

Final Report
Evaluation of the Aboriginal Business Services
Network

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Executive Summary

The Aboriginal Business Services Network (ABSN) is an important initiative offered through Canada Business Services Centres (CBSC) in Western Canada and funded by Western Economic Diversification (WD) as a component of the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative. The primary purpose of this evaluation was to assess the ABSN initiative and the degree of success achieved in reaching its goals and objectives. As a result, areas for improvement have been identified and recommendations made with respect to future initiative directions. This evaluation assessed the relevance, success, and effectiveness of the ABSN with particular reference to the April 1999 program submission to Treasury Board. That initial document outlined the following expected results:

- Increased awareness by Aboriginal business and business intermediaries;
- Increased utilization by Aboriginal business and business intermediaries; and
- Increased service and support capacity of partnering Aboriginal business development organizations.

A number of objectives were identified for the evaluation, based on the ABSN Program Logic Model and Data Collection Matrix developed for this study. These evaluation objectives included:

1. To describe the **background and development** of the ABSN in the four Western regions;
2. To describe the **implementation** of the ABSN in the four Western regions;
3. To determine the **success** of the ABSN in achieving its short-, intermediate- and long-term outcomes;
4. To determine the **continued relevance** of the ABSN; and
5. To determine the **effectiveness** of the ABSN in meeting its objectives compared to other alternatives.

Evaluation methods included site visits conducted in March and April 2005 at each of the four Western regions; a review of 61 program documents; and contacts with 62 individuals through either interviews or focus groups, including ABSN Business Users, ABSN Partners/ Business Intermediaries, and Key Informants.

Based on the information collected in this evaluation, twelve conclusions can be drawn and are presented according to the original initiative objectives.

Has ABSN made general business information accessible to Aboriginal people?

1. In all four Western regions, ABSN provides a wide variety of business information to Aboriginal people, either online, with hard copies, or in person.
2. The Aboriginal population's recognition of the need for business information has increased.
3. There is an increasing need for information about business maintenance and expansion.

Has ABSN customized information products?

4. Information products have been customized to the particular regional needs of each province. In many cases, information is further customized to the individual entrepreneur or community to best meet their specific information needs.
5. Some provinces customize their information products to the Aboriginal population; others do not, reflecting a variety of approaches to assist Aboriginal entrepreneurs to integrate into the non-Aboriginal business environment.
6. Information can be best customized when a personal relationship exists between client and service provider.

Has ABSN provided local access to information, referrals, and some services?

7. Aboriginal business owners have increased their access to ABSN services, although this was accomplished differently in the four provinces.
8. Website development and regionalization has improved local access to resources where the technological infrastructure exists to allow this access.
9. The Aboriginal population is more aware of the existence of business development services, but they are not necessarily aware that these services are provided by ABSN.



10. More systematic tracking of outputs is necessary in order to determine how many clients access ABSN services and how frequently they do so.

Has ABSN promoted the development of a national network of Aboriginal business and economic service providers?

11. Within each province, ABSN has created and maintained networks of Aboriginal service providers by providing networking opportunities.
12. Little networking occurs between the four provinces; however, not all provinces expressed interest in improving relations among the regional ABSN programs. Improving national networks of ABSN programs could improve the program in each province while maintaining regional uniqueness.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, several recommendations are advanced for consideration.

Recommendation 1

The role of WD in ABSN should continue over the long-term. The initiative has worked toward fulfilling its objectives and has effected useful changes in each of the four Western provinces.

Recommendation 2

Currently, each province operates a separate ABSN program, customized to respond to the particular population, needs, and contexts operating within the province. This regional uniqueness is a particular strength of the initiative and should be maintained.

Recommendation 3

There is a need for the ABSN initiative to be coordinated across the Western regions through decentralization and offering core resources to be used by all regions. Networking and sharing among regions should be formalized so that all can benefit from local lessons learned and resources developed.

Recommendation 4

Tracking of outputs should be more systematic so that the impact of ABSN can be more precisely understood, both provincially and nationally. Clear definitions of terms, including agree-upon outputs, are required to facilitate data collection and tracking.

Recommendation 5

Funding for special projects, such as internships and youth employment, should be available to ABSN programs in order to encourage the development of such projects. The cost of travel is a major issue in all four provinces because of the emphasis on rural and remote communities; funding should be provided to alleviate this burden as well.

Recommendation 6

ABSN should continue to participate in community development activities, including capacity building and development of technological infrastructure, as an additional method of promoting entrepreneurship in certain areas. At the individual level, capacity building can enhance business literacy and personal empowerment; at the community level, networking and increased interaction can benefit the community as a whole for many years to come.



Chapter 1 Initiative Overview

1.0 Background to the Aboriginal Business Services Network

In 1998-99 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Industry Canada and a number of regional agencies, including the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Canada Economic Development, and Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD), launched the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative. It was designed to¹:

- Provide financial support to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Aboriginal financial institutions;
- Leverage private sector financing to increase the loan base; and
- Ensure national availability of developmental lending.

One component of the Initiative is the Aboriginal Business Services Network (ABSN), which is the focus of this evaluation. The Aboriginal Business Services Network is an important initiative offered through Canada Business Services Centres (CBSC) in Western Canada. It has been acknowledged that Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and skills to increase their ability to access capital, grow their businesses and achieve success. The Aboriginal community generally is less aware of, and has more trouble accessing and using, business information, services and training. The ABSN is intended to respond to these needs by providing a relevant range of products, responsive services, and innovative delivery mechanisms.

Elements of the ABSN include:

- A core product line of generic and customized information to meet the needs of Aboriginal clients;
- Path-finding: an electronic and enhanced human resource network of Aboriginal business service providers;
- Advice and counseling services to enhance local access to information products, referrals, and services;
- An innovative delivery network with both a core infrastructure and regional tailoring to improve access to business information for Aboriginal businesses; and
- An on-going marketing and awareness component.²

The ABSN uses the CBSC model and infrastructure and tends to be integrated in the CBSC operational and management structure (with the exception of British Columbia) but it is also regionally driven in terms of providing regional products, service approaches and delivery systems. Dedicated access to the federal government's electronic business information system is provided with an Aboriginal flavour. All four provinces, as well as other Internet users, are served by the ABSN website at <http://www.cbcs.org/english/absn/>. It provides extensive information for Aboriginal entrepreneurs on small business start-up topics as well as links to many other informative government sources. The website also has a regional component, which helps to localize the information. Additional services are also provided by the ABSN and will be described in this report. However, because of its regional approach, the Network generally operates somewhat differently in each of the four Western Canadian provinces.

2.0 Demographics

In order to understand the current role of the ABSN, it is important to first look at the specific demographic context. People who identified themselves as Aboriginal – including First Nations (Status Indian, North American Indian, or registered Indian), Métis, and Inuit – comprised approximately 3.3% of the Canadian

¹ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2004) *Aboriginal Business Development Initiative*. Retrieved on June 8, 2005 from http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/ecd/ps/abdi_e.html.

² Western Economic Diversification. (1999). *Treasury Board Submission: Aboriginal Business Services Network*. Ottawa: Author.



population in 2001. In comparison, Aboriginal people comprised 2.8% of the total population in 1996.³ Part of this population growth is due to a birth rate 1.5 times higher than that of non-Aboriginals and to a mortality rate that has decreased dramatically over the past forty years. However, other factors also contribute to the growth increase observed in the Aboriginal population. Fewer reserves were incompletely enumerated in 2001 as compared to previous years. Further, since approximately 1986, there has been an increased tendency to self-report as an Aboriginal in the census. Taken together, these influences present difficulties in interpreting demographic trends.

The Aboriginal population in Canada is significantly younger than the overall Canadian population. Children under the age of 15 represented 33% of the Aboriginal population in 2001, although they represented only 19% of the non-Aboriginal population. The median age for Aboriginal people in 2001 was 24.7 years, while the median age for non-Aboriginals was 37.7 years. However, there is a trend towards aging in the Aboriginal population, mirroring a similar trend for Canadians as a whole. This is likely due to a combination of a declining birth rate and improved life expectancy.

Aboriginal employment rates and participation in the labour force are lower than those for non-Aboriginal people in Canada, but the gap is decreasing. Employment rates among Aboriginal people over the age of 15 were 49.7% in 2001, an increase of 5.3% since 1996. Employment rates for non-Aboriginals over 15 were 61.8%, an increase of only 2.6% since 1996. While unemployment rates for Aboriginal people were considerably higher (19.1%) than those for non-Aboriginal people (7.1%) in 2001, this unemployment rate decreased by 4.9% for Aboriginals but only 2.7% for non-Aboriginals. Employment rates for Métis people in 2001 were higher at 59.4% than for those identifying as First Nations (44.6%) or Inuit (48.6%).

The Labour Force Survey⁴ provided more recent employment data of off-reserve Aboriginal people in the Western provinces, covering the period from April 2004 to March 2005. Similar trends to those noted above can be seen here as well: Aboriginal people have lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than non-Aboriginal people, although the gap is lessening. Aboriginal youth, in particular, experience difficulty, while 61.7% of non-Aboriginal youth were employed in 2005, only 43.6% of Aboriginal youth were employed. Table 1 provides a summary of off-reserve labour force characteristics.

Table 1: Off-reserve labour force characteristics, April 2004 to March 2005

Identity	Total Western Provinces	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	British Columbia
Employment rate (%)					
Non-Aboriginal	65.2	65.9	65.7	70.4	61.2
Aboriginal	57.2	58.9	50.8	62.6	54.4
▪ First Nations	50.1	48.4	42.2	57.3	49.8
▪ Métis	63.7	65.6	57.8	66.4	62.5
Unemployment rate (%)					
Non-Aboriginal	5.3	4.8	4.5	4.2	6.6
Aboriginal	13.6	11.7	15.9	10.3	17.3
▪ First Nations	17.7	15.0	21.2	13.0	21.1
▪ Métis	10.5	10.1	12.4	8.7	12.2

Education appears to be strongly linked to employment. In 2001, 39% of Aboriginal people over the age of 25 had not completed high school (compared with 29% of non-Aboriginals); 42.9% were employed, an employment rate 17% lower than for similar non-Aboriginals. However, 82.3% of Aboriginal people in the same age group who had a university degree were employed, and there was no difference in employment rates when they were compared to non-Aboriginals with the same level of education.

³ Statistics Canada. (2004). Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Retrieved on June 8, 2005 from <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/abor/canada.cfm>.

⁴ Statistics Canada. (2005). *Labour Force Survey: Western Canada's off-reserve Aboriginal population*. Retrieved on June 13, 2005 from <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050613/d050613a.htm>.



In 2001, approximately 49% of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas and 31% lived on reserves or in settlements; the remaining 20% lived in rural non-reserve areas. In comparison, 80% of non-Aboriginal people lived in urban areas. Aboriginal people living in urban metropolitan areas had higher employment rates than those living elsewhere, particularly those on reserves or in settlements. In 2001, only 37.7% of Aboriginal people living on reserve were employed, a rate unchanged since 1996. In comparison, 54.2% of Aboriginal people living in non-reserve areas were employed in 2001, representing a 7% increase since 1996.

Table 2 provides average individual income levels in Canada in 1995 based on 1986 constant dollars.

Table 2: Average income levels in Canada (1995)

Population	Average Individual Income
Non-Aboriginal	\$19,831
All Aboriginal people	\$13,020
Métis	\$13,995
Inuit	\$12,268
Status off-reserve	\$13,830
Status on-reserve	\$10,528

The Aboriginal Entrepreneurs Survey was conducted by Statistics Canada in 2002⁵. In 2001, there were 27,195 self-employed Aboriginal people in Canada, or 2.78% of the population. Since 1996, the number of Aboriginals who were self-employed has increased by 30.7%, slightly over nine times faster than the national average of 3.3%. These Aboriginal entrepreneurs tend to be younger than their non-Aboriginal counterparts; over 25% are under the age of 35 with the median age range being 35 to 44 — the median age range for non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs was 45 to 54. Of the Aboriginal businesses surveyed, 72% reported profits in 2002, an increase of 11% since 1996. Furthermore, 43% had increased sales between 2001 and 2002 while an additional 39% had experienced stable sales. The majority of Aboriginal entrepreneurs (83%) used personal savings as start-up funds while only 51% used commercial loans from banks or credit unions.

3.0 ABSN Background

3.1 Purpose of ABSN

The Aboriginal Business Services Network (ABSN) is part of a larger Industry Portfolio initiative called the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative that includes three components: Access to Capital, ABSN, and Enhanced Programming (also referred to as "Increasing Take-Up"). The Aboriginal Business Development Initiative was officially announced in April 1999. It grew out of the Federal Government's January 1998 *Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. This plan identified the need to provide good business opportunities, create wealth and jobs, and support the ability and capacity of Aboriginal communities to exercise their values and priorities in development. The initiative was particularly directed towards Western Canada because twice as many of the country's First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples live in the West as the rest of Canada.

The Treasury Board submission in 1999 asked for approval of \$6.25 million in funding for ABSN. This submission asserted that:

Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and skills to increase their ability to access capital, grow their businesses and achieve success. The

⁵ Statistics Canada. (2003). *Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in 2002*. Retrieved on June 14, 2005 from <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/inabc-eac.nsf/PrintableE/ab00313e.html>.



Aboriginal community generally is also less aware of and has more trouble accessing and using business information, services, and training.

The 2001 *Evaluation Framework for the Increasing Take-Up Element of the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative*⁶ listed three key obstacles faced by Aboriginal businesses: business environment, access to capital, and skills. This report quoted the 1997 Aboriginal Business Survey conducted by Statistics Canada that found the need to access non-financial services was as important as access to capital for Aboriginal businesses.

In 2000/01, each province in the West commissioned a study on Aboriginal business needs for the ABSN initiative. The January 2001 report on Aboriginal Business Needs⁷, conducted by the CED Centre at Simon Fraser University for the CBSC in British Columbia, found that there was a need to improve access to existing business information, provide new tools, and take a collaborative approach with Aboriginal service providers. In Alberta, a study by Western Management Consultants noted the need for urban aboriginal support, more networking, and increased marketing of ABSN services. The recommendations of the reports from the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology and the Manitoba CBSC were unavailable as of the writing of this report.

The Access to Capital Board for the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative developed a proposal requesting additional funding in June 2003. Their proposal, entitled *Aboriginal Business Access to Capital for Growth*, suggested a number of key areas for action including increased capitalization for Aboriginal Financial Institutions, capacity development, and increased coordination and controls. This report described barriers that Aboriginal businesses face that are common to all businesses: lack of a track record, limited assets, limited familiarity with accounting practices, and limited sources of business assistance. In addition, the report suggested that Aboriginals face some unique barriers such as limited access to financing (partially due to the Indian Act restrictions on security), the high cost of accessing business expertise, and high transportation costs due to remote locations.

3.2 History of ABSN

The objectives of the ABSN are as follows:

- To make general business information accessible to Aboriginal people;
- To customize information products;
- To provide local access to information, referrals, and some services; and
- To promote the development of a national network of Aboriginal business and economic service providers.

The original view of ABSN was as a national initiative to provide relevant and accessible business information to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and businesses with a strong focus on providing on-line business information. The initial plan for ABSN involved a number of players:

- The Director General's Steering Committee, made up of Director Generals from the Industry Portfolio, was intended to set policy. This steering committee oversaw the entire Aboriginal Business Development Initiative, including ABSN.
- The Canada Business Service Centres, mandated to provide business information to the public, were intended to provide "overall operational direction" and contribute experience providing business information. Regional Agencies, including WD in the West, were intended to "manage the resources and activities of the ABSN hubs and satellite offices".
- The CBSC National Secretariat and a parallel ABSN National Secretariat were intended "to coordinate the ABSN initiative with the work of the CBSCs".

⁶ Goss Gilroy. (2001). *ABSN Evaluation Framework*. Ottawa: Author.

⁷ Community Economic Development Centre, Simon Fraser University. (2000). *Assessing the Business Information Needs of Aboriginal Entrepreneurs in British Columbia*. Vancouver: Author.



- There was an ABSN Regional Coordinator in each of the four Western regions.
- A series of satellite offices and outreach workers supported the Network.

Initially, the plan was to create an ABSN National Secretariat, parallel to the CBSC National Secretariat, to be responsible for developing national and regional ABSN websites; sharing best practices; developing products; coordinating regional customization, national service standards, and client tracking systems; providing coordination; and conducting program monitoring and evaluation. From its inception, some allowance for regional variation was anticipated. In Western Canada, WD planned to have four ABSN Coordinators, 90 Tier A ABSN Sites, 18 Tier B Sites, and 124 Tier C sites with public access computer terminals. Outreach workers were to report directly to WD. ABSN had a five-year budget of \$6.4 million of which WD contributed a total of \$3 million, with \$515,000 directed toward the National Secretariat. The expected results of ABSN included increased awareness of ABSN products and services, increased utilization, and increased service and support capacity of the partnering business development organizations.

The implementation process for ABSN in the West involved two approaches: funding projects with the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) and the Alberta Indian Economic Development Officers Network (AIEDON) to provide computers and basic computer training at 450 sites; and expanding the regional access partner network through the CBSCs to include ABSN.

By September 2000, the regions had started consultations with the Aboriginal community and studies of Aboriginal business needs. There was agreement to hire ABSN Coordinators and to house them at the CBSC offices in each region. For the first two years, virtually all ABSN funds went to CANDO, AIEDON and the CBSC National Secretariat. Then, in 2000/01, various regional studies of aboriginal business needs were undertaken and in 2001/02, WD started to provide funding that was earmarked for regional ABSN coordination. By November 2002, the CBSC National Secretariat reported that 76 ABSN locations and partners had been established across Canada and that CBSC staff had received cultural training. ABSN was being implemented across the West and the CBSC National Secretariat had fulfilled its initial goals of developing a national website, expanding the resource collection and operating a functional 1-888 line. By August 2003, ABSN Coordinators had been hired in all the provinces of Western Canada.

By 2004/05 the ABSN was seen to be well levered from the CBSC infrastructure and had its own website, ABSN brand, and ABSN national telephone line. Regional information products had been developed, some progress had been made in setting up a network of community-based partners, and innovative outreach activities such as mobile libraries and on-site training were developing.

3.3 Issues

There were, however, some ABSN-related questions about departmental priorities, funding, and accountability. WD was unsure about the value of targeted or Aboriginal-specific programming as opposed to inclusive programming that was open to all. The Department recognized that the ABSN networks were not integrated across regions. The multi-stakeholder approach made it difficult to track activities and outcomes and to provide accountability. At the same time, however, WD approved incremental grants and contributions funding of \$612,000/ year for three fiscal years, ending March 31, 2004. This funding was to extend support of regional coordination by the CBSCs.

One of the ABSN's funding issues concerns the use of grants, contributions and O & M funding. WD was required to fund the National Secretariat from O & M sources, but preferred to fund ABSN from the grants and contributions budget. However, the department could not fund ABSN directly through grants and contributions and so must use third parties as proponents. Proponents included the provincial Community Futures Associations in BC and Manitoba, the Business Link (CBSC) in Alberta, and Visions North CFDC in Saskatchewan.



Another issue deals with the evaluation of impacts and accountability and a number of evaluation frameworks were developed for the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative (Access to Capital, ABSN, and Increasing Up-Take). However, to date, no studies have looked at the impacts of ABSN. The CBSCs and ABSN sites have been reluctant or unable to report outputs and outcomes and the complexity of the networks and the large number of network members made tracking difficult. WD saw a need for a multi-stakeholder approach and, with it, a need for coordination and information sharing.

The question of who precisely should be considered the “client group” of ABSN continued to be unanswered. In fact ABSN was designed with two client groups in mind — Aboriginal businesses and Aboriginal organizations. Much of the emphasis in the West appears to have been on building capacity in Aboriginal organizations. ABSN was seen primarily as a vehicle to provide business information over the Internet and because of this, the CBSC model was a good fit. Over time, however, the ABSN appeared to be evolving into a community economic development program with a stronger focus on capacity building and providing assistance to Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

A Management Review of the ABSN was completed in August 2003⁸ and summarized the lessons learned and resources spent over its first few years. While the Review did not assess impacts, it did suggest that few Aboriginal businesses were aware of ABSN services. The Review concluded that a separate ABSN National Secretariat was not needed and would duplicate efforts of the CBSC National Secretariat and suggested that the impact of ABSN had been greatest in the regions that had used CBSC resources.

The Review also recommended that ABSN needed an appropriate management framework, as it was not being managed from a national perspective. Implementation was inconsistent across Canada and provided variable services depending on location. The Review stated that the CBSC National Secretariat did not have, or want, managerial control of the ABSN but that the gap still needed to be filled. It recommended that national service standards, national accessibility (i.e. availability in the north), and national outcomes and performance measures be developed. In addition, the role of the CBSC National Secretariat and the regional partners needed to be clarified. Staffing was identified as a concern and the report noted that up until 2003, there were difficulties recruiting and retaining qualified ABSN Coordinators because the ABSN funding was short-term.

Although WD spent \$2.1 million on computers for CANDO and AIDON offices, the Management Review suggested that computers in Aboriginal organizations were not enough to develop a good link with the ABSN. It highlighted four key lessons learned:

- Regionalization of the initiative was seen as a strength;
- Aboriginal entrepreneurs were most inclined to use existing aboriginal organizations, therefore ABSN needed to develop relationships with them and develop their capacity. Aboriginal organizations need to be supported through both training and infrastructure. This issue was heightened because of the high turnover rates of aboriginal Economic Development Officers;
- ABSN needed multiple distribution channels to ensure Aboriginal people access to the initiative. ABSN could not rely solely on on-line information because many aboriginal businesses and entrepreneurs were either not familiar with the Internet or could not access it; and
- ABSN should not aim for complete coverage because not all Aboriginal communities accepted the initiative or thought it was relevant.

⁸ Western Economic Diversification. (2003). *Management Review: Aboriginal Business Services Network*. Ottawa: Author.



In March 2004, WD agreed to extend ABSN to the end of 2004/05 and increased funding by 10% over the previous year. Part of the rationale for the funding was to encourage cooperation among ABSN Coordinators across the West. An internal document, *The Road Ahead for the ABSN 2004/05*, recommended that some parts of the ABSN remain national in scope, including phone support, content, and the website, but that other components should be regional, including marketing and awareness, access, and community capacity building.



Chapter 2 Evaluation Methodology

1.0 Evaluation Overview

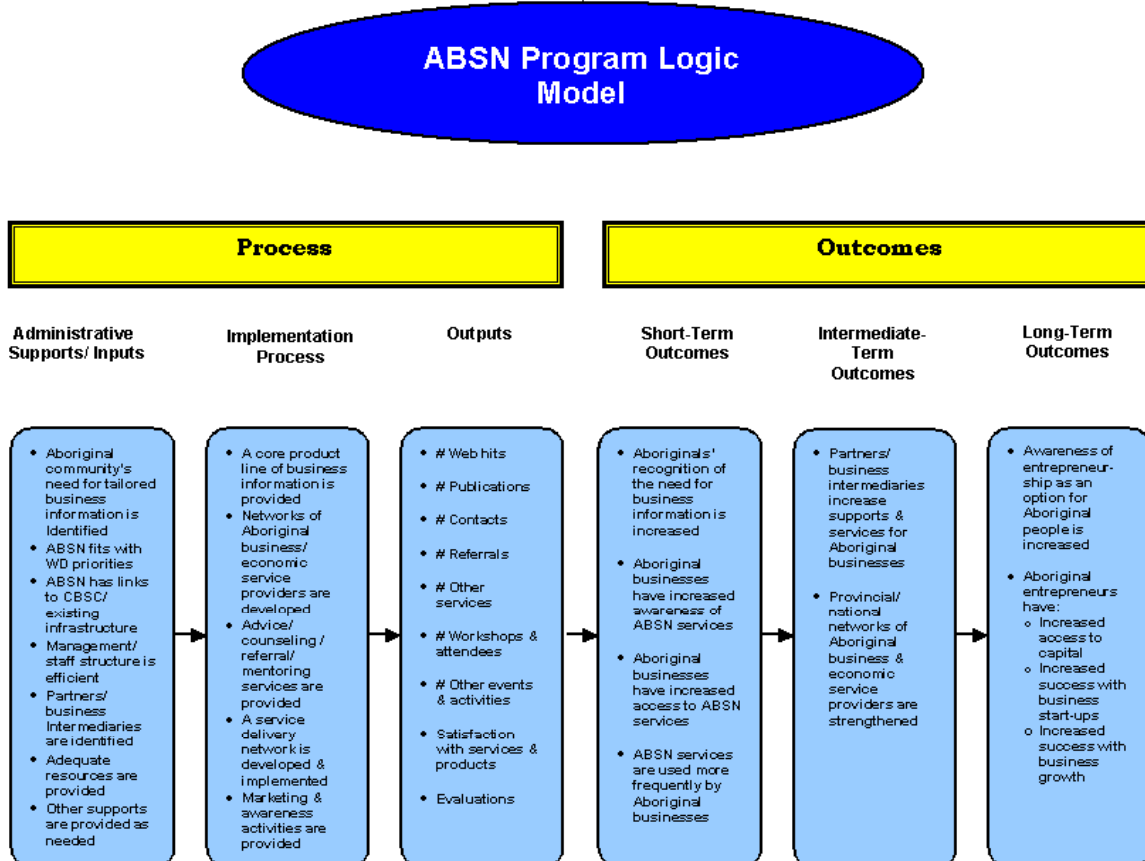
1.1 Evaluation Purpose

The primary purpose of this evaluation was to assess the ABSN initiative and the degree of success achieved in reaching its goals and objectives. As a result, areas for improvement have been identified and recommendations made with respect to future initiative directions. This evaluation assessed the relevance, success, and effectiveness of the ABSN with particular reference to the April 1999 program submission to Treasury Board. That initial document outlined the following expected results:

- Increased awareness by Aboriginal business and business intermediaries;
- Increased utilization by Aboriginal business and business intermediaries; and
- Increased service and support capacity of partnering Aboriginal business development organizations.

1.2 Program Logic Model

An ABSN Program Logic Model was developed by the evaluators, based on the Request for Proposal documents, the April 1999 ABSN submission to the Treasury Board, and the input of regional ABSN program stakeholders. The model clearly delineates the links in the initiative process, from initiative supports and inputs, to the implementation process, to initiative outputs. It also identifies initiative outcomes including short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes. The model also provides a thumbnail sketch of the evaluation plan and is presented below.



Initiative supports and inputs include the Aboriginal community's need for tailored business information; the extent to which ABSN fits with WD's priorities; ABSN's links to CBSC and the existing infrastructure; the efficiency of the management and staff structure; the identification of partners and business intermediaries; the provision of adequate resources; and the provision of other supports as needed.

The implementation process includes the provision of a core product line of business information; the development of networks of Aboriginal businesses and economic service providers; the provision of advice, counseling, referrals, and mentoring services; the development and implementation of a service delivery network; and the provision of marketing and awareness activities.

Initiative outputs include the number of hits to the ABSN websites; the number of publications; the number of contacts established; the number of referrals made; the number of other services provided; the number of workshops conducted and the number of attendees at these workshops; the number of other events and activities; the level of satisfaction with the services and products; and the evaluations.

Short-term outcomes include Aboriginal people's increased recognition of the need for business information; Aboriginal businesses' increased awareness of ABSN services; Aboriginal businesses' increased access to ABSN services; and Aboriginal businesses' more frequent use of ABSN services.

Intermediate-term outcomes include increased provision of supports and services for Aboriginal businesses by partners and business intermediaries; and strengthened provincial and national networks of Aboriginal business and economic service providers.

Long-term outcomes include increased awareness of entrepreneurship as an option for Aboriginal people; and increased access to capital, increased success with business start-ups, and increased success with business growth for Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

Based upon this model, a Data Collection Matrix (DCM) was designed to guide the evaluation research activities. Input from the regional ABSN program stakeholders was used to guide development of the Matrix along with the Request for Proposal documents and the April 1999 ABSN submission to the Treasury Board. A copy of the DCM is provided in Appendix 1.

1.3 Evaluation Objectives

A number of objectives were identified for the evaluation, based on the ABSN Program Logic Model and the purpose of the evaluation. These objectives include:

1. To describe the **background and development** of the ABSN in the four Western regions;
2. To describe the **implementation** of the ABSN in the four Western regions;
3. To determine the **success** of the ABSN in achieving its short-, intermediate- and long-term outcomes;
4. To determine the **continued relevance** of the ABSN; and
5. To determine the **effectiveness** of the ABSN in meeting its objectives compared to other alternatives.



2.0 Evaluation Methodology

Several research methods were proposed to evaluate this initiative, as described below.

2.1 Document Review

WD and the ABSN programs in each of the four regions provided the evaluators with a number of program documents for review, with 61 reviewed overall. These documents are summarized in the table below by region and type.

Table 3: Summary of program documents

Document Type	British Columbia	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba
Annual/ Manager Reports	3	0	1	1
Activity Reports	3	0	3	0
Planning	3	0	2	0
Administration	7	0	1	0
Marketing	0	1	1	11
Governance Policy	8	0	0	0
Research	1	0	0	0
Training Materials	0	7	1	0
Partnerships	0	0	0	7
TOTAL	25	8	9	19

2.2 Site Visits, Focus Groups and Interviews

In March and April 2005, visits were conducted to each of the four provincial regions in order to collect data from three groups of stakeholders: ABSN Business Users, ABSN Partners/ Business Intermediaries, and Key Informants. In all, 62 individuals were contacted during the site visits. Table 4 provides a summary.

Table 4. Regional site visits

Province	Dates	ABSN Business Users	ABSN Partners/ Business Intermediaries	Key Informants
British Columbia	March 9, 2005 – March 10, 2005	0	10	5
Alberta	April 11, 2005	4	8	2
Saskatchewan	April 15, 2005	0	3	4
Manitoba	March 15, 2005	7	16	3
TOTAL		11	37	14

2.2.1 ABSN Business Users Focus Groups

The ABSN Business Users Focus Group Guide was designed to gather information on the following topics:

- Materials and services provided by ABSN;
- Past and present needs for business information;
- Levels of awareness and access to ABSN;
- Business needs of entrepreneurs;
- Challenges faced in starting businesses; and



- Suggestions for the telephone survey.

Originally, the intention was to conduct one focus group with ABSN business users in each region, however, the varied composition of the regional ABSN programs made this impossible.

The ABSN Business Users Focus Group Guide was designed based on the DCM and is provided in Appendix 2. At each focus group, participants were asked to sign a Consent Form and were provided with an information sheet that summarized this evaluation study.

2.2.2 ABSN Partner/ Business Intermediary Focus Groups

The ABSN Partner/ Business Intermediary Focus Group Guide was designed to obtain:

- Insight into the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs;
- Insight into networks of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers, and ABSNs role in the development of these networks;
- Information about the need for business information and the level of support and service provided to Aboriginal entrepreneurs;
- Information about the challenges faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs;
- Suggestions for the telephone survey; and
- Recommendations for WD about the future of ABSN.

The ABSN Partner/ Business Intermediary Focus Group Guide was based on the DCM and is provided in Appendix 3. It should be noted that in Saskatchewan, ABSN Partners/ Business Intermediaries were interviewed individually by telephone due to geographic distance.

2.2.3 Key Informant Interviews

The ABSN Regional Staff and the WD Senior Staff Interview Protocols were designed to obtain:

- Insight into key informants' perceptions of initiative effectiveness and ability to meet the priorities of WD and the federal government;
- Insight into relationships between agencies (WD and ABSN, CBSC and ABSN) from the key informants' perspective;
- Information on the management/ staff structure of ABSN;
- Information on initiative outputs (resources, awareness of ABSN, access to ABSN resources, frequency of ABSN use);
- Insight into the role of ABSN in the development of networks of service providers from the key informants' perspective;
- Information on the challenges faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs; and
- Suggestions for topics for the telephone survey.

The protocols were based on the DCM. The ABSN Regional Staff and the WD Senior Staff Interview Protocols are provided in Appendices 4 and 5, respectively. At each focus group, participants were asked to sign a Consent Form and were provided with an information sheet that summarized this evaluation study.

2.3 Telephone Survey

Initially, it was planned that brief telephone interviews would be conducted with ABSN users to obtain information on the experiences of Aboriginal entrepreneurs starting businesses and dealing with ABSN. However, due to both the difficulties involved in obtaining contact information for an adequate number of end users and the variation in ABSN programs across regions, these interviews were not completed as planned. Only one Business User was contacted individually by phone and this interview proved helpful in finalizing the Business User Focus Group Guide.



3.0 Data Analysis

Following data collection, qualitative data was entered into Microsoft Word. In some cases, this involved transcribing the entire content of audio taped focus groups, whereas in others the notes made by the evaluator during the session were entered. This qualitative data was analyzed using traditional content analysis techniques (Krippendorff, 1980). Comments were separated by region and were grouped according to main themes that emerged from the data and through reference to the DCM. Emergent codes were discussed among the evaluation team and adjusted, or clarified, as necessary.

Findings from the qualitative analysis were then summarized in this report according to the topics identified in the Data Collection Matrix and Logic Model.

4.0 Evaluation Limitations

Several limitations are associated with the research methods employed in this study. As a result, the findings presented in this report should be understood with the limitations noted below in mind.

4.1 Document Variability

The only documents available for the document review were those obtained directly from the regions or publicly available online. Therefore, the document review could only include those documents the regions felt were important for the evaluation and in some regions, it was difficult to obtain relevant or current documents. Because the regions provided the evaluators with such a wide range of disparate documents, comparisons also became difficult. Although this was to be expected, given the variability in program structure and implementation across the four regions, it is nonetheless a limitation of the data collected for the review. Furthermore, the lack of clearly identified outputs based on shared definitions made assessing the concrete impact of the initiative considerably more difficult.

4.2 Selection of Focus Group Participants

The ABSN programs themselves selected the participants for both the ABSN Business Users focus groups the ABSN Partners/ Business Intermediary focus groups. It is likely that this process introduced a selection bias that influenced the responses obtained. Participants were certainly aware of ABSN and able to access its services or comment on its community impact. As a result, it was not possible for the evaluators to accurately assess the level of awareness and accessibility in the Aboriginal community as a whole. In addition, ABSN programs would be more likely to select participants for the Business User focus groups whom they knew and who may have been more satisfied with the program than those who may have accessed services only once. The ABSN Partners/ Business Intermediaries focus groups were frequently attached to other scheduled activities; thus participation was likely influenced by group members' ability to attend these other functions.

The practicalities of a focus group may have also affected responses to a certain extent. Prior to the evaluator's visit, ABSN regional staff members arranged the groups. Participants may not have felt comfortable providing complete, accurate responses in front of their peers and or in front of an ABSN staff member (as one sometimes attended these activities for information purposes). As such, the accuracy of focus group data was limited by the evaluators' ability to judge the accuracy and completeness of responses.

4.3 Personal Recollection

As interviews and focus groups are retrospective in nature, they are subject to the quality of personal recollection and level of bias demonstrated by participants. Therefore, the accuracy of data obtained from focus groups and interviews was limited by the ability of the evaluators to determine the accuracy and completeness of the responses provided.



4.4 Limited Number of Cases

As only a small number of interviews were conducted, and as participation in focus groups was fairly limited as well, the data that could be included in this report had to be carefully scrutinized in order to protect individuals' privacy. As a result, some useful information may not have been included.

In many cases, however, the limitations of individual methods are offset by the use of multiple sources of data, multiple methods of data collection, and the use of triangulation methods to validate findings. The Evaluation Steering Committee, made up of a variety of stakeholders (but excluding partners and users), did review a draft version of the data collected in this study and provided feedback and correction. In addition, this report was submitted to the Committee in draft form for final review. These feedback loops have added both validity and credibility to the findings reported here.

The following four chapters provide the evaluation study findings for each region, presented from east to west. Each chapter is organized according to the topics in the logic model and DCM for which information was obtained.



Chapter 3 ABSN Manitoba

1.0 The Aboriginal Context in Manitoba

In 2001, there were 150,040 Aboriginal people living in Manitoba, making up approximately 14% of the population, compared to 4.4% of the population of Canada identified as Aboriginal. Of Manitoba's Aboriginal population, 90,340 (60%) were First Nations, 56,800 (38%) were Métis, and 340 (0.2%) were Inuit.

The Aboriginal population in Manitoba is young when compared to the population as a whole: in 2001 the median age was 22.8, whereas the median age of the non-Aboriginal population was 38.5. In addition, 23% of children under the age of 14 in Manitoba were Aboriginal, compared to only 5.6% of Canadian children overall.

Aboriginal participation in the labour force was 54% in 1996, unchanged since 1981. Furthermore, in 1996, only 44% of Aboriginal youth were attending school, giving Manitoba the lowest rate of school attendance among Aboriginal youth in Canada. High school completion rates are at least 20% lower for Aboriginal people than for non-Aboriginal people and only 3% of Aboriginal people in Manitoba have completed university educations.

From 1981 to 1996, Aboriginal self-employment in Manitoba has increased much more rapidly than self-employment for non-Aboriginals. Aboriginal business has created 1 in 4 new jobs for Aboriginal people.

The key land claim issues in Manitoba are related to entitlements primarily arising because many Indian bands did not receive the amount of land to which they were entitled based on their respective treaties. Currently, there are approximately 31 bands with outstanding entitlement claims in Manitoba. Although reserves are a federal responsibility, the provincial government of Manitoba, like those in the other Prairie Provinces, are required to be involved because nearly all unoccupied Crown land and mineral resources were transferred to the provinces in 1930 with a provision to set aside land for reserves. One challenge to resolving the claims lies in the lack of unoccupied Crown land of sufficient quality and in the right location. Therefore, settlements for entitlement claims tend to involve a cash transfer that allows the band to purchase land from a willing seller.

In March 1994, the Minister of Indian Affairs announced that DIANDs regional office in Manitoba would be dismantled and its responsibilities transferred to the First Nations of Manitoba. An independent three-year review of the process was completed in early 1999, as required by the agreement.

The Office of the Federal Interlocutor currently manages ten tripartite negotiation processes with Métis and non-status Indian organizations, including off-reserve groups, at the provincial level across the country. Examples of activities include the establishment of Métis child and family agencies and authorities delivering child and family services to Métis communities in Manitoba and British Columbia.

2.0 Program Implementation

In Manitoba, the CBSC established a series of sharing circles with Aboriginal business intermediaries in September 1999 and undertook a survey of Aboriginal communities. By August 2003, an ABSN Consultant had been hired, nine ABSN sites were established, ABSN staff visited remote Aboriginal communities, and a regional ABSN web site had been launched. Products and services included a financing seminar, youth business program, a mobile ABSN site, and business counseling.

In 2004/05, the programs and services offered by ABSN Manitoba include one-on-one business development and counseling services to new and existing Aboriginal entrepreneurs, Aboriginal-specific Business Info-Guides, a Sharing Circle committee comprised of 32 Aboriginal service organization representatives, seminars on various business topics, and 11 Aboriginal regional access sites across



Manitoba. The ABSN coordinator also develops and implements or collaborates in the development and implementation of various initiatives to increase Aboriginal business participation in the Manitoba economy such as an Aboriginal Business Plan competition, an Aboriginal Procurement event, a Community Economic Development Officer Training program, and various business workshops and seminars with Aboriginal Youth.

The program disseminates information to clients using several methods. Advertising and editorial content in the newspaper *Thundervoice* provides information about programming and announcements about competitions. The information guide, *Starting a Business in a First Nations Community*, is distributed both online and in hard copy.

In addition, ABSN provides services directly to clients. Personnel meet with clients by telephone or in person to provide advice and information on business start-up and provide referrals to other service providers. Staff also travels to satellite sites to meet with clients, conduct inventories, and present information about available services. Forthcoming projects include a trade mission with the Aboriginal businesses of Manitoba and the Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce, and the development of a Sustainable Livelihoods model where all stages of entrepreneurship are identified and categorized so that all service providers can be classified in the appropriate category.

The national ABSN website also provides business information for Aboriginal clients in Manitoba. Although this website has not been changed to date, the program plans to differentiate the Manitoba website from those of other provinces so that clients can easily determine whether they are accessing local information.

A business plan competition was held for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and open to all Métis, First Nations, and Inuit people in Manitoba who were interested in starting a business. There were 14 entrants in the youth category and two \$1,000 prizes were awarded and out of 46 entrants in the adult category, two \$7,500 prizes were awarded. The competition has proved to be a useful capacity building activity: both of the adult winners are currently in the process of starting a business using their prize money. In addition, some of the other entrants have requested feedback on their business plans or have accessed information from ABSN.

A joint initiative was formed with partners to conduct in-school presentations about business for Aboriginal youth and two presentations have been held to date, focusing on entrepreneurship and business plans. A more detailed program discussing all aspects of business development is currently being planned.

Finally, the ABSN program in Manitoba has participated in a number of special events and presentations, including participation in the NACC Annual Conference (Youth Delegates Community Marketing Challenge), presentations to C/MSBC staff at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and at the Business Development Bank of Canada, the presentation of an October Small Business Week Seminar entitled *The Truth About Aboriginal Business Grants*, and participation in the Aboriginal Youth Achievement Awards Banquet.

3.0 Outputs

Based on a review of documents, in 2004/05 the measurable outputs of ABSN Manitoba included:

- 1 page of newspaper space per month;
- 81 referrals by C/MSBC to ABSN per month;
- 40 client contacts per month;
- 278 information guides (239 downloaded) and 139 start-up guides (111 downloaded) distributed per month;
- 4 computer science co-op students on 17-week terms;
- 46 entrants in the regular business plan contest and 14 entrants in the youth business plan contest, with 2 winners in each category; and



- 150 high school students participating in the Youth Business Institute Executive Challenge game.

4.0 Participants' Views

In the interviews and focus groups conducted for this evaluation, participants provided a great deal of additional information about ABSN Manitoba and the following sections summarize their views.

4.1 Resource Provision

In general, the ABSN program in Manitoba provides Aboriginal entrepreneurs with useful business information, practical assistance for developing necessary skills, and referrals to other service providers. The amount of information available to entrepreneurs has increased considerably thanks to ABSN Manitoba, but there continues to be a need for specialized Aboriginal business information. Similarly, although funding for education and training activities has increased, these activities need better marketing. Some participant responses include:

... there are business resources that are out there now because of ABSN that never were... and probably would not have been.

They need more broad-scale teaching opportunities.

And if the entrepreneur's doing it themselves but with guidance from ABSN and the Business Service Centre, that's huge. They can get off on the right foot.

[on referring clients to ABSN] ... when you're talking to clients, my first referral is, you need to go there first, because that's where all the information is. Then you can start going through your other networking. It's a beginning point.

4.2 User Characteristics

ABSN Manitoba has helped Aboriginal people become more aware of their options in business; they are no longer required to leave their communities in order to find a well-paying job. In addition, ABSN has initiated the process of improving the confidence of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and their personal empowerment in the business environment, and this encouragement needs to continue in order to maintain these gains. Comments include:

... not a lot of people know all of their options... But if you know that another career choice is being entrepreneur, well, that's an option. If you don't know that option is there, you're just gonna, what are you gonna do? You're gonna move to Winnipeg where there's lots of nursing jobs, right? And you're going to be removed from your community when maybe you could've been an entrepreneur and a leader for your community, right?

I think that being an entrepreneur or business is now becoming embedded in that group of people where that language was never used at all when I was a child, or very rarely.

Knowledge is power, but knowledge also gives you confidence to be successful in what you're trying to achieve.

There is an increasing level of awareness of the ability to undertake self-employment, growth their confidence to undertake it (and foster their entrepreneurial spirit) and provide a support function to get it going.

ABSN Manitoba has devoted a large portion of its resources and attention toward educating Aboriginal youth about possible options for the future; as a result, some youth now see entrepreneurship as a viable alternative that will allow them to remain in their communities. It is



easiest to effect change on a large scale by influencing youth first, because the results will eventually affect all areas of life. Some examples of comments include:

You've got all these youths that need direction, that need opportunities, to get involved in something that's worthwhile.

... when you look at the demographics, the stats on the population, it's young people is the majority of our population and they're the ones that are starting to look at starting up businesses, getting information, you know, maybe especially out in the communities and linking the rural to urban...

We find it easier to work with the youth who don't have all the old attitudes. We can affect more change that way. There are some very personable young people!

Aboriginal entrepreneurs' needs are changing and ABSN Manitoba will need to remain current in order to ensure maximum impact. Aboriginal businesses are becoming more integrated with the mainstream, possibly because the number of programs targeted only at Aboriginals is decreasing and entrepreneurs are recognizing that non-Aboriginal society provides a new market. Furthermore, due to an increased desire for business expansion, there is an increased need for individuals to build their networks. In order to meet the new needs that accompany established, growing businesses, participants suggested that ABSN should change to a support model, providing support when necessary rather than providing information or direction. Some responses include:

This program has/ will continue to see a change, to more of a support model, will move away from generating entrepreneurship to supporting it. For example, the business plan competition—there is more interest than there was five years ago. They need to shift to more pre-care and after-care, financing for clients.

... a new generation of Aboriginal businessperson is emerging that is going to have to be more competitive and more mainstream...

Cultural barriers coming down to a degree, there is not the stigma there use to be to have an Aboriginal-run business.

4.3 Community Factors

The communities in which Aboriginal people live influence their attitudes towards business and the opportunities they have, but many Aboriginal communities lack resources. Despite this fact, however, there is a need for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to remain in, and contribute to, their communities while having a well-paying job. Aboriginal clients are more likely to access services from Aboriginal-run programs than from governmental programs; there is a need for targeted business services in order to ensure that useful business information is reaching these entrepreneurs. For example:

People don't want to leave their communities, so they look around for their natural resources, so there's a lot of stuff, tourism, in the community now.

I think also the realization that in a lot of Aboriginal environments, self employment and entrepreneurship are going to be really the opportunity for people, you know, we're not establishing large manufacturers, you know, big employers, in a lot of locations. And the reality is that's how they're going to have to live.

It's important to make that distinction because a lot of people on reserve or in First Nations communities don't want to have to come into the city and they don't



want their youth to come into the city. They want the youth to have opportunities on reserve so I think that that's important and I think the maintenance of that.

A lot of services up until now have been provided by governments and in the last few years or the last year there's more of a push, at least an awareness, that Aboriginal people are better served by doing things themselves...

4.4 Programming

Participants suggested that ABSN Manitoba should take several factors into consideration. First, it is easier to help a person effectively through face-to-face contact, particularly if a personal relationship exists. Providing services in a variety of locations, and not only the ABSN sites, allows service delivery to be more effective and helps to build relationships. Clients often knew the person who delivered ABSN services but not the program itself. Second, in order to ensure that information can be easily disseminated, the technological infrastructure should be improved to provide Internet access and electronic equipment to communities that do not have access currently; this process has begun, but remains ongoing. Participants noted that:

[on outreach] It's easier to move one person than twenty students. But it just shows a lot of willingness to reach out and teach and share.

I don't know if you guys feel the same way, but if there was two or three [Coordinator's name] kicking around, maybe that would be a good thing.

The clients feel that there is someone here that they can relate to. I take extra time to make sure they get the right information, I write it down in language they can understand.

ABSN has focused on awareness, now we need to turn to technical infrastructure. Right now, CMBSC website is accessible with neat functions, but many communities can't access it.

It's not only providing resources, but its also providing Internet technology that they may not have had.

4.5 Networking

ABSN Manitoba promotes networking for both individuals and organizations. Individual entrepreneurs need to develop their business networks in order to expand their businesses, while service providers enjoy learning about each other's activities. Conferences should consider the needs of both individuals and organizations and involve both in order to be effective. Some examples of comments include:

... it's fine to say that you've got a network, but you've got to know who to network with.

I think they [i.e. ABSN] provide a forum for that networking and, you know, sharing information.

I try to partner with everybody because it's an opportunity to get involved in initiatives...

... these meetings are helpful because you get to see other organizations that I probably wouldn't have an opportunity to hear about what they're doing and what's going on.



4.6 Issues

Participants identified several issues related to Aboriginal entrepreneurship and the ABSN program in Manitoba.

4.6.1 Awareness

While awareness of ABSN services has increased, participants suggested that name recognition with regard to the ABSN program is not necessarily present; people know what services are provided and where to access them, but are not aware of the name of the agency. For example:

There's more awareness... in general, people have wanted to be in business or start something of their own but they've never known where to go or what to do or how do we even start.

I think they may not know that they know about ABSN when in fact that they do.

4.6.2 Funding

Participants commented that funding is the largest barrier for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and it is difficult to find sufficient funding to start a business. ABSN Manitoba attempts to help potential entrepreneurs come into contact with lenders and investors. Comments addressed that:

I'm starting from scratch with nothing at all and that has been a great obstacle. Whether it's the Native community, White, Black, anything, that is a big, big obstacle is trying to find the funds.

[ABSN] just acts as a conduit to all these financial opportunities and pass it on.

4.6.3 Capacity building

Capacity building is essential for potential Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Inexperience makes it more difficult to find assistance when it is needed, to know where to look for information, and to build a network. In particular, students have a great deal of inexperience, but by providing potential entrepreneurs with experience at a young age, this problem can be circumvented in the future. Participants noted:

I think inexperience is a huge barrier.

Love to see an internship program where we can bring people in and give them the experience so that they can keep a coordinator for a while and have the students here and bring the experience out to the community and help out the communities.

4.6.4 ABSN linkages

There is a need for better linkages between the ABSN programs in the various regions and there should be a national ABSN coordinator to provide more direction. Some examples of comments include:

If we had quarterly meetings, we could share. There is a need for a national coordinator.

One of the weaknesses of ABSN nationally is that there is no Aboriginal business coordinator. They did try and did run two competitions but the individuals were



subsequently whisked away to other jobs. What about a pan-Western coordinator? Don't know. It adds another layer. If the four coordinators had a good network, it would encourage having a pan-Western meeting.

4.6.5 Stability

ABSN needs stable funding over a longer term in order to deliver services most effectively and to have program continuity. There is high turnover among ABSN Coordinators due to their inability to plan in the long term. This weakens the program by decreasing continuity, although it does promote transfer of skills to other organizations. Participants suggested that:

... you need long term funding to keep producing that positive spin off too, any kind of initiative, Aboriginal or not.

They have had huge turnover in ABSN staff—they are cherry-picked.

There is a lot of turnover, it happens often. There are contract positions and programs and they end suddenly. It is a term thing, a short-term fix. It is disheartening. What do you tell clients? These programs could be annual but clients could be left hanging if the program is pulled.

Future

Participants in the focus groups and interviews provided a number of suggestions to improve the ABSN Manitoba. Some of their suggestions related to continuing current aspects of the program. In particular, they suggested that ABSN should continue to promote personal empowerment, to work with Aboriginal youth, and to emphasize the importance of a personal relationship between client and service provider. These program components were seen to be very important to service provision, which was seen to be excellent, and should be continued in the future.

Other suggestions dealt with specific needs or changes necessary to provide the best service possible and included:

- Increased project funding over the long-term would permit the ABSN program in Manitoba to provide continuing, effective services.
- Business information should be customized for the Aboriginal population and business services should be targeted to Aboriginal clients.
- The program needs to adapt to the changing needs of its audience; in particular, ABSN should assist clients in integrating with non-Aboriginal business and should adapt its program to meet the needs of established, growing businesses along with new businesses.
- ABSN should consider the networking needs of both individuals and organizations and attempt to aid both in establishing and widening their professional networks.
- The technological infrastructure present in Manitoba, particularly in rural and remote communities, should be further improved in order to provide access to online information for clients in those communities.
- ABSN should work to increase awareness of the program and name recognition among the Aboriginal population in order to provide effective service to a larger population.
- Problems commonly faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs should also be dealt with in order to promote Aboriginal entrepreneurship; specifically, Aboriginal entrepreneurs have problems finding individual funding and overcoming inexperience.
- More networking across the four Western provinces would be helpful and perhaps there should be a national coordinator.



Chapter 4 ABSN Saskatchewan

1.0 The Aboriginal Context in Saskatchewan

In 2001, there were 130,190 Aboriginal people living in Saskatchewan, making up approximately 14% of the population, compared to 4.4% of the total Canadian population. Of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population, 83,745 (64%) were First Nations, 43,695 (34%) were Métis, and 235 (0.2%) were Inuit.

The Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan is young when compared to the population as a whole: the median age of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population in 2001 was 20.1, whereas the median age of the non-Aboriginal population was 38.8. In addition, 25% of children under the age of 14 in Saskatchewan were Aboriginal, while only 5.6% of all Canadian children were Aboriginal.

In 2001, 52% of Aboriginal people had completed at least high school, compared with approximately 70% of non-Aboriginals people. Those living in urban areas had higher average levels of education. The average annual income for Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan was \$15,961, compared with \$26,914 for non-Aboriginal people. In 2005, the employment rate for Aboriginal people in the Western provinces was lowest in Saskatchewan, at 50.7%.

The key land claim issues in Saskatchewan are over entitlements as they are in Manitoba. Entitlement claims for some bands have been outstanding since 1874 and currently, there are approximately 26 bands with outstanding entitlement claims in Saskatchewan. In December 1996, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner of Saskatchewan was re-established to facilitate self-government negotiations and to assist with exploratory discussions on treaty issues. Subsequently, the mandate of the Office, created in 1989, was expanded.

2.0 Program Implementation

In Saskatchewan, the CBSC had been working with an ABSN Coordinator since 2000. The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology conducted a survey of Aboriginal businesses for the project and ABSN staff conducted one-on-one consultations with Aboriginal Economic Development Officers. The current program in Saskatchewan is based on what was learned from meetings between the ABSN Coordinator and a variety of stakeholders, including Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations personnel, tribal council chiefs and employees, Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and Aboriginal educational institutions. These meetings helped to determine what was needed and created awareness of the CSBSC and its resources. Based on this research, the CBSC developed an action plan for the ABSN and established an ABSN Advisory Committee. By August 2003, formal partnerships had been signed with seven Aboriginal organizations to deliver ABSN services. Such services included three mobile business information libraries and products like *Bookkeeping from a Shoebox*.

In 2004/05, partnership agreements were confirmed with organizations already capable of providing business information and other services to Aboriginal clients; currently, there are 19 partners and 20 more have been identified with immediate potential. Partners can access assistance from ABSN as needed, either online or by telephone. In particular, CAP sites were used to provide Internet access to remote locations, allowing ABSN to reach a wider audience and to provide more resources online.

The national ABSN website was modified to emphasize information important to Aboriginal entrepreneurs in Saskatchewan. Website training was provided to all partners and youth interns were placed at CAP sites to facilitate the dissemination of information and the use of interactive tools.

Bookkeeping from a Shoebox is a hands-on workshop providing participants with the ability to set up a basic bookkeeping system for their businesses. Fifteen trainers have been certified and a wide variety of promotional materials and visual aids have been developed, and they are indeed compact enough to fit in a shoebox! The program has adapted to serve the needs of its clientele through the use of multiple



delivery methods; it can be run either on four consecutive days, in weekly or biweekly sessions, or as evening workshops. The program has received the Minister's Award for Innovation and its success has led to the development of, or plans for, similar programs dealing with other aspects of business, including *Marketing from a Shoebox*, *Financial Decisions from a Shoebox*, and *Computerized Bookkeeping from a Shoebox*.

Another resource developed by ABSN Saskatchewan involved the development of three mobile libraries that originally rotated among early program partners. However, as the program has evolved, the mobile libraries have decreased in importance and information is disseminated primarily through the Internet.

ABSN Saskatchewan has worked to encourage youth entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan. The website includes a number of Aboriginal youth success stories and an online scavenger hunt contest designed to create awareness and facilitate use of the website. In addition, guidance counselors at schools on reserves received career resource kits targeting the youth sector. In order to promote ABSN's role in youth entrepreneurship, the program developed a PowerPoint presentation and met with stakeholders.

The communications and project team coordinator for ABSN Saskatchewan has a variety of roles and tasks: the organization of an Advisory Committee to assist in implementing and developing ABSN initiatives; the creation of a quarterly newsletter, distributed both in hard copy and electronically; the production of various documents for the purposes of information dissemination, promotion, and partner and workshop participant recognition; efforts to increase the effective use of available resources; and the creation of a link with the Raj Manek Mentorship Program.

3.0 Outputs

Based on a review of documents, in 2004/05 the measurable outputs of ABSN Saskatchewan included:

- 19 partners around the province, with the immediate potential for 20 more;
- 77 personnel at partner sites trained in website use;
- 750 career resource kits distributed to guidance counselors in on-reserve schools;
- 3 mobile libraries;
- 22 *Bookkeeping in a Shoebox* workshops conducted with a total of 195 participants (117 of whom were Aboriginal, including 104 participants living on-reserve);
- 20,278 web hits made by 8,213 unique visitors; and
- 195 visits to the On-Line Scavenger Hunt website, with 89 contest entrants.

4.0 Participants' Views

In the interviews conducted for this evaluation, participants provided a great deal of additional information about ABSN Saskatchewan and the following sections summarize their views.

4.1 Resource Provision

ABSN Saskatchewan provides a wide variety of information through a number of sources, including the mobile libraries, the provincial website, and the Shoebox seminars. Participants commented that the information is similar to that provided to non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs, as the business environment in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs are operating is the same. However, in order to assist Aboriginal entrepreneurs in understanding the information, ABSN Saskatchewan provides practical assistance and capacity building to improving business skills and, hopes doing so, to improve communities. At times conducting training can be difficult as potential participants will not seek it out unless there is a perceived need, so ABSN must demonstrate that these skills are necessary. For example:

...the Centre here is a solid base of knowledge, it evolves, it's always up to date, so you knew when you get a resource from the Centre that it's accurate, it's up to date, it's legal... and that's the most important part.



We need to have the people in our rural communities, we need to get the skill levels up, we need to get the abilities up, we need to ensure that they have the capacity to be productive and to actively participate. And that's our goal.

And this year is about developing that power so that they understand all of the resources and are confident in using them and sharing them and teaching them to others.

4.2 User Characteristics

Participants observed that the businesses being started by Aboriginal entrepreneurs have changed considerably in recent years. In particular, there has been a shift toward more urban types of businesses, even in rural areas and on reserves. Due to the current tendency to migrate away from cities to reserves, Aboriginal people who have become accustomed to the city lifestyle are bringing that lifestyle with them, along with the accompanying business and employment opportunities. Business ideas are becoming more realistic and more creative, as participants noted:

And you can see that the lifestyle of the city that they're looking for the same kinds of services, like sewer and water and garbage collection, so it's creating other employment opportunities that, like water management, that's a whole training that needs to occur.

A lot of people are getting back into business. They have ideas and are good at creativity and the generation of ideas but by the time they get to do it, the idea is out of date.

The business ideas that are coming through my doors now are far more realistic.

By providing resources to encourage empowerment, participants believe that ABSN Saskatchewan has assisted Aboriginal entrepreneurs and Aboriginal communities in creating an identity for themselves. Communities are in charge of their own ABSN programming and thus have more control, but further capacity building is necessary in order to continue this process. For example:

We'll have to ask some questions and all of a sudden they feel confident that we're not going to lead them down a path that they shouldn't, because it's their path, not ours.

... it gave them identity. That was crucial

And all we really are, are the providers of the tools and that mentorship and the base human resource development so that we know that the chapters in the communities, and there always has to be more than one, and that the chapters in the communities have the knowledge, the confidence, and the understanding of all the resources that are available to them.

That change only occurs when people are ready and empowered. They have to be ready.

Control is particularly relevant to Aboriginal youth and because they are beginning to look at alternatives, ABSN Saskatchewan has responded to their business needs by employing youth in ABSN centres and providing training in business skills to promote future entrepreneurship. Some participant suggestions include:



There is a strong new generation that is better educated and has fewer issues but we have to start now and not wait until they are adults. The evidence is clear, the school system has not adapted quickly enough.

... we employ youth in each of our communities to help kick-start and introduce the ABSN, the use of technology to access it...

4.3 Community Factors

Participants commented that business and the community are interdependent. ABSN Saskatchewan recognized that stereotypes are a problem and is working to break them down and the effects of land settlements have had a major impact on businesses and communities alike. Once people recognize that ABSN will assist them in improving their communities, they become more willing to work with ABSN and acquire skills to accomplish this goal. Participants noted:

... they are interested in learning all the skills that they need in order to move their communities forward.

... they're the ones that want the economic development because they are part of something that's much bigger than their individual community. That's what ABSN gave them.

And what it's done, because it has opened the door for access to education, to training, and all kinds of things, it's encouraged people who had migrated from the reserves to the urban areas to go back, because now there's something to go back to. And they see the potential for growth.

We are breaking the stereotype about First Nations. We have first hand knowledge and are breaking down barriers.

4.4 Programming

Initially, the reserves themselves were asked about their needs, and ABSN Saskatchewan was subsequently designed to meet those needs. All new programs are pilot-tested prior to implementation in order to ensure that they operate smoothly and effectively. ABSN sites deal with many topics in order to cultivate relationships between individuals and communities. By locating the sites within the communities, ABSN has become more personal, more accessible, and more comfortable, making contact easier to establish and maintain. Staff members are contractors who are located in different rural locations and through their long-term connection to specific communities have built personal relationships and increased confidence in the information and education being provided. Some examples of comments include:

So we decided that we would start with sort of a real grassroots process, where we hired a contractor who went out and talked to the people, talked to the bands, talked to the tribal councils, to get a feel of what their needs were, to create an awareness of the services that were already available here at the centre, and through the regional access partners.

... there's a confidence level built that they can just pick up the phone and here are these resource people that are non-threatening, there's no commitment, they can ask questions and we're not looking for, pitching a sale or anything like that, it's a non-threatening resource.

... it was a revolving door of people, dealing with every topic you can imagine, from food, feeding little children, to seniors and filling their forms to helping them access funds, you know, when you're living on, what, 92 dollars a week...



... it took us years to build the relationships...

Since similar programs already existed within Aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan, ABSN opted to integrate its services with those of pre-existing program sites. This avoided duplication of services while fostering networking between organizations and providing a focus for service provision that had not been present before. Along with other organizations, ABSN helped promote the development of technological infrastructure in rural communities and there has been a corresponding increase in high-speed Internet access. This infrastructure provided a basis on which to develop a provincial ABSN website effective at disseminating information. Some examples of comments include:

I think that in Saskatchewan the one thing, if there was one thing that is unique about us across the country, is what we did here—we overlapped and partnered all of our federal and provincial programs that were running at the same time.

... the strength of using the contract people was that we were able to leverage the benefits of other programs that were already going. So we weren't duplicating anything, we weren't recreating anything.

And so we're taking high speed into our communities, makes it possible for them to now access all of the services that are available...

... you have to remember that six years ago, within our First Nations communities, there was no Internet access. Zero.

And Industry Canada, you know, they provided the infrastructure for technology in this province, but their biggest concern was the digital divide. How do we get to people who have less and need the assistance the most? The Aboriginal Business Service Network actually provided that means to bridge that gap, because CAP, the Community Access Program, is taking the technology to them, the Aboriginal Business Service Network is taking the business to them and helping them use that online.

ABSN sites have seen an increase in demand and the program is growing. The program is based on the philosophy that social development must occur first, before business development can occur. Although the program took a while to get off the ground, there is now a clear plan and the future appears bright. Participants noted that:

I can't handle it, I can't handle the demand at my centre. [i.e., too much]

ABSN is the social development part. Business development is not realized unless you do that work, develop awareness of the potential of the social economy mandate. ABSN could have been stagnant, but now the province knows about it.

If I had asked... last year about the value of the Network, he would have said that it was of doubtful value, now he believes there may well be some value to it.

4.5 Networking

Participants commented that ABSN Saskatchewan encourages networking and has led to a great deal of interaction between organizations, encouraging close ties particularly between ABSN and its partners. ABSN has run a conference with the assistance of partners. Through their participation in ABSN, rural Aboriginal communities have started to network amongst themselves. They feel as though they are a part of something that is larger than their community and are more willing to share and cooperate with other communities as a result. Participant comments include:



And so it was an interesting, just a shift in the mindset that occurred because they belonged to something that was bigger than just their community.

We did a joint conference this year, with the Aboriginal Business Service Network, the IMT, Information Management Technology for volunteering sectors, and the provincial association for public Internet access, and out of there, there were 200 people that came to the conference for two days, and 47% of those were Aboriginal and First Nation.

The CAP program...could die, and the ABSN could die, but there's a group of 31 organizations out there that actually have an identity and belong to something, and that gives them that strength.

4.6 Issues

Participants identified several issues related to Aboriginal entrepreneurship, and the ABSN program, in Saskatchewan.

4.6.1 Community cooperation

By locating ABSN sites within the communities themselves, access to resources has improved. Further, ABSN provides training to members of the community to ensure that the services and skills are spread throughout the community and can thus improve the community as a whole. The primary focus of ABSN Saskatchewan has been on rural and remote communities, which tend to be territorial and it has been a challenge getting them to cooperate in order to focus on common goals and new opportunities. For example:

It is really ensuring that the community understands the importance and the role that the ABSN partner actually plays there, especially because they have a physical presence in their community, they are part of the community.

... traditionally, the Aboriginal community wants to access a service, they have to go elsewhere to do it. You know, they've got to go to their nearest town or to a bigger centre. If they want to take a class, it's just not there.... ABSN is bringing the information to them directly.

They felt and they are, because that's where the push is coming is that they are the champions that will develop rural Saskatchewan because the First Nation communities are all in rural Saskatchewan. They are those champions.

The people that are in rural Saskatchewan are not as mobile as what everyone would like to believe. And the First Nation communities, they are not mobile.

4.6.2 Funding

Poverty in Aboriginal communities makes it difficult to obtain the funds necessary to start a business. It is very difficult for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to obtain a loan to start a business because they do not meet loan criteria and, subsequently, lack of funding is the most significant barrier Aboriginal entrepreneurs face when starting a business. Respondents commented that:

It's very poor. You know, everybody thinks they're rich, but the First Nations, they're very, very poor. The population as a whole, the disposable income and collateral, it's not there. It's not there.

Business planning and business training are both important but capital is essential or you are dead in the water. It is still a barrier.



The solution is to get people to start taking charge of identifying the problem, more focused on the problem and adjusting the lending criteria.

4.6.3 Stability

Participants explained that an intricate web of funding arrangements supports the ABSN program in Saskatchewan, but this needs to be extended over a longer period of time. There is also a need for human, along with financial, resources. Travel is particularly costly, especially given that the ABSN sites are all located in rural, often remote, areas. Program funding needs to be stable and long-term so that ABSN can fulfill its goals. They suggested that the only way to develop trusting, personal relationships with clients and create lasting change is to do so over a lengthy period of time. Participants noted that:

The resources are not adequate — just look at the map of Saskatchewan. Travel alone is very expensive. They absorb the travel costs through their other work, it is not covered by ABSN.

You never know if you will have more funding next year. If you only have one year of funding, it is hard to do long-range planning. You have to reign in your enthusiasm if the funding may end, especially in the field to see the needs and not be able to respond.

... things don't happen quickly. You need that time.

Because every other government program has just come in and slapped a bandage on it and said, now deal with it. And ABSN has been there now, well, I've been three years through ABSN, four, so there is this, that you're not going away, that you really are here to work with us and to help us build our own knowledge base and to help us build our own communities. That's the difference of a longer term program rather than these hit and miss programs, is that it really allowed the trust to occur between a government, representatives of that government as contracted personnel, and the communities. And they should be thanked for that.

This program is funded year-to-year. It is hard to strategize past the short-term, hard to do longer-term planning. Longer-term funding would be good.

4.7 Suggestions for the Future

Participants provided a number of suggestions to improve ABSN Saskatchewan. Some of their suggestions related to continuing aspects of the current program. In particular, they suggested that ABSN should continue to encourage capacity building, promote empowerment, work with Aboriginal youth, conduct pilot testing on all program elements, work against stereotypes, and promote networking among organizations and communities. The placement of integrated partner sites within rural and remote Aboriginal communities has proven especially valuable: not only does this improve access to services, but it also results in increased customization of services to the target audience and benefits the community as a whole. These aspects of the current program were seen to be very important and should be continued in the future.

Other suggestions dealt with specific needs or changes necessary to provide the best service possible and included:

- Increased project funding over the long-term would permit the ABSN program in Saskatchewan to provide stable, effective services.
- Individual/ community poverty is a major issue that must be dealt with by increasing access to funding for new businesses and encouraging community growth.



- Many of these rural and remote communities are still without Internet access, and with the help of ABSN and its partner organizations, the technological infrastructure in Saskatchewan can be improved.



Chapter 5 ABSN Alberta

1.0 The Aboriginal Context in Alberta

In 2001, there were 156,220 Aboriginal people living in Alberta, making up approximately 5% of the population compared to 4.4% of the Canadian population. Of Alberta's Aboriginal population, 84,995 (54%) were First Nations, 66,080 (42%) were Métis, and 1,090 (0.7%) were Inuit.

The Aboriginal population in Alberta is young when compared to the population as a whole: in 2001, the median age was 23.4 compared to 35.4 in the non-Aboriginal population. In addition, 9% of Alberta's children were Aboriginal, compared to 5.6% of all Canadian children.

The economic prosperity that Alberta has experienced in recent years has benefited both non-Aboriginals and Aboriginals alike. Off-reserve Aboriginals in Alberta had an employment rate of 62.6% in 2005, comparable to the total overall Canadian employment rate of 62.7% in for the same year.

The key land claim issues in Alberta relate to entitlements and some of these claims have been outstanding since 1874. Although reserves are a federal responsibility, the provincial governments in the Prairie Provinces are required to get involved because nearly all unoccupied crown land and mineral resources were transferred to the provinces in 1930 with a provision requiring land be set aside for reserves.

Métis people were excluded from the historic treaty-making process. The modern process began in 1973, but in 1979, the Baker Lake decision handed down by the Federal Court specified that one element required for Aboriginal title was that the Aboriginal group was in existence at the time of contact with European society, thereby excluding Métis. However, Alberta has the largest Métis population in Canada and is the only province that has passed legislation specifically for Métis people. In 1990, the provincial government designated 8 Métis Settlements in Alberta along with 1.25 million acres of settlement lands, a provision for local governance, and provincial financial commitments.

2.0 Program Implementation

In Alberta, a study conducted by Western Management and funded jointly by the federal and provincial governments looked at Aboriginal business needs and gaps in service. A three-year plan was developed based on this study and an ABSN coordinator was hired. By August 2003, a regional ABSN web site had been launched, a province wide database of Aboriginal-owned businesses had been compiled, focused Aboriginal business services were available at the Business Link in Edmonton and at the Calgary Business Information Centre, and regional ABSN sites had been established.

Because there were no background program documents available for the ABSN program in Alberta at the time of this writing, information was exclusively obtained from interviews and focus groups.

The ABSN program in Alberta is run through Business Link, a not-for-profit organization funded by Western Economic Diversification and Alberta Economic Development. Business Link maintains the ABSN website and provides bilingual services by telephone, online, and in person, adding a regional context to the federal ABSN initiative. The ABSN program also conducted Aboriginal Awareness training programs with service providers and provided workbooks, guides, and information for workshops for partners. In addition, two Aboriginal business conferences were held. The ABSN program in Alberta uses videoconferencing technology in order to disseminate information most effectively.



3.0 Outputs

Based on a review of documents, in 2004/05 the measurable outputs of ABSN Alberta include:

- 30 partners around the province (6 of which have been equipped with Aboriginal business resources);
- Approximately 250 in-person or telephone contacts with Aboriginal clients per month;
- 2 conferences with a total of 360 attendees;
- 43,650 web visits (approximately 40% of which were on the French site);
- 22 videoconference points with over 2,000 users; and
- 38,000 business guides distributed (26,000 downloaded and 12,000 in print).

4.0 Participants' Views

In the interviews and focus groups conducted for this evaluation, participants provided a great deal of additional information about ABSN Alberta. The following sections summarize this information.

4.1 Resource Provision

Participants indicated that the information provided by the ABSN program in Alberta is both useful and widely available, both in hardcopy and online. However, it can be difficult to disseminate information at times, particularly to remote locations that may not necessarily have Internet access. As well, the information available needs to be updated constantly in order to ensure that it is current and relevant, which takes time and money. Participants noted that:

I really utilized their library and a lot of literature, pretty much everything they had. And it's really helped.

Just to this point, we haven't had to use a lot of the resources from it, but I know it's there and it's a backbone for us.

I think that the numbers are growing, more and more a growing need for a lot more Aboriginal business, people are graduating, getting more involved.

We have core resources, handouts, etc but we lack resources for other things. The needs are changing demographically, the information won't be good any more. We still have to get the resources out there and develop new guides but clients can't use them if they don't have the Internet. Some have phone hook-up which is no good for downloading documents. There are good resources, tools, presenters—it is just a matter of getting them out there.

Participants commented that education levels for Aboriginals are increasing, particularly among the urban population, although business literacy could be improved. Because the composition of the entrepreneurial audience is changing, so are the types of businesses in which they are interested. There is always a need for training and continuing education, regardless of other factors. For example:

One of the biggest challenges we have is that of business literacy.

The interest was always there but they didn't know where to go. Our job is to keep up with the EDOs; they are always turning over and we have to train them.

Many entrepreneurs contact ABSN without any real sense of focus for what they would like to do, and ABSN can assist them in finding a definite direction. Multiple services are available to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and are the same as those provided to non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs as



both groups of entrepreneurs are operating within the same market and require similar business information. Participants commented:

And coming back here keeps me more focused to get back and study a little bit and get back on track.

Our services to Aboriginals are pretty much the same as what they would be for anybody else walking through the door, so small business loans, business plan development, marketing.

4.2 Programming

ABSN sites in Alberta are meant to be welcoming environments where people can come to obtain credible business information. Although this information is the same that would be provided to non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs, the non-threatening, culturally-sensitive environment ABSN provides makes it more appropriate to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. For example:

Their business needs are the same [as everyone else's], they have to have the same skills and knowledge. The trick is to set an environment where they will come. You have to be ready and comfortable to deal with Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

We're always extremely welcoming in our office and certainly in our communities that to have this program, it opens a lot of doors for us, and these people feel much more at ease.

Most services are exclusionary—not for First Nations, or for on reserve, or for Métis. We are trying to create awareness about who provides services. Most service providers exclude 70% [a person view]. We are the only “status blind” service in the province.

In order to ensure that information is disseminated most effectively, ABSN Alberta has maintained that personal contact between service provider and client is especially important. The regional Coordinator's name is widely recognized and respected. He also personalizes information before providing it to his clients in order to ensure that they are receiving the best possible information for their particular case. Specifically:

... whenever he's up here on his tour visits, he's received extremely well and he's quite well known, surprisingly enough.

It is absolutely critical that you have a personal contact, knowing Aboriginal service needs, who the other providers are, being able to talk to clients.

ABSN Alberta employs technology such as their website and videoconferencing effectively in order to disseminate information. However, there is still a need to increase access to technology throughout the province, particularly in remote areas. Participants pointed out that:

You know, if I hear of something happening that [the ABSN Coordinator] e-mails to me then I make sure that we make a point of you know utilizing some of the businesses that are there.

Yes, 26,000 web site visits. Three years ago that wouldn't have happened. We have created a strong point of access for Aboriginals.

... interestingly, they all have videoconferencing... this is a fabulous tool for us.



I have to be closer to the partners out there and be able to network information back and forth. Maybe the videoconference equipment will help.

4.3 User Characteristics

The evolution of attitudes among Aboriginal people has led to increased empowerment and a sense of independence, which is necessary in order to conduct business effectively. By encouraging the development and growth of a sense of empowerment among Aboriginal entrepreneurs, participants believed that the ABSN program in Alberta also fosters the development and growth of their businesses. Specifically:

So because of that particular (I'm trying to think of the word here) dependency, then your own self-esteem and motivation is not as it would be in the non-Aboriginal society environment.

We are seeing more of an evolution. Five years ago the attitude [that] was prevalent on reserve, "You have to deal with me"; now they are more independent and there is a real desire to be in business. More have confidence, vision and the desire, because of schooling, greater awareness of the world, more support in the community to view success in entrepreneurship.

Not only does ABSN Alberta provide services to entrepreneurs attempting to start new businesses, it also assists entrepreneurs in maintaining their new businesses and eventually expanding them. This is an important service, as many resources and supports are available for new entrepreneurs, but it can be much more difficult to find help with the maintenance or expansion of a business. Some examples of comments include:

... it's great to find somebody a job and the other part of it, the huger part of it, is the job maintenance. And it's the same thing when it comes to starting your business, we all go out the shooting gate flying, but to maintain it is where the real work is.

We've actually had a number of Aboriginal businesses in the last year... to our program coming back, looking for expansion and taking their business international or adding additional stores and that kind of stuff.

They suggested that Aboriginal people are becoming increasingly integrated with non-Aboriginal society and while a difficult process, it is occurring nonetheless. The ABSN program in Alberta has taken this into consideration in providing its services and has focused on supplying business information that is not necessarily specific to Aboriginals in order to facilitate the integration with non-Aboriginal society. Some examples of comments include:

I don't know if the need itself is becoming greater, I think it was always there, but I think that a lot of the Aboriginal people are now coming more into the mainstream. There's more and more of them that are looking at small business and entrepreneurship and recognizing what they can do. So whatever demographic you're looking at, the fact is they're just becoming mainstream now so we're seeing a lot more of them. They're not sort of looking within their own programs all the time either, so I think now within our organization is just starting to see.

... to step out into the non Aboriginal community, which is part of their market as well, that's a big step for them.

Aboriginal youth are displaying a great deal of interest in entrepreneurship and participants recommended that ABSN should continue to encourage this interest by developing a presence in



schools and providing direction for young potential entrepreneurs. They indicated that by planting a seed now, ABSN could better serve a whole new generation of clients. Participants noted that:

There's a big interest with young people. I was really shocked, it was really good to see, you know what I mean.

To do a similar project aimed specifically at Aboriginal youth I think would be effective.

And I know it's really hard on young people to decide what they're going to be when they grow up, but I think that at some point, that seed needs to be planted way back, way back in their early years, so that they can start thinking and planning their career and their educational goals.

... it's amazing that the young people that come up and they do want to do business, but they just really don't know where to go, and they're quite lost. So I think that there needs to be some direction provided at a very young age.

4.3

4.4 Community Factors

Participants reported that ABSN Alberta has consciously attempted to be neutral to culture and be sensitive to the varying needs and contexts experienced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs both on- and off-reserve. In order to accomplish this goal, ABSN staff and partners are reaching out to remote communities, providing cultural sensitivity training for service providers, and educating both communities and individuals in business literacy. For example:

The only difference is, since we became a satellite office for the ABSN, we now actually do annual visits out to each of the Aboriginal communities, whether they be Métis or First Nations, and we do individual workshops out there.

I think some of the education has to be provided to the Aboriginal communities themselves...

We don't understand the separate needs that they might have in their communities or the lack of services that they might have in their communities or the lack of information, so having something specifically designed for them, then they begin to understand that some of those things have been recognized. And they really appreciate that.

We have done cultural awareness training for other organizations.

4.5 Networking

Participants indicated that there is a need for increased network development by Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Although networks are starting to form, the process is by no means complete. The conferences held by ABSN Alberta are a good first step and were of high quality. However, conferences in general are expensive to hold and attend, particularly from the perspective of a small business owner, and it can be difficult to advertise to the appropriate audience. Some examples of comments include:

And it's unfortunate, because I know our business would grow if we had the proper contacts. And so we have to work kind of on our own, personal selling and so on to try and grow our business.



But a lot of the conferences are so expensive, you know, if you want to put an exhibit up or be one of the conference people to go there. As a small business owner, you know, that's no good.

This year they had two Aboriginal conferences. One was the "All about Opportunities" conference, an Aboriginal event for Aboriginal entrepreneurs; 185 people attended. The second conference was for people mostly from outside Edmonton; 175 attended. Both were really highly rated.

Like individuals, organizations need to build their networks. ABSN Alberta has provided organizations with a link through which they can continue to build these networks and be aware of what other organizations are doing. Participants indicated that there is some desire to see increased networking between ABSN organizations across the four Western provinces. For example:

I think if nothing else, ABSN has certainly provided that link between the service providers.

... with ABSN, they've been able to continue to maintain that communication link for us, and make sure that we know who each other are and then can share that information and do cross-referrals and those kinds of things.

There is no ABSN inter-provincial network any more.

4.6 Issues

Participants identified several issues related to Aboriginal entrepreneurship and the ABSN program in Alberta. Issues facing individual entrepreneurs include a lack of funding, unrealistic attitudes, and the misuse of consultants (who were reported to have overcharged for business plan development services).

4.6.1 Funding

Typically, a significant amount of money is needed to start a business. Although the money may be available in theory, it can be very difficult for entrepreneurs to obtain the necessary capital to start their business. Further, once the business is established, its financial situation must be continually monitored in order to ensure that the limited amount of money is being spent in the most effective manner. In addition, Aboriginal entrepreneurs have some unrealistic perceptions and expectations about self-employment, which can make starting a business more difficult unless entrepreneurs are educated about the realities of self-employment. Some Aboriginal entrepreneurs and communities have used consultants in order to improve their businesses, however the expense does not always provide much benefit for the price. These consultants do not, in general, take context into account when providing their services, particularly to on-reserve businesses. Participants pointed out:

Well, you know, it's very costly to get a business up and running right off the bat, you know, with all your hookups and your rent and your deposits and like in the WCB, you've got to get in, and your insurance and insurance is really expensive.

I had good credit, that's the thing. I had a thirty-five thousand dollar line of credit going in and had all my equipment and everything, and they wouldn't touch me.

I thought I was going to be a millionaire in six months... You won't be a millionaire right away or even make any money for the first couple years.



... there seems to be a general lack of experience and knowledge going into it, that they have a great idea, but they've never worked in it and they don't really know how they're going to implement it.

... the entrepreneurs that come to us are relying very heavily on outside consultants. And we see that time and time again. And they're paying huge dollars to consultants.

Yeah, in many cases, thousands of dollars and the consultant has no idea even where that person's community is, let alone what their needs might be or how their business might fit into that community. An abuse, actually.

4.6.2 Awareness

Services cannot be provided effectively if the intended audience is not aware that they are available. There is some awareness among Aboriginal people of the services provided by the ABSN program in Alberta, but there is not necessarily any recognition that the services are provided by ABSN. Specifically:

... they don't know that it's ABSN. And I don't know that they care, for that matter. They really don't. They just know that the services are there, that the opportunities are there, and that the information's there. They really couldn't care who provides it.

4.6.3 Stability

ABSN Alberta reports that they obtain program funding from a number of different, unnamed sources and because of this, the program is more creative and flexible in the services provided. However, increased funding is still necessary in order to improve service. Participants noted that:

The money comes to us through a non-profit and we are not restricted by government bureaucracy. We can be more creative and responsive.

We need to continue core funding for the program, to also have project and joint initiative funding to be matched with other funders that we could be aligned with.

Additional factors limiting ABSN Alberta's ability to provide service most effectively include a lack of marketing and some hesitation by businesses to use the available services.

4.7 Suggestions for the Future

Participants in the focus groups and interviews provided a number of suggestions to improve ABSN Alberta. Some suggestions related to continuing aspects of the current program, in particular, ABSN should continue to assist clients in focusing their goals, provide services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs that aid their integration into the non-Aboriginal business environment, promote empowerment, work with Aboriginal youth, serve both new and growing businesses, and maintain networks between organizations. The non-threatening, culturally appropriate environment provided by ABSN Alberta has proved to be beneficial to service provision and the emphasis on the importance of a personal relationship between client and service provider, and customized information also increases the comfort level of clients. These aspects of the current program are critical to the provision of excellent service and should be continued in the future.

Other suggestions deal with specific needs or changes necessary to provide the best service possible and included:

- Increased project funding over the long-term would permit the ABSN program in Alberta to provide stable, effective services.



- The information provided by ABSN needs to be kept up to date and business literacy could be improved further.
- Effort should be directed toward improving access to technology and increasing program awareness and name recognition.
- The ABSN program in Alberta should focus on resolving issues faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs.
- There is a need for increased network development and while the conferences have been helpful in this regard, the format is not always appropriate for individual entrepreneurs.
- Aboriginal entrepreneurs face a lack of funding, unrealistic attitudes, and misuse of consultants, and the ABSN program in Alberta could alleviate these problems by providing education and increased access to funding sources.
- There is also a need to resolve issues faced by ABSN itself, such as a lack of resources, lack of marketing, and hesitation on the part of businesses to use the services offered.
- Nationally, there is a need for increased networking between ABSN organizations in the four Western provinces.



Chapter 6 ABSN British Columbia

1.0 The Aboriginal Context in British Columbia

In 2001, there were 170,025 Aboriginal people living in British Columbia, consisting of approximately 4.4% of the population in line with the 4.4% in the Canadian population identified as Aboriginal. Of British Columbia's Aboriginal population, 118,295 (70%) were First Nations, 44,265 (26%) were Métis, and 800 (0.5%) were Inuit.

The Aboriginal population in British Columbia is young when compared to the population as a whole: in 2001, the median age of the Aboriginal population was 26.8, whereas the median age of the non-Aboriginal population was 38.7. In addition, 7% of children in British Columbia were Aboriginal, compared to 5.6% in of all Canada.

While in the three Prairie Provinces all areas are covered by land treaties, BC has a different political context for Aboriginal peoples. Between 1850 and 1854, there were 14 treaties signed on Vancouver Island but this process stopped after 1854. In the year 2000, the first treaty in modern BC history was finalized after 23 years of negotiation. Comprehensive land claims are a key issue in BC with much of the land in the province being claimed. Subsequently, the provincial government has created the Treaty Negotiation Office to deal with the issue.

The federal Comprehensive Land Claims Policy was adopted in 1973 and last revised in 1986. Its goal was to achieve certainty with respect to lands and resources in areas of Canada where Aboriginal rights were not resolved by treaty or other lawful means. The policy applies to First Nations and Inuit, but excludes Métis groups. Since 1973, sixteen comprehensive land claim agreements have been negotiated and brought into effect, mostly in northern Quebec and the three Territories. However, comprehensive land claims are currently outstanding in approximately 20% of Canada (mostly in BC, all of the Maritimes, much of Labrador, over a third of Quebec, the Ottawa Valley in Ontario, and continuing residual claims in all three territories). Over half of the active negotiation tables are in BC and are overseen by the tripartite British Columbia Treaty Commission.

The claims settled in the past thirty years were primarily in northern and remote regions with limited third party interests and in the Territories where the federal government controls the land and resources. The remaining claims are primarily in the provinces, often in populated areas with extensive third party interests and greater competition for access to land and resources. Thus, achieving settlement is much more complex.

The Comprehensive Land Claims Policy has not been formally reviewed since 1986 but there have been a number of significant adjustments. For example, since 1995, self-government can be negotiated as part of a comprehensive land claims agreement. As well, some federal departments are beginning to negotiate co-management mechanisms and a consultation process for resource allocation with Aboriginal groups claiming Aboriginal rights. For example, included are the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Aboriginal fishery strategy; Parks Canada and Wood Buffalo National Park; and fishery discussions with the Haida Nation in British Columbia. Provincial governments and industry are also examining mechanisms to fulfill potential consultation obligations. British Columbia is currently negotiating forestry accommodation agreements with First Nations.

In May 1986, the *Sechelt Indian Band Self-Government Act* was passed after 15 years of negotiation and consultation. This was a specific piece of legislation that allowed the Sechelt Indian Band, located on the BC coast, to move toward self-government. The Sechelt Indian band has municipal status under provincial legislation, however other Aboriginal groups have criticized the Sechelt model for being governed by provincial legislation. In response, the Sechelt people contend that theirs is a unique model, established in response to their particular situation, and not intended to constrain other communities. In



1996, the B.C. Treaty Commission was created to negotiate comprehensive land claims in BC and the Sechelt Indian Band signed an Agreement-in-Principle in 1999, the first in the Commission process.

The Nisga'a land claim in BC was settled in 2000 with representatives from the Nisga'a Tribal Council, the federal government, and the government of BC. It includes provisions related to land, resources, financial compensation and governance. Under the Agreement, the Nisga'a have a central government and four village governments, similar to local government arrangements. All Nisga'a law-making powers are concurrent with those of Canada and BC.

The Office of the Federal Interlocutor currently manages negotiation processes with Métis and non-status Indian organizations at the provincial level across Canada and has established Métis child and family agencies and authorities delivering child and family services to Métis communities in BC.

2.0 Program Implementation

In British Columbia, the Community Economic Development Centre at Simon Fraser University (SFU) completed a study on Aboriginal business needs in January 2001. This Gap Analysis Study was intended to determine the business information needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs and service providers. A three-year action plan grew out of the analysis and an ABSN Coordinator was hired in September 2002. By August 2003, nine ABSN REACH sites had been established and a regional ABSN website was being developed.

In BC, ABSN is an unincorporated Steering Committee operating in partnership with the support of WD and managed through a contract with CFDA. Small Business BC (SBBC), located in downtown Vancouver, has a sub-contract with CFDA to provide services to ABSN, including in-person and telephone support, and web hosting. The full-time ABSN Coordinator is also under contract with CFDA but is managed by WD.

The SFU Advisory Committee involved in the 2001 Gap Analysis study included stakeholder representation from service providers, government, and other partners. It was later reconvened to form the ABSN Steering Committee. It is made up of volunteer Aboriginal business service providers who are working together to create a comprehensive and integrated strategy to support the growth and development of Aboriginal business. Steering Committee members include representatives from Aboriginal service providers, the provincial government of British Columbia, and federal departments such as INAC, HRSDC, ABC, and WD. In addition, key network partners include the CFDA and Small Business BC.

By 2004, 17 REACH sites were located in areas where Aboriginal entrepreneurs had public access. Aboriginal-specific business resource materials, support and Internet access were provided at these sites to support business research, planning, and development. Each site was provided with \$5,000 worth of computer equipment and resource library materials. An Aboriginal business intern was hired to build partnerships. The development of the REACH sites resulted in increased capacity development and networking.

The Aboriginal business website www.firstbusiness.ca, provided under contract by SBBC, was designed to provide comprehensive, relevant, and effective business information and resources to Aboriginal entrepreneurs. A resource binder – containing an Aboriginal Business Development workbook and a variety of other tools – intended as a capacity development tool for Aboriginal Business Development Officers is also available. In addition, an Aboriginal Community Economic Development Toolbox is under development, particularly the portion focusing on curriculum development.

Partnerships were developed with a number of organizations in order to share information, resources, and best practices, as well as to communicate important information and events to Aboriginal service providers. Furthermore, private sector partners were identified in order to assist in the delivery of a variety



of initiatives. A Youth at Risk internship program, in which six at risk youth will be placed as interns at REACH sites, is currently under development.

3.0 Outputs

Based on a review of documents, recent measurable outputs of ABSN BC included:

- 1 gap analysis;
- 17 REACH sites;
- 170 in-person contacts per month (2003-04);
- 4,862 unique website visitors per month (2004-5); and
- 1 BC Aboriginal Small Business Profile.

4.0 Participants' Views

In the interviews and focus groups conducted for this evaluation, participants provided a great deal of additional information about ABSN BC which is summarized in the following sections.

4.1 Resource Provision

Participants indicated that there is an increased need for information about business, covering a wide variety of topics. Although a wide range of information is available from ABSN BC, information must still be tailored to the appropriate target audience. For example:

There was already a lot of information available but it wasn't accessed. There was a huge need to tailor the information.

There is a need for basic information but also a need for high-end resources, consultants to help communities take advantage of some of these opportunities.

More Aboriginal people are getting into business. The need for access to information has increased and the range of information has, and needs to increase.

4.2 Programming

Participants stressed that in BC, the impetus for the development of ABSN came from the gap analysis conducted by SFU. That study became the basis for ABSN and its Advisory Committee re-emerged as the volunteer ABSN Steering Committee. ABSN BC has grown a great deal since its inception and has adopted a holistic approach based on the individual and emphasized the importance of face-to-face contact. By developing long-term relationships and building capacity, participants indicated that problems can be better dealt with over an extended period of time, rather than fixed temporarily. ABSN BC has also increased the networking capacity by promoting awareness of other organizations and increasing their collaboration. The ABSN website provides a great deal of easily accessible business information. The creation of the REACH sites has permitted ABSN BC to assist individuals with their business needs. However, further growth is still required which, in the view of participants, requires both time and money. Some examples of comments include:

The gap analysis was the tool they used to identify needs. ABSN provided the funding and it was overseen by stakeholders. They were slow off the mark but they did get the relevant information.

ABSN is a direct result of the gap study. It set the benchmark on how to provide services. They still haven't met all its recommendations



We set our own priorities based on the gap analysis. There used to be additional dollars for ABSN but no longer. This makes our attachment to the ABSN strategy less strong...

It has a good mix of organizations and individuals. They are collaborative and share the same goals, have a common purpose.

There are eight new REACH sites, the website, a coordinator, a small business phone line (1-800) at CSBC, all services that didn't exist three years ago. There is still room for improvement.

ABSN is holistic and individualized, not like the government standardized approach.

Participants commented that the Aboriginal community has particular cultural needs that must be considered when developing programming targeted at an Aboriginal population. Although governmental and non-profit organizations are becoming more sensitive to Aboriginal culture, programs that deal specifically with those needs are lacking and many Aboriginal people have no choice but to use non-Aboriginal programs to fulfill their needs. The development of Aboriginal-specific resources and programs would be better able to meet the needs of this population. Participants noted that:

The materials have a personalized aspect. There is an understanding of Aboriginal culture and business history. Aboriginals are more receptive if the service is from an Aboriginal provider.

They are just starting to build the momentum and get past the old attitude of government towards Aboriginals, they are starting to develop strategic partnerships, are more sensitive to cultural needs and more awareness.

Participants pointed out that ABSN BC uses technology in a number of different ways to increase programming effectiveness. First, information can be easily disseminated via the Internet, thereby increasing access to information for those with computer access. Second, there has been an increase in Aboriginal entrepreneurs' use of technology as a tool to aid in developing and maintaining their businesses. However, the prevalence of technology has resulted in yet another domain where capacity building is required as Aboriginal entrepreneurs cannot be competitive in today's world without understanding how to use technology effectively. Specifically, participants stated that:

It [ABSN BC] provides enhanced electronic access to information and also provides tools.

Generally, the information needs of business have changed. They are more complex, global, Internet/ information-based. An entrepreneur has to be more sophisticated and aware of technology and more complex markets.

4.3 User Characteristics

Participants commented extensively on the changing Aboriginal population. The high birth rate has resulted in a growing youth population whose needs must be taken into consideration with any programming directed at Aboriginal people. In addition, the particular need for positive role models for all Aboriginal people is larger for these youth. As a whole, the Aboriginal population is also better educated than in the past and as the Aboriginal people change, the types of businesses in which they are involved also change. While Aboriginal people were once involved mainly in primary industry and arts and crafts, they are now involved in all sectors of the economy. Further, there has been an attitude shift in recent years toward increased



independence and empowerment, and programming needs to provide the tools to support that newfound attitude. Although empowerment and self-determination already exists to some degree, there is a continued need for the promotion of further empowerment in order to support the results of these attitudes. In response to these changes, ABSN BC can use the resources at its disposal to assist Aboriginal people in fulfilling their goals. For example:

The 1996 census showed that the need was growing but Aboriginal entrepreneurs were mostly in the resource industry. Now they are in all sectors. Consulting, capacity building, technical expertise will all become prevalent.

There is a huge emerging market of youth who will want entrepreneurial advice. The needs of youth are huge, massive. They will need role models to inspire them.

The Aboriginal work force is more educated. The youth bulge impacts the thinking of Aboriginal business.

ABSN has provided a sense of empowerment to end users.

There is a stronger entrepreneurial spirit in BC, less dependence on government assistance, self-determination is stronger. The key message is, "Don't wait for a hand-out, it's time to get moving. It will be our fault if we don't take advantage of the opportunities."

4.4 Networking

Participants commented that because of ABSN BC, organizations have become more aware of one another and collaboration has subsequently increased. Widening organizational networks has also increased both informal and formal relationships and partnerships. Participants commented that:

ABSN has broadened awareness geographically. It has also increased awareness of other organizations (CFDA, CEDU, ASO's, NACCA). They share an integrity and common purpose regarding the delivery of service and leadership. They share a common voice about the ABSN goals and objectives. It is like a hub with a focus on the practitioner. In the process it has expanded everyone's networks. Even the mindset of WD has changed in the last two years.

The Advisory Committee is a neutral, multi-stakeholder group. It is the least political and parochial of any Aboriginal group in the province.

4.5 Issues

Participants identified several issues relating to either the ABSN program or Aboriginal entrepreneurship in BC.

4.5.1 ABSN Website

Participants described an organizational issue that was causing some discomfort regarding the relationship between ABSN BC and SBBC in terms of the ABSN website. Comments included:

The website... was controversial.

The website was developed through the SBBC with no input from ABSN.

The utility of the site is well-recognized but there is lingering angst about the website. Who owns it? The Steering Committee? SBBC? There is a grey area of intellectual property and control.



They were developed without long-term planning. There was no thought given to their maintenance or to upgrades, troubleshooting or repairs.

4.5.2 Management Structure

There are some issues related to the management structure of ABSN BC and it was suggested by participants that more structure and clearer reporting linkages are required to improve program functioning. Further, the issue of autonomy for the Society was a topic of on-going discussion.

4.5.3 Funding

A key issue facing Aboriginal entrepreneurs is access to funding, and, on an individual level, loans are difficult to obtain and finding the capital necessary to start a business is a major barrier.

4.5.4 Access

With three Aboriginal service centers in BC, there are more sites available at which individuals can gain access to ABSN services. However, the gap analysis focused on rural British Columbia, and the REACH sites have been selected in order to respond to those rural needs. Clearly, further assessment of urban needs is necessary in order to improve access to services.

4.5.5 Awareness

Outputs have not been well-tracked, making it difficult to determine how many people have access to ABSN services but overall, client awareness of ABSN's programs and services appears to be increasing. However, because ABSN is partnered with other organizations, clients may not necessarily be aware that the services they receive come from the ABSN program. Despite this, as long as these services are reaching the appropriate audience, name recognition may not actually be necessary. For example:

Individuals who live in small communities, or on reserve, they have no capital and can't get it from family and friends, often don't have a credit record, won't attract venture capital.

The gap analysis was rural in focus, now we want to focus on the needs of urban Aboriginals.

The REACH sites are located in an organization, ABSN is just a partner, there is a sign but they probably don't notice it. It's not an issue for me if they don't recognize the ABSN name.

4.5.6 Stability

Participants explained that, initially, ABSN BC did not focus on the long term, and this was at least partially due to the fact that funding was short-term. They commented that although funding is improving, it is still difficult to see a concrete impact from the money that has been spent. Increased funding is necessary in order to improve services and demonstrate more concrete effects. Although plans exist that could be implemented over a longer period, without guaranteed funding and the certainty that the program will exist for many years to come, it will be impossible to fully implement them. Some examples of comments include:

In the future we will be nurturing regional providers and taking a broader systemic approach. It is more creative, a bigger bang, but does create some confusion.

They need to develop capacity more, more time is needed.



There is a real advantage to tying financial resources to specific program outcomes. It protects the money and focuses what you are doing. There are stronger outcomes as a result.

You can't tell what the impact of the money really is but there are some visible outputs.

4.5.7 ABSN Linkages

Participants commented that although networks exist at the provincial and national levels, they have very little effect on services. There is a lack of communication between ABSN programs in the four regions and ABSN BC is not very involved in any national networks. Comments include:

B.C. didn't want to buy in to the national design for the ABSN.

We don't talk to other ABSN regions. I don't know what is going on.

4.6 Suggestions for the Future

Participants in the focus groups and interviews provided a number of suggestions to improve ABSN BC. Some of their suggestions dealt with current aspects of the program. In particular, the ABSN program should continue to use a holistic approach to program implementation, maintain increased networking between organizations, and promote the use of technology to obtain business information. These program components were seen to be very important aspects of the current program and should be continued in the future.

Other suggestions dealt with specific needs or changes necessary to provide the best service possible and included:

- Increased project funding over the long-term would permit ABSN BC to produce concrete impacts and produce program growth.
- Aboriginal-specific programs and resources should be developed in order to provide useful business information.
- Urban needs should be assessed in order to serve all segments of the Aboriginal population effectively.
- ABSN BC could operate more efficiently if the program was given more autonomy and the management structure was revamped.
- An attempt should be made to resolve issues faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs, such as lack of funding, lack of access to program sites, and program awareness.
- Conflict regarding the ABSN website should be resolved quickly so that the program can focus on providing service.
- Tracking of outputs should be improved so that any effects of program activities can be better measured.
- Nationally, British Columbia does not network with other provinces; interest is limited in this area but should be expanded to benefit from the experiences of other ABSN programs.



Chapter 7 Summary and Conclusions

1.0 Summary of Evaluation Evidence

The objectives for this evaluation of the ABSN were as follows:

- To describe the **background and development** of the ABSN in the four Western regions;
- To describe the **implementation** of the ABSN in the four Western regions;
- To determine the **success** of the ABSN in achieving its short-, intermediate- and long-term outcomes;
- To determine the **continued relevance** of the ABSN; and
- To determine the **effectiveness** of the ABSN in meeting its objectives compared to other alternatives.

This report has documented many instances of the ABSN attaining these objectives. To summarize our findings, the following table has been developed, based on the key research questions developed in the study's Data Collection Matrix.

Table 5: Evidence of evaluation findings by research question

Research Questions	Evaluation Findings
Background and Development	
To describe the background and development of the ABSN in the four Western regions.	<p>The ABSN initiative in Canada is part of the Aboriginal Business Development Initiative. This initiative was particularly directed toward Western Canada in order to provide access to capital and non-financial services to Aboriginal people and communities.</p> <p>In Manitoba, the CSBC established a series of sharing circles with Aboriginal business intermediaries in 1999.</p> <p>In Saskatchewan, the ABSN program was based on needs outlined in meetings with stakeholders such as Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations personnel, tribal council members, Aboriginal entrepreneurs, and Aboriginal educational institutions.</p> <p>In Alberta, a three-year plan was developed based on a study conducted by Western Management that identified Aboriginal business needs and gaps in service.</p> <p>In British Columbia, the ABSN program was based on the 2001 Gap Analysis conducted by Simon Fraser University.</p>
Implementation	
To describe the implementation of the ABSN in the four Western provinces.	<p>In Manitoba, the ABSN program involved: awareness and information dissemination; direct service to clients by telephone or in person; utilization of regional sites; website development and modification for regional use; an Aboriginal Business Plan competition; and Aboriginal youth business training.</p> <p>In Saskatchewan, the ABSN program involved: partnerships with existing organizations, with a 24-hour help line available to assist partners; website development; mobile resource library development; Bookkeeping in a Shoebox workshops; youth entrepreneurship initiatives; organization of an Advisory Committee; and resource development.</p> <p>In Alberta, the ABSN program involved: website development; direct service to clients by telephone, online, and in person; Aboriginal Awareness Training for service providers; distribution of workbooks,</p>



guides, DVDs, and workshop information; and organization of two Aboriginal conferences.

In British Columbia, the ABSN program involved: SFU gap analysis; formation of ABSN Steering Committee; development of REACH sites; website development; development of a resource binder; Youth at Risk internship program; partnerships with service providers; and identification of private sector partners.

Success/ Outcomes

To determine the success of the ABSN in achieving its short-term outcomes.

Across Canada, Aboriginals' recognition of the need for business information has increased and the regional ABSN programs are able to supply that information.

Although Aboriginal clients in all four provinces are more aware of the business services available to them, they do not necessarily recognize ABSN as the service provider handling these services.

While Aboriginal businesses have increased access to ABSN services, this was accomplished differently in the four provinces. In Manitoba, services are provided both at program sites and as an outreach service in other locations. In Saskatchewan, program sites are partnered with pre-existing service providers within Aboriginal communities. In Alberta, the use of videoconferencing permits service provision in remote and rural areas. In British Columbia, the number of rural sites has been increased, but there is still a need for urban access to program services.

More systematic tracking of outputs is necessary in order to determine the frequency at which program services are used.

To determine the success of the ABSN in achieving its intermediate-term outcomes.

Partners and business intermediaries in all regions are more aware of one another's activities. In Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the use of other service providers as ABSN partners allows those service providers to increase the type and improve the quality of services offered.

Across all four provinces, ABSN has increased the networking opportunities between service providers. In Saskatchewan and British Columbia, other service providers function as partners and help provide ABSNs services. There is little networking between the four regions, but not all regions expressed interest in improving national networks. Networking and sharing among regions needs to be formalized in order to improve the program.

To determine the success of the ABSN in achieving its long-term outcomes.

In Manitoba, both Aboriginal adults and Aboriginal youth now see entrepreneurship as a viable option for the future that will allow them to remain in their communities. In Saskatchewan, people are returning to the reserves and starting businesses there. In Alberta and British Columbia, ABSN fosters a sense of empowerment and independence among Aboriginal entrepreneurs that encourages business start-up.

Individual access to capital remains the largest barrier to Aboriginal entrepreneurship in all regions. In Manitoba, ABSN helps entrepreneurs contact lenders and investors. In Saskatchewan, poverty is a major issue, making it even more difficult to obtain funding. In Alberta and British Columbia, it is also difficult for entrepreneurs to obtain funding and the money must therefore be effectively spent.

In all four regions, ABSN has provided a great deal of assistance to Aboriginal entrepreneurs looking to start businesses. This includes information, practical assistance learning the necessary skills, education and training, and referrals.



There is an increasing need for information about business growth and expansion. In Manitoba, Aboriginal entrepreneurs need assistance developing their networks in order to expand their businesses. In Alberta, ABSN assists entrepreneurs in maintaining their new businesses and eventually expanding them.

Continued Relevance

To determine the continued relevance of the ABSN.

ABSN has worked toward fulfilling the majority of its objectives. General business information is more accessible to Aboriginal people and they are more aware of where to access the information and can retrieve the information more effectively online, with hard copies, or in person. Information has been customized for the particular regional needs of each province, but not necessarily for the Aboriginal community as a whole. Manitoba and British Columbia prefer to use information targeted toward Aboriginals, while Alberta and Saskatchewan use information designed for all entrepreneurs, because the business market is identical. A national network of service providers has not been developed and more contact between the regions is needed.

Communities have increased access to resources and awareness about what services are available. ABSN has helped build technological infrastructure in Alberta and Saskatchewan and encouraged Aboriginal people to remain on or return to reserves in Saskatchewan and Manitoba

Effectiveness

To determine the effectiveness of the ABSN in meeting its objectives compared to other alternatives.

All four regions identified personal contact as an important factor in the effectiveness of ABSN; without personal attention and strong individual relationships, services could not be provided as effectively. This personalization extends to the regional character of the programs: ABSN is very different in each of the four regions, because it has been adapted to serve the particular needs of the province. This regional uniqueness is a major strength of ABSN.

All regions expressed concerns about program stability over the long-term and increased program funding. Services can be provided most effectively with more funding guaranteed over a longer period of time.

There is a great deal of interest in youth entrepreneurship. In Manitoba, ABSN has focused on educating youth on entrepreneurship as a possible career choice. In Saskatchewan, youth are employed at ABSN sites in order to build skills and increase interest in entrepreneurship. In Alberta, ABSN needs to continue to encourage youth interest in entrepreneurship.

The implementation of ABSN has provided several lessons about business development programming for Aboriginals. The importance of cultural sensitivity was highlighted in all regions. The use of technology was also a major concern in all regions, including the improvement of infrastructure, building skills with computers, and the provision of service online. However, the most important lesson learned was the importance of a personal connection between client and service provider; this connection permits the most effective service provision possible.



2.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the information collected in this evaluation, twelve conclusions can be drawn. These are presented according to the original initiative objectives.

Has ABSN made general business information accessible to Aboriginal people?

- 2.1 In all four Western regions, ABSN provides a wide variety of business information to Aboriginal people, either online, with hard copies, or in person.
- 2.2 The Aboriginal population's recognition of the need for business information has increased.
- 2.3 There is an increasing need for information about business maintenance and expansion.

Has ABSN customized information products?

- 2.4 Information products have been customized to the particular regional needs of each province. In many cases, information is further customized to the individual entrepreneur or community to best meet unique information needs.
- 2.5 Some provinces customize their information products to the Aboriginal population; others do not, reflecting a variety of approaches to assist Aboriginal entrepreneurs to integrate into the non-Aboriginal business environment.
- 2.6 Information can be best customized when a personal relationship exists between client and service provider.

Has ABSN provided local access to information, referrals, and some services?

- 2.7 Aboriginal businesses have increased access to ABSN services, although this was accomplished differently in the four provinces.
- 2.8 Website development and regionalization has improved local access to resources where supported by technological infrastructure
- 2.9 The Aboriginal population is more aware of the existence of business development services, but they are not necessarily aware that these services are provided by ABSN.
- 2.10 More systematic tracking of outputs is necessary in order to determine how many clients access ABSN services and how frequently they do so.

Has ABSN promoted the development of a national network of Aboriginal business and economic service providers?

- 2.11 Within each province, ABSN has created and maintained networks of Aboriginal service providers by supplying networking opportunities.
- 2.12 Little networking occurs between the four provinces; however, not all provinces expressed interest in improving relations among the regional ABSN programs. Improving national networks of ABSN programs could improve the program in each province while maintaining regional uniqueness.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, several recommendations are advanced for consideration.

Recommendation 1

The role of WD in ABSN should continue over the long-term. The initiative has worked toward fulfilling its objectives and has effected useful changes in each of the four Western provinces.

Recommendation 2

Currently, each province operates a separate ABSN project, customized to respond to particular population, needs, and contexts. This regional uniqueness is a particular strength of the initiative and should be maintained.



Recommendation 3

There is a need for ABSN to be coordinated across the Western region. This coordination should be decentralized and offer core resources to be used by all regions. Networking and sharing among regions should be formalized so that all can benefit from local lessons learned and resources that have been developed.

Recommendation 4

Tracking of outputs should be more systematic so that the impact of ABSN can be more precisely understood, both provincially and nationally. Clear definitions of terms, including agreed-upon outputs, are required to facilitate data collection and tracking.

Recommendation 5

Funding for special projects, such as internships and youth employment, should be available to ABSN projects to encourage development. The cost of travel is a major issue in all four provinces because of the emphasis on rural and remote communities; therefore funding should be provided to alleviate this burden as well.

Recommendation 6

ABSN should continue to participate in community development activities, including capacity building and development of technological infrastructure, as an additional method of promoting entrepreneurship in certain areas. At the individual level, capacity building can enhance business literacy and personal empowerment; at the community level, networking and increased interaction can benefit the community as a whole for many years to come.



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Appendix 1

Data Collection Matrix



Data Collection Matrix for the Aboriginal Business Service Network

The ABSN Data Collection Matrix (DCM) presented in the following pages summarizes the recommended approach to the evaluation of the Aboriginal Business Service Network. The DCM links the evaluation topics identified in the ABSN Program Logic Model with the related evaluation questions, performance indicators and/or research methods, and data sources. This cross-referenced tool keeps the evaluation research focused and manageable so that resources are used wisely to collect the most pertinent information. The DCM provides a documented common understanding of the scope of the research prior to undertaking any data collection activities.

The DCM is organized according to the approach outlined by Rossi et al (1999)⁹ with a focus on process (administrative supports/ inputs, implementation process, and outputs) and outcomes (short-term, intermediate-term, and long-term). In addition, topics of particular interest to WD, specifically success, relevance and effectiveness, will also be analyzed based on the data collected according to the ABSN Program Logic Model.

The basic program theory underlying the ABSN is as follows:

- a) If Aboriginal communities' needs for tailored information have been accurately identified so that this kind of program can make a substantial difference in the Aboriginal business community; and
- b) If the ABSN still fits with governmental priorities; and
- c) If the ABSN has used resources efficiently in terms of linkages to CBSC and/ or other existing infrastructure, developed efficient management and staffing models, and identified Aboriginal and other business partners and intermediaries in the community; and
- d) If adequate resources have been provided to support such a network, so that
- e) A core product line of general and tailored business information is provided, related services delivered, networks built, and marketing and awareness activities about these products and services provided; then
- f) Aboriginals' recognition of the need for business information is increased, Aboriginal businesses have increased awareness of and access to ABSN services, and those services are used more frequently by Aboriginal businesses; and
- g) Partners and business intermediaries increase supports and services for Aboriginal businesses and provincial and/ or national networks of Aboriginal and other business and economic service providers are strengthened; and
- h) Awareness of entrepreneurship as an option for Aboriginal people is increased, and Aboriginal entrepreneurs have increased access to capital and experience increased success with business start-ups and business growth.

⁹ Rossi, Peter H, Howard E. Freeman & Mark W. Lipsey. Evaluation: A Systematic Approach. 6th edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (1999).



ABSN Data Collection Matrix

Evaluation Objectives		Evaluation	Indicators/ Method	Data Sources
Background & Development	1. To describe the background and development of the ABSN in the four Western regions.	1.1 What impetus led to the development of ABSN?	Description & document review Key informant interviews	WD files/ documents WD staff interview
		1.2 What were the government priorities surrounding this type of programming? Does the ABSN continue to fit with WD priorities?	Description & document review Key informant interviews Gap analysis	WD files/ documents WD staff interviews
		1.3 What needs related to the program were identified in the Aboriginal community? Have these needs changed over time?	Document review Key informant interviews Issue identification Gap analysis	WD files/ documents Regional documents WD/ Regional staff interviews
		1.4 What administrative supports are in place to support ABSN implementation: a) Links to CBSC/ existing infrastructure?	Description & on-site observation Key informant interviews	Regional staff interviews
		b) Efficiency of management/ staff structure?	Description Key informant interviews	Regional staff/contractor interviews
		c) Identification of appropriate partners/ business intermediaries?	Document review Description & analysis of partner types Focus group	Partner lists Partner/ business intermediary focus group
		d) Adequacy of resources?	Document review Description & analysis of budgets Key informant interviews	Regional budgets Regional staff interviews
Implementation	2. To describe the implementation of the ABSN in the four Western regions	2.1 Is a core product line of business information (whether generic or regionalized, and with an Aboriginal style) provided?	Document review Description & analysis of web services, materials & publications, # products disseminated, # web hits	Program materials, annual reports



Implementation (cont'd)	2. To describe the implementation of the ABSN in the four Western regions (cont'd)	2.2 Has a network of Aboriginal business/ economic service providers been developed?	Document review Description & analysis of # & type of network members Focus group	Annual reports Partner/ business intermediary focus group
		2.3 Are advice, counseling, referrals, and/ or mentoring services provided?	Document review Description & analysis of # contacts, referrals, etc. Focus group	Annual reports Business user focus group Business user telephone survey
		2.4 Has a delivery network: for these products and services been developed?	Document review Description of network links, services offered Analysis of # workshops, other events/ activities Analysis of # attendees, users etc. Satisfaction ratings/ evaluations	Annual reports Business user focus group Other evaluation reports/ summaries
		2.5 Have marketing & awareness activities been provided?	Document review Description & analysis of promotional materials/ activities, # circulated Focus group	Program materials Annual reports Business user focus group Business user telephone survey
Success/ Outcomes	3. To determine the success of the ABSN in achieving its short-term outcomes .	3.1 Has Aboriginals' recognition of the need for business information increased?	Focus groups Key informant interviews Anecdotal evidence	Partner/ business intermediary focus group Business user focus group Regional staff interviews Business user telephone survey
		3.2 Have Aboriginal businesses increased their awareness of ABSN services?	Focus groups Key informant interviews Anecdotal evidence	Partner/ business intermediary focus group Business user focus group Regional staff interviews Business user telephone survey
		3.3 Have Aboriginal businesses had increased access to ABSN services?	Focus groups Key informant interviews Anecdotal evidence	Partner/ business intermediary focus group Business user focus group Regional staff interviews Business user telephone survey



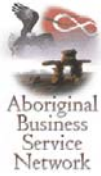
		3.4 Are ABSN services used more frequently by Aboriginal businesses?	Document review Key informant interviews Anecdotal evidence	Annual reports Regional staff interviews
Success/ Outcomes (cont'd)	4. To determine the success of the ABSN in achieving its intermediate-term outcomes .	4.1 Do partners and business intermediaries provide increased supports & services for Aboriginal businesses as a result of the ABSN?	Focus group Anecdotal evidence Key informant interview	Partner/ business intermediary focus group Regional staff interviews Emergent
		4.2 Have provincial and national networks of Aboriginal business & economic service providers been strengthened as a result of the ABSN?	Focus group Anecdotal evidence Key informant interview	Partner/ business intermediary focus group Regional staff interviews Emergent
	5. To determine the success of the ABSN in achieving its long-term outcomes .	5.1 Has awareness of entrepreneurship as an option for Aboriginal people increased as a result of the ABSN?	Analysis of data	All sources
		5.2 Have aboriginal entrepreneurs been able to access capital more easily as a result of the ABSN?	Analysis of data	All sources
		5.3 Have Aboriginal entrepreneurs experienced increased success with business start-ups as a result of the ABSN?	Analysis of data	All sources
		5.4 Have Aboriginal entrepreneurs experienced increased success with business growth as a result of the ABSN?	Analysis of data	All sources
	Continued Relevance	6. To determine the continued relevance of the ABSN	6.1 Does ABSN continue to meet government and department priorities?	Analysis of data
6.2 Does ABSN meet the identified community needs?			Analysis of data	All sources
Effectiveness	7. To determine the effectiveness of the ABSN in meeting its objectives compared to other alternatives.	7.1 Is ABSN the most effective way to achieve the stated objectives?	Analysis of data	All sources
		7.2 What alternatives to ABSN exist to achieve the same objectives?	Analysis of data	All sources
		7.3 Are there any unanticipated outcomes resulting from the ABSN?	Analysis of data	All sources
		7.4 What lessons can be learned about business development programming for Aboriginals?	Analysis of data	All sources



Appendix 2

ABSN Business Users Focus Group Guide





Evaluation of the Aboriginal Business Services Network: ABS N Business Users Focus Group Guide

The Aboriginal Business Services Network is an important initiative offered through Canada Business Services Centres (CBSC) in Western Canada. It has been acknowledged that Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and skills to increase their ability to access capital, grow their businesses and achieve success. The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the ABSN program and the degree of success achieved in reaching its goals and objectives.

Your decision to participate in no way waives your legal rights, nor releases the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research, please contact:
Kathy Locke, Audit and Evaluation Officer Western Economic Diversification Canada Phone (780) 495-6047
Fax (780) 495-6223 Email kathy.locke@wd.gc.ca

-
- Welcome and thank you for coming
 - Introduce roles of the facilitator and participants
 - *My role is to ask questions and to make notes in order to identify general themes that come out of the discussion. I will also be taping this session to help me capture more of your comments.*
 - Your role is to share feelings, thoughts, opinions and experiences as freely and honestly as you wish.
 - Why we are here
 - As you know, you are here to provide Western Economic Diversification Canada with some feedback regarding the Aboriginal Business Services Network (ABSN).
 - I don't work for either Western Economic Diversification (WD) or ABSN. I work for Barrington Research Group, Inc., an independent evaluation firm in Calgary.
 - Our firm has been contracted by WD to evaluate the ABSN.
 - It is important for us to understand your thoughts about your experience with ABSN.
 - Review the consent form
 - Any questions?
 - Housekeeping
 - Get started, getting a general sense of who is in the room. Ask everyone to give a brief introduction of themselves.

Press Record Now!



Questions:

(2.5)

1. How did you learn about ABSN services?

(2.4)

2. What types of ABSN materials have you used? (e.g., web-based, pamphlets)

(2.3)

3. What types of ABSN services have you used? (e.g., advice, counseling, referrals, mentoring services)

(3.1)

4. Do you think that the need for business information has increased within the Aboriginal community over the last three years? Can you give me examples?

(3.2, 3.4)

5. Are you more aware of ABSN services than you were three years ago? Why? Are you using the services more?

(3.3)

6. Do you think ABSN services are more accessible that they were three years ago?
7. Do you have any other comments about the needs of Aboriginal entrepreneurs or individuals planning a business?
8. What challenges or barriers have you faced when trying to start a business?
9. What should we be asking ABSN business users in our telephone survey of them?
[*Explain planned survey.*]

➤ Last words

Is there anything else that you can tell us about ABSN?

➤ Thank you

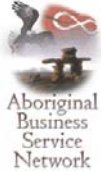
We would like to thank you very much for volunteering to share your thoughts with us today. We know how valuable your time is so thank you for helping us with this. You can be assured that the information you have provided to us tonight will help ABSN improve their services in the future. Thank for your contribution to this evaluation!



Appendix 3

ABSN Business Intermediates Focus Group Guide





Evaluation of the Aboriginal Business Services Network: ABSN Business Intermediaries Focus Group Guide

The Aboriginal Business Services Network is an important initiative offered through Canada Business Services Centres (CBSC) in Western Canada. It has been acknowledged that Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and skills to increase their ability to access capital, grow their businesses and achieve success. The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the ABSN program and the degree of success achieved in reaching its goals and objectives.

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-
- Welcome and thank you for coming
 - Introduce roles of the facilitator and participants
 - *My role is to ask questions and to make notes in order to identify general themes that come out of the discussion. I will also be taping this session to help me capture more of your comments.*
 - Your role is to share feelings, thoughts, opinions and experiences as freely and honestly as you wish.
 - Why we are here
 - As you know, you are here to provide Western Economic Diversification Canada with some feedback regarding the Aboriginal Business Services Network (ABSN).
 - I don't work for either Western Economic Diversification (WD) or ABSN. I work for Barrington Research Group, Inc., an independent evaluation firm in Calgary.
 - Our firm has been contracted by WD to evaluate the ABSN.
 - It is important for us to understand your thoughts about your experience with ABSN.
 - Review the consent form
 - Any questions?
 - Housekeeping
 - Get started, getting a general sense of who is in the room. Ask everyone to give a brief introduction of themselves



Questions:

1. What are the needs of Aboriginal businesses and those wanting to start a business?
2. Is a network of Aboriginal business and service providers being developed in your region?

What role do you think ABSN has played in that development?

3. Has the need for business information increased within the Aboriginal community over the last three years?

Can you give me examples?

4. Is your agency providing more supports and services for Aboriginal businesses/ individuals as a result of the ABSN?

Can you give me examples of spin-offs for your agency?

5. Have provincial networks of Aboriginal business and economic service providers been strengthened as a result of the ABSN?

Have national networks strengthened as a result of the ABSN?

6. What challenges or barriers exist for Aboriginals who want to start their own business?

7. Do you have any suggestions for how to access ABSN users in order to interview them by telephone?

8. Do you have any recommendations for WD regarding ABSN?

➤ Last words

Is there anything else that you can tell me about the ABSN?

Future Directions?

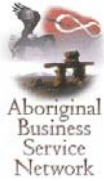
Thank you very much for volunteering to share your thoughts with us today. We know how valuable your time is so thank you for helping us. You can be assured that the information you have provided to us tonight will help ABSN improve their services in the future.



Appendix 4

ABSN Regional Staff Interview Guide





Evaluation of the Aboriginal Business Services Network: ABS Regional Staff Interview Guide

The Aboriginal Business Services Network is an important initiative offered through Canada Business Services Centres (CBSC) in Western Canada. It has been acknowledged that Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and skills to increase their ability to access capital, grow their businesses and achieve success. The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the ABSN program and the degree of success achieved in reaching its goals and objectives.

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-
- (1.3)
1. What are the business needs in the Aboriginal community that can be met by the ABSN program?
 - (1.3)
2. Do you think that these needs have changed over time? In what way?
 - (1.4)
3. Can you describe the relationship between ABSN and the Canadian Business Service Centres (CBSC)?
 - (1.4)
4. What are your thoughts about the way the management structure is set up for ABSN?
 - (1.4)
5. What are your thoughts about the way staff are deployed/ contracted for ABSN?
 - (1.4)
6. How adequate do you think the present resources are to accomplish ABSN's goals? How do you utilize the resources you currently have to use them the most effectively?
 - (3.1)
7. Do you think the need for business information has increased within the Aboriginal community? Can you give me examples?
 - (3.2)
8. Are Aboriginal businesses more aware of ABSN services than they were, say, three years ago? How can you tell?
 - (3.3)



9. Do Aboriginal businesses have greater access to ABSN services than they did, say, three years ago? Why do you say that?
- (3.4)
10. Do you think ABSN services are used more frequently by Aboriginal businesses than they were three years ago? What evidence supports your view? [Obtain related documents]
- (4.1)
11. Do you think that there are more supports and services provided by partners and business intermediaries as a result of ABSN? Examples?
- (4.2)
12. Do you think that provincial and national networks of Aboriginal business and economic service providers have been strengthened because of ABSN? What evidence supports your view?
- (3.5)
13. What challenges or barriers to starting a business have ABSN users identified? Are the challenges different on and off reserve?
14. What should we be asking ABSN business users in our telephone survey of them? [*Explain planned survey.*]

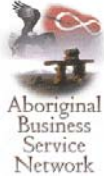
Thank you very much for your contribution to this evaluation!



Appendix 5

WD Senior Staff Interview Protocol





Evaluation of the Aboriginal Business Services Network: WD Senior Staff Interview Protocol

The Aboriginal Business Services Network is an important initiative offered through Canada Business Services Centres (CBSC) in Western Canada. It has been acknowledged that Aboriginal entrepreneurs need information and skills to increase their ability to access capital, grow their businesses and achieve success. The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the ABSN program and the degree of success achieved in reaching its goals and objectives.

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-
- (1.2)
15. What are the government priorities surrounding Aboriginal Entrepreneurship?
- (7.1)
16. Is ABSN the most effective way to achieve the goals of the government?
Do you think there are better alternatives?
- (6.1)
17. Does ABSN continue to meet the Federal Governments priorities?
- (1.2)
18. Does the ABSN continue to fit in with WD priorities?
- (1.2)
5. Do you see the relationship between WD and ABSN evolving over time?

Thank you very much for your contribution to this evaluation!

