

*National Synthesis of Mid-Term
Review of Regional
Bilateral Agreements*

*Evaluation and Data Development
Strategic Policy
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Preface

From the Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) to the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS): The Way Forward

The report, *The National Synthesis of Mid-Term Review of Regional Bilateral Agreements*, summarises the findings from a Mid-Term Review conducted by HRDC and 15 separate RBA holders in Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta during 1997-98. The studies conducted by the agreement holders focus on the administration and delivery of programs under their respective agreements.

The findings in the report demonstrate that there is consensus among RBA holders that programs have benefited communities, in both economic and social terms. Key recommendations that arose out of the local reviews focus on the need for improvements relating to capacity building, planning and decision making, accountability process and tools, and gender equality in access and participation.

The following describes operating features of the AHRDS implemented in 1999 as the successor to the RBA Program, to help address the need for improvement in these four areas cited in the Report recommendations.

I. Capacity Building

The AHRDS includes funding of \$30 million dedicated to capacity building. Each Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA) holder submits a capacity building plan to HRDC as part of the agreement. This plan is meant to outline how the funds dedicated to capacity building will improve administrative, human and technological resources so that an organisation can become more efficient and effective.

Other capacity building initiatives that are taking place under the AHRDS include funding the development and delivery of training for Aboriginal Employment Counsellors.

II. Planning and Decision-making

AHRDA holders submit an action plan and annual expenditure plan. These plans outline the description of objectives, priorities, planned agreements and activities for the year with respect to each of its programs.

AHRDA holders also submit an annual report, which outlines their achievements. By developing these plans and reports, AHRDA holders can better plan for the future.

III. Accountability Process and Tools

HRDC has developed and conducted training sessions for Regional HRDC staff as well as AHRDA holders on all dimensions of data management, systems, accountability, and results.

HRDC has and continues to develop tools and mechanisms to address reporting and data compliance issues consistent with HRDC systems requirements and standards.

IV. Gender Equality in Access and Participation in the AHRDS

AHRD Agreements require agreement holders to provide equitable access to programs and services to all clients. Overall, 49 percent of all AHRDS participants are women, which is greater than Aboriginal women's participation in the labour force.

It is also important to note that in 1999, the First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative (FNICCI) was integrated in the AHRDS, as a parental support and early childhood development initiative. At present, the FNICCI funds 7,000 child care spaces in 390 child care centres in First Nation and Inuit communities.

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Acknowledgements

This report summarizes the findings from a Mid-Term Review conducted by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBA)-holder organizations during 1997-1998. It is based on findings from studies of 15 RBAs. This report also includes an assessment of the initiative's accountability framework, a comparison of HRDC and mid-term review client data, and the strategic evaluation plan for the RBA initiative.

The study benefited from the contribution of numerous participants. In particular, the dedication of Sheila Dohoo Faure and Céline Pinsent from Goss Gilroy Inc. and Francine Whiteduck from Whiteduck Resources Inc. made this project possible.

The Assembly of First Nations, The Inuit Tapirisat of Canada and the Métis National Council provided guidance by serving on an advisory committee.

The Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) within Human Resources Development Canada supported the evaluation team by facilitating meetings, responding quickly to information requests and providing timely feed-back. The project also received much support from HRDC's regional offices evaluation officers and program coordinators.

Following is a list, by region, of the 15 RBA-holders organizations that participated in the reviews. Special thanks are due to them and the local consulting firms who conducted the studies.

Newfoundland

- *Miawpukek First Nation*
- *Federation of Newfoundland Indians*

Quebec

- *Kativik Regional Administration*
- *Assembly of First Nations of Labrador and Quebec*

Ontario

- *London District Chiefs Council*
- *Nishnawbe Aski Nation*
- *Métis Nation of Ontario*
- *Six Nations Onkwehon:we*

Saskatchewan

- *Federation of Saskatchewan Indians*
- *Métis Nation of Saskatchewan*

Alberta

- *Métis Nation of Alberta*
- *Métis Settlements General Council*
- *Confederacy of Treaty 6*
- *Treaty 7 Economic Development Corporation*
- *Treaty 8 First Nations Human Resources Development Board*

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Methodology.....	1
2. National Synthesis	5
2.1 Introduction.....	5
2.2 HRDC-RBA-Holders — General Context	7
2.3 Managing, Designing and Delivery at Level of RBA-holder	14
2.3.1 Managing — Planning and Financial Controls	14
2.3.2 Managing — Design and Delivery	16
2.4 Interventions, Participants and Results	24
2.4.1 Interventions.....	24
2.4.2 Participants.....	25
2.4.3 Results	26
2.5 Data and Accountability.....	26
2.6 Costs	28
2.7 Client and Community Satisfaction.....	29
2.7.1 Client Satisfaction	30
2.7.2 Community Satisfaction	30
2.8 Recommendations for Improvements	31
2.8.1 Recommendations	31
2.8.2 Lessons Learned	33
3. Comparison of Mid-Term Review Data and the RBA Client Data File	35
3.1 The RBA Client Data File	35
3.2 Methodology.....	35
3.3 Results.....	36
3.3.1 Analysis 1: How many client records are missing?.....	36
3.3.2 Analysis 2: What variables are missing?	38
3.4 Summary.....	39
4. RBA Accountability	43
4.1 Planning, Reporting and Accountability Structure	43
4.1.1 Accountability and Evaluation Frameworks	44
4.1.2 Program Model	44
4.2 RBA Program Models	45
4.2.1 RBA-Holders	46
4.2.2 RBA — HRDC	51

4.3	Assessment of the Accountability Framework	53
4.3.1	Existing Key Results	53
4.3.2	Assessment of Existing Key Result Indicators	54
4.3.3	Additional Key Results	55
4.4	Review Strategy	57
4.4.1	AHRDS Agreement Holders' Day-to-Day Management	57
4.4.2	HRDC Accountability Requirements	58
4.4.3	Implementation Evaluation (optional)	58
4.4.4	Special Study (optional)	59
4.4.5	Interim Evaluation	59
4.4.6	Final Summative Evaluation.....	60
5.	Evaluation Options	61
5.1	Evaluation Context.....	61
5.1.1	Challenges	62
5.1.2	Evaluation Principles and Objectives	64
5.2	Evaluation Issues/Questions	65
5.2.1	Initiative-level Issues.....	65
5.2.2	RBA-level Issues	66
5.3	Evaluation Data Sources	68
5.4	Evaluation Components	68
5.4.1	Process Evaluation of RBA Initiative.....	69
5.4.2	RBA-level Impact Evaluation.....	70
5.4.3	Process-focussed Self-Assessment	71
5.4.4	Capacity Assessment.....	72
5.5	Evaluation Options	73

List of Tables

Table 2.1 RBAs Participating in Mid-Term Review	6
Table 2.2 Number and \$ Value of RBAs and Contribution Agreements by Province and Territory	8
Table 2.3 Summary off Costs Reported in Mid-Term Reviews.....	29
Table 3.1 Comparison of Number of Participants as Reported in Mid-Term Reviews and HRDC-RBA Client Data File	37
Table 3.2 Results from RBA Client Data File for RBAs Participating in Mid-Term Review	40-41
Chart: Logic Chart for Regional Bilateral Agreements — Holder	50
Chart: Logic Chart for Regional Bilateral Agreements — HRDC	52
Table 5.1 Summary of Evaluation Components	69

Executive Summary

Background

On January 23, 1996, HRDC signed the first of three National Framework Agreements with national Aboriginal organizations: the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. These agreements formed the foundation for the negotiation of separate Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) with 54 Aboriginal organizations. These provided the opportunity for RBA-holders to design and deliver their own labour market programs and services.

This report offers a summary of findings from a Mid-Term Review conducted by HRDC and RBA-holders during 1997-98. The report provides a summary of findings from the studies conducted by 15 RBA-holders who focused on the administration and delivery of programs under their own agreements. It also presents an assessment of the RBA initiative's accountability framework, the HRDC RBA Client Data File, and the strategic evaluation plan for the RBA initiative.

Methodology of the Mid-Term Review Report

The analysis presented in this report is based on information collected from a number of sources. Meetings were held and interviews were completed with representatives of the Aboriginal Relations Office, HRDC, and of the organizations with whom HRDC signed National Framework Agreements.¹ Reviews of the studies conducted by RBAs, along with other RBA-related documents were also completed. Telephone interviews were completed with staff of regional offices of HRDC and of Aboriginal organizations; and visits were made to each of the five regions (Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) involved in the Mid-Term Review to discuss issues in more detail with RBA-holders and HRDC regional office representatives.

Key Findings from the Mid-Term Reviews conducted by RBA-Holders

The reviews conducted by RBA-holders contained findings and recommendations that were specific to their agreements. The following provides a brief overview of the key findings that were relevant to most, if not all, who participated in the Review.

- **The signing of the agreements.** Many factors facilitated the signing of the agreements. They included the recognition that there was a need for more Aboriginal control over program design and delivery; that basic capacity for control had been developed; and that there was a successful history of joint projects with HRDC.

¹ Due to scheduling problem, an interview was not conducted with staff of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. However, they participated in the advisory committee meeting.

- **Consistency with NFA principles.** delivery by RBA-holders is consistent with most of the principles set out in the National Framework Agreements. For example, there is Aboriginal control over program administration, including program design and delivery. There is flexibility in program design and delivery to accommodate unique and special circumstances of Aboriginal peoples (although more flexibility, for example, is needed to meet the needs of remote communities). There is a focus on labour market needs of participants, communities, and employers.
- **Partnership.** Overall, the partnership between HRDC and RBA-holders contributed to the successful facilitation of program design and delivery. In general, there is less bureaucracy, less time spent on administration, and a greater degree of decision-making authority.
- **Capacity.** RBA-holders were at different levels of capacity. Some achieved a high level; others need improvements throughout their organizations. There was little evidence of RBA-holders having formal capacity building plans.
- **Interventions and client results.** RBA-holders offer a wide range of interventions, including wage subsidies, self-employment benefit, job creation partnerships, purchase of training, job entry, job placement, pre-employment preparation, basic adult education. The reports contained little information on client results. There was some indication that clients are completing interventions; and that many are finding work, but earnings are low.
- **Planning.** Formal planning procedures to assist in the decision-making process were not readily apparent. This is not generally seen as a shortcoming by RBA-holders as local managers are usually “plugged in” to their communities and aware of training needs.
- **Financial.** Financial controls are in place. In general, the RBA-holders, along with HRDC, are responsible for controlling the expenditure of program funds. RBA-holders are taking on the responsibility for financial monitoring.
- **Accountability and Evaluation.** RBA-holders share the responsibility with HRDC for collecting data and reporting on accountability measures and program impacts. There is evidence that RBAs are collecting client data for purposes of program administration and accountability, although systems were still under development. There is a need to validate the data. It is uncertain that sufficient data is being collected for evaluating the impacts on key client and community outcomes over the longer-term.
- **Client and Community Satisfaction.** There is a high degree of satisfaction among program participants of the training and education they received through RBA support. Under some RBAs, clients are particularly satisfied with the ongoing support and counselling provided by community-based delivery staff. Clients expressed dissatisfaction regarding some services. For example, they were somewhat dissatisfied

with the variation in the quality of instructors; the level of living allowances for those receiving social assistance; delays in the process for verifying ancestry which, in turn, delay access to RBA program services; the lack of clear information on RBA programs among the communities; and perceptions of political influence.

Information provided on community satisfaction varied among the mid-term reviews. Overall, there is consensus among RBA-holders that RBA programs have benefited communities, in both economic terms and in social terms. Some RBA-holders noted that community satisfaction would increase with increased focus on long-term programming; increased efforts aimed at capacity building; and better marketing and communication strategies to enhance community awareness of RBA program services and the goals of the RBA itself.

Recommendations

The following summarizes key recommendations that were made in the local reviews conducted by the RBA-holders. The studies recommended that:

- HRDC and RBA-holders hold more formal and regular meetings to ensure information sharing and decision-making between the two partners.
- RBA-holders develop strategic/operational plans to clarify long-term goals in human resources development (e.g., identification of gaps in future employment needs).
- Standardized client and program tracking systems be established to ensure consistency in reporting across the geographic areas covered by an RBA.
- There is equal access among all prospective clients to RBA programming. That assistance be sufficient to meet the needs of women clients, particularly single mothers requiring child care assistance.
- RBA-holders find better ways to promote RBA programs to their membership, as many students were unaware of the range of programs being offered.
- That instructors are qualified to meet the needs of their clients. This requires a review of the training of instructors.
- That consideration be given to increasing the human resources required to deliver RBA programs, particularly as the demand for programs is increasing significantly. Further consideration should be given to training and allocating costs to support capacity building.
- That consideration be given to developing a training strategy for case management, employment and assessment counselling.

Mid-Term Review Data and the HRDC RBA Client Data File

The HRDC RBA Client Data File was still under development. Not all RBA-holders had data on the file. For those RBA-holders for whom data had been uploaded, the file was under-reporting the number of clients served. The file is very likely underestimating employment and savings to EI.

For those client records that have been uploaded to the file, they are for the most part complete. One variable that is often missing, however, is “telephone number”. This is an important piece of information that is extremely useful for monitoring client outcomes and conducting evaluation studies.

Assessment of the Accountability Framework for RBAs

The RBA initiative includes an accountability framework. The framework focuses on two primary success indicators for EI funded activities: the number of clients who became employed and savings to the EI account. It also includes three primary success indicators for clients served using Consolidated Revenue Funds: number of clients who became employed, the number who completed interventions, and savings to income support programs, mainly social assistance. These indicators measure short-term outcomes.

Employment

The report suggests that:

- caution is warranted regarding the short-term nature of the primary indicators and the impact this could have on RBA client selection and program results. The framework does not recognize the need for some RBA clients who have severe employment difficulties to engage in a continuum of RBA interventions which might take several years to complete and achieve the planned result;
- attention should be paid to the quality of jobs found (i.e., duration, earnings, full/part-time, permanent or seasonal, etc.), not only the quantity;
- the definition of employment and the tracking of the continuum of services through carefully defined interventions is important for comparing results and estimating cost effectiveness; and
- the accountability framework should include indicators with respect to capacity building efforts.

Review

The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) will replace the RBA initiative beginning in April 1999. A new review strategy is proposed for the

initiative. It is designed to efficiently and effectively provide the key performance information required by both HRDC and AHRDS agreement holders. It covers information needs for day-to-day management of the agreements, accountability, special studies and reviews, and evaluation. The review strategy should result in a flow of performance information that would build over time and minimize the response burden on AHRDS participants and staff.

Nature and Scope of the Final Evaluation of the RBA Initiative

The RBA initiative draws its authorities from two sources: the Aboriginal Labour Market Development Program and Part II of the EI Legislation. Accompanying these authorities are requirements that HRDC and RBA-holders evaluate their programs. The question for this study focused on what should be the nature and scope of the final evaluation, given existing circumstances.

There were several key challenges to consider:

- administrative data at the level of the initiative was incomplete;
- the data underestimated the volume and nature of the work undertaken by RBA-holders;
- there was a lack of consistency in the definition of interventions;
- there was the short-term focus on primary indicators; and
- evaluation fatigue is evident among Aboriginal communities.

In addition, there are a number of principles that had to be honoured:

- It was too early to conduct a summative evaluation of the initiative; there is not sufficient data to assess the overall impacts of the initiative; and many agreements had been in operation for only a short time.
- The evaluation should focus on issues for which information is timely and useful to both partners.
- The evaluation process must be flexible, respecting the partnership between HRDC regions and RBA-holders, and sensitive to cultural issues, individual contexts, the response burden on Aboriginal communities, and the amount of time remaining to conduct such work.
- The evaluation framework must reflect the accountabilities of both partners (HRDC as per those outlined in program authorities and RBA-holders to their communities).

- The evaluation process should contribute to building evaluation capacity among RBA-holders.

The Evaluation Components

Four components are recommended.

Component 1: a process evaluation of HRDC's implementation of the RBA initiative, focusing on a number of key process issues, including accountabilities, partnership and communication.

Component 2: an analysis of of RBA-program impacts on client outcomes with selected RBAs who have sufficient participant information and who have been in operation for a sufficient period.

Component 3: a systematic assessment of the capacity of RBA-holders to design, deliver and evaluate their own programs;

Component 4: the development of a self-evaluation tool for RBAs to conduct process evaluations.

1. Introduction

This report reflects the results of a synthesis of the reports of Mid-Term reviews conducted of selected Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBA) signed between Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC) and Aboriginal groups. The purpose of the RBAs, and the subsequent Aboriginal Flexible Funding Arrangements (AFFA) Contribution, was to create a new partnership with Aboriginal organizations for providing employment and training programs for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Canadians.

The signing of the RBAs occurred at the same time as — but was a distinct process from — the negotiation of Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA) with the provinces and territories.

HRDC first signed three National Framework Agreements with national Aboriginal organizations: the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. These National Agreements provided the framework for the negotiation of separate RBAs with 54 Aboriginal organizations. A further nine Contribution Agreements were signed with other organizations which, although not technically RBAs, are similar to RBAs.

Accountability frameworks are key to the implementation of all RBAs. The Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) developed a framework for setting and tracking results for program participants and a strategic evaluation plan to assess the impacts of the initiative. The Mid-Term review process is a part of that strategic plan.

In consultation with Evaluation and Data Development (EDD) at HRDC, the ARO requested that external consultants prepare a synthesis of the results of these Mid-Term reviews.

1.1 Methodology

This report is based on information collected from a number of sources. The research team initially met with staff of EDD and ARO at HRDC to confirm the project objectives and to collect background information on the RBA initiative.

A meeting was held with the RBA evaluation advisory committee made up of representatives of the organizations with which HRDC had signed National Framework Agreements. Then individual interviews were conducted with representatives of these organizations.¹

¹ Due to scheduling problem, an interview was not conducted with staff of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. However, they participated in the advisory committee meeting.

Research team members then reviewed the reports of the Mid-Term reviews conducted with selected RBAs in five HRDC regions:

Newfoundland

- HRDC-Miawpukek First Nation
- HRDC Federation of Newfoundland Indians

Quebec

- HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration²
- HRDC-Assembly of First Nations of Labrador and Quebec

Ontario

- HRDC-London District Chiefs Council
- HRDC-Nishnawbe Aski Nation
- HRDC-Métis Nation of Ontario
- HRDC-Six Nations Onkwehon:we

Saskatchewan

- HRDC-Federation of Saskatchewan Indians
- HRDC-Métis Nation of Saskatchewan

Alberta³

- HRDC-Métis Nation of Alberta
- HRDC-Métis Settlements General Council
- HRDC-Confederacy of Treaty 6
- HRDC-Treaty 7 Economic Development Corporation
- HRDC-Treaty 8 First Nations Human Resources Development Board

Local consulting firms conducted the Mid-Term reviews in collaboration with the RBA-holders and HRDC. ARO had provided a list of evaluation questions to be addressed in the reviews. Although, for the most part, the reviews covered the evaluation questions, there was considerable variation in the nature and quality of the reports.

Process for the Synthesis

Information from each of the reports was summarized in a grid that covered all the evaluation questions. To supplement the information available from the reports, telephone interviews were conducted with staff of regional offices of HRDC and of the Aboriginal organizations, as required. The draft grids were sent to the HRDC regional offices for review. Comments from regional offices were incorporated into the final review grids.

² HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration is not, strictly speaking, an RBA. However, it was included in the agreements that participated in the Mid-Term review.

³ One evaluation reported covered all the Alberta RBA Partners.

Following completion of the synthesis of Mid-Term reviews, research team members conducted visits to each of the five regions involved in the Mid-Term review process. Team members met with HRDC regional staff and representatives of the RBA-holders. Among other things, these visits contributed to the finalization of this synthesis report by giving the team an opportunity to provide feedback on the results of the review of Mid-Term reviews and to identify the lessons learned about the process of conducting reviews/evaluations with the RBAs.

2. *National Synthesis*

2.1 Introduction

On January 23, 1996, three-year National Framework Agreements were signed with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. These Framework Agreements set out the principles and reporting relationships to guide negotiations of Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) between HRDC and Aboriginal organizations on the design and delivery of Aboriginal human resources programs. The principles address national concerns such as equitable access, women's issues, adherence to HRDC's mandate, reporting and evaluation requirements.

HRDC's Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO), along with HRDC regional co-ordinators, has responsibility for the management of the RBA initiatives. In order to provide performance information with respect to the implementation and impact of the RBAs and to meet contractual obligations and Treasury Board requirements, the ARO developed a strategic evaluation plan. As part of the evaluation plan, Mid-Term reviews with selected RBAs were scheduled to provide information on the early experiences with implementation of the initiative, particularly at the level of the RBA.

The objectives of these Mid-Term reviews were to:

Provide a description and analysis of:

- The RBA process, the agreements implemented, and the characteristics of operations in diverse communities;
 - The employment and labour market interventions and activities designed and delivered (or to be delivered) under the Agreements;
 - The early outcomes and achievements for client groups and communities who participated in the development of the RBA interventions and in the RBA interventions; and,
 - The processes and procedures that are in place for ongoing monitoring and future reviews and evaluations under the RBA initiative.
- Collect and analyze information on the processes put in place (e.g., service delivery) to achieve their objectives; and,
- Report findings to:
 - RBA-holders to assist in the improvement and fine-tuning of the RBA process and of activities that are undertaken under these agreements; and,
 - HRDC to assist in the improvement of human resources development policy.

Five HRDC regions — Newfoundland, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta — agreed to participate in this exercise and conducted Mid-Term reviews with some of their RBA partners to document their initial experience with the initiative. The purpose of this study is to provide a national synthesis of the information coming from the regional Mid-Term reviews. A total of 11 Mid-Term review reports were examined: 2 from Newfoundland, 2 from Quebec, 4 from Ontario, 2 from Saskatchewan and 1 from Alberta. These 11 Mid-Term reviews covered a total of 14 RBAs and 1 HRDC-Aboriginal Government Agreement. Table 2.1 summarizes the RBAs included in the Mid-Term reviews.

TABLE 2.1		
RBA's Participating in Mid-Term Review		
Region	RBA's Included in Review	Total Value of Agreement
Newfoundland	HRDC-Miawpukek First Nation	\$650,153
	HRDC Federation of Newfoundland Indians ⁴	\$1,197,421
Quebec	HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration ⁵	\$3,325,761
	HRDC-Assembly of First Nations of Labrador and Quebec	\$15,037,285
Ontario	HRDC-London District Chiefs Council	\$2,890,446
	HRDC-Nishnawbe Aski Nation	\$11,200,187
	HRDC-Métis Nation of Ontario	\$6,656,043
	HRDC-Six Nations Onkwehon:we	\$5,024,243
Saskatchewan	HRDC-Federation of Saskatchewan Indians	\$17,300,000
	HRDC-Métis Nation of Saskatchewan	\$8,225,819
Alberta	HRDC-Confederacy of Treaty	\$5,230,358
	HRDC-Métis Nation of Alberta	\$6,279,742
	HRDC-Métis Settlements General Council	\$2,093,249
	HRDC-Treaty 7 Economic Development Corporation	\$4,872,404
	HRDC-Treaty 8 First Nations Human Resources Development Board	\$5,257,414

The methodologies employed by the organizations/consultants conducting the Mid-Term review generally included the following:

- *A Document Review* (e.g., RBA documents, funding framework agreements, evaluation frameworks, policies and procedures, previous reviews, etc.);
- *A Database Review* (where available);
- *Key Informant Interviews* with representatives from HRDC and RBA-holders, including program staff at HRDC and Aboriginal service delivery organizations;
- *Focus Groups* with representatives of Aboriginal service delivery organizations;

⁴ This is a Contribution Agreement and not a Regional Bilateral Agreement.

⁵ Although the third Agreement between HRDC and the Katavik Regional Administration was not an RBA, it was included in the RBAs that were subject to a Mid-Term review.

- *A Participant Survey* (a survey of those who have participated in RBA interventions where applicable); and,
- *Case Studies*, involving interviews and focus groups, in selected communities where time for the review was limited and/or the geographic area covered by RBA was large.

The results of the 11 Mid-Term reviews were summarized in a standard grid format according to seven broad categories of issues identified in the RFP: HRDC-RBA-Holders; Managing, Designing and Delivery; Interventions, Participants and Results; Data and Accountability; Costs; Client and Community Satisfaction; and, Recommendations for Improvements. Once the grids were completed, they were reviewed to identify any gaps in the information provided in the review reports. Where information gaps were identified, supplementary interviews were conducted with HRDC regional program staff. The synthesis study was also sent to Regions and RBAs who participated in the Mid-Term review for their comment.

The results of our national synthesis of the regional Mid-Term reviews of the RBAs are presented below.

2.2 HRDC-RBA-Holders — General Context

How many Agreements have been signed?

A total of 54 Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) have been signed since April 1996. In addition, there are 9 Contribution Agreements with the Congress of Aboriginal People within the RBA budget. Table 2.2 illustrates the number of agreements per province/territory and the total dollar value.

What factors facilitated the signing of agreements?

What factors delayed their signing?

Most of the RBAs included for this study were signed in a timely manner. For many RBAs, the signing of these agreements was generally facilitated by several factors — all linked to the experience of both parties (HRDC and RBA-Holders) under the Pathways to Success program. As a result of their Pathways experience:

- **A need for more Aboriginal control was identified.** The Pathways experience led both HRDC and Aboriginal organizations to seek an alternative program structure that would place the management of funds with the Aboriginal organizations. Both parties agreed that such a structure would permit Aboriginal organizations to identify more accurately the specific human resource development needs of their respective communities and to develop and implement programs that would increase their members' access to the labour force.

TABLE 2.2		
Number and \$ Value of RBAs and Contribution Agreements by Province and Territory		
Province/Territory	Number of Agreements	Total Value of Agreements
<i>Regional Bilateral Agreements</i>		
British Columbia/Yukon	12	\$34,266,208
Alberta	6	\$24,465,262
Northwest Territories	9	\$11,149,232
Saskatchewan	2	\$25,525,819
Manitoba	2	\$21,126,763
Ontario	11	\$51,577,532
Quebec	4	\$23,221,220
New Brunswick	2	\$3,727,854
Nova Scotia	1	\$4,808,627
Prince Edward Island	2	\$408,879
Newfoundland and Labrador	3	\$2,721,529
Total	54	\$202,998,925
<i>Contribution Agreements with Congress of Aboriginal People⁶</i>		
British Columbia/Yukon	1	\$1,480,641
Northwest Territories	2	\$1,148,197
Ontario	1	\$1,000,000
New Brunswick	1	\$293,438
Nova Scotia	1	\$500,000
Prince Edward Island	1	\$155,520
Newfoundland and Labrador	2	\$2,007,094
Total	9	\$6,584,890

- **Administrative capacity gained by Aboriginal organizations as a result of participation in Pathways to Success program.** In a number of the RBAs reviewed (the HRDC-Federation of Newfoundland Indians RBA, the HRDC-Miawpukek First Nation RBA, HRDC-London Districts Chiefs Councils RBA, and HRDC-Saskatchewan Indian and Training Assessment Group RBA), participation in the Pathways for Success program permitted the RBA-holder (i.e., the Aboriginal organization) to build on and enhance their administrative capacity (management structures, delivery structures, information systems, etc.). Having this capacity enabled the RBA-holder to take over the administrative control of Aboriginal programming, including design and delivery. In these RBAs, the transition to the new structure appeared to have transpired quite smoothly.

⁶ All contribution agreements were operating at the time of this report.

However, according to the Mid-Term review reports, in other RBAs reviewed, lack of administrative capacity within the Aboriginal organization led to problems in implementing their agreements. In one particular case, this was mainly attributed to the fact that the agreement was signed prematurely; i.e., before both parties, and in particular the RBA-holder, were ready in terms of administrative and delivery capacity to assume their responsibilities under the new structure.

- **A prior history of working with HRDC on joint projects was a key facilitative factor for the RBA-holder.** For a number of the RBA-holders (the Federation of Newfoundland Indians, the Miawpukek First Nation, the London District Chiefs Council, the Saskatchewan Indian Training and Assessment Group, and the Kativik Regional Administration), a previous history of working jointly with HRDC to deliver human resource development programs to their respective communities was key to the signing and subsequent implementation of the agreement.

In at least one case, the relationship between the two parties at the senior management level was not as good as it could have been and may have contributed to problems in implementation.

Two of the RBAs included in the Mid-Term review experienced a delay in signing. In one case, this was mainly attributable to issues surrounding the distribution of funds. In another case, the delay was due mainly to issues related to the political impact of RBA negotiations on other agreement negotiations and the capacity of the RBA-holder to quickly assume its new administrative responsibilities.

To what extent is the content of the RBAs consistent with National Framework Agreements?

Although there was little in the way of description of the content of the agreements in the Mid-Term reviews studied, the intent of all the RBAs reviewed was to increase the capacity of the RBA-holder to design and administer their own programs. There is evidence that what is happening through the agreements is generally consistent with most of the principles set out in the National Framework Agreements; i.e., in most of the RBAs reviewed, there is evidence of:

- increased Aboriginal control over program administration, including program design and delivery;
- recognition that Aboriginal communities best understand their human resource needs and are best positioned to develop programs to meet those needs;
- non-derogation of existing rights;

- flexibility in program design and delivery to accommodate unique and special circumstances of Aboriginal peoples (e.g., although training was identified as a priority for their community members, the Federation of Newfoundland Indians recognized that most members did not have their high school leaving certificate. Thus, there was an initial focus on group-based Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs under their RBA.);
- a focus on labour market needs of participants, communities and employers;
- inclusiveness, equality of access and incrementality;
- consistency with applicable legislation;
- gender equity;
- inclusion of a representative proportion of youth among program participants;
- some openness in terms of availability of information about the programs (awareness of programs in the communities). While this is ensured through the marketing activities of the Aboriginal delivery agents, in most of the RBAs reviewed, there are indications that this openness is not present in all RBAs; and,
- accountability.

However, in a number of the RBAs reviewed, there is evidence that not all the principles of the NFA are being respected. In particular:

- the Mid-Term review of one RBA found that more effort is required to enhance the accessibility and availability of training programs for Aboriginal people through better out-reach;
- the Mid-Term review of another RBA found that the inclusiveness principle needs addressing. The review found that the ratio of on-reserve participants to off-reserve participants was greater than 6:1 and recommended that participation of off-reserve participants be increased;
- at the time of the Mid-Term review, systematic monitoring and reporting systems were not yet fully operational for most of the RBAs participating in the Mid-Term review. This made it difficult to assess accountability for RBA funds and to identify results achieved. This was particularly problematic for two of the RBAs; and
- although there is some evidence that there is gender equity among program participants in all the RBAs reviewed, there is no evidence that Aboriginals with disabilities or Elders⁷ are being served by programming under any of the RBAs reviewed.

⁷ The term “Elder” is used in the guiding principles for National Framework Agreements.

Has the funding arrangement under the RBA process improved the flexibility of program and services options from which Aboriginal people can select to meet the employment needs of clients?

For most of the RBAs reviewed, the funding arrangement under the RBA process has improved the flexibility of program and services options from which Aboriginals can select to meet the employment needs of clients. Generally speaking, the funding arrangements have allowed RBA-holders the flexibility to design interventions based on local need. There is also evidence that some RBA funding arrangements have allowed more flexibility in terms of eligibility. For example:

- under the HRDC-Federation of Newfoundland Indians (FNI) Aboriginal Flexible Funding Arrangement (AFFA), the FNI has the flexibility to allocate living expenses based on individual need rather than eligibility rules that apply regardless of need (this makes individuals responsible for their own success in the programs); and
- under the HRDC-Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) RBA, RBA funds are being used to assist individuals who are employed (in the past, regional HRDC guidelines did not permit this type of support).

On the other hand, in the opinion of some RBA-holders, the funding arrangements under some RBAs have not led to increased flexibility and this remains an issue to be addressed. For example:

- in one particular case, the funding arrangement did not result in a discernible difference in flexibility of programs and services options for Aboriginal clients. In the opinion of one Aboriginal official interviewed as part of the review, there was more flexibility under the Pathways for Success program. This is due to the phased-in approach to empowerment that was taken. Under this RBA, only those funds dedicated to administration and implementation of the Agreement were transferred to the RBA-holder, while responsibility for the actual contracting of client programs and purchases on behalf of clients remained with HRDC.

In addition, the RBA-holder indicated that the agreement was not flexible enough to meet the needs of degree-seeking students. This support is currently restricted by regional⁸ HRDC guidelines;

- under one RBA, HRDC continued to manage and deliver training programs and services to Aboriginal clients during the first year even though the Regional Approval Committees (RACs) were mandated to decide on training applications submitted by Aboriginal clients for assistance;

⁸ There appears to be some confusion as to whether this is a regional policy or a corporate policy.

- under another RBA, it was noted in the Mid-Term review report that more flexibility was required in terms of responding to the needs of youth in remote communities, particularly in the area of pre-employment training. In the opinion of the RBA-holder, HRDC guidelines are not flexible enough to meet the “economic and cultural” realities of remote communities — they focussed on the recently unemployed rather than those with little experience in the workforce; and
- under one of the Alberta RBAs, RBA-holder interviewees indicated that more flexibility in how goals and objectives are to be achieved and how funds are to be spent is required. There is a general feeling that the RBA funding arrangement is not responsive enough to the particular needs of the RBA-holder’s clients. In the opinion of the RBA-holder, employment and training should be considered from a holistic perspective that includes a balance of “spirituality, alcohol and drug abuse, fear of success, and employment equity”.

Has the partnership between HRDC and the RBA-holder facilitated the process of program and services design and delivery?

Overall, the partnership between HRDC and the RBA-holder has contributed to the successful facilitation of the process of program and services design and delivery. In most cases, this partnership is a longstanding one and there is a history of successfully working together on joint projects. Under most RBAs, this partnership has become more informal yet supportive. The Human Resources Centres of Canada (HRCCs),⁹ though no longer involved in direct service to clients, provide support to the RBA-holders in the areas of program design, development and implementation and financial accountability system development and implementation. In addition, there is ongoing consultation, counselling and communication between the two parties on an “as needed” basis.

Overall, from the point of view of the RBA-holder, there is less bureaucracy, less time spent on administration and a greater degree of decision-making authority.

In some cases, there are difficulties in the partnership between HRDC and the RBA-holder. For example:

- under one RBA, the nature of the partnership between HRDC and the RBA-holder was not as facilitative as it could have been. According to the Mid-Term review of this RBA, the senior parties on both sides generally agreed that poor communication between them was at the heart of the many problems facing the agreement. In addition, the parties were unable to agree on several aspects of the administration and have not as yet reached mutually satisfactory accommodations on these issues. However, it must be noted that, at the local delivery level, the partnership between HRDC and the RBA-holder remained strong and supportive;

⁹ Aboriginal people can obtain services from HRCCs if they wish. However, they do not need to identify themselves as Aboriginal people.

- in Alberta, under one of the RBAs, there are some challenges in the current working relationship with HRDC. The RBA-holder indicated that there is still some mistrust of HRDC relative to the “paternalistic approaches” experienced under the Pathways to Success program. HRDC has decentralized the authority to the regional level. Although this has given the regional managers significantly more authority, the result has been less co-ordination at the national level; and
- under another RBA, although the partnership process was, for the most part, effective and harmonious, the federal government did not always make the distinction between the Aboriginal partner and those responsible for other agreements between the federal and Aboriginal governments.

Are interventions that have been offered to clients consistent with the agreements, the Employment Insurance (EI) legislation, and the employment needs of their clients?

According to the Mid-Term reviews of the RBAs included for this study, the interventions that have been offered to clients are generally in line with what HRDC would have done regardless of whether there was an RBA in place or not; e.g., purchase of training benefits, wage subsidy programs, job creation programs, and research and innovation support measures. Although the primary objective of all interventions is to improve the employability of Aboriginal clients, the focus of such programming may differ from RBA to RBA. For example, while the Miawpukek First Nation (MFN) focuses on offering their membership a full array of one-on-one training courses rather than the traditional project-based training approaches, the Federation of Newfoundland Indians (FNI) initially focussed on offering Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses to their clients.

Overall, these interventions are serving the employment needs of the RBA-holders’ clients. However, in some areas, RBA-holders indicated that the employment needs are not being adequately served by the interventions offered under the RBA. For example:

- some RBA-holders are frustrated by the fact they cannot offer assistance for degree-seeking Aboriginal clients under the RBA. Although this is consistent with HRDC regional (see footnote 8 on page 11.) guidelines, this is an employment need not being adequately served by the interventions offered under the RBAs; and
- one RBA-holder indicated that the technology-based training needs of their clients were not being adequately addressed by interventions offered through the RBA. In addition, the RBA-holder indicated that a greater focus on career training, counselling, apprenticeship and certification was required.

2.3 Managing, Designing and Delivery at Level of RBA-holder

2.3.1 Managing — Planning and Financial Controls

Guidelines, Procedures and Processes

- *Are general guidelines for planning and decision-making in place to determine which programs and services are needed and how they are to be designed and delivered?*
- *Are formal procedures in place to assist in the planning and decision-making process?*
- *Are there ongoing approval or confirmation processes?*
- *Are community partners and/or groups involved in these processes?*
- *How do results for clients feed back into the decision-making process?*

In general, the RBAs set out detailed terms and conditions related to reporting requirements and financial arrangements. Planning and decision-making processes to determine which programs and services are needed are generally left up to the local Aboriginal management organizations (e.g., Local Indian Management Boards or LIMBs, Local Métis Management Boards or LMMBs, Local First Nations Commissions or LFNCs) which are the program delivery agents.

The Mid-Term reviews of the RBAs indicate that formal planning procedures to assist in the decision-making process were not readily apparent. Planning processes are generally informal with very little in the way of formalized community needs assessments and training plans. Planning typically occurs at year-end as a way of allocating the next year's training budget. This results in general objectives and guidelines for the upcoming year. This is not generally seen as a shortcoming by the RBA-holder as local Aboriginal management organization members are usually "plugged in" to their communities and aware of training needs.

Typical planning partners include regional training agencies (e.g., regional colleges), regional labour market development committees, or other human resource development agencies (including HRCCs).

While targets for primary measures (savings to EI and SA) were negotiated for each RBA, strategic operational planning is not present in most of the RBAs reviewed for this study. However, there are some elements of this type of planning occurring under the HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration Agreement (and at a more local level under the HRDC-AFNQL RBA). Under the HRDC-KRA Agreement, formal annual operational plans are developed which include quantitative targets for each program and financial parameters such as: number of projects; the number of participants, the target discontinuation rate and budgeted CRF (Consolidated Revenue Fund) and EI (Employment Insurance) allocations.

Application and review processes vary from community to community but, in general, clients are responsible for identifying their own goals. Generally, the local Aboriginal management organizations' staff work with clients to identify ways to meet those goals. Clients then formally apply to their local Aboriginal management organization to receive training sponsorship. Depending on the amount of sponsorship requested and the area, the local Aboriginal management organization may approve/deny the application directly. Otherwise, staff prepare a recommendation for approval to the Aboriginal agency (typically a Board of Directors made up of representatives of the local Aboriginal management boards) responsible for overseeing program delivery.

In all of the RBAs reviewed, it is unsure that client outcomes are being fed back into decision-making processes.

Financial Controls

- *Are financial controls in place?*
- *What is the nature of these control processes?*
- *How is adherence to these processes encouraged, verified?*
- *Are audit procedures in place?*

The review of the RBAs, which participated in the Mid-Term Review process, indicates that there are financial controls in place. In general, the RBA-holders are responsible for controlling the expenditure of program funds (e.g., issuing the cheques to training providers, employers, etc.), with HRDC and the RBA-holder taking on the responsibility for financial monitoring. This is usually done through the submission to HRDC of quarterly claims, an annual report, expenditure plans and participant records. In all cases, the RBA requires the RBA-holder to submit audited financial statements to HRDC. RBA-holders are also held accountable to their membership/communities through regular financial reports.

Financial expenditure data is captured either manually (on a ledger system) or on a computerized system (e.g., SITAG's computerized Training and Administrative System or TAS).

In at least one RBA, there is reinforcement of financial control processes by the RBA-holder. The RBA-holder will not reimburse the individual program delivery organizations for activities not entered into the RBA-holder's computerized financial expenditure data system. In addition, the RBA-holder conducts in-person financial monitors at each office of the local program delivery organization. During such monitors, the RBA-holder staff reviews the computerized expenditure data and general ledgers for inconsistency and irregularity.

There is evidence that financial control processes vary from agreement to agreement in terms of adequacy and our review of the Mid-Term reports indicated that this was an issue under at least one RBA. Suggestions of a lack of financial control and evidence of nepotism in the expenditure of RBA funds led to the suspension by HRDC of the RBA. Until the RBA-holder enacts the required changes in its corporate structure, which would assure that adequate financial control processes were in place, HRDC staff is conducting continuous financial monitoring of the expenditures of the individual program delivery organizations. This requires that all receipts be submitted and examined to see if they are eligible for reimbursement under the agreement.

2.3.2 Managing — Design and Delivery

Operational Manager and Delivery Officer Involvement

- *Are operational managers and delivery officers involved in the design of interventions and delivery mechanisms?*
- *Do managers monitor delivery operations?*
- *Are there guidelines/procedures that facilitate this work?*

In principle, RBAs transfer authority for the design of federal labour market programs from HRDC to the Aboriginal RBA-holder. RBA-holders typically manage and administer agreements through their human resources development agencies (e.g., FNI's Mi'kmaq Resources and Development, the Miawpukek First Nation's Miawpukek Human Resources, Kativik Regional Administration's Employment and Training Service, AFNQL's Commission for the Development of Quebec First Nations Human Resources, etc.) which are, in essence, the principal delivery agents for the agreement. A Board of Directors/Committee made up of Band/community representatives typically governs these agencies.

In some RBAs, these agencies are directly responsible for reviewing and approving applications for program funding; contacting schools and instructors to set up individualized training programs; working with co-ordinators of Group-based programs; conducting regular monitoring and follow-up of clients; and, counselling clients to ensure they complete their programs. In some RBAs, the agency has set up a number of offices to facilitate greater accessibility for their membership.

In other RBAs, the human resources development agency provides regional co-ordination and leadership, with delivery at a more local level through geographically/community-based organizations. These local delivery agents can be local Aboriginal management boards, local First Nations Commissions, agents, or Aboriginal regional councils and it is they who decide who gets trained, for what, and by whom. Local delivery is typically managed through service delivery agreements with the central human resources development agency. This configuration allows both maximum local flexibility and strong central control.

Delivery implementing structures are usually outlined in the agreements. HRDC's Aboriginal Relations Office developed the *RBA Aboriginal Flexible Funding Arrangement Handbook* to help, among other things, Aboriginal organizations design and develop their own labour market programs. Further refinement of these guidelines was not indicated in most of the reviews of the RBAs included for this study. However, under the HRDC-London District Chiefs Council (LDCC) RBA, the RBA-holder's Central Administration Unit, which co-ordinates delivery at the local level, developed a Program and Funding Criteria Policy Manual.

Configuration of Delivery System

- *What is the configuration of the delivery system (e.g., are the interventions designed and delivered directly by the RBA-holder? Or does the RBA-holder contract with others — third parties — to do this work or parts of the work? etc.).*
- *How varied is the configuration among RBA-holders participating in the Review?*

As noted earlier, RBA-holders are responsible for managing and administering the Agreement. This is generally done through their human resources development agencies (e.g., FNI's Mi'kmaq Resources and Development or MRD, MNS's Métis Employment and Training of Saskatchewan, Inc. or METSI) which were either developed specifically in response to the RBA or were in existence prior to the Agreement. These agencies may establish agreements with third parties (e.g., training agencies) to provide services.

At this point the delivery system can take on one of two general configurations. However, it is important to note that further variations may exist within these two themes and these are noted where applicable.

1. Centralized: In this configuration, the Aboriginal human resources development agencies work directly with clients (review and approve/deny applications to the program for funding) and trainers/co-ordinators (to set up individualized training programs or group-based programs). These agencies may establish offices in a number of locations to facilitate membership accessibility to the programs. This is the current delivery configuration for:

- **The HRDC-Federation of Newfoundland Indians (FNI) RBA:** Its delivery agency, Mi'kmaq Resources and Development or MRD), reviews and approves applications to the program for funding; contacts schools and instructors to set up individualized training programs; works with co-ordinators of Group Based programs; monitors and follows up on clients on a regular basis; and, counsels clients to help them complete their programs. MRD is functionally operated by a Committee and has two offices.

- **The HRDC-Miawpukek First Nation (MFN) RBA:** Its delivery agency, Miawpukek Human Resources (MHR), reviews and approves/denies applications to the program from clients for funding. A Board of Directors composed of six Band members governs MHR. MHR prepares an annual operating plan that outlines the programs to be delivered, the operations budget, and the management plan for training and specific activities for the upcoming year.

MHR has a sub-agreement with the Central Aboriginal Training Institute to deliver services (in conjunction with HRDC's St. Alban's Outreach Office) to off-reserve band members.

2. Devolved to Communities: In this configuration, the delivery agency oversees a delivery system that has been devolved to the communities; i.e., delivery agents are located in the communities they serve. This is the current delivery configuration for:

- **The HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration (KRA) Agreement:** Although KRA is the only service provider for all training and employment services, implementation is primarily done through its Employment and Training Service (ETS) group. ETS is highly decentralized in its structure, with most of its co-ordinators residing in the communities. These local agents are important contributors to estimating the training and employer needs for their particular communities. They are also responsible for post-training follow-up.
- **The HRDC-Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL) RBA:** AFNQL's Commission for the Development of Quebec First Nations Human Resources (CDQFNHR) is the regional organization responsible for human resources development under the RBA. As such, it ensures that the local delivery agents, the Local First Nation Commissions (LFNCs), are well informed of national human resources development programs. At the local level, the LFNCs are responsible for implementing RBA programming based on needs analyzes of prospective clients. Twenty-two LFNCs serve twenty-nine communities and are accountable to the CDQFNHR regarding the nature of the interventions being implemented.
- **The HRDC-Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) RBA:** MNO's Métis Training Initiative (MTI) manages and administers labour market training programs. MTI is headquartered in Toronto but has Community Development Officers (CDOs) located in each of the nine MNO regions. In addition to these CDOs, MNO established Regional Approval Committees (RACs) in each of the nine regions. Applications to the program for funding are submitted to RAC members who then forward them on to MTI in Toronto for approval. The CDOs are responsible for tracking client progress, while MTI is responsible for program expenditures.

- **The HRDC-London District Chiefs Council (LDCC) RBA:** LDCC's Central Administration Unit co-ordinates program delivery through sub-agreements with ten Local Delivery Mechanisms (LDMs). The Central Administration Unit provides an overview of annual work plans that contain training components. Although all LDMs assess training components, the approval process for applications to the program for funding varies from LDM to LDM: 4 LDMs approve applications directly, 3 require Band Council approval of applications; and, 3 have Oversight Committees which review and approve applications.
- **The HRDC-Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) RBA:** NAN covers a large geographic area that has been divided into sub-areas for administration purposes. Delivery of program services is generally managed by separate organizations in each sub-area which either act as a Local Delivery Mechanism or as a manager of local community-based Economic Development Officers. Applications to the program for funding are submitted at the local level but a central Regional Bilateral Agreement Committee reviews and approves these applications.
- **The HRDC-Six Nations Onkwehon:we RBA:** Grand River Employment and Training (GREAT) is the administrative authority on behalf of the 6 Nations Council. Delivery of program services is done through delivery agency agreements signed with Friendship Centres located in southern Ontario or where there is a high concentration of Six Nation membership. For example, services to Onkwehon:we living in the Brantford and Fort Erie areas are offered Friendship Centres located in these communities.
- **The HRDC-Saskatchewan Indian Training and Assessment Group (SITAG) RBA:** SITAG provides regional co-ordination and leadership, with delivery at the local level by 22 Local Indian Management Boards (LIMBs). Each of these LIMBs has a management agreement with SITAG. LIMBs are responsible for: identifying local training needs, delivering services to meet those needs; developing partnerships to enhance opportunities for clients; monitoring and controlling administration of the RBA; and, building capacity to improve administration and delivery. Centrally, SITAG ensures that training activities meet the terms of the RBA and that administration is consistent from LIMB to LIMB.
- **The HRDC-Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MNS) RBA:** MNS's affiliate, Métis Employment and Training of Saskatchewan, Inc. (METSI), has the main responsibility for implementing and co-ordinating the agreement throughout the province. To administer the RBA, METSI has entered into service delivery arrangements with Local Métis Management Boards (LMMBs), which represent 12 geographic areas in the province. Each LMMB is responsible for delivering program services to its area. LMMBs are responsible for: identifying local training needs; planning services to meet those needs; developing partnerships to enhance opportunities for clients; and, building capacity to improve administration and delivery. Although LMMBs do not have the authority to contract for program services on their own, they work closely with their local HRCC which does.

- In Alberta, there is considerable variation in the configuration of the delivery system but essentially all reflect a devolved community-based delivery mechanism:
 - **HRDC-Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) RBA:** Services are offered to approximately 42,000 non-settlement Métis through six Regional Council offices and 14 Employment Service Centres.
 - **HRDC-Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) RBA:** The Strategic Training Initiative (STI) delivers program services to eight Métis settlements. The STI has five full-time staff but each settlement has a “political, technical, and financial contact” to assist in the delivery of program services.
 - **HRDC-Treaty 6 RBA:** The Human Resources Development Board delivers program services to 16 First Nations through a Contribution Agreement. A Human Resource Co-ordinator is located in each First Nation community and is responsible for submitting a local plan for approval by the Chief and Council.
 - **HRDC-Treaty 7 RBA:** The RBA is administered through the Community Futures business corporation under the Treaty 7 Economic Development Corporation. A Board of Directors composed of two representatives from each Band identifies training priorities and the General Manager is responsible for ensuring that priorities are carried out among the Treaty 7 membership in Calgary and on-reserve. Programs and services of the on-reserve members are the responsibility of each Band, while those for off-reserve members are the responsibility of the Urban Projects Review Committee.
 - **HRDC-Treaty 8 RBA:** Contribution Agreements were signed with the five Regional/Tribal Councils and Urban Board in the second year of the RBA to facilitate Council accountability. The five Councils represent 22 First Nations and each is responsible for its own programs and reports to HRDC. The Urban Board focuses on funding projects, pre-employment programs and individual training.

Short-term Results for Clients and Primary Measures

- *How does information on short-term results for clients feed back into the decision-making process?*

With the exception of the two Newfoundland RBAs and the HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration (KRA) Agreement, it is unsure from the Mid-Term reviews that information on clients is systematically collected and fed back into decision-making processes.¹⁰

In Newfoundland, both RBA-holders have recently begun inputting client data into the newly installed Client Adjustment Tracking System (CATS). This system focuses on the case management approach; i.e., a client-driven approach to data collection. The CATS is designed to:

- measure results and outcomes rather than processes;
- ensure follow-up until the client outcomes are achieved;
- include all clients who receive assisted service (employment benefits and support measures), as well as counselled clients; and,
- focus on identifying client needs and accountability.¹¹

Under the HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration (KRA) Agreement, participant results are entered into Employment and Training System's computerized program management system. The system is easy to use as each screen corresponds to the hard copy forms used by delivery agents and program managers. Data analysis is automatic and produces reports containing statistics on a number of topics such as placements, EI requests, training requests, post-training follow-up and counselling sessions. However, there is concern over the quality of the information collected, in particular, employment services data. Client data is not always up-to-date as follow-up by local delivery agents is not conducted on a regular basis. At this point in time, there is no information available as to how the information collected on the ETS is being fed back into decision-making processes.

In Saskatchewan, SITAG is currently working on a comprehensive client follow-up process to organize the outcome data in a more reliable fashion.

¹⁰ Primary measures (savings to EI and SA) are intended to be available to RBA-holders on HRDC's Human Resources Investment (HRI) database to help them make decisions based on client results. At the time of this synthesis, the HRI database was just starting up and little information was available to RBA-holders. However, subsequent to the preparation of this synthesis, more data has been uploaded to the HRI database from the regions and, consequently, more information is being made available to RBA-holders.

¹¹ As the first upload of CATS data to NHQ's HRI dataset was expected on April 1, 1998, there was no information available at the time of this synthesis to indicate how such information was being fed back into decision-making processes. However, subsequent to this synthesis, more data has been uploaded to NHQ's HRI dataset and more information is now available to the Newfoundland RBA-holders.

Sufficient Capacity and Capacity-building

- *Do RBA-holders have sufficient capacity to design and to deliver the interventions as planned?*
- *Do they have capacity-building processes in place?*
- *Does the Aboriginal Flexible Funding Arrangement (AFFA) provide them with the assistance and funding necessary to achieve their capacity-building goals?*

In most of the RBAs under review for this synthesis study, it was reported that the RBA-holders have capacity to design and deliver the interventions as planned. Capacity building has been particularly successful at the grassroots level. Experience gained during the previous Pathways to Success Program and during the first year of RBA implementation has contributed significantly to building capacity within the Aboriginal organizations to design and deliver labour market programming.

However, in some of the RBAs, the lack of sufficient capacity in program design and delivery needs addressing. For example:

- some are finding it difficult to find appropriately trained individuals to assume the positions of local delivery agent and co-ordinator. Currently, most local delivery agents have received little or no training and undertake a variety of tasks. Although time is likely to remedy the situation, with the high turnover rate of delivery staff, sufficient delivery capacity may take longer to attain than originally anticipated;
- where agreements were signed prematurely, the capacity to design and deliver program services was found to be lacking throughout the delivery configuration; i.e., from the RBA-holder to the community-based delivery agents. Lack of training and human resources were cited as the main reasons why. Furthermore, all requests for HRDC staff secondments by the RBA-holder to ease the transition process could not be granted. However, as this report is being written, steps are being taken to address the capacity issue; and
- in some, the lack of funding for administering the RBA was identified as an issue requiring addressing.

Other than day-to-day ongoing support from HRDC, there is little evidence of formal capacity-building processes in place. Although AFFA guidelines allow for secondment of HRDC staff to Aboriginal organizations to share experience and expertise, none of the Mid-Term reviews indicated that this, in fact, occurred.

Additional training in administrative processes (e.g., computer systems, development of work plans, etc.) and capacity building in the area of client support; i.e., employment/assessment counselling, career development, job creation strategies and targeted wage subsidy initiatives, were identified as gaps in capacity building.

Development of New Community Infrastructures

- *Have any new community infrastructures been developed?*
- *Have new relationships/partnerships been developed that facilitate the delivery of multiple services to clients?*

Among the RBAs selected for this review, there is evidence that new community infrastructures and/or new partnerships have developed to facilitate delivery of multiple services to clients. For example:

- In Newfoundland, one of the key benefits of the RBA process under the HRDC-Miawpukek First Nation RBA, has been the ability to make collateral contacts across communities to share resources. For example, the Cupertino between the Central Aboriginal Training Institute (CATI) and the Federation of Newfoundland Indians facilitated the sharing of the cost of upgrading River Monitors to full River Guardian status.
- In Quebec, in addition to the HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration (KRA) Agreement, agreements with other federal departments (Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Health Canada) linked KRA in the development and delivery of employment and training services and programs. Furthermore, two agreements signed with the Quebec provincial government (Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'œuvre) permitted the completion of Agreement programs and services, particularly those related to human resources and special projects.
- Under the HRDC-Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) RBA, the establishment of a Service Delivery Network enabled the MNO to manage and deliver Métis training programs and services.
- Under the HRDC-London District Chiefs Council RBA, several of the Local Delivery Mechanisms (LDMs) experienced significant success in working together on joint projects and developing job placements with the private sector.
- Under the HRDC-Nishnawbe-Aski (NAN) RBA:
 - the creation of the Sioux Lookout Area Aboriginal Management Board (SLAAMB) facilitated the administration of RBA employment training and labour market programs to that geographic area;
 - partnerships with other First Nations have reportedly enhanced skills and increased the opportunities for economic growth and employment for local people; and,

- linkages established with Local Delivery Mechanisms, the Ministry of Social Services, HRDC, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, education agencies, Métis programs, as well as federal and provincial forestry programs, have helped to facilitate program delivery.
- In Alberta:
 - informal relationships have reportedly been formed between the various RBA-holders for the sharing of information;
 - the Métis Nation of Alberta created a new Board to oversee program delivery and project selection committees to deliver programs in the various geographic zones; and,
 - under the Treaty 6 RBA, partnerships are being actively sought out with business, industry, corporations and government to maximize the use of funds and to leverage other opportunities.

2.4 Interventions, Participants and Results

2.4.1 Interventions

- *What types of RBA interventions (e.g., skills training, wage subsidies, self-employment assistance, job creation, counselling, job finding clubs) were offered to clients?*

The nature of the interventions being offered is quite varied. They may include the following: Targeted Wage Subsidy; Self-Employment Benefit, Job Creation Partnerships, Purchase of Training Benefit, Job Finding Club, On-the-Job Training, Training Projects, General Projects, Challenge, Job Entry (including Heritage), Job Placement Assistance, Job Seeking Assistance, Career Academic Preparation, Pre-employment Preparation, Basic Academic Preparation, and Specific Career Orientation. Although not all the Mid-Term reviews provided the same level of detail on the nature of the training offered and taken, there was evidence provided indicating that some RBAs had more focus than others in terms of the interventions being offered. For example:

- under the HRDC-FNI RBA, the RBA-holder recognized the need for long-term planning and focussed on ABE programs as a first step in their RBA programming;
- under the HRDC-MFN, the RBA-holder focussed on individualized training programs at community or private colleges. There was a wide variety of training offered, ranging from micro-computer specialist to veterinarian nursing assistant to heavy equipment repair, which demonstrated that many clients did not want to depend on local economies for employment. In addition, under a one-year Special Arrangement, a component of Group Based training focussed on enhancing the skills of individuals already in the workforce; e.g., Basket Making and Canoe Making for on-reserve clients working in the tourism industry;

- KRA recognized the need for programs to target youths and their cultural heritage. The Heritage Program aimed at youths no longer in school or at risk provides individuals with skills and knowledge related to the Inuit culture and other traditional activities; and
- in Alberta, RBA interventions appeared to have a particular focus on employment seeking counselling; i.e., independent job search, career decision assessment, job finder club, and resume writing.

2.4.2 Participants

- *How many participated in RBA interventions — (reported by client groups)?*
- *How many completed their interventions?*
- *How many participated in more than one intervention during the period?*
- *How many received certificates, accreditation or awards?*
- *Did clients receive financial assistance from EI Part II, SA, CRF? How much did they receive?*
- *What was the funding source for expenditures on interventions to date (based on information from administrative files at NHQ)?*

The level of detail and the quality of data provided on the program participants varied among the Mid-Term reviews; however, this was more a function of the quality of existing reporting systems at that time rather than the quality of the review itself. Because it is not reasonable to compare these results across RBAs, the results are not presented in this synthesis. Comparison is not possible for a number of reasons:

- results are based on two different data sources: administrative data systems and participant surveys;
- in some cases, the participant survey covered only some intervention types;
- not all surveys addressed all results indicators;
- information is not captured in the same way across all RBAs; and
- administrative data was not yet available for some RBAs.

2.4.3 Results

- *Did clients find work (employment or self-employment)?*
- *If information available, what types of work did clients obtain (full-time, part-time, seasonal, occupation; industrial sectors?)*
- *Were jobs created?*
- *How long did it take for clients to find work after completing or leaving their intervention?*
- *What were wages/earnings of clients who found work?*
- *How much did clients receive in EI benefits since leaving their RBA intervention?*
- *How many did not complete their interventions (reported by reason for not completing)?*

There was limited results information reported in the Mid-Term reviews. For the same reasons that participant information could not be compared or aggregated, results information is not presented in this synthesis report.

However, from the data that is available in the Mid-Term reviews, the following overall findings have been identified:

- clients are obtaining employment after an intervention. But, the majority of the jobs are short-term; i.e., seasonal or temporary;
- the majority of participants complete their intervention; and
- the majority of those who do find employment are earning at or around the minimum wage.

2.5 Data and Accountability

- *Are RBA-holders collecting the data and information required for proper monitoring and evaluation?*
- *Is this data being uploaded to HRDC?*
- *Is the data reliable?*
- *Is the computerized data in the HRI client and participant file dataset correctly reflecting the data uploaded from RBA-holders?*

- *Are the primary measures being calculated by the HRDC Human Resources Investment Fund (HRIF) results dataset for RBAs reflecting the true experiences of clients?*

From the Mid-Term reviews, it is unsure that the majority of RBA-holders included in this synthesis study are systematically collecting data and information required for strategic monitoring of outcomes for clients and evaluation. Either there was no data collection system fully operational at the time of the review, or if there was such a system, little information was available on the nature of the data being collected.¹² Our review of the Mid-Term reviews identified at least two data collection systems that appear to hold promise for monitoring and evaluation purposes. These are briefly described below:

- in Newfoundland, the Client Adjustment Tracking System (CATS) has just been put in place to track the results of those who participated in the interventions offered under the two RBAs (the HRDC-FNI and HRDC-MFN RBAs). CATS captures all client-specific (by SIN #) data such as income support, earnings, and interventions completed. The first upload of results to NHQ's database was expected April 1, 1998. As most of the training courses did not get started until September of 1997, the expected results will only reflect what happened in the short-term. Some primary measures (such as savings to EI) will be available. However, the FNI's focus on ABE (Adult Basic Education) courses will have an initial impact on the primary measures for their RBA; and
- under the HRDC-Kativik Regional Administration (KRA) Agreement, participant results are entered into Employment and Training System's computerized program management system. The system is easy to use as each screen corresponds to the hardcopy forms used by delivery agents and program managers. Data analysis is automatic and produces reports containing statistics on a number of topics such as placements, EI requests, training requests, post-training follow-up and counselling sessions. However, at the time of the study client data was not always up-to-date as follow-up by local delivery agents was not conducted on a regular basis.

In addition, four other data collection and client tracking systems were mentioned in the Mid-Term review reports: the Connector database case management software (HRDC-Alberta RBA Partners); the Contact IV (HRDC-Métis Nation of Ontario RBA); the Aboriginal Labour Market Support Information System or ALMSIS (HRDC-Aboriginal First Nations of Quebec and Labrador); and, the Training and Administrative System or TAS (HRDC-SITAG RBA). These may hold promise for evaluation and monitoring provided that database training and standardization of techniques occurs.

¹² However, since the completion of these Mid-Term reviews, progress has been made in the implementation of data collection systems.

In general, as the uploading of data to the HRI dataset began just prior to this synthesis, there is no information as yet on the primary measures.¹³ Moreover, there is insufficient evidence to assess whether these will reflect the true experiences of clients.

2.6 Costs

- *How much of the RBA funds are being spent on clients who are participating in interventions?*
- *How much is being spent on administration?*
- *How much is spent on capacity building?*

Detailed information of RBA costs varied from review to review. However, some cost data was provided and is summarized in Table 2.3. Note, the data was not always available in consistent format. For example, in some cases, it is provided in dollar amounts and in others it is provided as a percentage of total program costs. In some cases, the cost figures are budgeted amounts rather than expenditure amounts.

Although none of the Mid-Term reviews provided information on how much is being spent on capacity building, the need to do so is being recognized by some RBA-holders. For example, the FNI recognizes that some funds should be directed towards capacity building, particularly in the areas of career development, employment counselling, job creation strategies, and implementation of CATS.

¹³ As noted previously in this report, more data has since been uploaded to the HRIF dataset at NHQ and, consequently, more information is now available to RBA-holders on primary measures.

TABLE 2.3			
Summary of Costs Reported in Mid-Term Reviews			
RBA	Program Costs/Client	Admin Costs	Capacity Bldg
HRDC-FNI	Unknown	11% of total program costs	\$0
HRDC-MFN	Unknown	19.4% in 1997-98 ¹⁴ 15% in 1998-99	None indicated
HRDC-KRA	Training projects: \$6100/client On-the-job training: \$4900/client Purchase of training: \$2000/client General Projects: \$2700/client Challenge: \$65/client Job Entry: \$384/client	Not identifiable	None indicated
HRDC-AFNQL	Not calculated	15.4% of total program funds	None indicated
HRDC-MNO	Training purchase: \$6000/client Wage Subsidy: \$8400/client	15% of total program funds	None indicated
HRDC-NAN		10.2% — 14.3% of total program expenditures	None indicated
HRDC-SITAG	Programs: \$3900/client Training for specific careers: \$4200/client	Not identifiable	None indicated
HRDC-MNS	Training purchase: \$7000/client ¹⁵ Project funding: \$4000/client	Cap of 25% of total RBA funding for administration	None indicated
HRDC-Alberta RBA Partners	Unknown	Treaty 7: 9.5% Treaty 8: 17% MNA: 17%	None indicated

2.7 Client and Community Satisfaction

- *Are clients satisfied with the interventions they received (including e.g., generally with the intervention, interactions with program administrators, training courses attended, job skills upgrading, work experiences)?*
- *Are communities satisfied (if available from information collected in the regional reviews) with their involvement in design and delivery processes?*

¹⁴ Higher administration costs in 1997-98 due to higher than anticipated costs in establishing the Central Aboriginal Training Institute.

¹⁵ Based on average of costs in 2 regions.

2.7.1 Client Satisfaction

Information on client satisfaction was provided through participant surveys or through interviews with community-based program delivery agents. From the information provided in the Mid-Term reviews, there is a high degree of satisfaction among program participants of the training/education they have received through RBA support. According to participants, they would not have been able to access further training or education without the RBA funding support. Under some RBAs, clients are particularly satisfied with the ongoing support and counselling provided by community-based delivery staff.

However, program participants expressed dissatisfaction over the following:

- variable quality of instructors;
- levels of funding for living allowance for those receiving Social Assistance;
- lengthy delays in the verification Métis ancestry process which, in turn, delay access to RBA program services;
- lack of clear information on RBA programs and levels of assistance among the communities; and,
- perception of political influence.

2.7.2 Community Satisfaction

Information provided on community satisfaction varied among the Mid-Term reviews. Much of this information was obtained through interviews with HRDC and RBA-holder delivery staff. Overall, there is consensus among RBA-holders that RBA programs have benefited communities, in both economic terms and in social terms. Although the extent to which communities are satisfied varies from RBA to RBA, a number of community satisfaction indicators were reported. They included the following:

- increased self respect through increased control of programs and creation of role models; (e.g., a more positive attitude towards education as a result of completing ABE courses has led to participants feeling that they are serving as role models for their children);
- increased sense of well-being within the family unit;
- community well-being;
- reduced numbers of crisis and police interventions in communities during the training period (this is particularly true for remote communities where high unemployment levels among youth lead to violence, abuse and suicide);

- low turnover rate of local delivery staff; and,
- increased levels of employment and reduced levels of assistance.

However, there was an indication expressed by some RBA-holders that community satisfaction would increase with the following improvements:

- increased focus on long-term programming;
- increased efforts aimed at capacity building; and,
- better marketing and communication strategies to enhance community awareness of RBA program services and the goals of the RBA itself.

2.8 Recommendations for Improvements

2.8.1 Recommendations

- *What types of recommendations for improvements were typically made in the regional reviews?*

Although the number and nature of recommendations reported varied from report to report, we identified the main ones (those that appeared more than once) and grouped them under common themes. Therefore, the following recommendations for improvement were made:

Process/Implementation

- That HRDC and the RBA-holder hold more formal and regular meetings to ensure information sharing and decision-making between the two partners.
- That the RBA-holder develop strategic/operational plans to clarify its long-term goals in human resources development (e.g., identification of gaps in future employment needs). This would assist the RBA-holder in its negotiations for continued funding once the RBA has terminated.
- That program participants undergo the proper skills assessment and testing prior to selecting their training program. The lack of career counselling/planning services has resulted in a lowered awareness of career choices and an overestimation of aptitude by the student while underestimating the degree of difficulty associated with the program.
- That all procedures/processes in place be reviewed to ensure that they are effective, efficient and clear.
- That a standardised client and program tracking system is established to ensure consistency in reporting across the geographic area covered by an RBA.

Client/Community Needs

- That there be more pre-employment and job-readiness training.
- That assistance is sufficient to meet the needs of women clients, particularly single mothers requiring childcare assistance.
- That the level of funding provided to needy students be revisited, particularly those on Social Assistance.
- There is a need to revisit guidelines pertaining to the funding of university courses, particularly courses offered in the third and fourth years.
- That the RBA-holder find better ways to promote the RBA programs to its membership as many students were unaware of the range of programs being offered.
- That the delivery system in place meets the needs of clients and communities.
- That instructors are qualified to meet the needs of their clients. This requires a review of the training of instructors.
- That there is equal access among all prospective clients to RBA programming.

Capacity Building

- That consideration be given to increasing the human resources required to deliver RBA programs, particularly as the demand for them is increasing significantly. Further, consideration should be given to training and allocating costs to support capacity building.
- That consideration be given to developing a training strategy for case management, employment and assessment counselling.
- That consideration be given to loans of HRDC staff to assist the RBA-holder develop capacity in areas where it is lacking.

2.8.2 Lessons Learned

- *What lessons may be learned from the early implementation experiences of HRDC and its RBA partners?*

The early implementation experiences of HRDC and its RBA partners resulted in a number of lessons learned. As for recommendations the nature and number of lessons learned differed from region to region, however, we were able to identify those lessons that are applicable to all RBAs. These included:

Program Design/Implementation

- The process of case management is a key component of delivering effective and efficient human resource development.
- The lack of systems support was a significant gap in the first years of RBA implementation. This had a negative impact on the capacity to deliver and maintain an accurate record of participants' progress.
- Existing administrative capacity is an important prerequisite to the success of the empowerment process. It is difficult for any agency to exert effective administrative control until they have developed the staffing structures, systems, procedures and policies needed to establish this control in the first place. Developing agencies need enhanced support, including staff secondments, if they are to be successful in assuming responsibility for program administration.
- A detailed transition plan can help clarify mutual roles and responsibilities in the transfer of a program from one administrative agency to another. Ideally such a plan should include a critical path that outlines exactly what needs to be accomplished, by when, and by whom.

Program Delivery

- Local control over the delivery mechanism is regarded as the most important element of the RBA.
- Delivery of RBA programs is most efficient where client numbers warrant it. Upon expiration of the Pathways to Success Program, the RBA process was the next logical step to devolve process responsibilities to Aboriginal human resource organizations. However, there must be a sufficiently large number of clients with suitable demographic characteristics to make service delivery feasible.
- The appeals process may be open to political influence and should be made more impartial.

Accountability

- It is important that the RBA-holder be accountable not only to HRDC but to its membership for impact of the RBA on client outcomes.

Client/Community Needs

- Provincial government policy on training support (treats it as income and subsequently reduces assistance) acts as a disincentive to participants on Social Assistance accessing the program. This should be made clearer to prospective clients at the outset.
- Having RBA promotional materials in the language of the RBA-holder's membership is an important aspect of RBA program delivery.
- There has been minimal linkage to the private sector. Private sector partnerships are essential to meet long term training and career development needs of individual clients.

3. Comparison of Mid-Term Review Data and the RBA Client Data File

3.1 The RBA Client Data File

As part of the synthesis of the Mid-Term reviews, the research team compared the information obtained from the reviews with information derived from the client data that is uploaded by the RBA-holders to HRDC. It should be noted that the data file and uploading systems are in the developmental phase. The purpose of the comparison was a attempt a *preliminary* data validation exercise. Additional work must be completed in the areas of data integrity, reliability and validity as the system matures.

The HRDC data file analyzed for these comparisons is the RBA Client Data File developed and maintained by Information Services at HRDC-NHQ. The RBA data file consists of client data uploaded from the RBA-holders and is currently under development. As of 30 April 1998, over 13,000 RBA client records have been uploaded, and another 3,000 records have been received at NHQ but have not been uploaded into the file. Some RBAs have yet to upload any data to HRDC-NHQ.

Once data is received, it is matched with the BNOP file (Benefits and Overpayments) to ascertain the employment status of each EI client. The primary indicators of unpaid EI benefits, and unpaid social assistance are then calculated. (See Section 4. for a discussion of these indicators.) National-, regional- and RBA-level results are made available to all RBA-holders. The current analyzes were completed using the RBA Client Data File for those client records uploaded as of 30 April 1998.

3.2 Methodology

The team conducted two levels of analyzes with the data from the RBA Client Data File. The first set of analyzes was conducted to determine the level of completeness for number of clients or participants in RBA. That is, are the data contained in the RBA Client Data File an accurate reflection of the clients described in the Mid-Term review reports? This analysis will aid in the assessment of the accuracy of the primary indicators calculated using the RBA Client Data File.

The second level of analysis the team conducted was on the completeness of individual client records. That is, for the client records that are being successfully uploaded, do they contain data in the mandatory data fields? This level of analysis is connected to the first in that if there are very few client records, then an accurate analysis of indicators is not possible. Conversely, if there are many client records but they are relatively empty (many missing variables), then the usefulness of the data is also severely hampered.

3.3 Results

The following tables and text contain the results obtained by the team.

3.3.1 Analysis 1: How many client records are missing?

As can be expected in a complex data collection system under development, it appears that not all client records are being uploaded. As reported in Table 3.1, of the 15 RBAs included in the Mid-Term review process, 10 had successfully uploaded some client data. With one exception, the number of participants contained in the client data file for each RBA is lower than the number of participants reported in the Mid-Term review. If the data system was fully operational, we would expect the opposite, since data collection for the Mid-Term review process was completed several months prior to the data upload used for these analyzes.

Table 3.1 provides estimates of missing client records, based on the Mid-Term review information.

It should be noted that in most cases, these are likely *underestimates*, given the gap between Mid-Term reviews and data uploading. That is, it should be assumed that the RBA-holders have continued to provide interventions to new clients during the period between the Mid-Term reviews and the most recent data upload.

With this amount of missing data, the validity of the values calculated for the primary indicators (Unpaid EI and Unpaid SA) becomes questionable. With the exception of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians RBA, the values for these indicators appear to be underestimates for the majority of RBA-holders participating in the Mid-Term review process. Particular caution should be paid to the primary indicator data of those RBA-holders that have uploaded a substantial amount of data (60% or more of expected cases). The tendency is to assume that once some data has been uploaded the data set is complete or representative of the RBA.

TABLE 3.1
Comparison of Number of Participants as Reported in
Mid-Term Reviews and HRDC-RBA Client Data File

RBA-holder	Mid-Term Review # of Participants	RBA Client File # of Clients	Estimate of Client Data Missing	Estimate of % Missing Data
Miawpukek First Nation (NF)	84 (Purchase of training interventions only)	No Data	84+	100%
Federation of Newfoundland Indians (NF)	244	No Data	244+	100%
Kativik Regional Administration (QC)	Not reported	No Data	—	100%
Assembly of First Nations of Labrador and Quebec (QC)	Not reported	762	—	—
London District Chiefs Council (ON)	87	79	8+	9%
Nishnawbe Aski Nation (ON)	1,164 (from projects in SLAAMB area)	1103	61+	(impossible to estimate)
Métis Nation of Ontario (ON)	325	210	115+	35%
Six Nations Onkwehon:we	Not reported	297	—	—
Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (SK)	2952	3333	0	0%
Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (SK)	248 (based on 3 HRCCs only)	No Data	248+	100%
Confederacy Treaty of 6 (AL)	5671	No Data	1899+	33%
Métis Settlements General Council (AL)		74		
Métis Nation of Alberta (AL)		867		
Treaty 7 Economic Development Corporation (AL)		411		
Treaty 8 First Nations Human Resources Development Board (AL)		547		

3.3.2 Analysis 2: What variables are missing?

Although a substantial portion of the records appear to be not yet uploaded to the RBA Client Data File, those records that have been received are for the most part complete. In order to calculate the primary indicators, the essential information is a client Social Insurance Number (SIN), type of client (EI, SA or other), number of SA clients employed, and intervention start and end dates. Other data that Mid-Term review RBAs are consistently providing are:

- tombstone data;
- intervention type;
- source of funding for intervention; and
- intervention outcome.

Social Insurance Numbers

As the SIN is the unique identifier for the matching link with the other databases (e.g., BNOP), this piece of data is crucial to success of the system. A perusal of the data revealed that most SINs were in the valid range (9-digits; no letters). Looking at the results of the calculations for unpaid EI benefits, it appears that the SINs were matched successfully between the BNOP and RBA Client Data File. If an RBA-holder indicated that it had 50 EI clients, then the calculations showed that $n=50$ for the calculations of EI Unpaid. It is assumed that if it had not been possible to match the SIN with the BNOP for all 50 cases, then this would have been indicated in the calculation outcome (i.e., $n<50$).

Type of Client

For the RBA-holders who participated in the Mid-Term review and successfully uploaded client data, the type of client was reported for almost all clients.¹⁶ As this is crucial to determining the primary indicators of EI and SA unpaid, it is a positive sign to see this variable relatively complete. Table 3.2 reports the numbers for the EI/SA split for each of the RBAs. This raises the question of whether any RBA clients are neither EI or SA clients? If that is the case (as reported in one Mid-Term review), why are these client records not being uploaded? They may not be calculated into any of the primary indicators; however, these interventions are RBA activities and perhaps should be considered when conducting uploads of client data.

Social Assistance Clients Employed

This variable requires a follow-up process by the RBA-holder to ascertain whether an SA client has found employment post intervention. It is difficult to assess the accuracy of the data collected on this variable without examining individual data collection systems at the RBA level. For the RBAs included in the Mid-Term review, there is an indication that almost all have some sort of follow-up data collection process in place. As reported in Table 3.2, except for one, all RBAs that had uploaded data had some Unpaid SA

¹⁶ Since this review was conducted, HRDC has further refined the information being uploaded with respect to the type of client (reflecting the type of income assistance being received).

calculated. This illustrates the fact that they are reporting that some SA clients have found employment post intervention. For the RBA that showed no SA savings, it could be the case that none of the SA clients had found employment post intervention. Another interpretation is that the RBA has not yet set up a follow-up data collection process.

Intervention Start and End Dates

The client records uploaded by the RBAs participating in the Mid-Term review contain start and end dates for most interventions. This permits more accurate calculations of Unpaid EI and SA and Displacement (SA clients receiving RBA support, rather than SA while training).

Other Variables

Other main variables, such as Client Name, Address, Birthdate and Sex, are fairly complete. One variable that is only reported approximately 15% of the time is Telephone Number. For the purposes of calculation of primary indicators, it is not necessary. However, for the follow-up with clients in any evaluation work, this is an important piece of information that, although not mandatory, is extremely useful for conducting surveys for outcome or impact evaluations.

3.4 Summary

The RBA client data collection system is still under development. The Client Data File is incomplete. Using data obtained from the RBA Mid-Term review process, the team found that the RBA Client Data File contains data from only 10 of the 15 participating RBAs. Of those eight RBAs that have successfully uploaded data, only one RBA has managed to upload more client records than those reported in its Mid-Term review. This suggests that the RBA Client Data File should still be considered in the developmental phase. As a result, *information derived from this file, including calculations of primary indicators, should be considered **underestimates** and **not as being necessarily representative** of all RBA activities* in relation to the method of calculating the indicators. Whether this truly reflects the results of the RBAs is another question, which is explored in Section 4.

RBA-holder	Total Clients	Completed Clients	Gender	Primary Interventions*	EI/SA clients	EI Unpaid	SA Unpaid
Miawpukek First Nation (NF)	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Federation of Newfoundland Indians (NF)	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Kativik Regional Administration (QC)	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Assembly of First Nations of Labrador and Quebec (QC)	762	694	Men 54% Women 46%	Job Partnerships (25%) Wage Subsidy (25%)	EI — 219 SA — 541	\$207,800	\$507,086
London District Chiefs Council (ON)	79	78	Men 75% Women 24%	Project Based Training (39%)	EI — 36 SA — 43	No Results**	\$234,800
Nishnawbe Aski Nation (ON)	1103	935	Men 68% Women 32%	Project Based Training (75%)	EI — 297 SA — 806	\$1,169,474	\$50,235
Métis Nation of Ontario (ON)	210	5	Men 46% Women 48%	Purchase of Training (74%)	EI — 49 SA — 161	\$176,313	\$20,761
Six Nations Onkweh:we	297	253	Men 50% Women 49%	Purchase of Training (80%)	EI — 71 SA — 226	\$53,774	\$442,643
Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (SK)	3333	1227	Men 51% Women 49%	Project Based Training (65%)	EI — 423 SA — 2,910	\$1,118,529	\$603,740
Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (SK)	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Confederacy Treaty of 6 (AL)	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data	No Data
Métis Settlements General Council (AL)	74	9	Men 35% Women 65%	Purchase Training (89%)	EI — 7 SA — 67	\$18,463	No Data
Métis Nation of Alberta (AL)	867	220	Men 51% Women 48 %	Employment Assistance Services (63%)	EI — 146 SA — 721	\$305,957	\$239,478

RBA-holder	Total Clients	Completed Clients	Gender	Primary Interventions*	EI/SA clients	EI Unpaid	SA Unpaid
Treaty 7 Economic Development Corporation (AL)	411	185	Men 51 Women 49%	Purchase Training (29%)	EI — 40 SA — 371	\$65,154	\$85,337
Treaty 8 First Nations Human Resources Development Board (AL)	547	126	Men 51% Women 48%	Employment Assistance Services (66%)	EI — 79 SA — 468	\$155,589	\$115,421

* This reflects the type of intervention most commonly funded under the RBA. The percentage is shown in brackets. Note that this categorization of interventions is the standard NESS system of classification. Individual RBAs may be operating with slightly different classifications.

** This is likely a problem with system calculations.

4. *RBA Accountability*

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the accountability framework for the RBAs. The research team gained considerable knowledge of the RBA initiative and the individual RBAs through the review of RBA documentation and the Mid-Term review reports and through interviews with HRDC and RBA staff. This knowledge of the RBA initiative, combined with the team's experience in the development and review of accountability frameworks, was used to assess the current RBA accountability framework. The team was also asked to provide an overview of a review strategy for the new five-year strategy (Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy [AHRD]).¹⁷

To set a context for the assessment of the accountability framework, this chapter begins with a brief review of the general accountability requirements set forth by the Government of Canada. Next, it presents a model of the RBA's performance so as to provide a foundation for assessing the RBA accountability framework. It then assesses the accountability framework and suggests ways in which it might be improved. Finally, it suggests a review strategy that synthesizes the collection of performance information for the day-to-day management of the RBA with that for the accountability requirements of HRDC.

4.1 Planning, Reporting and Accountability Structure

According to the Treasury Board of Canada, an *accountability framework* defines the nature and scope of a department's responsibilities, its performance expectations, and the monitoring and reporting requirements through which the department will answer for the authority vested in it. The Planning, Reporting and Accountability Structure (PRAS) is the federal government's accountability framework, and all departmental programming is expected to conform to it. For each business line or program, the PRAS requires:

- (a) an objective;
- (b) a description;
- (c) key results that will be reported in planning and performance documents;
- (d) a performance measurement strategy; and
- (e) the position in the organization accountable for achieving results.

¹⁷ It must be noted, however, that this overview is based on the programming as it was implemented in the current RBA initiative. It does not take into account any program changes that are being incorporated into the AHRDS.

An accountability framework provides the basis for developing an *accountability accord*. An accountability accord is an agreement between organizational levels that sets out performance commitments and performance targets. Also referred to as a “performance agreement” or “performance contract,” an accord covers a specified period and usually reflects strategic priorities.

4.1.1 Accountability and Evaluation Frameworks

Many of the first four elements of an accountability framework are found in an evaluation framework. Therefore, in general, accountability and evaluation frameworks are mutually supportive documents and must be completely consistent. The major difference between them is their purpose. An accountability framework focuses on the key results that will be reported in planning and performance documents, along with the position in the organization accountable for achieving these results. An evaluation framework identifies which performance data should be collected on an ongoing basis and which should be collected at the time of the evaluation. In this way, it seeks to optimize evaluation data collection in terms of cost, timing and reliability. An evaluation framework also outlines the methodology for estimating impacts and cost/benefits for the program.

More sophisticated evaluation frameworks identify a flow of performance information, including (a) the day-to-day information needed to manage the program; (b) implementation evaluations to ensure that the performance of a new initiative is not compromised by design changes made during its implementation; (c) special studies (such as management reviews, audits) that deal with specific problems or information requirements or (d) interim evaluations (usually carried out in the early days of a program’s operation) designed to look at a program’s design and preliminary impacts; and (e) summative or final evaluations (usually carried out after a program has matured) designed to assess how well the program is achieving its objectives. Theoretically, this flow of information builds over time, reinforcing successive needs and minimizing response burden on program participants and staff.

4.1.2 Program Model

At the heart of both accountability and evaluation frameworks is performance. Performance is not just about knowing *what* you want to achieve. It is also about knowing *how* you will achieve it. This is because current accountability models do more than promise results and explain shortfalls. They now include the need to show that reasonable and appropriate precautions have been taken to avoid shortfalls. And this requires knowing and making explicit the “cause and effect” relationships of performance so that they can be managed and validated. For example, RBA staff skills affect their ability to counsel. In turn, this counselling ability affects RBA staff’s ability to help clients develop appropriate personal action plans, which affect the bottom line — whether RBA clients are able to find meaningful employment after they have completed their RBA programming.

Performance may be based on a program¹⁸ model. It shows the intended cause and effect relationship among key activities, their outputs and their impacts. It reflects program design from a performance perspective. The evaluation framework makes the model explicit, while the accountability framework usually does not.

The program model lays a foundation for assessing whether an organization has the capacity to manage its performance. Capacity is determined by:

- (a) assessing the infrastructure (i.e., employee morale, skills, organizational structure, policies, procedures, systems, standards, etc.) underlying the program;
- (b) identifying shortcomings in business processes and personnel; and
- (c) aligning the organization's infrastructure with program objectives, especially those impacts/results for which it has made a commitment.

In a rapidly changing environment, such as that of the RBA initiative, capacity assessment can provide an early indication of whether a program or initiative is being implemented successfully. It provides the means not only to identify and redress performance shortfalls, but also to identify and redress threats to performance before they occur.

Both the program model and capacity assessment provide a foundation for developing a performance measurement system. The program model focuses on outcome measures, while the capacity assessment focuses on process measures. Both are compatible with the PRAS and are necessary to identify key accountability results.

4.2 RBA Program Models

HRDC negotiates and signs RBAs with various Aboriginal organizations to give them the opportunity to design and deliver employment programs that reflect and serve Aboriginal needs at the local labour market and community level. These agreements enable Aboriginal organizations, through a number of employment programs, to help Aboriginal people (including the employed and those not in the labour force, as well as the unemployed) prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment.

The performance of the RBA initiative is best depicted by two program models. The first shows the cause and effect relationship among the activities, outputs and impacts of the RBA-holder — the Aboriginal organizations that design and deliver the programming. The second shows the cause and effect relationship among the activities, outputs and impacts of HRDC in its role as program administrator, at the level of the RBA initiative. Together these models show the initiative's design from a performance perspective. They also focus on identifying outcome measures that lay a foundation for the PRAS.

¹⁸ "Program" is used in the generic sense for any type of public-sector intervention. For example, a program model can be constructed for such interventions as a project, a service, a piece of legislation, a set of regulations, an initiative and a policy. The key ingredients to constructing a program model are a set of activities designed to produce outputs that seek to achieve specific impacts.

It should be noted that the proposed models presented in this section are based on RBA documents and interviews with selected RBA-holders and HRDC personnel. While the proposed models have been reviewed by staff of the ARO at HRDC, they have not been reviewed in any formal way by the various RBA-holders. Such a review is suggested, not only to ensure the models' accuracy but also to ensure its acceptance among the RBA-holders. Any changes to the initiative would lead to changes of a material nature in the program model.

4.2.1 RBA-Holders

The performance of RBA-holders rests on eight basic activities. First, RBA managers negotiate budgets and associated results. Then, they assess their capacity to realize these performance expectations and, where necessary, build or strengthen their capacity to achieve these results. Next, they promote the RBA programming. At this point, they are ready to identify and determine the eligibility of potential clients. Next, they counsel them and help them to determine their employment programming needs. Eligible clients whose employment action plans are approved are then matched with appropriate delivery mechanisms. As clients are engaged in their employment programming, their progress is monitored and assessed, and the eventual results are reported to HRDC. As a final step, RBA managers evaluate how well the RBA performed and how well its performance was managed. The following explains each of these eight activities in more detail, along with their primary impacts.

Negotiate Budgets/Targets

Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) are similar but not identical. In general, they cover the term of the agreement; local appeal process; funding, reporting and accountability mechanisms; services to be provided; data sharing; geographic area to be served; evaluation and monitoring of agreements; transitional measures; regional budget allocations; communities of interest; and joint projects. For each of the three years of the RBA's term, holders negotiate budgets and performance targets. These are established at the local level to reflect local conditions, such as the unemployment rate and the number of job-ready clients.

Success is measured using indicators. Primary success indicators are the number of clients who become employed or self-employed; the number of clients who successfully completed labour market interventions; and savings to the EI Account or Income Support programs (such as social assistance). Other success indicators include the proportion of youth participants; proportion of participants who self-identify as having a disability; number of trainees successfully completing interventions in high-skill occupational areas; number of on- and off-reserve participants; and duration of employment.

Negotiating budgets and targets should result in a better understanding of performance commitments and expected results. It may also improve the contribution of unit delivery mechanisms to RBA's performance commitments.

Build/Strengthen Capacity

Some RBAs need to build or strengthen their organizational capacity to successfully deliver their labour market programming. In particular, there is a recognized need for RBAs to increase their ability to (a) set objectives and priorities; (b) perform functions, solve problems and achieve their objectives; and (c) understand and deal with their labour market needs in a broad, strategic and sustainable manner.

Both internal and external improvements in capacity are needed. Externally, the RBAs encourage and support employers, employee and/or employer associations and communities to improve their capacity for dealing with human resources requirements and implementing labour force adjustments. There is also a need to better develop and use partnerships with the private sector (as well as others, such as training institutions) and to work out programming relationships with the provinces (e.g., social assistance and training allowances). Internally, there is a need to integrate the RBA into the community and, where necessary, establish or strengthen local labour market delivery mechanisms. RBAs may allocate funds to these mechanisms and negotiate/assign targets. Also at the internal level, there is a need to develop tools that lead to improvements in program design, delivery and results. These tools are grouped in five broad areas: (a) planning, such as labour market analysis, data analysis, accountability and monitoring/evaluation; (b) systems, such as data collection, accounting and EI screens; (c) people, such as counsellor training and project officer training; (d) self-assessment, such as counsellor tools; and (e) delivery, such as Aboriginal training institutions.

Immediate priorities lie in the areas of employment counselling, accountability (tracking, following up and measuring success), board training (team building), staff training (communication skills) and needs assessment (client needs).

Building capacity will increase both the knowledge and skills present in the RBA, as well as its ability to efficiently and effectively deliver programming and results.

Promote Programming

RBAs may undertake a number of activities to increase awareness of their programming and its benefits. This should make it easier to attract participants. RBA managers may use a number of means to promote their programming, such as publications, flyers, brochures, meetings, presentations, seminars and “word-of-mouth.” Promoting RBA programming should increase community support for, and interest in, the RBAs and their programs, including attracting clients.

Identify Clients/Determine Eligibility

Some RBA clients self-identify. Others are identified through local knowledge or in connection with local community business plans or projects. RBAs need to ensure that potential clients are eligible for RBA programming. The eligibility of participants is primarily based on their unemployment status, but there may also be a need to verify their Aboriginal status. Where potential clients are not eligible for RBA programming, the

RBA may refer them to alternative federal or provincial programming. These activities ensure that RBA programming is directed at appropriate clients.

Counsel Clients/ Determine Needs

RBAs provide a wide range of labour market programming to help their unemployed clients find employment. Their programs may include:

- (a) *targeted wage subsidies* that encourage employers to hire individuals whom they would not normally hire in the absence of the subsidy;
- (b) *self-employment assistance* (which help individuals create jobs for themselves by starting a business);
- (c) *job creation partnerships* (which provide individuals with employment opportunities through which they can gain work experience that leads to ongoing employment); and
- (d) *training purchases* (which help individuals to obtain skills, ranging from basic to advanced, which should improve their immediate and long-term employment prospects). In some cases, tuitions are paid, as opposed to seats being purchased.

In support of this programming, RBAs counsel their clients and help them create job finding clubs and develop job search strategies. RBAs may also support activities that identify better ways of helping individuals prepare for, or keep, employment and be productive participants in the labour force.

RBAs need to assess the skills and qualifications of eligible clients and determine with them what RBA programming best suits their individual needs. The suitability of eligible clients may be assessed in terms of their interest, commitment to achieve career goals, educational background, and readiness for participation in RBA programming. RBAs may prepare a personal action plan for each client that may be based on a case management approach. Determining client needs in consultation with the client increases client commitment and leads to better targeted, more efficient programming.

Some RBAs use committees to review and approve proposed personal action plans. Decisions may be appealed. This process ensures that the needs of the community and the individual are met and that unrealistic plans are not funded.

Based on their needs, RBAs provide appropriate employment services, including matching them with identified delivery mechanisms, such as training institutes, employers or associations. Depending on the service(s) provided, clients may increase their knowledge, skills and experience as a step towards increasing their employment. Once they are employed, SAR/EI savings (defined as unpaid benefits) may result. Evaluations may want to look at other indicators of success in relation to government assistance. The program may also increase well-being, not only for the individual, but also for the community.

Monitor, Assess and Report Results

While RBA clients are undergoing their programming, their progress will be monitored and payments will be made. Where necessary, adjustments may be made. In addition, RBAs survey their clients after they have completed their programming to determine their employment status. Not only does monitoring help ensure that clients are progressing according to their personal action plans, it allows RBA managers to report to HRDC on the status and results of their programming. Using monitoring information helps RBA managers and staff to improve their performance and meet their commitments/results.

Review RBA

Besides the ongoing monitoring and day-to-day management of the RBA's program performance, RBA managers and staff rely on periodic internal/external evaluations/reviews to assess the effectiveness of its performance and control. In addition, they assess its performance management and measurement by appraising the value/contribution of various performance measures, eliminating unneeded measures/data and refining performance measures, targets and commitments. The RBA-holder shared these experiences throughout its organization in an effort not only to improve its performance management and measurement but also to make its programming more efficient and more effective. The RBA-holder reports its performance to its clients and stakeholders.

Logic Chart

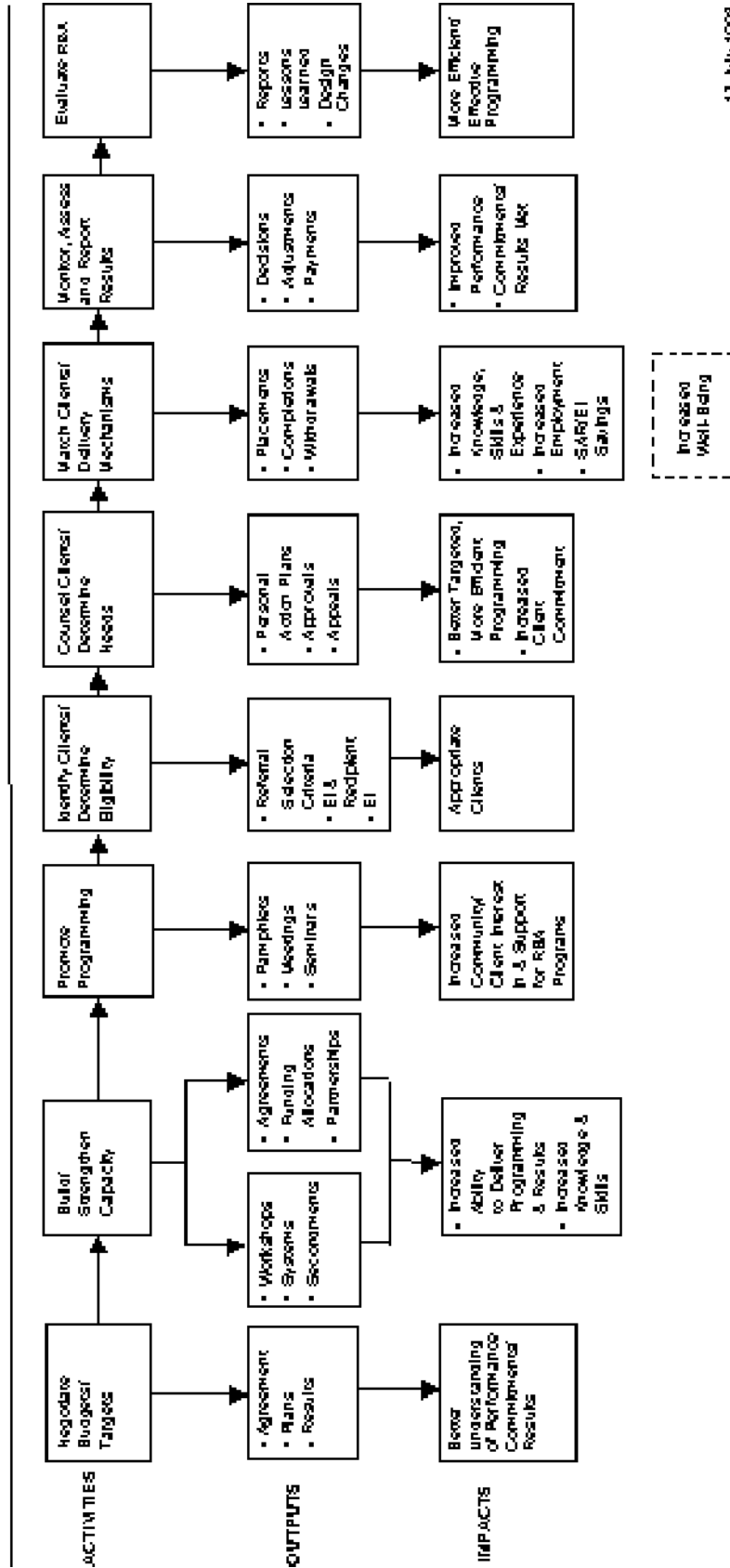
The logic chart, or performance map that follows depicts these eight key activities, along with their main outputs and the impacts they are expected to produce. This Activity → Output → Impacts chain shows what results the RBA-holders can achieve. As such, the logic chart makes explicit the cause and effect relationships of performance so that they can be managed and validated.

In the Activity → Output → Impacts chain, *activities* are major (in terms of resources) or significant (in terms of importance) chunks of work. These are what resources are used for. *Outputs* are the goods or services provided by the RBA-holder to its clients. These are key because they are the basis on which clients judge program performance. *Impacts* are the consequences of the RBA-holder's outputs. They are often called outcomes.

In looking at the logic chart, it is important to note that the Activity → Output → Impacts chain — that is, the vertical arrows — focuses on *primary* causality. For example, promoting RBA programming, is primarily designed to increase the community's interest in, and support for, the program, including attracting clients. It may lead to increased employment, but other activities, such as counselling sessions, job finding clubs and RBA programming, are primarily designed for that purpose.

The horizontal arrows connecting the activities show the “logical” sequence in which the program is delivered. They also capture the notion that earlier activities support the impacts achieved by later activities but that their “influence” fades the further they are from the impact.

Logic Chart for Regional Bilateral Agreements — Holder



4.2.2 RBA — HRDC

The performance of the RBA initiative from the perspective of HRDC in its role as program administrator rests on six basic activities. First, HRDC managers establish the initiative's parameters. Next, they identify holders and negotiate agreements. Once agreements are in place they negotiate budgets and associated results. Then, they help RBA-holders build or strengthen their capacity to deliver RBA programming. As the RBA-holders deliver their programming, they send monitoring reports to HRDC for review. In the final step, HRDC managers review evaluations prepared by RBA-holders and integrate these into an evaluation of the program as a whole.

The following explains the first two of these activities in more detail, along with their primary impacts. The four remaining activities mirror those of the RBA-holders and need no further explanation.

Establish Program Parameters

HRDC managers are responsible for establishing the parameters of the RBA initiative. They design the initiative, including the respective roles and responsibilities of the Aboriginal organizations and HRDC. In dealing with the Treasury Board, they prepare funding proposals and establish the terms and conditions under which the program will operate. All of these activities lead to better designed and targeted programming.

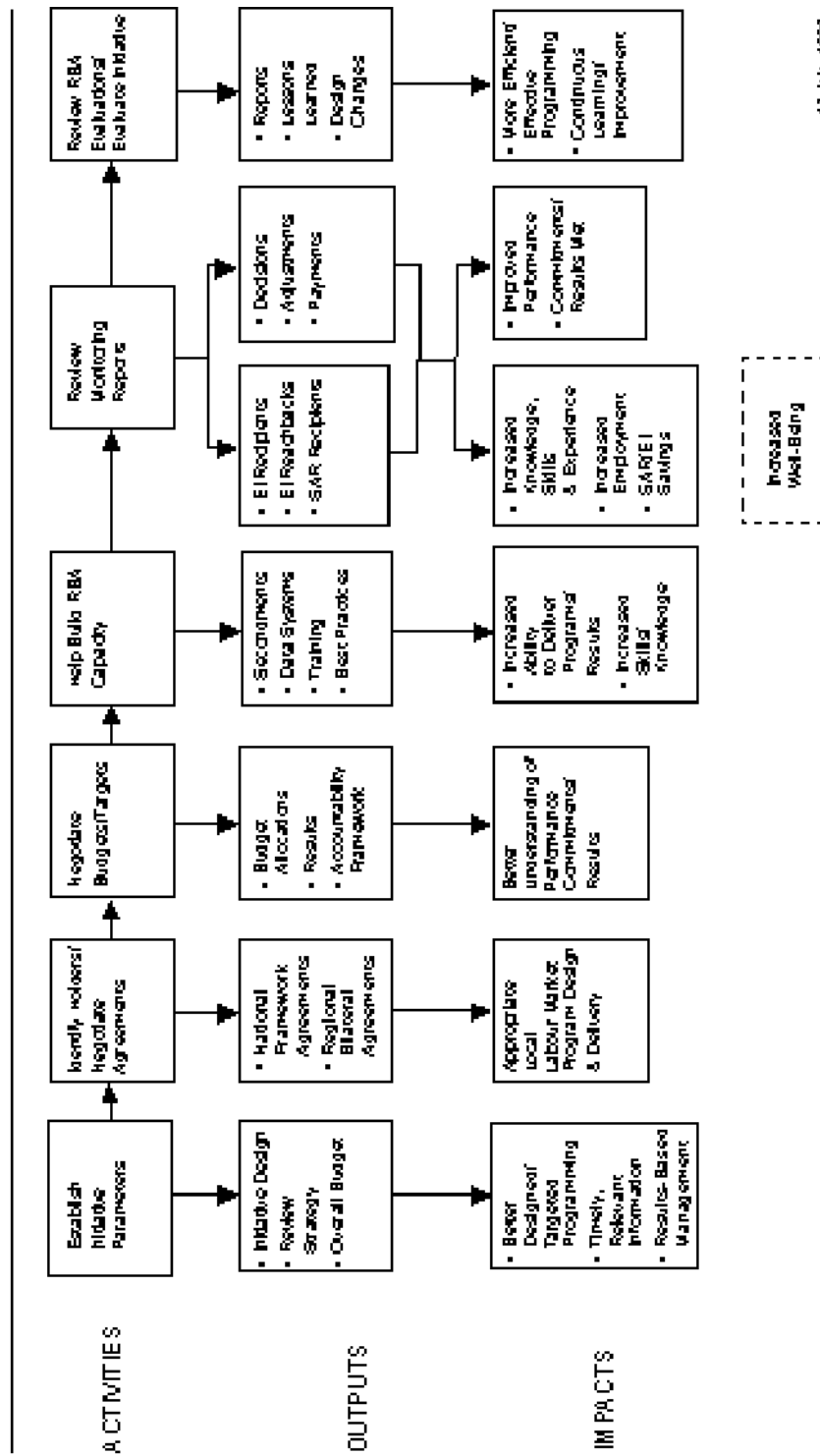
As part of this activity, HRDC managers also develop a review strategy. This strategy not only leads to more timely, relevant information on the initiative's and the RBA's performance but also supports a results-based management regime.

Identify Holders/Negotiate Agreements

While the principal instrument of delivery is the RBA, HRDC negotiates these under the auspices of National Framework Agreements (NFAs), which are negotiated with the three national Aboriginal groups — First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The NFAs account for more than 50 RBAs. However, some Aboriginal groups fall outside the NFAs. HRDC negotiated agreements with 9 such groups. The breadth of such agreements ensures that HRDC helps Aboriginal organizations develop appropriate local labour market delivery approaches.

The logic chart on the next page depicts the six key activities of the RBA initiative from the HRDC perspective, along with their main outputs and the impacts they are expected to produce.

Logic Chart for Regional Bilateral Agreements — HRDC



13 July 2008

4.3 Assessment of the Accountability Framework

The RBA initiative meets the requirements of the government's PRAS accountability framework. It has an objective, a description, key results to be reported in planning and performance documents, a performance measurement strategy, and the positions in the various organizations (e.g., RBA-holders and HRDC) accountable for achieving results. The purpose of this section is to examine the key results in the accountability framework for the RBAs and suggest improvements, if any.

This assessment looks at the key results from both a conceptual and a definitional point of view (i.e., *what* results should be in the accountability framework and *how* they are or should be defined). It also takes into account observations from the Mid-Term reviews and feedback from discussions with HRDC regional office and RBA staff who participated in the Mid-Term review. The assessment is also based on the understanding of the initiative reflected in the RBA program models.

The assessment assumes a simple client management model for the RBAs. This model holds that clients are identified, their specific programming needs (i.e., interventions) are determined/provided, and the outcome of this programming is monitored to find out what impact, if any, it had in helping the clients find employment. This simple client → intervention → outcome model suggests a focus for determining key results for the RBA initiative.

4.3.1 Existing Key Results

The accountability framework for the RBAs focuses on two primary success indicators for EI-funded activities:

1. the number of clients who became employed or self-employed; and
2. savings to the EI Account;

and three primary success indicators for activities funded by the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF):

1. the number of clients who became employed or self-employed;
2. the number of clients who successfully completed labour market interventions; and
3. savings to the Income Support programs (primarily social assistance — short and medium term).

For both EI- and CRF-funded activities, other success indicators may be chosen, such as the:

1. number of youth participants;
2. number of participants who self-identify as having a disability;
3. number of trainees successfully completing interventions in high-skill occupational areas;
4. number of on- and off-reserve participants; and
5. duration of employment.

4.3.2 Assessment of Existing Key Result Indicators

The assessment that follows will look at each of the three key success indicators individually — employment, savings and interventions.

Employment

The objective for the RBA initiative suggests that it is appropriate that emphasis be placed on employment as the single-most critical measure of the success for RBA programming. However, the accountability framework defines “employment” as the “number of clients who became employed or self-employed.” While the quantity of employment generated by the RBAs is important, account must also be taken of the quality of the employment generated. If the quality dimension is ignored, RBAs may bias programming towards part-time, short-term/seasonal, low-paying employment. In other words, the quality of employment may be sacrificed for quantity.

Information provided in the Mid-Term review suggested that this is happening in some RBAs. However, RBA-holders expressed a preference for focusing on full-time, high-paying, long-term/permanent employment, as opposed to part-time, low-paying, short-term/seasonal employment. Thus, to meet the needs of both partners, *the accountability framework needs to recognize the quality of employment* as well as the number of jobs arising from RBA programming. Key quality indicators of employment include its length, the wage/income paid, and whether it was full- or part-time, permanent or seasonal. Both HRDC and the RBA-holders need to decide what dimensions of quality should be included in the accountability framework and how they should be measured.

The accountability framework measures the quantity of employment in a number of ways. For some RBA clients, employment is based on the duration of the EI claim and the amount drawn. For others, employment is based on whether the client reports being employed when contacted during the 12-week follow-up survey. The presence of many definitions of employment has the potential to increase the non-comparability of results amongst RBA-holders and their interventions. In addition, it increases confusion on the part of RBA-holders. HRDC and the RBA-holders should agree on a single definition of the quantity of employment, and this should be applied to all clients. The simplest and most straightforward definition would appear to be client-reported employment (through an administrative follow-up) at the time of the 12-week follow-up survey.

Savings

The accountability framework identifies savings to the EI Account and to income-support programs (primarily social assistance) as another primary success indicator for RBA-holders. This reflects the initiative’s emphasis on EI and social-assistance recipients as clients. While “savings” is a key result for HRDC to report in its accountability to Parliament, RBA-holders do not actually calculate the savings that result from their interventions. Rather, the RBA-holders identify clients who are currently in receipt of EI or some other income-support program, and HRDC calculates the estimates of “savings.” The concept of “savings” is not a factor that drives implementation of the RBA; service

deliverers do not focus on targeting activities to maximize savings. The focus is more on employment, with activities targeted to those who currently rely on government assistance, rather than employment, for their income. As a result, consideration should be given to having this as the key indicator of performance, rather than savings.

Savings to EI Benefits or some other form of income-support program are determined by an RBA client's employment status. As noted earlier, there are a variety of employment definitions, and this may affect the consistency and integrity of this calculation.

Savings to EI are defined as the difference between what a person was entitled to receive in benefits and what is estimated to be paid out in benefits to that person. Similarly, savings to income-support programs are defined as the difference between what a person was entitled to receive in social-assistance benefits and what is estimated to be paid out in benefits to that person. The latter is based on an "assumption that these clients would have remained on SA for the duration of the year and when they find employment, that they would remain employed for the duration of that year." This assumption can only result in a potential upward bias to the estimated SA savings. *While the assumption may be valid, it should be verified.*

Interventions

The performance indicator measuring "the number of clients who successfully completed labour market interventions" is another critical measure of how the RBAs perform. However, *it should be broken down by the type of intervention* to reflect the continuum of services. This is important because interventions carry different costs and impacts. In addition, there may need to be some agreement on definitions. A case in point is counselling. If a client has several counselling sessions with RBA staff, do these count as one or three counselling interventions? Early feedback from some RBA-holders indicates that the average number of interventions per client was a little over one. However, one RBA-holder reported an average of about eight. This suggests that RBA-holders may be defining their interventions differently. Thus, *consideration should be given to developing common definitions of interventions*. In the absence of this, it will be important to develop a good understanding of what constitutes each intervention type so that they can be aggregated across RBAs.

Also, as each intervention carries different costs and may have different employment impacts, *consideration should be given to including measures of the cost-effectiveness of the various interventions*.

4.3.3 Additional Key Results

Besides the accountability framework's three primary success indicators (employment, savings and interventions) discussed in the previous section, consideration should be given to adding success indicators that reflect the longer term impacts of the RBA initiative and the need for capacity building. These are discussed below.

Term

The accountability framework appears to focus on the short as opposed to the long term. However, the longer term impacts may be much more important than the shorter term ones. For example, what are the employment impacts of RBA programming one, two or three years after the intervention? How long were clients employed? How many clients return to EI or SA? The accountability framework may need to recognize *the employment history of clients* following their RBA program participation. This would include looking at the number of clients who have returned to EI or SA and for how long.

Similarly, the accountability framework does not recognize the need for some RBA clients who face serious employment barriers to complete personal action plans containing several RBA interventions to help them obtain employment, even low-paying, short-term/seasonal employment. Such plans may take several years to complete, especially if the goal is high-paying, long-term/permanent employment. *The accountability framework should recognize long-term personal action plans.* Such action plans are expected to be more than one year in duration and may last as long as three years.

Capacity Building

Finally, the Mid-Term review indicates that many RBA-holders had limited, if not insufficient, capacity to deliver the results expected in the accountability framework. As capacity precedes results, *the accountability framework needs to recognize capacity-building efforts and the maturity or self-sufficiency of the RBA-holder.*

Capacity building has many dimensions and is, to some extent, a continuum along which RBA-holders may progress on the way to becoming self-sufficient. In this regard, the accountability framework may need to include indicators with respect to the operation of the RBAs, such as their ability to:

- (a) report results;
- (b) ensure their financial integrity;
- (c) assess local labour market needs, set priorities, and prepare appropriate strategies and plans;
- (d) integrate themselves into their communities;
- (e) deliver programming, i.e., skills needed to identify/counsel clients and monitor their performance with a view to identifying opportunities for improvement, if needed;
- (f) create supportive labour market conditions (through partnerships, linkages to professional organization, etc.) and take advantage of emerging opportunities;
- (g) assess their performance, learn from that experience, and redesign their programming if needed; and
- (h) sustain themselves in terms of having achieved all of the foregoing and being able to maintain them, including being able to build and maintain capacity of local labour market deliverers.

Target vs. Commitment

In closing this section, consideration should be given to distinguishing between performance commitments and performance targets in the accountability framework. A *performance commitment* is a “promised” result, while a *performance target* is an “aimed-for” result. The difference between the two rests largely with the degree of control that the organization has over achieving the result. The former is within the control of the organization delivering or achieving it, while the latter is usually not (i.e., it may be affected to a significant extent by external factors). In the case of the success indicators discussed above, only capacity building would be considered a performance commitment. All of the rest would be considered performance targets.

4.4 Review Strategy

The RBA initiative will be succeeded by the AHRDS. The purpose of this section is to propose a review strategy that will suggest performance indicators and methods to provide performance information required: (1) by AHRDS agreement holders for the day-to-day management of their agreements; (2) by HRDC to meet its accountability requirements; (3) for an implementation evaluation of new AHRDS agreements; (4) for special studies, if needed; (5) for interim evaluations of the AHRDS agreements and the program; and (6) for summative or final evaluations of the AHRDS agreements and the program. This strategy results in a flow of performance information that builds over time, reinforcing successive needs and minimizing response burden on AHRDS participants and staff.

4.4.1 AHRDS Agreement Holders’ Day-to-Day Management

The information needed by AHRDS agreement holders for the day-to-day management of their clients reflects the client χ intervention \rightarrow outcome model introduced earlier.

AHRDS-holders require information on their clients (e.g., SIN, name, address) and their interventions (e.g., type [e.g., training, wage subsidy], start/end dates) to successfully manage their programming. Such information can be captured in various electronic formats and sent to HRDC on a daily or weekly basis, if needed. Monthly or quarterly reporting may be more efficient. These administrative (i.e., client and intervention) data support the monitoring of clients’ progress through their personal action plans and allow AHRDS staff to take corrective action, as needed, to help their clients succeed.

Once an AHRDS client has completed (or withdrawn from) his or her programming, the AHRDS-holder requires information on what has happened to the client, i.e., the outcome. Outcome data may be collected in follow-up surveys conducted, for example, 3 and 12 months after the client has completed his or her programming. These surveys provide short-term and longer term impact measures, particularly with respect to the nature (e.g., occupation, duration, wage/income, full-time/part-time, permanent/temporary) of the employment found. However, finding clients for follow-up surveys may prove difficult, and special attention would have to be paid to this activity.

Some AHRDS agreement holders may wish to consider exit interviews with clients as a way of collecting rapid feedback on the preliminary effectiveness of a client's programming. Exit surveys could be used to collect a considerable amount of client information on continuing need, program design and delivery, satisfaction with the program, employment prospects, and whether clients would recommend the program to others. This information is not likely to be very time dependent, and it could be used to help manage the program. The use of exit surveys means that follow-up surveys and an interim evaluation could concentrate on estimating program impacts.

Ideally, the exit surveys should be conducted on the last day of the intervention. However, more practical timing would be the week before or the week after the intervention ends. The advantages of this approach are that: (a) the data are collected consistently (i.e., at the end of the intervention); (b) the surveys are easy to administer (compared with collecting the information some time after the interventions are over); (c) the surveys are cheaper (they are completed by the clients); (d) it is easier to locate clients; (e) the experiences are fresher; (f) it allows for greater follow-up for non-response; (g) it provides a way to verify client addresses and telephone numbers that could be used in the 3- and 12-month follow-up surveys; (h) it provides a quick way to identify and concentrate on "success stories"; and (i) it starts to address evaluation questions earlier in the development process.

4.4.2 HRDC Accountability Requirements

The data collected as part of the AHRDS agreement day-to-day management should answer virtually all of HRDC's accountability requirements. AHRDS administrative data sent to HRDC easily allow HRDC to generate reports containing such performance information as number of clients and interventions, year-to-date budget expenditures, average cost per client, employment found, etc. The employment data allow HRDC to estimate unpaid EI and social-assistance benefits.

To supplement this, AHRDS agreement holders should provide HRDC with periodic summaries of progress in meeting capacity-building commitments and success stories. Such information could be provided in the AHRDS agreement holder's annual report and would accompany annual financial and management reviews.

4.4.3 Implementation Evaluation (optional)

Putting in place a new initiative is tricky. Many things can go wrong during the implementation phase. That is why new AHRDS agreements may wish to consider conducting implementation evaluations. They are designed to determine whether the programming of the agreement is being carried out as designed. If not, it identifies what problems are being encountered and suggests what needs to be done to solve them. Implementation evaluations are useful not only for new initiatives but also for substantially changed ones. They are also useful in preventing design flaws or changes that may compromise the initiative's effectiveness.

4.4.4 Special Study (optional)

Similarly, special studies focus on one or two specific issues that may arise after an initiative has been implemented. For example, why is the take-up on a program less than expected? Or, how can we increase client satisfaction with our service? They tend to be problem driven and solution oriented.

4.4.5 Interim Evaluation

Many initiatives take considerable time before showing whether and to what degree they are having any impacts and effects. In such cases, AHRDS managers may not be able to wait for a final evaluation. They may require more immediate feedback on a range of shorter term or intermediate impacts and effects, including how well the initiative's design is working and how satisfied are its clients. These are generally addressed in interim evaluations.

Interim evaluations are important for new AHRDS agreement holders. They are also important for existing agreement holders should AHRDS include programming that was not contained in the RBA initiative.

The use of exit surveys would considerably reduce the scope and depth of an interim evaluation. An interim evaluation would likely include:

- (a) follow-up surveys of clients;
- (b) interviews with the key AHRDS agreement holder staff and community leaders;
and
- (c) an analysis and assessment of client/intervention/outcomes data.

The use of exit surveys means that follow-up surveys of clients can concentrate on the program's employment (particularly, the quality) impacts. Otherwise, the survey may have to include other areas, such as client satisfaction.

Facilitated self-assessments might be an appropriate approach for evaluation of the AHRDS. This would involve staff of the RBA-holder organizations (and potentially their local delivery agents) in an assessment (guided by a facilitator) of their own program, its processes and impacts. This approach to evaluation is consistent with the findings of the Mid-Term reviews and with the guiding principles for the RBA initiative. It has the potential to increase the involvement of various stakeholders and strengthen partnerships under the initiative.

As will be seen in Section 5, this approach is proposed for the final evaluation of the current RBA initiative, for those RBA-holders that have not already conducted an interim evaluation. The approach uses the experiences of RBA-holders who participated in the Mid-Term review as a way of identifying design and delivery problems and solutions. Agreement holder staff would review and discuss various design and delivery issues in a workshop under the guidance of a facilitator. The purpose would be to identify and prioritize any potential delivery problems with a view to investigating and resolving them.

The probable starting date for AHRDS agreement interim evaluations would be determined by the maturity of the agreement and how far along it is in its five-year life. Mature AHRDS agreements probably do not require interim evaluations. Newer AHRDS agreements may require an interim evaluation two or three years after starting.

4.4.6 Final Summative Evaluation

Final evaluations look at a program's impacts and effects, including such issues as how well programs have achieved their objective(s), whether they have continuing relevance, and whether there are more effective alternatives to their design and delivery.

The timing of final evaluation of the AHRDS agreement and the program as a whole would probably take place during the last year of AHRDS's five-year mandate. In the event that it did, final evaluations of AHRDS agreements would include:

- (a) 12-month (or longer) follow-up surveys of clients (to obtain longer term data on the program's employment and savings impacts);
- (b) interviews with the key AHRDS agreement holder staff and community leaders;
- (c) interviews with non-participants (in this case, people who applied to participate in the program but were not found suitable or eligible and were referred elsewhere);
- (d) a file review; and
- (e) administrative data analysis — e.g., longer term estimates of earnings and/or use of government assistance (EI or SA).

Given the nature of the interim evaluations, final evaluations would likely concentrate on issues of reach (i.e., profile of clients served, interventions used successfully/unsuccessfully), accountability (i.e., how well performance targets were met), effectiveness (i.e., what results various interventions produced, community impacts, rural/urban differences) and design (i.e., what changes in programming and its delivery, if any, are needed to make the agreement more effective or efficient).

These final evaluations, at the agreement level, would be synthesized into an overall evaluation of the impacts of AHRDS and would be added to a final evaluation of the overall AHRDS, which would address issues related to program rationale (i.e., continuing need for the program, contribution to devolution) and effectiveness (i.e., design and delivery). In addition to the information supplied by the synthesis of the final evaluations of the AHRDS agreements, these issues would largely be addressed by interviews with key staff and stakeholders.

5. Evaluation Options

The final product of the synthesis of the Mid-Term reviews is the development of options for the summative (or final) evaluation of the RBA initiative. Plans for the final RBA evaluation were included in the ARO strategic evaluation plan and in HRDC EDD workplan. Given the research team's experience with the review of the Mid-Term reviews, the team was asked to propose options for this final evaluation. The timing for this work is appropriate, given that summative evaluations are planned for 1998/99 in anticipation that a new five-year strategy (AHRDS) would be in place in April 1999.

The accountability framework for the RBA calls for both implementation and summative evaluations to be conducted.¹⁹ Under this framework and the agreements signed with the RBA-holders, each RBA-holder is required to evaluate, jointly with HRDC, their design and delivery process, as well as program impacts, within the three-year period during which the RBA is in effect. It was expected that the final evaluation process would follow a bilateral approach. Lessons learned on the process of designing and developing local evaluation frameworks for the Mid-Term reviews would help in the design of a similar bilateral process for final evaluations to address both formative and summative evaluation issues.

The consultants were asked to review the evaluation requirements and objectives, the needs of the partners, and information priorities within the context of their experience of preparing the synthesis report and the budget constraints of the Department. The task was to develop options for conducting the final evaluation. This chapter reflects those options. The development of these options was informed not only by the results of the synthesis of Mid-Term reviews but also by information provided by HRDC and RBA-holder staff at meetings held in each of the five regions that participated in the Mid-Term review.

Before identifying the options, however, it is important to set the context for conducting the evaluation (including identifying the challenges that have to be faced and developing a shared understanding of the evaluation objectives).

5.1 Evaluation Context

The RBA initiative draws its authority from two sources: the Aboriginal Labour Market Development Program and Part II of the EI Legislation Employee Benefits and National Employment Service. Accompanying these authorities are requirements that HRDC evaluate program impacts across all RBAs, addressing the following:

- sustainability of employment;
- change in dependency on income transfers (EI and social assistance);

¹⁹ Draft evaluation framework for the Evaluation of National Framework Agreements and RBAs (May 1997).

- impacts on communities; and
- changes in tax revenues.²⁰

Information from the synthesis of Mid-Term reviews and interviews with staff of Aboriginal organizations and HRDC (both at HQ and in the field) provided valuable contextual information for determining to what extent the final evaluation could address this requirement for impact evaluation and for developing specific evaluation options. Staff of HRDC regional offices and the RBAs that conducted Mid-Term reviews learned valuable lessons through this process.

5.1.1 Challenges

There is considerable interest in evaluation and data collection and clearly some good evaluation capacity at the regional level. However, there are also challenges to conducting the final evaluation. The most significant challenge is the lack of accurate and reliable administrative data on participants and outcomes available in electronic files. This issue is worth some elaboration, since it has a major impact on the extent to which HRDC can meet its evaluation requirements.

Administrative Data

In recognition of its accountability requirements, the ARO established a national database that includes information on program participants. In recognition of the government's policies concerning self-government and empowering Aboriginal organizations to design and deliver their own programs, each RBA-holder was left to select the database systems that most effectively met their own needs for managing their RBA and collecting and providing information to HRDC. Some elected to continue using already established local information systems; others opted to use existing national HRDC systems (such as Contact IV); and others (in consultation with HRDC regional offices) used region-specific systems (such as the Client Adjustment Tracking System (CATS) developed in the Newfoundland region). All systems are supposed to have the capability to upload data to HRDC-HQ, and the HQ system is supposed to accept data from the RBA.

This data includes key variables, such as:

- participant identifier;
- RBA;
- Aboriginal group;
- type of intervention;
- intervention completion and outcome; and
- source of funding, etc.

²⁰ This is not particularly relevant for some parts of the Aboriginal community.

HRDC links this data with existing national databases (such as NESS and EI Benefits and Overpayment File) to calculate or estimate values for core indicators that are being used to assess the short-term impact of all HRDC employment/training programs. These indicators include:

- employment;
- savings to the EI account; and
- savings to provincial social-assistance accounts.

(See Section 4. for a fuller discussion of issues related to program accountability requirements.)

The ARO has made considerable progress in encouraging RBA-holders to submit the program data required to assess the impact of the RBA initiative. However, the systems are still maturing, and there appear to be considerable gaps in the information available. It is difficult to assess the extent of the missing information because, without an attestation from all RBA-holders that all participant information has been submitted, the total number of program participants is not known. (See the discussion of data availability in Section 3.)

It is known, however, from the Mid-Term reviews and the field interviews, that some RBA-holders have considerable administrative data (in electronic format) that have not yet been submitted to HRDC-HQ. Others have had difficulty collecting the required data at the RBA level. Some have experienced technical problems with their individual databases. HRDC regional staff and staff of the RBA-holders are sceptical about use of the national data for evaluation purposes. Specifically, they question:

- the completeness of data available from HRDC-HQ (uploaded data, at times, appear not to be reflected in reports from HQ);
- the validity of the available information (e.g., they report that the information underestimates the volume and nature of the work undertaken by the RBA-holders);
- the consistency of definitions as they relate to various data elements (e.g., the definition of an intervention), which limits the extent to which it will be possible to compare information across regions and RBA-holders; and
- the validity of HQ estimations of savings to the EI Account and to provincial SAR accounts. They are particularly concerned about the short-term focus of these calculations.

As a result, both HRDC and RBA-holder staff are concerned about how evaluation results based on these data would be used. Some RBA-holders interviewed reported that the EI and SAR savings generated as a result of their program activities will form the basis for future program funding. While they believe that any savings generated should benefit Aboriginal communities, they are sceptical about the validity of the calculations and hesitant to see this information used in a final evaluation.

Other Challenges

In addition to their concerns about administrative data, there is also considerable scepticism about evaluation and fatigue among RBA-holders who have been subject to many evaluations and surveys (including those conducted for programs other than the RBAs). This is particularly a concern if the evaluation is perceived to be measuring success through indicators that have limited appeal for the Aboriginal communities — the short-term impacts of jobs and EI/SAR savings, as opposed to longer-term individual and community economic and social development.

An additional challenge is the lack of program awareness among participants. It is possible that participants in employment or training-related programs funded through the RBA would be unable to identify the RBA — as opposed to other federal and/or provincial employment programs — as the source of the funding for their programs.

5.1.2 Evaluation Principles and Objectives

Consideration of the challenges that will have to be faced in this evaluation led the team to identify a number of principles to underpin the development of evaluation options:

- the evaluation should not be considered a *summative* evaluation. For the most part, it is too early and there is inadequate administrative data to assess the overall impacts of the initiative;
- the options should make wise use of evaluation resources by focusing on issues for which evaluation information will be timely and useful. It is important that the evaluation plan be compatible with current program information needs;
- the evaluation process must be flexible enough to respect the relationships between the HRDC regions and the RBA-holders. The synthesis report highlights that, for the most part, the partnership with HRDC facilitated the signing of the agreements, and these agreements have resulted in more flexibility for RBA-holders. This flexibility needs to be reflected in the evaluation process. There must be a high level of involvement of both parties and recognition of the importance of a regional approach to the evaluation. This will reassure the RBA-holders about use of the evaluation information, allow for an evaluation design that is sensitive to cultural issues, reflect the individual RBA context (social, economic, labour market, etc.), reduce the response burden on the RBA-holders, and be sensitive to the necessary time frames for participation of RBA-holders in the evaluation process;
- the evaluation design must reflect both RBA-holder and HRDC accountabilities for program outcomes. HRDC-HQ has accountability requirements outlined in the program authorities. However, the RBA-holders also have accountabilities to their communities for the results of the RBA funding; and
- the evaluation process should contribute to building planning and evaluation capacity among RBA-holders.

Keeping these challenges and principles in mind, the team proposes the following evaluation objectives:

- to provide information to RBA-holders for design and delivery of future agreements;
- to develop the planning and evaluation capacity of RBA-holders; and
- to provide information for HRDC on the delivery of the overall RBA initiative in order to improve the design and delivery of AHRDS.

5.2 Evaluation Issues/Questions

This section outlines generic evaluation issues/questions for both the overall RBA initiative and the individual RBAs.

5.2.1 Initiative-level Issues

1. How effective is the RBA initiative's design?

Addressing this issue requires information on how well RBA-holders have received the accountability accord and its emphasis on jobs and EI/SAR savings. Do RBA-holders have an adequate understanding and acceptance of the concept of accountability? Are there better indicators of accountability? Are there better ways of measuring these indicators?

It also requires information on the impact of the split between EI and CRF funding. Does it help or hinder RBA-holders in meeting their program design and client selection objectives?

Information on the degree to which the initiative responds to the RBA-holder needs is also required. Do RBA-holders enjoy the degree of flexibility that the initiative's design intended?

Finally, what changes, if any, to the design of the RBA initiative would make it more efficient and effective?

2. How efficient and effective were the initiative's operations?

Addressing this issue requires information on how RBA-holders were selected and how their funding allocations were determined. Were appropriate RBAs selected? Were funding allocations equitable and adequate?

It also requires information on how well the organizational structure for initiative administration worked. How efficient and effective are the relations between the RBA-holders and both the HRDC headquarters and regions? How well do RBA-holders (and their local delivery mechanisms) understand the initiative and the roles and responsibilities of the various 'players'? To what degree, if any, has HRDC been involved in the design and delivery of RBA programming? Did it support local labour market design or did it simply "hand off" existing HRDC programming?

Finally, information on the efficiency and effectiveness of HRDC's data collection/reporting systems is required. How have these contributed to effective initiative monitoring and decision-making? How could they be improved?

3. To what degree does the RBA initiative contribute to empowering Aboriginal organizations to design and deliver their own programs and services?

Addressing this issue requires information on how well HRDC (both regions and HQ) has supported RBA-holder capacity building. Did RBA-holders have sufficient start-up time? What capacity to deliver did they have at the start of their agreements? It also requires information on how well the RBA programming has been integrated into the local communities.

Finally, to what extent has HRDC helped the RBA-holders forge partnerships with provincial governments and the private sector? How has HRDC addressed jurisdictional (e.g., interprovincial, on-reserve/off-reserve) matters?

5.2.2 RBA-level Issues

This section outlines issues that need to be addressed at the level of the RBA to provide information for HRDC-HQ initiative accountability. Other issues, concerning the accountability needs of individual RBA-holders to their communities, need to be developed for each RBA evaluation.

1. What is the profile of the RBAs clients?

Addressing this issue requires information on the number of participants (EI, EI reachback, SAR, other particular client groups) by age, sex and disability status. It might also be useful to include information on clients' employment history.

2. What type of intervention(s) did RBA clients use and how did they fare?

Addressing this issue requires information on the number of participants by the type of intervention (i.e., targeted wage subsidies, self-employment, job creation partnerships, training purchases, counselling, job finding clubs, etc). It also requires information on how participants fared with their type of intervention — withdrawal, completion, employed, unemployed, returned to EI/SAR, not in the labour force. Information on certificates, accreditation, awards, etc., would also address this issue. Information on the number and type of intervention(s) per participant might provide some insight into whether a "case management" approach was used. It may also be useful to know how many participants had action plans. Cost per intervention may also be useful in addressing this issue. Additional information to enhance addressing this issue would focus on the satisfaction of clients with the service received.

3. How effective are the various interventions? What results did they have?

Addressing this issue requires information on the number of participants by the type of intervention by the number of clients who became employed after the intervention. It also requires information on the nature of the employment found or jobs created. This would include the length of time to find employment after the completion of the intervention, earnings, the type of employment (paid or self-employed, full or part time, seasonal or year round, occupation, industry, etc.). Cost per participant who found employment may also be useful in addressing this issue. Additional information to enhance addressing this issue would focus on whether clients felt that their interventions had helped increase their employability, employment and earnings, and whether they had reduced their dependency on EI or SA.

4. How well did the RBA meet its performance targets?

Addressing this issue requires information on the number of jobs found or created and the amount of EI or SAR savings. This would be compared with the performance targets set.

5. What other results did the interventions/RBAs achieve?

Addressing this issue requires information on the number of partnerships created, life skills developed, community impacts (including degree of support), referrals and counselling of RBA participants who are not part of the database, etc. It may also look at the results of capacity-building and promotional actions undertaken by the RBA-holder. RBA-holders may identify other impacts.

Optional issues that might be included in an evaluation of the RBA include:

6. Are there differences in the effectiveness of rural and urban RBAs?

Addressing this issue requires information on the number and proportion of participants who found jobs in rural and urban RBAs. It may also look at the cost per participant and per job found.

7. What actions have been taken to address the recommendations of the Mid-Term review?

Addressing this issue requires information on changes in the type of programming delivered, the organization of the RBA, capacity building, etc.

5.3 Evaluation Data Sources

Normally, after the identification of evaluation questions, an evaluation plan would identify the appropriate data sources for addressing each question. However, given the proposed decentralized approach to carrying out this evaluation, it is difficult to identify specific data sources. Generic data sources would include:

- review of initiative and RBA-level documents;
- interviews with HRDC staff (HQ and regions);
- interviews and/or surveys with staff of the national Aboriginal organizations, individual RBA-holders, and service delivery organizations;
- interviews, surveys and focus groups with program participants and community members;
- case studies to provide information on notable practices from the RBAs;
- expert assessments/panels;
- administrative data from electronic or hard-copy files held by RBA-holders and service delivery organizations; and
- administrative data from HRDC-HQ electronic files.

Combinations of these data sources will need to be identified once decisions have been made as to which of the evaluation components are to be selected for the evaluations.

5.4 Evaluation Components

The team proposes evaluations to be undertaken at two levels — the level of the:

- overall RBA initiative (Section 5.4.1); and
- the individual RBA. At the individual RBA level, there would be two possible approaches to evaluation: either an impact evaluation (Section 5.4.2) or a process-focused evaluation (Section 5.4.3).

Figure 5.1 summarizes the overall approach to these evaluation components. There are two dimensions to be considered: the focus of the evaluation (either process or impact questions) and the level at which the evaluation is being conducted (the level of the overall initiative or the level of the individual RBA).

TABLE 5.1
Summary of Evaluation Components

Focus		Level
	Initiative	RBA
Process	Recommended (see Section 5.4.1) — primarily to provide information to HRDC on the administration of the initiative to contribute to the development of the new AHRDS.	Recommended (see Section 5.4.3) — primarily for those RBAs that were not included in the Mid-Term reviews. Use a self-assessment tool (facilitated workshop) to address process level questions with respect to the design and delivery of the RBA.
Impact	Not recommended because of limitations in the availability of impact and/or participant data.	Recommended (see Section 5.4.2) — for those RBAs for which there is sufficient participant and/or impact data. Information on impacts to come from either administrative databases or a survey of participants.

At the level of the individual RBA, the choice of which approach to take would be made in collaboration with HRDC regional staff and the RBA-holder.²¹

In addition, the team has proposed a component that would focus on assessing the capacity of individual RBA-holders (Section 5.4.4). This component would be used for all RBA-holders.

Each of the four resulting evaluation components is described in greater detail below.

5.4.1 Process Evaluation of RBA Initiative

Ideally, an RBA-level evaluation conducted at the end of a period of initiative funding would focus on impacts. However, it is only possible to measure these impacts if individual program participants can be identified (with the basic personal identifier being the SIN). Once program participants are identified, changes in their employment status, use of income dependency, and tax situation can be identified either through federal and provincial data files or through a participant survey. However, given the availability of participant information, the degree of development of many RBA-holders, and the time remaining in the RBA initiative, it is recommended that HRDC not attempt to measure the impacts on program participants at the level of the RBA initiative as a whole.

²¹ Some RBAs may not be in position to participate in either the impact evaluation or the self-assessment workshop. This is expected to be the case for a very small number (less than 10) RBAs. The situation may arise for a number of reasons: if an RBA-holder has only recently completed the Mid-Term review and yet does not have the capacity to participate in the impact evaluation; if the Aboriginal organization has only just taken responsibility for managing its RBA; or if the organization is subject to other investigations (for example, audits). As with all decisions on the implementation of the two proposed evaluation approaches, decisions on whether some RBAs should be exempt from evaluation at the time would be left to the regions and the RBA-holders. This would not exempt them from evaluation in the future.

Hence, it is proposed that the evaluation component that covers the RBA initiative as a whole focus on process issues to assess HRDC's delivery of the initiative (including accountabilities, partnership and communications). The objective of this component is to provide information for management of the post-1999 strategy (AHRDS).

Key factors to ensuring the success of this component are that:

- the evaluation be conducted in timely fashion for post-1999 strategy decision-making;
- it be linked to ARO's development of the review strategy of AHRDS; and
- it involve an external evaluator.

Methodologies would include document reviews, interviews, focus groups and expert assessments.

5.4.2 RBA-level Impact Evaluation

Although it is not possible to assess the impacts of the RBAs at the initiative level, it is possible to assess impacts at the level of some individual RBAs. Therefore, the second evaluation component focus at the RBA level and assess the impact of the individual RBA on program participants and communities.

This type of evaluation would be possible for those RBAs that have adequate participant information. It is expected that this will be the case for many of those RBAs that participated in the Mid-Term review process. However, there may be other RBAs that have the required information and capacity to conduct an impact evaluation. For planning purposes, it has been estimated that impact evaluations could be conducted in approximately 15 — 20 RBAs.

The evaluations would address the common evaluation issues identified in Section 5.2.2, but time and resources would also have to be allocated to address other issues identified by the RBA-holder. The approach to conducting these evaluations would vary, depending on whether the impact information came from administrative files or a participant survey. Once the evaluations are complete, a synthesis of evaluation results (including information on the factors that contributed to, or detracted from, the success of the RBA) should be completed. This synthesis of results would provide partial evidence on overall initiative impacts — notably for those RBAs that have been operating for a longer period of time or have greater capacity than others.

The objective of this component would, therefore, be to provide information on the impacts of the RBA for use by both the RBA-holder and HRDC.

Key factors to ensuring the success of this component are that:

- there be local management participation in the evaluation, involving both the RBA-holders and HRDC regions;

- the evaluation needs to be kept simple, with limited common national and local issues;
- there be some form of pre-testing the availability of data necessary to do an impact evaluation; and
- external evaluators be involved in the impact evaluations — to both reinforce the perception of objectivity and provide the resources the RBA-holders and HRDC will need to conduct the evaluations.

Methodologies would depend on the availability of impact information in the RBA administrative files (either hard copy or electronic) but might include the following:

- analysis of administrative records;
- surveys of program participants; and
- focus groups with community members and/or program participants.

The evaluation would highlight (through the use of case studies) notable practices that would serve as examples for development of future RBAs.

5.4.3 Process-focussed Self-Assessment

For those RBAs that are not in a position to conduct an impact evaluation, particularly those that did not participate in the Mid-Term review process, a second RBA-level evaluation is proposed. This would focus on process issues and be carried out through facilitated workshops at the RBA-level, involving them in self-assessment. It is estimated that in the order of 40 RBA-holders would participate in the next fiscal year in this self-assessment process.

The RBAs that participated in the Mid-Term review process recognized the importance of the learning opportunities provided by these reviews. Individually, involvement in the evaluation process, along with the exercise (which is just beginning for most of these RBA-holders) of addressing the findings and recommendations, was seen as a valuable tool for strengthening the planning and evaluation capacity of the RBA-holders. Collectively, the synthesis of Mid-Term review results provides a number of lessons upon which a facilitated workshop for other RBA-holders could be based.

Many services offered under the RBA are offered through third-party service delivery agents — many of which were set up under the former *Pathways to Success* program. It is not possible to involve stakeholders from these agents in these self-assessment workshops. Nonetheless, they would benefit from the self-assessment tools and techniques that would be developed for the workshops. It would be the intent to train RBA-holder staff to use these tools for an assessment of the services offered to them by these service delivery agents.

The objectives of these facilitated workshops/self-assessments would be to:

- provide information to RBA-holders for more effective RBA design and delivery;
- develop the planning and evaluation capacity of RBA-holders; and
- train RBA staff for the evaluation of local delivery mechanisms.

An additional benefit of this self-assessment process is that it will contribute to an understanding of the importance of accountability and data collection and prepare the RBA-holders for impact evaluations in the future. Undertaking a process evaluation, using self-assessment, at this point would be an investment in the future — ensuring not only longer term program benefits but also evaluation benefits.

Key factors for ensuring the success of this component are that:

- the timing be adequately linked to the planning phase for the RBAs to be developed under AHRDS;
- the RBA-holders participate voluntarily in the process;
- there be sufficient time to implement this process with partners;
- an external facilitator be involved in the development of the workshop/self-assessment tools; and
- the external facilitator be involved in the delivery of the workshop work with local resources to ensure that ongoing support is available for the RBA-holders.

5.4.4 Capacity Assessment

RBAs are at different stages of development: some had considerable capacity prior to the signing of the current agreements (much of that developed under *the Pathways to Success* program); others have only recently taken responsibility for the implementation of their RBAs. Yet little is known about the specific capacity of each RBA-holder.

A number of the lessons learned/recommendations arising from the Mid-Term reviews address issues related to RBA-holder capacity. These include the need for:

- more strategic and operational planning;
- greater administrative capacity;
- enhanced capacity at the RBA delivery point;
- more program promotion;
- expanding service delivery capacity; and
- more systems support for monitoring and evaluation.

The development of Aboriginal organizations' capacity has been an element of the overall RBA initiative and is expected to be a major thrust of the new AHRDS.²² To contribute not only to the short-term objective of confirming the RBAs' capacity to be involved in the self-assessment process but also to defining the baseline for ARHDS capacity-building initiatives, the research team proposes that an assessment of the management capacity of all current RBA-holders be conducted.

The objective would be to systematically assess the capacity of RBAs to design, deliver and evaluate their programming. This assessment should be based primarily on a structured interview process with RBA-holders and HRDC staff (at both HQ and the regional level), should focus on personnel and systems, and assess what works and what needs improvement. It would inform the development of the tools and training necessary to do the self-assessment (Section 5.4.3).

5.5 Evaluation Options

This section outlines two possible options that combine in different ways the components proposed in Section 5.4 above. It identifies the advantages and disadvantages of each.

With respect to the self-assessment (RBA-level process evaluation), the team has assumed that given the need to allow sufficient time for the participation of HRDC regions and RBA-holders in the self-assessment process, only the development and pre-testing of the tools for the facilitated workshops would be undertaken this fiscal year. The actual implementation of the workshops would occur in 1999/2000.

Option 1

Process Evaluation (Component 1)
Impact Evaluations (Component 2)

The advantages to this option are that it:

- is relatively inexpensive;
- is acceptable to the RBA-holders;
- meets the basic evaluation requirement at the level of the overall RBA initiative;
- provides impact information on a number RBAs, which can be used to strengthen future RBA programming; and
- provides an indicator of program success by providing impact information from selected RBAs.

²² ARO undertook a number of initiatives in support of capacity building. For example, offers were made to second HRDC staff to Aboriginal organizations; training tools are being developed; a meeting on capacity building was held in November/December 1997 to review the program's approach to capacity building; and a discussion paper on capacity building was drafted.

However, there are disadvantages, in comparison with the second option, notably:

- it further delays the development of the evaluation capacity of the RBA-holders;
- by not providing funding for all RBA-holders to engage in some evaluation process, it appears to place less importance on evaluation than originally intended in the evaluation requirement and strategic plan; and
- provides more limited information and tools for the review strategy of the AHRDS.

Option 2

- Process Evaluation (Component 1)
- Impact Evaluations (Component 2)
- Capacity Assessment (Component 3)
- Process self-assessment (Component 4)

The second option includes all components in Option 1 but adds the development and testing of the self-assessment workshops and the capacity assessment of all RBA-holders.

In addition to the advantages of the first option, this option:

- provides baseline information for capacity-building activities to be carried out under AHRDS;
- builds a foundation for early evaluation of the RBAs under AHRDS;
- responds to the need for bilateral planning;
- responds to the RBA's need to be responsible for results-based performance; and, hence
- is cost-effective in the long term.

The disadvantages are, however, that it:

- is more expensive; and
- commits HRDC to a longer term process with RBA-holders and requires considerable commitment on behalf of all partners, including HRDC-HQ, regions and RBA-holders.