation and funding sources. This reflects a problem also found in other studies. Caldwell and Hunt (1998), for example, found that more than 75% of entrepreneurs were not aware of the federal Aboriginal Procurement Program.

Entrepreneurs responding to our survey wanted a greater awareness of what information products and services are available and where to find it, as indicated by their comments:

> "I need information on who to contact in my community to help me with business building."

> "There are so many young people out there who have no resources and don't know where to look to get started. Information in the mail is a good place to start."

> "It was difficult to find information but the quality of information was good when I finally found it."

Entrepreneurs suggest that providers need to spend more resources on marketing their programs and services and offer specific suggestions regarding the most appropriate advertising techniques. In particular, mail and radio announcements were mentioned as preferred venues as they do not rely on

providers to disseminate information to the community at large: "Avoid sending information to the band office where it can be dead ended." Providers also suggest that word-of-mouth and referrals are favoured methods of raising awareness. "(They are) the ones our clients trust".

6.5.2 Provider Awareness

Awareness is low not only among entrepreneurs but also among some service providers. A recent survey of EDOs, for example, indicated that less than 25% had heard of the Canada/BC Business Service Centre and suggested that the Centre should market its services more aggressively to Aboriginal organizations, communities, and business people (CBSC, 1999). Entrepreneurs also suggest that some providers need to become more aware of the programs, services and tools available to them.

6.5.3 Community Awareness

Given that entrepreneurs go to family, friends and community business people most when seeking information, awareness of the opportunities and requirements for entrepreneurship could also be improved at the community level. Community members, particularly local businesses should know of available services in order to refer entrepreneurs to such services. Although community members, other than entrepreneurs and providers, were not surveyed it might be assumed that community awareness is low, as the users themselves appear to have low awareness. Schools were suggested as one avenue for raising awareness not only of programs but of entrepreneurship as an option. One respondent suggested "economic diversification options should be made known to children at elementary and high school levels".

6.5.4 Frequency of Use

Levels of use of a given service or organization can be indicative of a number of things, including awareness and quality of service. Levels of use for the information tools and services of various agencies vary considerably. EDOs and Development Corporations serve on average 8-10 Aboriginal entrepreneurs per month, with the exception of Tribal Council EDOs, which indicated higher numbers (e.g. 30-40 per month) and the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Economic Development Corporation, which is also an intermediary organization (Aboriginal CFDC and ACC). NEDC serves an estimated 180 clients per month.

CFDCs (non-Aboriginal-specific) serve significantly lower numbers (5 per month on average). In some cases CFDCs report that this is because entrepreneurs are referred to Aboriginal providers in the area (e.g. Cowichan, Kamloops, Fraser Valley). Aboriginal organizations serving clients across the province generally estimate their rate of use at much higher levels (e.g. 50 - 300 per month), although others are as low as one per month. Provincial and federal government agencies vary considerably depending on their focus, ranging from 10-15 clients per month (National Research Council, Northern Development Commission, First Nations Forestry Program) to 200 (Aboriginal Business Canada).[24]

Overall, research results indicate that the level of awareness of available products and services is poor, not only among entrepreneurs but also among some service providers and the community at large. Providers need to increase their promotions and outreach efforts.

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[24] Note: These are self-identified figures of numbers served.

6.6 Service

As with other issues addressed here, Aboriginal entrepreneur satisfaction with the level and quality of service currently provided varies considerably from organization to organization. Overall, however, while providers were considered very important to the entrepreneurs, the quality of their services could be significantly improved.

6.6.1 Response Time

Response time was mentioned as one concern. A number of complaints were raised about delays incurred responding to requests for information and funding applications. Both federal agencies and other organizations were said to have "unnecessary waiting time". There appears to be some discrepancy in perceptions, however, since few of the organizations surveyed claimed to have long time lags in their service. The majority stated that they are able to reply within one week. Only two stated they take more than two weeks to respond.

While many entrepreneurs praised the service they received, particularly from Aboriginal intermediaries, many others were frustrated with the interface with service providers, particularly when there was not enough time allocated by the provider to work with the entrepreneur. Many providers indicated that they are unable to meet demand for personal one-on-one assistance due to insufficient funding and staff resources. In some cases funding had been cut back, resulting in staff reductions. At the same time, the need for services has increased due to growth in self-employment within the Aboriginal community. Thus their ability to provide timely service is limited by a lack of resources.

6.6.2 Staff Expertise

Study results indicate that the expertise of staff also varies from organization to organization. Although details regarding staff qualifications were not requested of individual providers, over 40% of entrepreneurs felt providers and their staff should be "more entrepreneurial" and stressed the importance of business knowledge.

Entrepreneurs report that some service provider staff do not have recent or relevant business experience. Entrepreneurs lack confidence in advice given by individuals without business experience or knowledge of their specific industry.

Three quarters of survey respondents noted that information sources were useful primarily due to knowledgeable staff. Entrepreneurs complain that lack of knowledge often leads to "buck passing". They report that the service staff within some organizations are of limited value as an information resource as they are not always aware of the programs, tools and services that are available. High turnover among EDOs was suggested as one reason for this.

6.6.3 Staff Approach/Conduct

Although there are some exceptions, both the low numbers of Aboriginal clients served by some organizations and focus group comments, suggest that in general there is a reluctance of Aboriginal entrepreneurs to use the services non-Aboriginal CFDCs and other organizations that do not specialize in serving Aboriginal clientele. Aboriginal entrepreneurs report there is an erroneous stereotype of Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal women, regarding their lack of entrepreneurial capability. This attitude, they report, is often exhibited in banks, government offices and many non-Aboriginal agencies that are mandated to help entrepreneurs. Complaints ranged from being treated

with disrespect, to being given minimal service, to outright discrimination. "There is an inherent bias/discrimination in the system that results in poorer service or no service. Aboriginal businesses are treated differently…They find out you are Aboriginal and the door shuts."

Approximately one-third of entrepreneurs surveyed felt that providers needed to be "more aware of First Nations protocols", and point to a need for greater cultural understanding and respect.

> "(Providers) do not have First Nations understanding, staff or board members…(They are) not meeting the needs. They discourage people; say business plans are incomplete; and offer insufficient counselling, followed by loan denials. (This) leads to discouragement. People don't come back."

First hand knowledge of factors within their communities that affect Aboriginal business development and entrepreneurial growth, help increase the effectiveness of intermediary and community-based organizations.

Political and accessibility issues were also raised regarding EDOs and Band offices, with a number of entrepreneurs expressing frustration at the lack of support received from their Nation and their reluctance to approach staff. At the same time, entrepreneurs were on the whole very positive about the support they have received from Aboriginal intermediaries, although specific concerns were also raised about the extensive paperwork required. Respondents called for honest, open, timely and less complicated communications.

6.6.4 Range of Services Provided

While a one-stop-shop would be an ideal way to address entrepreneurial needs, it is difficult for any one organization to offer a full range of information and services that are needed, given the limited funds and time available and often, the small population served. Yet inventory results show that some providers, more than others, offer a wide range of services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Many of the smaller providers in the rural and remote areas are limited to one-on-one advisory and referral services. Other larger providers, with potentially more available resources, added mentoring, coaching, training and conferences and networking opportunities to their slate of provision.

6.6.5 Monitoring of Success

Insufficient data was gathered to track indicators such as number of repeat visits or trends in use. As a general measure (and perhaps the ultimate test) of the success of service and information provided, providers were asked if they monitored the success of their clients after service. Of those who do monitor the success of their clients after service, many report high rates of success (more than 70%)[25]. What is not known is how providers monitor this success, and what criteria they use to measure the success.

There is considerable variation among organizations in service provision. Some of the most important service needs have to do with staff attitude and approach, with response time and with reduced funding and staff that limits individual attention required and desired by entrepreneurs. Greater staff knowledge and sensitivity were also called for, particularly regarding entrepreneurialism and cultural awareness. Issues of sensitivity unique to the needs of women, youth and those in

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[25] Note: These are self-reported figures and details regarding monitoring methods were not requested.

remote areas were also brought up. Many entrepreneurs experienced prejudice and an uninviting atmosphere that led to reluctance in approaching various organizations, such as banks. Improved communications among all stakeholders was seen as necessary to alleviate the distrust that was too often evident within many relationships.

6.7 Relationships and Networks

6.7.1 Provider Linkages

Although cooperation and communication between providers appears to be increasing, with the formation of provider associations and events to bring providers together, significant improvement in this area is called for. Entrepreneurs and providers alike called for the elimination of overlap, duplication and competition among service delivery agencies, and the need to improve the ad hoc, irregular co-ordination among service providers, between government agencies and between providers and government agencies.

Service providers and Aboriginal entrepreneurs reported that BC does not speak with one voice on issues of Aboriginal economic development and entrepreneurship. If a coordinated strategy for Aboriginal economic development in BC existed, there would be a better chance of increasing the funding available, establishing more co-operation between agencies and reducing the overlaps in provision.

Service providers reported that consultation carried out by government agencies is often "too little and too late." Providers say, "If those nearest the client could participate in the planning, and be involved in program strategies, it would result in more relevant and productive programs with greater buy-in from service providers".

6.7.2 Business to Business Linkages

Entrepreneurs unanimously agree that poor communications most limit their success and development. As one entrepreneur remarked, "Knowing how to communicate with the right people and places is what is most important". Entrepreneurs responding to the survey express that they are not connected to business circles - they are "not in the loop"- and therefore miss out on important information. The importance of business connections was indicated by more than 50% of respondents, who noted that networking with was "very important" or "important". Business associations and organizations are seen by some as a way of addressing this need. Aboriginal Tourism BC was provided as an example, although few participate in such organizations.

6.7.3 Business to Community Relationships

Many respondents indicated a need to strengthen their relationships within their community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The RCAP reminds us of "the importance of the collectivity in Aboriginal society (the extended family, the community, the nation) and of rights, institutions and relationships that are collective in nature" (RCAP, vol.2, chap.5). Yet, as indicated elsewhere in this report, many entrepreneurs experience a lack of support within their own communities, and internal discord that ultimately affects their ability to succeed. Results demonstrate that community-wide support for entrepreneurship must be garnered, emphasizing the importance of CED planning in Aboriginal communities to entrepreneurial success. Most importantly, perhaps, the community leadership must be supportive of entrepreneurial efforts. Finally, results demonstrate that

partnerships and communication between Aboriginal entrepreneurs and the non-Aboriginal community also could be improved to overcome stereotypes.

In conclusion, communications linkages and networks must be significantly improved by eliminating overlap, increasing cooperation among providers and users, bringing entrepreneurs "into the loop" through business networks and, finally, improving community relations through partnerships and CED planning.

6.8 Section Summary

This evaluation considered several aspects of the current system, including content and presentation, access to resources, awareness of resources, type and quality of service provided and relationships and networks among all stakeholders. This evaluation was based on a set of criteria and indicators developed for the purposes of conducting a comprehensive evaluation and as a tool for providers to use to evaluate their own performance. A thorough assessment of the gaps identified reveals that although entrepreneurs noted an absence of certain tools or services, in fact, often such provision existed. In many cases, lack of awareness was the issue that most needed to be addressed. Research results indicate that, in general, the level of awareness of available products and services is poor, not only among entrepreneurs but also among some service providers. Also requiring attention is the quality of service provided accessibility issues and, in particular, a need for improved relationships, cooperation and networking. See Table 15 for a summary of strengths and gaps identified.

Table 15: Strengths and Gaps in Information Service Provision

Strengths	Gaps - Areas Needing Improvement
1. Content and presentation:	
- Wide variety of services available - Wide variety of content available, closely matching identified needs - Start-up information - Tourism and forestry sectors well served	- Tools and services targeted to established businesses (e.g. Information about new business opportunities and changes in the business environment) - Tools and services targeted to First Nations' women, Métis, urban and displaced workers - Information on First Nations' history & success stories - Aboriginal-specific information related to marketing, home-based business, women - Financing, financial management, business structures, incorporation options and registration/legal information - Search and research skills - Sector gaps, including consulting and professional services, construction, real estate development and retail - Fragmented information - Training options
2. Access:	
- Telephone and Internet services potentially available to all entrepreneurs, resulting in direct information access (e.g. without provider assistance) - Some level of personal service available in most communities - Tools and services available at a range of costs, many low cost or free	- Infrastructure, cost and skills for Internet use and in some cases even telephone access - Language and format of materials - Communities and regions under-served (urban and rural, remote)
3. Awareness:	
Awareness of many start-up materials	Awareness of available tools, programs and services among providers and entrepreneurs

Strengths	Gaps - Areas Needing Improvement
4. Service:	
• In general high level of satisfaction with Aboriginal intermediaries reported • High rates of success among those businesses monitored after service • Wide range of services available	• Lack of sensitivity to First Nations culture and entrepreneurship with implications for business services • Response and processing times • One-stop-shop (services are fragmented) • Inadequate time and resources for "one-on-one" personal assistance • Outreach and promotion of services
5. Relationships & Networks:	
• Increasing linkages between providers	• Linkages between Aboriginal entrepreneurs and between Aboriginal entrepreneurs and other business people in their community/industry • Communication/understanding between entrepreneurs and their communities • Government/non-government provider consultation/relations • Programming overlap • Mentoring opportunities

A look at content and presentation revealed that financing and marketing information, with an Aboriginal orientation, was difficult to find in the early stages of business development, as was technical aspects of business formation, information on Aboriginal home-based business and training options. There was evidence of a wide variety of sector-specific information, yet some regional coverage was poor. The resource-based, arts and crafts and tourism sectors are reported to be well-served throughout, yet information on construction, real estate development, high-tech, consulting services and professional services sectors is poorly identified. Many entrepreneurs expressed that they felt abandoned beyond the initial first stage of business and wanted on-going support and better "aftercare". Furthermore, particular needs were expressed for First Nations' women, Métis, entrepreneurs in remote areas and urban residents who often require programming developed or adapted to their distinctive situations and needs.

Gaps in access to service result from regional variation in the presence of service providers, as well as the methods and media providers use to deliver business information. In general, urban and rural entrepreneurs have access to different resources and have different needs. In urban areas, entrepreneurs can turn to Friendship Centres, business resource centres, government agencies and the private sector for help, whereas in many rural areas entrepreneurs rely upon EDOs and/or CFDCs for service delivery. In some regions, and in some districts within those regions, there appears to be a need for improved service, particularly strengthening EDO and Aboriginal intermediary provision.

In some cases, information tools and materials require modification to improve accessibility for Aboriginal entrepreneurs. In general, entrepreneurs require understandable, easy-to-use materials. Several entrepreneurs also expressed a desire for information through the Internet, but require training and appropriate infrastructure to utilize web-based tools and services. Although use of Information Technology is greatest in urban areas, there is growing interest within rural settings.

A look at the providers themselves revealed some gaps in provision. Some of the most important service issues have to do with poor staff attitude and approach, with long response times. Many entrepreneurs demand greater staff knowledge and sensitivity, particularly regarding entrepreneurialism and cultural awareness. Improved communications among all stakeholders was called for to alleviate the distrust that was too often evident within many relationships.

Along with improved relationships among all stakeholders, stronger networks were seen as a way to eliminate overlap of provision, to increase cooperation and to bring entrepreneurs "into the loop".

7. Issues, Recommendations and Action Priorities

The following section outlines a series of recommendations for addressing the gaps in content, delivery and cooperation/coordination identified through this study and discussed in detail above. Two types of recommendations are presented. First, a series of recommendations that are broad and strategic in nature are made. These recommendations address critical issues such as the need for improved networking, building capacity among service provider workers and organizations, increasing cultural sensitivity and understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs, particularly within some segments of Aboriginal society, and, finally, the need for enhanced cooperation among providers and governments to improve service delivery.

Second, in accordance with the terms of reference for this study, recommendations pertaining to the development of specific new and modified information tools are presented. This list of "top ten" tools recommendations addresses key gaps in information content identified through the research findings. Guidelines for developing and adapting information tools are also provided. It must be emphasized, however, that although the development of new tools can address some of the needs raised by entrepreneurs in this study, it will not result in significant improvements to the delivery of information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in British Columbia if the broader issues raised above are not also addressed.

All sources of primary and secondary data point to several overall principles that should guide the development and delivery of information tools and services. These principles include:

1. **Decentralize information**.   Design and delivery at the local level, involving Aboriginal peoples and organizations themselves, is most effective. Therefore, whenever possible it is important to provide local ownership of materials, to inform and empower those providers closest to the community users, and to devolve program delivery to the community level, particularly where the organizational infrastructure and community partnerships are present.
2. **Don't reinvent the wheel**. It is unproductive and redundant to put resources into the development of new programs, services and/or tools when several good ones already exist. As much as possible, providers should build upon existing programs, tools and services, by adding to them, adapting them to suit unique client groups or improving them based on feedback from users. This implies that providers are fully aware of what exists, and are willing to work with others to share and improve resources.
3. **Adopt a bias for substance over style**. While creative visuals and attractive publications and Web Sites are appealing to users, their usefulness is limited if strong appropriate content does not follow, or if materials are not provided in an understandable manner, accommodating the users educational levels and learning styles.
4. **Be client-centred**. The design of information tools and methods of information delivery must be determined by the needs of the client, rather than agency priorities or program guidelines. This may require flexibility and adaptation. It also requires providers to have an understanding of the context in which the Aboriginal entrepreneur operates and a holistic picture of their needs, their preferences and abilities. For many this means materials and services must be delivered in a form that is Aboriginal-specific, whether it be a service delivery climate that is respectful of Aboriginal cultures and realities, or a print publication with Aboriginal case studies.

Each of these principles has been kept in mind in the development of the recommendations that follow.

7.1 Strategic Recommendations

Included in this section are three themes or areas of concern: 1. Gaps in content, 2. Gaps in service delivery and 3. Gaps in communications and coordination. Under each of the themes, specific "Issues" are outlined, followed by "Recommendations" and "Action Priorities" for service providers.

7.1.1 Gaps in Content

Issue: Required information resources, and tools are either not known about or not available.

There currently exist a variety of print materials suitable for most regional and client circumstances on topics most needed by Aboriginal entrepreneurs. However, cost effective mechanisms to share/exchange these tools among providers and with clients are not in place and awareness of their availability is limited. Further, some tools that are not targeted specially to Aboriginal entrepreneurs require modification to increase their effectiveness. Finally, there are areas where there is a lack of resources, requiring that new tools be developed.

Recommendation 1

Improve awareness and distribution of existing business information tools, modify existing tools to better meet the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and develop new tools in both print and electronic formats to address topics not adequately covered by existing materials.

Action Priorities:

1.a) Utilizing the inventory of programs, services and tools compiled in this study as a basis, create a list of available resources available to support Aboriginal entrepreneurs and circulate this list in print to all service providers and, through providers, to entrepreneurs. Designate an agency/organization to update this list of resources on a regular basis (e.g. annually) and encourage providers to advise of new materials as they become available, and withdraw materials as they become outdated. This list should also be available on an on-going basis on an Aboriginal business web site (see priority 5 b. below).

1.b) Develop new tools and modify existing ones to address gaps in currently available business information content. Detailed recommendations for tools modification and development are outlined in section 7.2 below.

1.c) Provide orientations for providers to new programs and materials for Aboriginal entrepreneurs as they become available, include these resources in the list of available tools (1a. above) and distribute a written notice of their release to all providers at a minimum and preferably to the Aboriginal community at large through local media.

1.d) Encourage all agencies to share their resources with others on a "willingness-to-exchange" basis, to enable all providers to inexpensively access and distribute a greater range and variety of resources.

1.e) Assist community-based providers to develop a comprehensive resource library and set of information tools by providing key resources, free or at a nominal cost, to service providers with the appropriate facilities to make them publicly available.

Issue: There is a need for "aftercare" products and services for those who have progressed beyond the initial start-up phase of business development

Study results demonstrate that there are numerous information tools and intermediary agency services available to entrepreneurs wishing to start a business, but few focus on the continuing care of businesses after start-up.

Recommendation 2

Improve services for businesses after they have been established, preferably on a continuing basis throughout the life of the business.

Action Priorities:

2.a) Establish benchmarks for service providers to track the success of their clients over time and include the criteria "on-going support of the entrepreneur" in agency evaluations.

2.b) Include service providers and entrepreneurs themselves in devising a general strategy of continuing care of entrepreneurs that may include:

  ➢ Programs that build in the importance of continuing business success, for example rotating trust/loan funds and peer lending;

  ➢ Regular meetings with and site visits to entrepreneurs to gauge their needs for assistance;

  ➢ "New Business Opportunities" seminar series, that may be sector specific, will contribute to entrepreneurs' continuing business knowledge (e.g. new trends in the industry, growth industries, business management skills, changes in technology, etc.). These events will also provide a forum for service providers to keep in touch with their clients, strengthen relationships and provide valuable opportunities for client feedback and group problem-solving; and

  ➢ On-going information exchange and mentoring partnerships between Aboriginal entrepreneurs and others in the private sector (e.g. financial institutions, business networks).

<u>7.1.2 Gaps in Service Delivery</u>

Issue: Aboriginal Entrepreneurs are "not-in-the-loop"- not connected to business circles - and therefore miss out on important information.

Both entrepreneurs and service providers emphasize the importance of networks among Aboriginal entrepreneurs, mentors and other business people in their community and/or industry. Without a connection to the business community, entrepreneurs miss out on business opportunities and essential information that could affect the operation of their businesses. It is therefore important to maintain good networks with entrepreneurs and to keep them informed of programs, tools and services available to facilitate networking and business mentoring.

Recommendation 3

Develop vehicles and processes that will facilitate formal and informal business networks at local and regional levels.

Action Priorities:

3.a) Introduce Aboriginal entrepreneurs into business, industry and peer networks where appropriate.

3.b) Facilitate regional networking by providing new funding to local and regional agencies, enabling them to hire additional staff to facilitate and support networking activities. Such initiatives could include offering workshops, conferences, luncheon meetings; facilitating links with mentors and peers through informal and formal networks; creating regional directories of Aboriginal-owned businesses; and providing training and technical support networks.

3.c) Compile and make available a database by region and sector of businesspeople (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) available to serve as mentors to Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

3.d) Research the potential of the Internet in creating information and support networks among entrepreneurs themselves, and with service providers, particularly in remote or rural areas, where connections to peers, and access to information and training opportunities are restricted due to geographic limitations.

Issue: There is a need to build capacity among service provider workers.

While some agencies have experienced staff, have clear indicators of staff performance and undertake regular reviews of client satisfaction, many Aboriginal entrepreneurs report that the skills and knowledge of current resource people are limited in the following ways: approach (enthusiasm, friendliness), experience, knowledge of available programs and resources, business skills and understanding of Aboriginal issues and First Nations protocol.

Recommendation 4

Invest in building capacity of service provider personnel to ensure quality service, through hiring policies, monitoring, networking and on-going training. This would include updating staff on current business issues and trends and new resources available, sensitizing them to the unique situations and needs of Aboriginal clients, and enhancing their understanding of client service and the key role they play in supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurs and economic development.

Action Priorities:

4.a) Build the capacity of provider staff as a resource to Aboriginal entrepreneurs by:

➢ Providing regular opportunities for staff to network with other providers and contacts in key industries in their regions;

➢ Sensitizing staff to Aboriginal culture, the importance of Aboriginal economic development and the important role of service providers in entrepreneurial development through sensitivity and diversity workshops;

➢ Providing on-going professional development opportunities in the forms of business training (general and specific to key sectors), training in counselling and client service, skills upgrading and certification;

➢ Sponsoring a workshop for providers (or a series of regional events) to familiarize them with the full range of programs, services and tools currently available to them. Include opportunities for discussion of those resources found to be most useful in their experience; and

➢ Identifying ancillary resources available at the community level to address needs outside of the direct mandate of business information providers, including the needs of clients faced with personal, family or community difficulties or requiring basic education or life skills training.

4.b) Develop processes to evaluate entry-level skills and on-going performance of staff, by:

➢ Identifying, developing, implementing and monitoring measurement criteria that track the level and quality of service to Aboriginal entrepreneurs; and

➢ Developing benchmarks for hiring staff with recent and relevant business experience.

Issue: While an increasing number are using, or desire to use, the Internet for business research, marketing and communications, web-based service delivery has many obstacles and few shortcuts to improved information services for many Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Service providers' opinions vary on the present utility and appropriateness of web-based services. While over half of the Aboriginal entrepreneurs surveyed are using the Internet, primarily for e-mail but also for marketing and research, others were not using this tool due to lack of skills and communications infrastructure within their communities. Time required to search on the Internet was also a barrier, which could be addressed in part through the development of an appropriate and comprehensive Aboriginal business web site. Many not currently using the Internet were emphatic that improving their capacity to do so would be important in the future. They see the Internet as a means of finding up-to-date information, necessary for "staying in the loop". It also provides direct access to information, not filtered through band offices or service providers.

Recommendation 5

Enhance web-based services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and their capacity to access such services, and ensure that service providers are equipped with the requisite tools and training to integrate Internet-based information with other forms of service delivery.

Action Priorities:

5.a)   Design a comprehensive, Aboriginal-specific, open-access business web site, under the direction of the BC Economic Development Working Group (see 8 a below), and in consultation with Canada/BC Business Service Centre staff. (See Section 7.2 for further details on web site content and design recommendations.)

5.b)   Consider the development of a closed Internet-based site for Aboriginal service providers only, to provide an on-going exchange among providers as well as notification and assessment of resources available. An example for such a site would be REACH. However, use of this as a model would dependent on the results of the review of this program and Aboriginal pilot projects underway at the time of preparation of this report.

5.c)   Ensure computers with Internet access are publicly and freely available for use by Aboriginal entrepreneurs in all communities, along with appropriate training and technical support. This would imply that a proper infrastructure would be in place and would therefore necessitate working with local and regional utilities to provide adequate service and maintenance. Partnerships may also be formed with existing local providers of Internet access (e.g. Internet Service Providers, schools, libraries, private sector users).

Issue: Increased sensitivity to and support of the unique needs of those in more remote and under-served areas, and of unique groups, including women and Métis, is called for.

The special circumstances of entrepreneurs living in remote locations, often on-reserve, must be taken into account in designing information products and services. Business information services are

often not delivered in or near the community of the entrepreneur, resulting in difficulties in accessing products and services and discomfort in approaching service providers.

Study results indicate that some regions may be particularly under-served, not all of them remote. These include the Lower Mainland, North Coast, Vancouver Island/Coast, Northeast, Kootenays, Cariboo and Nechako (all but the Okanagan warrant further investigation). Further, within these regions there are communities and sub-regions that appear to require particular attention, such as the northern Nechako, Victoria, northern Vancouver Island and parts of the central coast within the Island/Coast region, and Vancouver and the Sunshine Coast in the Lower Mainland. Further consultation with providers within these areas is required to discuss their unique needs and current service delivery arrangements. In remote areas that are underserved partnership possibilities with providers in larger centres, the private sector and others should be explored, along with the potential for extension workers to address their needs.

Research results also indicate that some segments of Aboriginal society, including women, youth, and Métis, have unique information and service requirements that have been addressed to varying degrees. A number of organizations and programs have been formed to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth in business, while few initiatives have been taken to support Aboriginal women or investigate the unique circumstances of the Métis entrepreneur.

Recommendation 6

Extend business information services to those in more remote and under-served areas, and to groups with unique needs (e.g. Aboriginal women, Métis) through consultation, networking, funding and information products and services tailored to their unique needs.

Action Priorities:

6.a) In consultation with First Nations governments, community-based providers and entrepreneurs in these regions, investigate options for extending or improving services to areas that currently appear to be under served, including the Lower Mainland, Kootenays, Nechako, North East, Vancouver Island/Coast, and North Coast. Within these regions some areas have been identified that appear to require particular attention. This should include exploring potential information and resource-sharing partnerships between individual First Nations and/or community organizations and intermediaries located in regional centres, the private sector, governments and others.

6.b) In regions where it is deemed appropriate, make funding available to service providers that serve large areas with remote communities, so they may implement an extension program that takes advantage of mentors or experienced business people who are culturally and/or geographically closer to the entrepreneur (e.g. Alaska Peer Outreach model, see McBride and Ndungutse, 2000).

6.c) Conduct research on the particular difficulties Métis experience in accessing business information services, and assess ways their needs might be better met. Research and

consultation should be conducted in cooperation with existing agencies serving the Métis population.

6.d)   Extend existing women's programs and support the development of new programs and pilot projects that meet the needs of Aboriginal women in business, including networking, workshops in the areas of marketing and financial management, and child care provision. Partnerships between Women's Enterprise Society and one or more Aboriginal women's organizations (i.e. Aboriginal Women's Council) are suggested.

Issue: Sensitivity towards Aboriginal culture and the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs needs to be strengthened.

Many Aboriginals seeking services report a positive response from service providers. However, others experience a climate that is intimidating and discriminatory within government agencies, the private sector and non-Aboriginal intermediaries. Aboriginal entrepreneurs in their home communities also face cultural barriers.

In part providers suggest that the perceived "lack of sensitivity" is due resource limitations. Generally, Aboriginal cultural norms favour more face-to-face contact and less dependence on print for effective communication. However, providers suggest they do not have the staff resources to meet the demand for one-on-one counselling.

Creating a climate within Aboriginal communities in which entrepreneurs can succeed requires that the community and its leadership accept economic development as a means of effecting change. Within an active small business environment, the role of the Aboriginal entrepreneur is more easily understood and more likely accepted.

In the "mainstream" society, creating a climate for Aboriginal entrepreneurial success is dependent on a strategy of preparing the entrepreneur with the skills, information, and support, and providing opportunities for networking with the business community at-large to create opportunities for partnership and overcome stereotypes.

Recommendation 7

Promote greater understanding of and more cultural sensitivity towards Aboriginal entrepreneurs by providing a choice of service providers, holding cross-cultural workshops for service providers, promoting networking between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs and organizations, and facilitating CED planning within Aboriginal communities.

Action Priorities:

7.a)   To help provide Aboriginal entrepreneurs with a greater choice of service providers, compile and circulate a list or directory of service providers to Aboriginal entrepreneurs (as per action priority 1a). This list should be available in print and on-line and should be both regional and provincial.

7.b)   Under the guidance of Aboriginal service providers, design and deliver training workshops for non-Aboriginal service providers that promote cultural understanding and emphasize the economic importance of the First Nations communities.

7.c)   Encourage networking and partnerships between non-Aboriginal community-based business organizations (e.g. Chambers of Commerce), and Aboriginal organizations and entrepreneurs, as a means of reducing stereotypes and creating a better understanding and acceptance of Aboriginal culture and the importance of Aboriginal entrepreneurship and economic development to both communities.

7.d)   Share information on models and practices where Tribal Councils, Bands, and EDO's have successfully overcome culturally-related challenges for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and created community support for entrepreneurship with Aboriginal organizations and communities.

7.e)   Encourage and support CED planning within Aboriginal communities, including processes to seek agreement among leaders and community members on the role of, and strategies for supporting, entrepreneurship.

7.1.3 Gaps in Communications and Coordination

Issue: Co-operation and co-ordination between service providers, between government agencies, and between providers and government agencies is fragmented and inadequate.

Service providers and Aboriginal entrepreneurs report a lack of coordination among government agencies (e.g. DIAND, WD, Ministry of Small Business and Tourism, and ABC) as well as a need for greater coordination and communication among providers. In particular, they point out, that there is no Aboriginal economic development strategy for BC that serves to integrate the efforts of various agencies. The absence of such a strategy results in the duplication of services and programs, less effective use of funds and competition among service providers. The involvement of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers is critical in the development of such a strategy.

> **Recommendation 8**
>
> **Foster co-ordination and co-operation among government agencies and between government and service agencies through a BC Economic Development Working Group mandated to: a) oversee the development of an Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy for BC; b) ensure ongoing cooperation on strategy implementation (including adequate funding); and c) facilitate regular, regional consultation on priorities, programs and funding.**

Action Priorities:

8.a)   Activate the BC Economic Development Working Group, a broad-based advisory group to all levels of government that includes a range of provider types as well as entrepreneurs and communities from across the province, that is accountable for two-way communication with those they represent and is mandated to provide input on an on-going basis on priorities, programs and funding. In recognition of the financial pressures faced by many provider organizations, and entrepreneurs, financial compensation for time and expenses of Working Group members should be considered.

8.b)   Under the guidance of the BC Economic Development Working Group, develop an Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy for BC that would identify priorities, develop plans, and design programs for implementation and monitoring at provincial level to support community and regional efforts. Providers, First Nations and community-based organizations should develop strategies for each region collaboratively, with links between community/regional and provincial strategies. The Strategy may include pilot projects and initiatives to implement recommendations 1 through 7 above.

8.c)   Jointly sponsor a BC Aboriginal economic development conference, that would showcase best practices, address the development of an Aboriginal Economic Strategy for BC and provide an opportunity for dialogue among Aboriginal economic development practitioners, community leaders, service providers and key government agencies.

8.d)   Encourage the development and ongoing maintenance of provider networks and networking activities at both the community/regional and provincial/national levels.

7.2 "Top Ten" Recommendations for Development and Modification of Information Tools

Research results demonstrate overall gaps in content in the following areas:

➢ Financing and financial management

➢ Marketing

➢ Available information products and services, including training options for small business

➢ Mentorship opportunities

➢ Awareness of trends (i.e. new business opportunities, changes in the business environment)

➢ Knowledge of business history, success stories, talents of First Nations

➢ Research skills

➢ Legal and business registration regulations (on and off-reserve)

➢ Incorporation options

➢ Sector-specific information (i.e. services, retail, construction, real estate)

➢ Home-based business (Aboriginal specific)

➢ Aboriginal women in business

➢ Confronting challenges associated with culture and community

7.2.1 Tools Recommendations

Based on a review of existing materials and the identification of content gaps listed above the following "Top Ten Tools" are recommended for development and/or revision by information providers.

1. FINANCING GUIDEBOOK
A consolidated source of information related to financing options for Aboriginal businesses that includes:

a. What loans and grants are available and from what sponsoring agencies
b. Information about the type and purpose of loans and grants
c. Private sector investment options
d. Private sector partnership option
e. Information on the importance of credit and establishing credit history
f. Criteria for eligibility
g. References to ancillary resources and links to Web sites for further information

It would be important to include case studies showing ways other Aboriginal entrepreneurs have "patched" together various sources to meet their specific needs.

2. MULTI-MEDIA MARKETING PACKAGES
A three part series of marketing information packages, organized around the various stages of business development, start-up, maintenance and growth, should be developed. The three parts or "modules" would cover:

a. Basic marketing concepts (such as identifying your market, pricing)
b. Capturing local markets, including building community support and cultural match
c. Seeking new markets
      i. Domestic
      ii. Intertribal
      iii. International
      iv. Web-based marketing

Each package should include a workbook, relevant articles, program brochures and lists of further references. They should also include a video to introduce the learner to the meaning of various concepts and issues through stories about successful endeavours as told through the words of Aboriginal entrepreneurs themselves. Materials used for existing marketing workshops (e.g. offered by CFDCs) should be reviewed and considered for inclusion and/or modification.

3. DIRECTORY OF PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Using the inventory of programs, services and tools compiled for this study as a basis, a directory should be created of the available resources to support Aboriginal entrepreneurs, including training and educational opportunities. Recognizing the holistic nature of entrepreneurialism, it should also include resources that, although not directly related to small business, are influential to the success of entrepreneurs. Certain guidelines for development of this directory include:

a. It must be well organized according to region and type of service/specialty
b. It should be in an easily searchable format (e.g. clear table of contents and index in print, links within web site page)
c. An organization or agency must be responsible for updating and revising the list on regular basis
d. Formal and regular communications channels with providers must be established for the purposes of advising of new materials as available, and outdated materials to be withdrawn from the directory
e. Available on an Aboriginal business web site (see 6 below), as well as in print

4. "GROW YOUR BUSINESS" WORKBOOKS

Aboriginal specific tools are needed to support an "Aftercare" strategy. At this time in business development, entrepreneurs need concise information to address their specific issues and needs. A workbook style is recommended. The workbooks could be used in two ways. For independent learning, they would allow entrepreneurs to learn interactively with the material, at a pace and time that they choose. Used in a seminar setting, they should be accompanied by a facilitator's guide. These workbooks should include:

a. Assessing your business' health
b. Assessing the business environment and seeking new opportunities

5. MENTORING DATABASE & ACCOMPANYING MENTORING SUPPORT MATERIALS

This is a database of entrepreneurs, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, who are willing to provide advice and/or enter into an ongoing mentoring relationship with Aboriginal entrepreneurs. The database should be established by region, and contain information about the mentor's business interests and expertise, availability, and conditions for engagement. A detailed process and set of agreements must be laid out, and understood by service providers, mentors and entrepreneurs. Mentors will require support in the form of training or coaching. Materials that should be developed include:

➤ A brochure outlining what mentoring is and what the responsibilities are for mentors and for entrepreneurs

> ➢ An orientation workshop for those committing to participating, to introduce the process, responsibilities and to the parties involved

Similar materials from existing mentoring programs should be reviewed and modified as required.

6. ABORIGINAL BUSINESS WEB SITE

A comprehensive Internet-based repository of information related to the business needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC. Content would include (but not be limited to):

a. <u>Business planning:</u> with several samples of Aboriginal plans at various levels of complexity. This would be a simpler form of the Interactive Business Planner currently used by intermediary delivery agencies.
b. <u>Pre-business planning/How to Start a Business</u>: including sections on self-assessment, taxation, marketing and financing for First Nations (e.g. an electronic version of the financing guidebook and marketing concepts package).
c. <u>Sector/business-specific component:</u> around such topics of interest as: Home-based business; Tourism; Retail; Forestry; Aboriginal arts & crafts etc. Sector manuals should be included (see #8 below) and each component should link the user to specific agencies or associations that can provide more information.
d. <u>Mentoring:</u> access to the mentor database suggested in 5 above, and/or other mentoring information or programs.
e. <u>Financing:</u> a quick list of all delivery the delivery agencies that have loan programs with a basic outline of what is offered in BC. This should link to the sites of more specific information.
f. <u>Marketing:</u> this would include information regarding Aboriginal statistics, export opportunities and expanding markets.
g. <u>Growth:</u> design content for those businesses that are more mature and complex rated to management, growth, financing, etc. (include electronic version of #4).
h. <u>Regional:</u> information pertinent to each region of the province (e.g. providers, communities, sector information) should be included.
i. <u>Links:</u> One of the primary components of this site would be links to a number of other informational and support agencies, including: The Canada/BC Business Service Centre, ABSN sites, sector-related sites, useful local, provincial and federal government sites, various regional providers and community businesses web sites.

This site should include an interactive component in the form of a chat feature and bulletin board to strengthen the networks of entrepreneurs within regions, sectors and other interests. This would also allow discussion of issues, sources of advice and buy/sell/trade opportunities.

7. PROVIDER NETWORK/ON-LINE PROVIDER RESOURCES

A closed (intranet) network for those service providers serving Aboriginal clients (such as REACH) should be considered as a component of regional service support. The utility and desirability of an electronic version of support should be informed by:

> ➢ Consultation between the Web advisory committee and the Canada/BC Business Service Centre
> ➢ Outcome of the REACH evaluation study
> ➢ Evaluation of existing Aboriginal service provider REACH sites

This should also include placement of OSBR at Aboriginal provider locations.

8. SECTOR-SPECIFIC MANUALS FOR ABORIGINAL ENTREPRENEURS

Sector-specific information manuals should be developed in a simple, easy-to-use style, and made available in provider reference libraries. Manuals should be devised for all major sectors of Aboriginal enterprise, with existing Canada/BC Business Service Centre manuals serving as a starting point for product development. Legal/legislative issues pertaining to each sector should be included, along with industry contacts, associations and other references.

9. RESEARCH & SEARCH TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP

A guidebook should be developed and used in a workshop format that teaches the learner about researching business topics and issues, including a process for researching, where to source information, such as statistical information for First Nations and the uses and limitations of these statistics. The workshop should also assist the entrepreneurs in how to use search engines on the Internet. Note that prerequisite computer skills must be first assessed.

10. HOME-BASED BUSINESS GUIDEBOOK

A guidebook is important for start-up entrepreneurs intending to work from home. The book should:

> ➢ Contain several self-assessment worksheets
> ➢ Address the unique circumstances of blending a family and work
> ➢ Have samples of forms or processes relevant to home-based business operation
> ➢ Contain many stories of Aboriginal entrepreneurs with whom the learner can identify.

Other

Other important areas not listed in the "Top 10" above have to do with issues of awareness. Materials are available but not reaching the Aboriginal entrepreneur. For instance, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of the <u>Federal Procurement Strategy</u>. Although it might be wise to look further into the reasons why several entrepreneurs are unaware of programs, improved publicity, marketing and program information may be in order.

Research results also indicated that awareness of existing <u>taxation</u> information is a problem for many entrepreneurs. In light of the availability of various tools and programs that provide this information, and the importance of this issue, it is suggested that the existing tax materials be reviewed by a group of providers, including intermediaries and the Indian Taxation Advisory Board. They would determine if a combination of existing materials, made widely available, would adequately address the gap or if a new or modified tool is in order. For example, a 1999 study recommended the creation of an interactive program that would allow the entrepreneur to explore the tax implications of their situation (Visions First Nations Planning Group & Rosi Niedermayer and Associates, 1999).

<u>Business structures and incorporation options</u> is another topic for which information is available but of which entrepreneurs are often unaware. Materials should be gathered and offered in a workshop format on these topics, including:
> ➢ Community enterprise, e.g. Development Corps., societies
> ➢ Sole proprietorship

➢ Cooperatives
➢ Partnerships & joint ventures
➢ Incorporated vs. unincorporated

Materials could be oriented to two different audiences: the individual entrepreneur and the Band Council or Aboriginal organization considering getting into business.

Workshops should include such elements as:

➢ Discussions of potential conflicts between entrepreneurial development and community/cultural values, and how these conflicts could be resolved (particularly for community enterprise)
➢ Case studies
➢ Examples of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business ventures
➢ References to related materials

Web site content on these subjects should also be considered and may be modified from existing materials (e.g. WD's Resource Guide for Small Businesses for individuals, Centre for Community Enterprise materials).

7.2.2 Guidelines for Developing and Adapting Information Tools

From comments about what they liked or disliked about current tools available to them, and about what they would like to have, focus group participants explicitly stated, or hinted at, several preferences in the information tools they use or plan to use. From these preferences, we have developed a list of ten guidelines that providers can use in developing new tools or adapting exiting tools. Information tools should be:

1) Easy to use:
   a) Medium to large fonts
   b) Simple lay-outs
   c) Instructions and directions
   d) Table of contents
   e) Step-by-step guidance

2) Easy to comprehend:
   a) Use of examples, case studies and samples
   b) Simple, clear language
   c) Reflecting appropriate reading levels

3) Up-to-date, reflecting changes in:
   a) Aboriginal tax laws
   b) Market information
   c) Sector economies
   d) Government programs and names

4) Specific, rather than generic, information related to:

    a) First Nations
    b) Aboriginal women
    c) Aboriginal youth
    d) Various business sectors
    e) Various regions

5) Multi-modal, using more than one delivery mode or means, including:
    a) Print
    b) Resource people
    c) WWW
    d) One-on-one guidance
    e) Courses and workshops
    f) Conferences
    g) Mentors and networks

6) Contribute to a comprehensive set of available tools, including:
    a) All aspects of business start-up and expansion
    b) All regional and sectoral economies
    c) Relevant background materials
    d) Links to appropriate other materials
    e) Aboriginal-specific restrictions or conditions

7) Accessible, including:
    a) Directly accessible by the user
    b) Affordable
    c) Well-promoted (e.g. use of direct mail-outs and local media for announcements)

8) Concise, including:
    a) Limited length/size
    b) "To-the-point" explanations
    c) Use of brochures and booklets
    d) Limited sponsor information

9) Interactive, through:
    a) Use of exercises, worksheets and checklists
    b) Use in conjunction with a resource person
    c) Ability to discuss with others through a workshop or WWW chat line or bulletin board

10) Interesting, through:
    a) Use of appropriate graphics and illustrations
    b) Plenty of "white space" in document and web pages
    c) Limited use of large graphics that take long times to download onto computer
    d) Organized information

8. Areas Requiring Further Study

Study results have revealed several questions that remain unanswered. Many of these issues call for further investigation through research and/or consultation for the benefit of Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

1. There is a need to encourage more acceptance of the entrepreneur in the community. For many entrepreneurs, especially for those on reserve, but including those off reserve, a positive climate and an acceptance of their role in their own community is an essential element of success. It would also be valuable follow up work to identify:

    a. what a community can do to improve the climate for Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and

    b. what Aboriginal entrepreneurs can do themselves to improve their receptivity in the community.

2. With respect to the boundaries defined for delivering Aboriginal business services, providers and government should be consulted to design regional boundaries that best lend themselves to efficient and effective provision of services to Aboriginal clients. This will help to insure that Aboriginal specific providers have identified areas they can serve, and lessen overlapping provision and areas underserved.

3. Once appropriate regional boundaries have been agreed upon, additional research is required to determine specific regional characteristics, particularly the level of service (coverage) each region (and the communities within them) receives and the degrees to which key sectors within each region are serviced.

4. There is a need to conduct research on the particular difficulties Métis experience in accessing business information services, and assess ways their needs might be better met by working with existing agencies serving the Métis population. It would be useful to investigate the unique challenges and needs of the Métis entrepreneur in conjunction with organizations such as the Métis Provincial Council.

5. There is a need for more research and information on business structures and incorporation options, from the perspective of First Nations cultures, to address the issues raised by the differences (and common ground) between a collective approach to CED and an approach that encourages individual entrepreneurship. Existing research points out that governments have promoted a European economic model (Myers, 1999). However, the history and present tendency of First Nations development is towards a collective approach that emphasizes local control, a holistic point of view, comprehensive planning, cooperation, and development of local capacity (Newhouse, 1999). First Nations leaders have pursued approaches to economic development on a continuum between these two seemingly opposing perspectives and in some cases have combined the two. Questions to be answered include:

    a. To what extent are community development corporations, proprietorships, partnerships, co-ops., etc. compatible with historical and present realities?

    b. To what extent are present government structures and constitutions compatible with historical structures, and to what extent do they impact economic development success of Aboriginal entrepreneurs?

      c. What is the status of First Nations-controlled Development Corporations in BC? If there has been a decline, as research suggests, then why?

6. Appropriate measures and indicators of provider effectiveness require further work and discussion to reach consensus among funders and providers.

7. Investigate the high turnover of EDOs and address the needs that ensue accordingly.

9. Conclusion

Clearly, we are witnessing unprecedented changes in our economic landscape that are having far-reaching effects in our personal, family, work and community lives. Embedded within this reality, are almost one million Aboriginal Canadians who are experiencing their own unique transitions. In addition to the global economic changes affecting us all, the Aboriginal community faces changes associated with land claims settlements, a movement towards self-governance, a burgeoning population and many others factors outlined in this report. All are impacting First Nations in BC profoundly. Meanwhile, First Nations communities must continue to struggle with socio-economic conditions widely deemed to be unacceptable, including high levels of dependency and unemployment.

To overcome these conditions and manage this unpredictable environment, many Aboriginals are embracing entrepreneurship as a way to meet head-on the economic realities that impact their lives. Through WD, this study is an effort to help Aboriginal entrepreneurs, organizations and communities to succeed in these endeavours. It was undertaken to look particularly at the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs regarding the business information and services they require to start and carry out their enterprises. This report is the culmination of culling a great deal of information to, first, find out what information, tools and resources are currently available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and, second, to comparing these available tools and services with what Aboriginal entrepreneurs report that they need to help them succeed.

This report examines and consolidates the research, information and insights from service providers, and most importantly, the experiences, thoughts and ideas of Aboriginal entrepreneurs themselves, who know their situation better than anyone else. It provides an analysis of the information gathered, along with recommendations to providers for meeting the needs that have been demonstrated.

Above all the detailed information needs identified, three basic but fundamental realities stand out. First, although these Aboriginal entrepreneurs have in common the intention to create, maintain or grow their businesses, they have far more distinctions. From differing business sectors to differing needs for support, these individuals call for a client-centred approach to provision that fits their unique circumstances.

Second, the issues and needs that emerged from this study demonstrate that no one issue can be fully understood, or addressed, in isolation from the others, or without consideration of the context in which Aboriginal entrepreneurs and provider organizations operate. The many interrelated elements of the entrepreneurial context are unquestionably influential, and thus vital, to understanding the challenges faced by entrepreneurs, and to finding solutions to address them.

A third reality is that we are indeed faced with an information explosion. Among other things, this study process provided insight into the complicated and sometimes frustrating experience of searching for information among the many sources and forms of information available, and then sifting through it to find the most relevant and appropriate materials for a specific purpose. This learning helped to guide the report recommendations and highlighted the importance of services and tools that organize and consolidate the array of information that is out there in a format easily accessible by the user, whether it be a resource centre, a web site, or a knowledgeable individual who

knows what is available and is able to refer the entrepreneur to the most appropriate location to meet their needs.

It is clear that many of the report recommendations are beyond the scope of any one agency or department to address. The responsibility to achieve positive outcomes rests with many agencies and individuals. Therefore, in order to realize significant progress, it will take the concerted, collective effort and good will of many people, in the many agencies that serve Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

This report provides insights into the present situation for Aboriginal entrepreneurs in BC and offers recommendations for improving the services available to them. Other studies report similar findings and recommendations. The challenge now is for service providers, including all levels of government, to take the appropriate actions to generate positive change; actions that will enhance the ability of BC's First Nations to succeed as entrepreneurs and to build sustainable, self-reliant economies in their communities. As one entrepreneur stated: *"Stop studying the problem; (We need) direct solutions".*

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Report Documents

The analysis of the business information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs, undertaken by the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University, is comprised of four elements. For ease of reference, the analysis has been divided into four separate documents: Report, Appendices, Literature Review, and Best Practices.
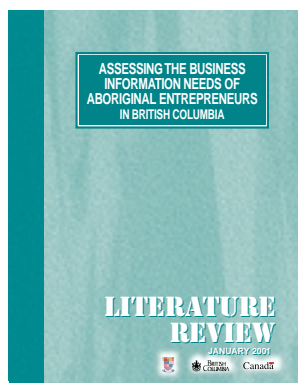
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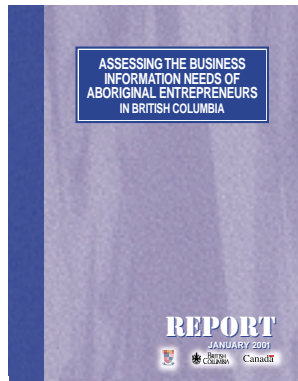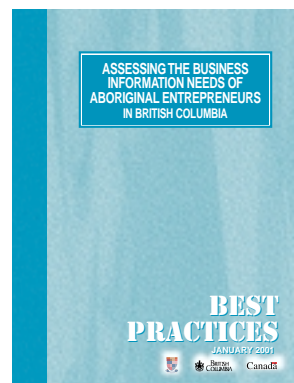
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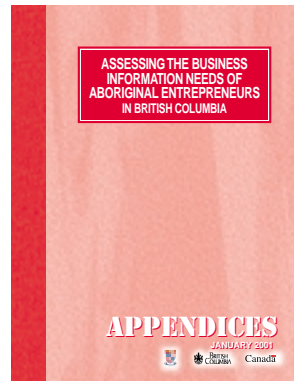
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