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Completing the Circle: Realities, Challenges and Strategies to Improve Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes in the Calgary Region

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Executive Summary

The Opportunity

Alberta Employment and Immigration estimates that the province will experience a shortfall of over 93,000 workers during the next 10 years. While the economic slowdown that hit the global economy in 2008 will have a substantive short-term impact on the demand side of the labour market, it is anticipated that over the long-term demographic changes and economic expansion will continue to drive demand for labour in Alberta.

The Aboriginal population is the largest untapped labour force in Alberta, and is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. In 2006, Aboriginal employment rates were 10.6 per cent below those of the population at large. At parity, this translates into an additional 14,000 workers for the provincial economy.

Aboriginal Labour Market Realities

Within the Calgary Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), Aboriginal people represent a young and growing segment of the population. The 2006 Aboriginal median age was 27.1 years, compared to 35.7 for non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal participation and employment rates have rose steadily since 1996 and the unemployment rate dropped by nearly half. Despite this positive trend, Aboriginal unemployment rates are higher than non-Aboriginal unemployment rates at all levels of educational attainment. Consequently, education in and of itself, while beneficial, does not necessarily guarantee improved Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

The Business Case for Engagement

There are many reasons to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes, including:

Build a Stable, Local, Skilled and Reliable Workforce – For business, the combination of underemployment, a younger than average population, and individuals rooted in the local community make the Aboriginal population an ideal pool of talent for long-term engagement.

Achieve Diversity in the Workforce – There are genuine business advantages gained from employing Aboriginal people in the workplace including accessing the growing Aboriginal market, and improving market knowledge of the local consumer base.

Develop a Capacity and Reputation for Corporate Social Responsibility – Aboriginal engagement and employment programs help gain public and regulator support for projects, alleviating avoidable project delays and cost escalations.

Reduce Support Service Costs to the Aboriginal Community – Improving Aboriginal employment outcomes will increase employment income tax revenues and reduce excess government spending on remedial health and social support programs – ultimately reducing the tax burden on all Canadians and businesses in Canada.



Priority Actions to Improve Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes

Through in-depth focus groups and personal interviews engaging a total of 26 key stakeholders, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce identified four overarching priority actions to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities

Businesses seeking to work with Aboriginal communities need to align their objectives with those of Aboriginal communities. This means approaching issues in a manner that considers the perspectives, interests and culture of the community, and then assessing how the business opportunity can align with these values. In an urban context the focus needs to be on the individual. The Government of Alberta's *First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative* is working with Aboriginal communities and their leadership to develop collaborative community workforce action plans.

1. It is recommended that the business community support the Government of Alberta's *First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative* and seek opportunities to engage Aboriginal communities and the province in partnering to achieve economic and labour market success.

The *FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative* compliments the objectives of the federal government's *New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*. This framework, announced in spring of 2008, is a consultative initiative that seeks to "increase the participation of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian economy" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008:2).

2. It is recommended that Alberta Employment and Immigration and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada coordinate their efforts in working with Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal economic and labour market outcomes through the collaborative *FNMI Workforce Action Plan* initiative and the *New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*.

Single Access Point for Aboriginal Employment Services

Multiple Aboriginal career and employment service providers operate within the Calgary region yet these organizations do not fully coordinate in linking and referring clients to services. What is needed is a single access point to connect Aboriginal people to the services, training, programming and employment opportunities they need to succeed in the workplace. The Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, through its established ability to serve as a "true collaborative" is aptly positioned as the conduit for this role.

3. It is recommended that the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, Aboriginal employment agencies and other Aboriginal service providers work together to continue to build on their success in coordinating their efforts and resources to strengthen their network linkages and better connect clients to services.

Stronger connection to the business community was identified in the research as one of the key areas for improvement. It is imperative that the business community and the network of Aboriginal employment service agencies work together to connect Aboriginal talent to business needs.

4. It is recommended that business community associations, such as the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, work together with the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative and other service providers to better connect Aboriginal employment programs and services to business needs.



The process for connecting employers to prospective employees needs to be as streamlined, accessible and coordinated as possible.

5. It is recommended that all Aboriginal employment postings (including those posted by employers and employment service providers) be consolidated onto a single website (such as the Aboriginal Canada Portal) to create an Aboriginal equivalent of “monster.ca” – a national single access resource for all Aboriginal job seekers and employers seeking to connect with one another.

Workplace Preparation and Support

Cross cultural awareness training was identified in the research as critical to Aboriginal employment success. For Aboriginal employees, this was manifested in pre-employment preparation training. From an employer perspective, Aboriginal awareness training at the managerial level seemed to be the most effective.

6. It is recommended that accessible, competency-based Aboriginal awareness programming be developed and marketed to small- and medium-sized businesses, and that this training serve as recognition of these organizations as Aboriginal employers of choice for potential pools of talent.
7. It is recommended that government funding agencies develop funding structures that facilitate and encourage the building and maintenance of web-based program delivery and marketing for Aboriginal employment service providers, to better connect with Aboriginal youth.

Skills Development and Business Capacity Building

Engaging Aboriginal youth often requires using new media. This means overcoming current tendencies to favour traditional forms of communications in government funding decisions.

8. It is recommended that government study the Sunchild e-learning program and develop best practices that can then be used to implement e-learning strategies within band school systems.

The current Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement for the Calgary region, which expires this year, does not prioritize high school equivalency or literacy programs, which could provide the tremendous returns of education in the form of better labour market outcomes.

9. It is recommended that government ensure applied high school upgrading and literacy programs are available as key components of any new Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement program.

Education levels on-reserve are well below those of the population at large. Success in other provinces has been demonstrably achieved through provincial involvement in Aboriginal education, as a result of well-developed educational capacity at the provincial level.

10. It is recommended that the Province and Aboriginal communities continue work in collaboration to achieve meaningful gains in Aboriginal K-12 outcomes.



Even with improved educational attainment, skills training, and a more accepting and inclusive work environment a major barrier to improved labour market outcomes is the level of economic development on-reserve.

11. It is recommended that Aboriginal entrepreneurs on-reserve work with community leaders interested in enhancing opportunities to develop business-friendly governance and regulatory practices such as competitive rents and streamlined approval processes.

Another challenge that arises is in the process of working with government departments. The level of bureaucracy and regulation can discourage otherwise successful and much needed projects from accessing funding.

12. It is recommended that businesses seeking economic development opportunities on-reserve, work together with Aboriginal communities and government to adopt an ethos of innovation and flexibility in creating mutually beneficial economic development partnerships.



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Introduction

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce represents over 3,200 members, and seeks to raise the consciousness and quality of public discourse on key policy issues confronting its members and stakeholders. The Chamber also supports the social responsibility of businesses in creating employment opportunities for the residents of Calgary and district, so that the City becomes a more attractive community in which to reside and work. In 2008, Chamber members identified labour shortages as the number one priority impacting their businesses.

Alberta Employment and Immigration estimates that the province will experience a shortfall of over 93,000 workers over the next 10 years (Alberta Employment and Immigration, 2008). While the economic slowdown that hit the global economy in 2008 will have a substantive short-term impact on the demand side of the labour market, it is anticipated that over the long-term demographic changes and economic expansion will continue to drive demand for labour in Alberta.

The Aboriginal population is the largest untapped labour force in Alberta, and is younger than the non-Aboriginal population. In 2006, Aboriginal employment rates were 10.6 per cent below those of the population at large. At parity, this translates into an additional 14,000 workers for the provincial economy (Statistics Canada 2008a).

This report seeks to understand the labour market challenges confronting Aboriginal people, and identify strategies to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes. While the geographic focus is primarily on the Calgary region, the strategies identified in this report can be applied in any number of regions and urban centres across Canada.

Section one of this report utilizes Canadian Census data to analyze the labour market realities confronting Aboriginal people in the Calgary region. Section two presents the business case for more fully engaging Aboriginal people in the workforce. Section three identifies and discusses strategies and programs that can be applied to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes. Last, section five presents policy recommendations to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes.



1 Aboriginal People and the Calgary Labour Market – A Socio-Demographic Analysis

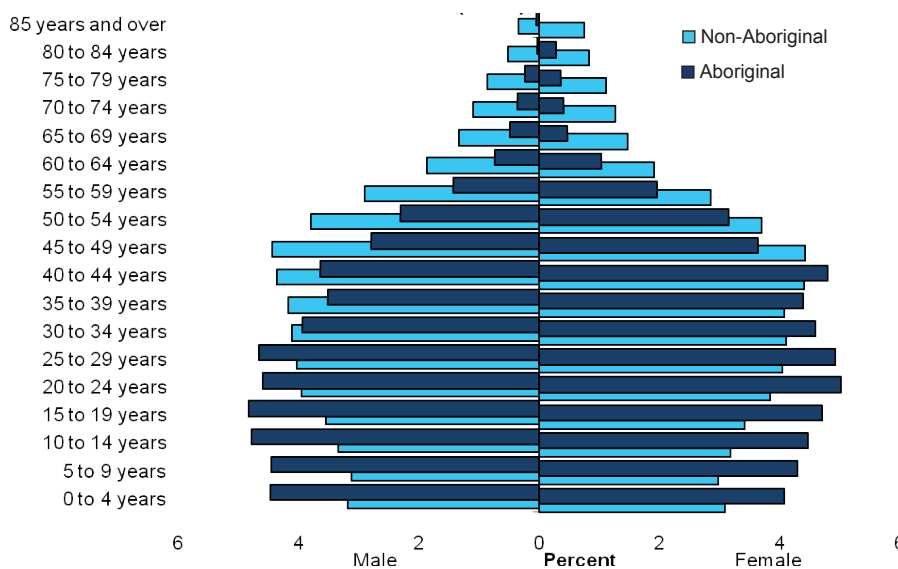
This section seeks to understand the demographic, education and labour market realities confronting Aboriginal people in the Calgary region. The primary data source used for this analysis is the 2006 Canadian Census. Despite its limitations, which include incomplete reserve enumeration and undercounting in urban areas, it is the most complete source of socio-demographic Aboriginal data available.

The Aboriginal identity population, which consists of those individuals who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group (e.g., North American Indian, Métis and Inuit), is the measure used as the Aboriginal population throughout this report. The Census also collects data on the Aboriginal origin population, defined as those individuals who report at least one Aboriginal origin to the ethnic origin Census question. Ethnic origin refers to the ethnic or cultural groups to which the respondents' ancestors belong. While the Aboriginal origin population is larger than the Aboriginal identity population, the Aboriginal identity population is a more accurate representation of the number of individuals that continue to identify with a particular Aboriginal culture.

1.1 Age and Gender Demographics

The Aboriginal population, underrepresented in the labour market, is a key source of employees in the future as it is a young and growing segment of the population. The median age for the Calgary Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) Aboriginal population was 27.1 years while the median age for the total population as a whole was nearly nine years higher at 35.7 years. Figure 1.1 depicts the demographic differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations within the Calgary CMA, with a much higher proportion of Aboriginal population below the age of 34.

Figure 1.1 Age Pyramid Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Population Calgary (CMA), 2006



¹ This growth in population is not entirely due to natural growth in the population as much as it is due to an increasing acceptance or awareness of Aboriginal identity. Many of those who would not have reported Aboriginal identity in the past are now choosing to self-identify.



The youthful characteristics of the Aboriginal population mark a significant opportunity for policymakers and businesses to address issues contributing to the group's weaker labour market outcomes. By taking action now, governments can ensure better outcomes not only in the immediate years to come, but also over the long-term as stable employment in the present may generate better employment patterns in future generations.

1.2 Migration and Population Patterns

Another feature of the Aboriginal population is the strong growth in numbers it has exhibited over the last 10-years. As seen in Table 1.1, from 1996 to 2006, a period of strong population growth in the Calgary CMA, the proportion of Calgary's population reporting Aboriginal identity grew by nearly 32 per cent to 2.5 per cent, and the number of people reporting Aboriginal identity was up 75 per cent to a total of 26,575 in 2006.¹ The population growth in the Calgary CMA is representative of Alberta's Aboriginal population trend, which is one of continuing urbanization. Since 2001, the proportion of the Aboriginal population living in an urban setting rose from 59.3 per cent to 60.8 per cent in 2006.

Table 1.1

The Aboriginal Population in Calgary (CMA), 1996 - 2006			
	1996	2001	2006
Total Population	815,985	951,395	1,079,310
Aboriginal Identity Population	15,200	21,915	26,575
Aboriginal Identity Population as % of Total Population	1.9%	2.3%	2.5%

Source: Aboriginal Population Profile (2001 and 2006 Census of Population), Community Profile (2001 and 2006 Census of Population) and Profile of the Urban Aboriginal Population, Canada, 1996

On-reserve populations in the southern Alberta region demonstrate mixed growth. While the Stoney and Blood reserves demonstrated significant growth rates of 16.4 and 8.4 per cent respectively, the Piikani demonstrated negative growth of 15.4 per cent. Siksika demonstrated no change, and data were not available for the Tsuu T'ina reserve. Overall, the southern Alberta reserve population grew by 4.3 per cent over this period.

Table 1.2

Aboriginal Population On-Reserve in the Southern Alberta (Treaty 7) Region. 2001-2006			
Aboriginal Population	2001	2006	% Change
Blood (Kainai)	3,852	4,177	8.4%
Piikani (Peigan)	1,537	1,300	-15.4%
Stoney	2,173	2,529	16.4%
Siksika	2,767	2,767	0
Tsuu T'ina	NA	NA	NA
Total Calgary Region	10,329	10,773	4.3%

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Aboriginal Population Profile and Community Profile for Calgary



Demographers expect the population growth among those identifying themselves as Aboriginal to continue to outpace the growth of the population as a whole. Demographers also expect the on-reserve population to grow in comparison to both the off-reserve rural and off-reserve urban populations (Clatworthy, 2006). These projections highlight two points: (1) Efforts to ensure that Aboriginal labour market outcomes reach parity with those of the non-Aboriginal population need to occur in the near future while the Aboriginal population is still young; and (2) improvements in both on-reserve economic and educational outcomes are critical to the overall success of an Aboriginal employment strategy.

1.3 Labour Market Outcomes in the Calgary Census Metropolitan Area

The labour market outcomes of the Aboriginal population in the Calgary CMA have improved significantly from 1996 to 2006. As illustrated in Figure 1.2, the participation and employment rates rose steadily while the unemployment rate dropped by nearly half from 14.2 per cent in 1996 to 7.3 per cent in 2006. A major reason for this success was the strong demand for labour in the Calgary CMA, especially over the past five years. As staff shortages forced employers to seek out talent, businesses turned to previously untapped sources of labour including Aboriginal people.

When comparing labour market outcomes between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population there are more reasons for optimism. The labour force participation rate of Aboriginal people, relative to non-Aboriginal people, went from 4.3 per cent below in 1996, to 1.7 per cent above in 2006. The employment rate of the Aboriginal population neared parity with that of the non-Aboriginal population in 2006 with a difference of only one percent.

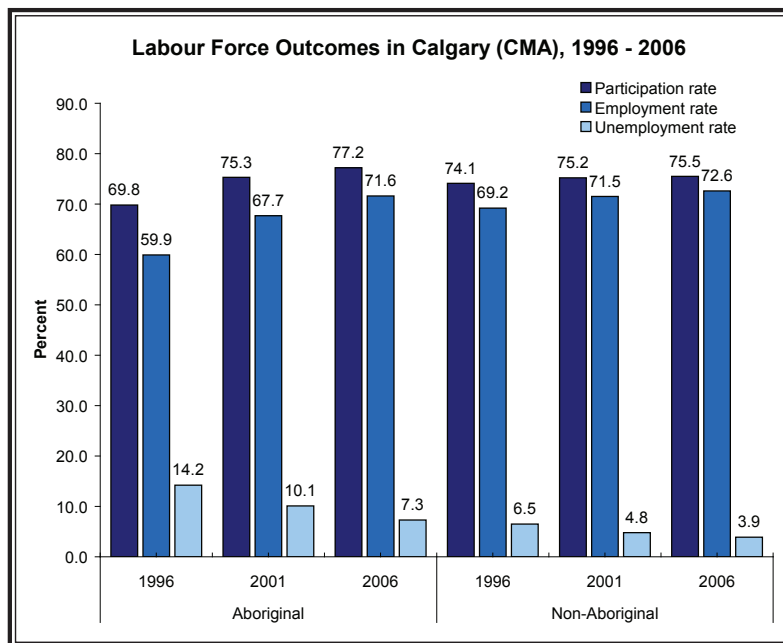


Figure 1.2 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, Profile of the Urban Aboriginal Population, Canada, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Population, Table No. 97F0011XCB2001045; Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Table No. 97-559-X2006019.



Key Labour Force Measures and Definitions (Brunnen 2004)

The participation rate:

The participation rate is defined as the number of individuals in the labour force (both employed and unemployed) divided by the population 15 years and older. The participation rate in general provides an indication of a group's affinity to participate in the labour force, and implies variations in individuals' propensities to attend school, retire or become homemakers. In addition, analysis of the participation rate may detect the presence of the "discouraged worker phenomenon" – the idea that an individual withdraws from the labour force after a long period of unsuccessful job searching.

The unemployment rate:

The unemployment rate is defined as the number of people unemployed divided by the number of people participating in the labour force (both employed and unemployed). The unemployment rate is useful in that it measures discrepancies only within the labour force; it excludes individuals who have chosen to opt out of the labour force, be it for retirement, child rearing, or for any other reason. In other words, one must be actively looking for work to be "unemployed."

The employment rate:

The employment rate is defined as the number of people employed divided by the population 15 years and older. In other words, the employment rate considers the full population 15 and older, including those participating in the labour force and those who, for whatever reason, are not participating in the labour force. It provides a useful indication of the labour force outcomes of a particular group, especially when compared to the participation rate. As the employment rate approaches the participation rate, the number of people who were unemployed but actively seeking employment declines.

While it is clear that the percentage difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment rates declined over the ten year span (from a spread of 7.7 per cent in 1996 to just 3.4 per cent in 2006), even more encouragingly, the Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal unemployment ratio² decreased from 2.2 in 1996 to 1.9 in 2006 meaning that, against the benchmark of the non-Aboriginal unemployment rate, Aboriginal unemployment rates showed demonstrable improvement.

More importantly, in 2006 the Aboriginal participation rate, at 77.2 per cent, exceeded that of the non-Aboriginal participation rate (75.5), which suggests that the labour market challenges confronting Aboriginal people do not stem from an unwillingness to participate, but rather from a lack of success in securing and retaining employment.

² The unemployment ratio is used to measure the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal unemployment outcomes and is calculated by dividing the Aboriginal unemployment rate by the non-Aboriginal employment rate. When the two rates are identical the index equals one. If Aboriginal outcomes are comparatively worse the index rises above one. If Aboriginal outcomes are better than non-Aboriginal outcomes the ratio sinks below one. The same is true of the median income index though, in this case, the non-Aboriginal outcome is divided by the Aboriginal outcome.



Information regarding the labour market outcomes of the various Aboriginal Identify groups can be extracted by delving further into the data. As shown in Figure 1.3, First Nations people (listed as North American Indians in the Census), represent nearly 40 per cent of the Aboriginal workforce, but have labour market outcomes significantly below those of Métis identity (who represent over 55 per cent of the Aboriginal workforce). Métis labour market outcomes come much closer to approximating those of the non-Aboriginal population. The Inuit population suffers from a high unemployment rate, and because of the marginal size of its population (only 155 individuals in the Calgary region) may not receive much attention from service providers who may be more focused on First Nations and Métis populations. These findings suggest that programs targeting First Nations Aboriginal people would have the greatest return on investment.

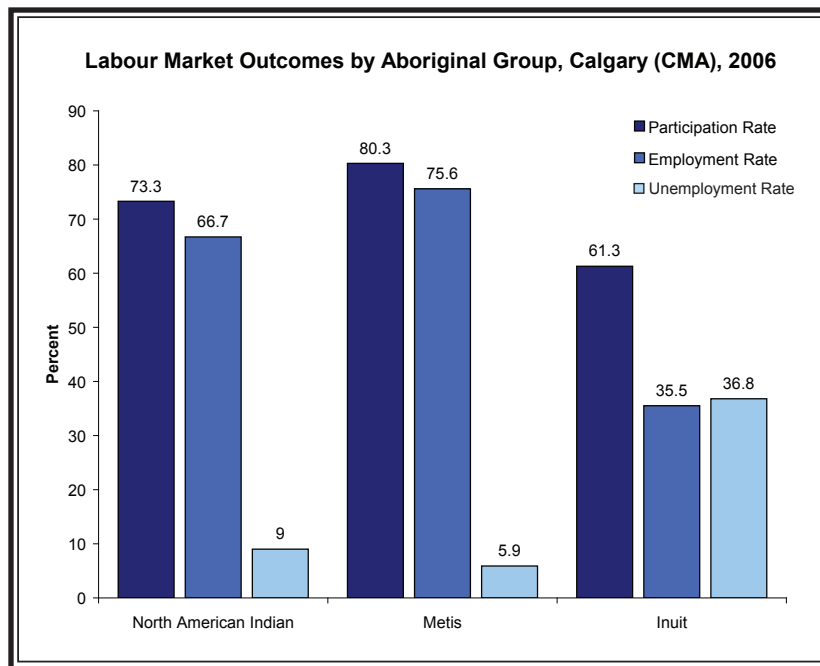


Figure 1.3 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, Profile of the Urban Aboriginal Population, Canada, 1996; Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Population, Table No. 97F0011XCB2001043; Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Table No. 97-559-X2006019.

1.4 Educational Attainment and Labour Market Outcomes in the Calgary CMA

Educational attainment has a significant impact on the desirability of a given worker. An employer, faced with a decision between a college graduate and someone who has not yet graduated high school will, under most circumstances choose the worker with a higher education level. Educational outcomes for the Aboriginal population in Calgary have improved in the period between 1996 and 2006 (Figure 1.4). The proportion of those having completed at least a high school certificate increased from 60.4 cent in 1996 to 69 per cent in 2006. These improvements in educational attainment coincide with the improved Aboriginal labour market outcomes observed over this period as illustrated in Figure 1.2 above.

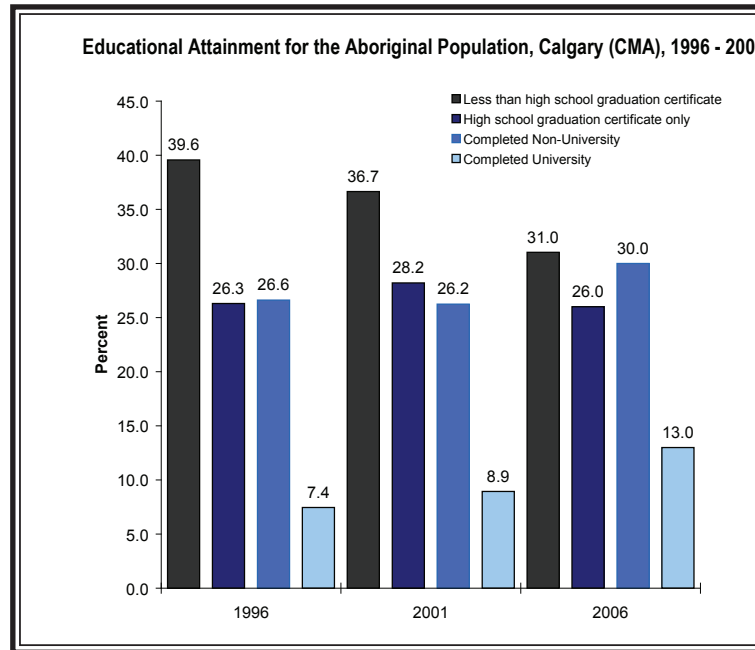


Figure 1.4 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Table No. 97-559-XCB2006019³

When comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education levels, Aboriginal education levels continue to be well below those of non-Aboriginal people. Table 1.2 indicates that 31 per cent of Aboriginal people possess less than a high school graduation certificate compared to 18 per cent for non-Aboriginal people, and non-Aboriginal people complete university at twice the rate of the Aboriginal population.

Table 1.3

Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Educational Attainment in Calgary CMA 2006		
	Non-Aboriginal	Aboriginal
No certificate, diploma or degree	18.1%	31.0%
High school certificate or equivalent ³⁵	25.7%	26.0%
Completed Non-University	26.5%	30.0%
Completed University	29.7%	13.0%

Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Table No. 97-559-XCB2006019

Taking a closer look at the relationship between employment outcomes and education there are some important trends to note (Figure 1.5). While the general trend is that unemployment rates are lower with higher educational attainment, the Aboriginal unemployment rate for those with trade or apprenticeship certificates rises to 10.1 per cent – nearly equalling the unemployment rate for those with no training at all, and more than tripling the unemployment rate of non-Aboriginal people with the same type of

³ For ease of comparison throughout three different censuses, categories from the 2001 and 2006 censuses were combined to make a better fit with 1996 data.



qualifications. This is a serious concern as it appears that there are a large number of Aboriginal people with the skills and training to alleviate one of the most acute labour market shortages in the past few years, and yet they are still experiencing difficulties finding and retaining employment. One possible explanation is in the nature of the trades certificate reported by Statistics Canada.

The trades or apprenticeship column listed in Figure 1.5 includes both “designated” and “non-designated” trades certificates. “Designated trades are governed by regulations under the Provincial and Territorial Apprenticeship Acts. These regulations outline the standards and conditions of training for specific trades (e.g. methods of registering apprentices, curriculum, accreditation, certification)” (Red Seal 2006). Non-designated trades lack the formal standards and conditions required by designated trades and are often less marketable to prospective employers. It is possible that a high proportion of Aboriginal people with non-designated trade certificates are skewing the unemployment rates for the “trades or apprenticeship” category in the data.

A more significant finding identified in Figure 1.5 is that for all educational attainments, Aboriginal unemployment rates are higher than non-Aboriginal unemployment rates. While the gap comes closest to parity for individuals that have a university certificate or diploma, the underlying conclusion is compelling: for any given education level, Aboriginal unemployment rates are higher than non-Aboriginal unemployment rates. Clearly, education in and of itself, while beneficial, does not necessarily guarantee improved Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

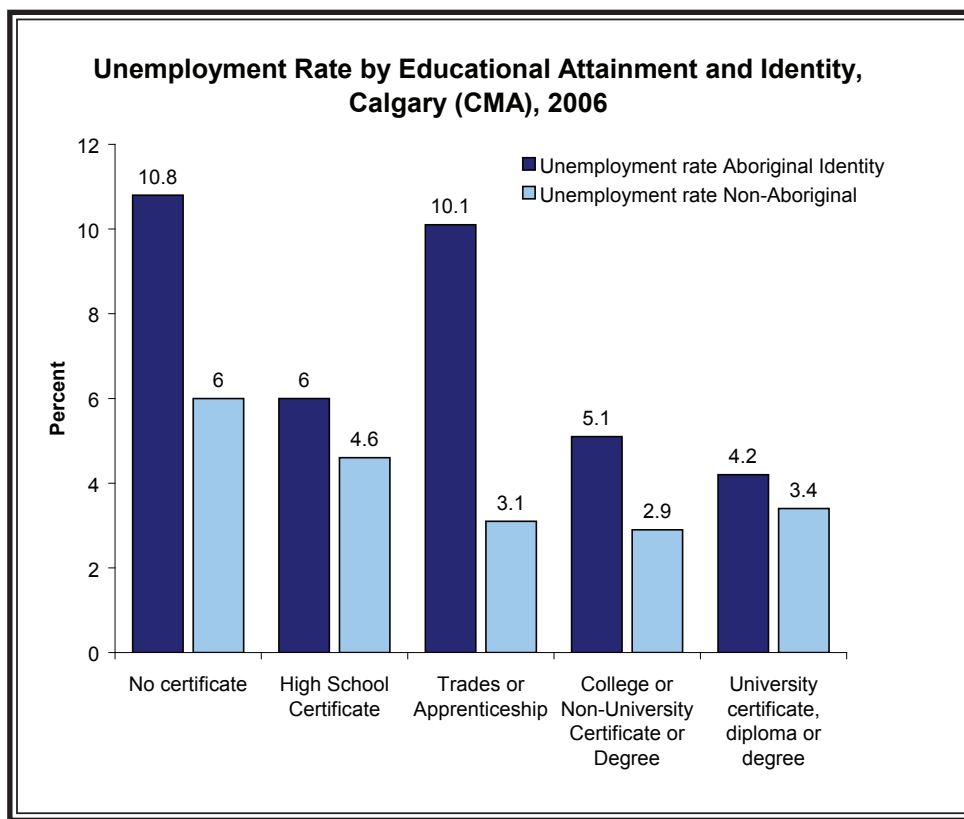


Figure 1.5 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Table No. 97-559-XCB2006019



In looking at the different occupational choices of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, educational attainment accounts for some of the characteristics (Figure 1.6). The Aboriginal population tends to be employed in those occupations which in general require less education, such as jobs in the sales and service sector. For occupations requiring more education, like management and the natural sciences, Aboriginal people are not employed to the same extent as the non-Aboriginal population. This is somewhat expected as non-Aboriginal people complete a university certificate, diploma, or degree at twice the rate of Aboriginal people.

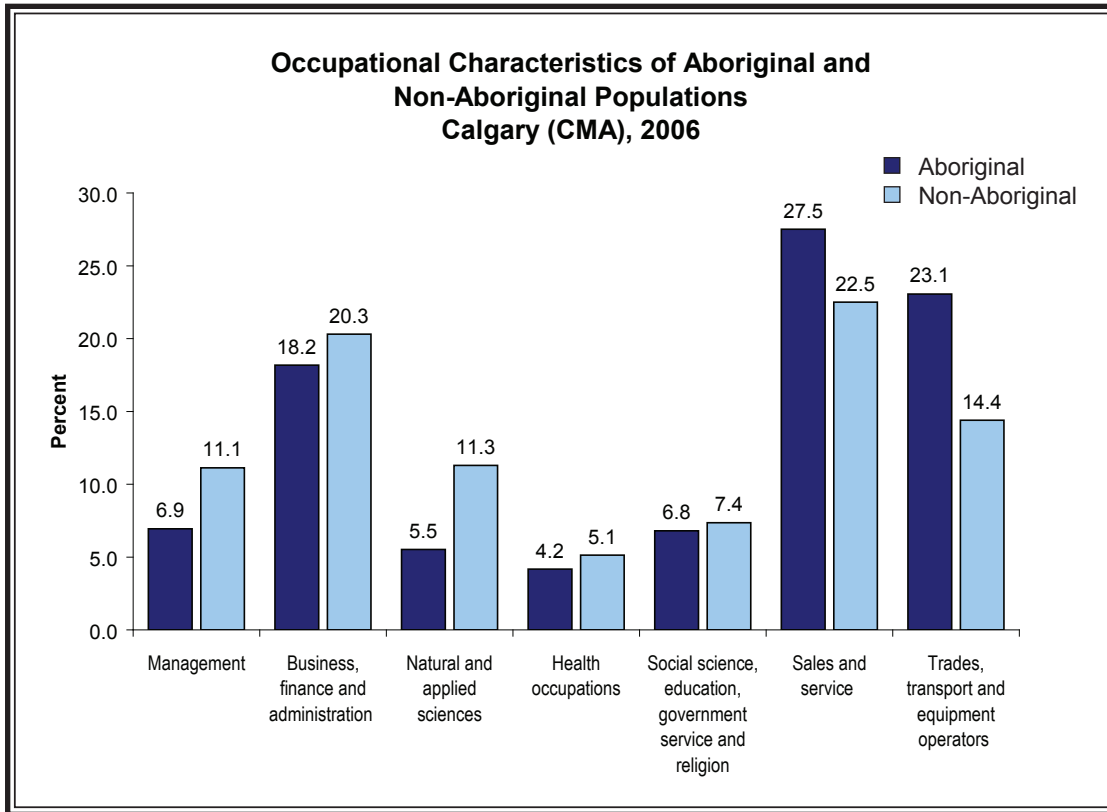


Figure 1.6 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Aboriginal Population Profile and Community Profile for Calgary

1.5 Education and Labour Market Outcomes in Canadian CMAs

Table 1.3 depicts the labour market outcomes of the Aboriginal population in the Calgary CMA relative to other CMAs. Calgary exhibits the highest Aboriginal participation and employment rates of all the CMAs listed, as well as the lowest Aboriginal unemployment rates. However, when comparing the Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal unemployment ratio, Calgary is behind Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. In terms of the Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal income gap, only Edmonton and Victoria exhibit greater Aboriginal income disparity than Calgary. Consequently, while Calgary leads the country in absolute terms, the city fares less well when looking at the relative gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The eastern CMAs of Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa scored better on the unemployment rate index, likely a result of



their higher overall unemployment rates, relative to Calgary, which exhibited the lowest unemployment rate among all CMAS.

Of note, and worthy of further investigation, is the correlation between the proportion of total population represented by the Aboriginal population and the labour market outcomes of that population. On initial inspection, it appears that the labour market outcomes of the Aboriginal population decline as the share of Aboriginal population increases. One possible explanation for this is that only upwardly mobile Aboriginal people choose to move to cities with a traditionally low population of Aboriginal people. Another, correlated and perhaps more controversial explanation, is that the concentration of an Aboriginal population in a particular city or neighbourhood leads to the ghettoization of that population.

Table 1.4

Labour Market Outcomes of the Aboriginal Population in Selected CMAs, 2006										
	Calgary	Edmon- ton	Winnipeg	Saskatoon	Regina	Victoria	Vancouver	Montreal	Toronto	Ottawa - Hull
Participation rate	77.2	70.1	65.5	63.2	64.6	68.8	67.3	65.9	69.8	72.4
Employment Rate	71.6	63.3	58.1	54.1	55.7	62.7	60.1	60.2	63.3	66.0
Unemployment Rate	7.3	9.8	11.3	14.6	13.7	8.8	10.7	8.7	9.3	8.8
Ab / Non Ab Unemp. Rate Ratio	1.9	2.2	2.5	3.2	3.3	2.1	1.9	1.3	1.4	1.5
Aboriginal as % of Total Population	2.5%	5.0%	9.8%	9.2%	8.8%	3.3%	1.9%	0.5%	0.5%	1.8%
Aboriginal Identity Labour Force as % of Total Labour Force	2.2%	4.4%	8.5%	7.5%	7.1%	2.9%	1.7%	0.5%	0.5%	1.8%
Median Employment Income Ratio	1.21	1.23	1.16	1.18	1.17	1.25	1.15	1.20	1.06	1.09
Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Aboriginal and Community Profiles										

1.6 Education and Labour Market Outcomes in Southern Alberta Reserves

The contrast between off-reserve and on-reserve Aboriginal labour market outcomes is stark. Economic and social conditions on-reserve simply do not compare, in most cases, with conditions off-reserve. A simple and telling illustration of the differences between life on- and off-reserve can be found by comparing the educational outcomes for the different populations. As seen in Figure 1.7, less than half of the on-reserve population in the southern Alberta region⁴ has graduated from high school. This puts reserve communities in a deep educational deficit with respect to the off-reserve population, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

⁴ Statistics from the Tsuu T'ina were not included because as Statistics Canada states, "On some Indian reserves and Indian settlements in the 2006 Census, enumeration was not permitted or was interrupted before it could be completed. Moreover, for some Indian reserves and Indian settlements, the quality of the enumeration was considered inadequate" (Statistics Canada, 2009)

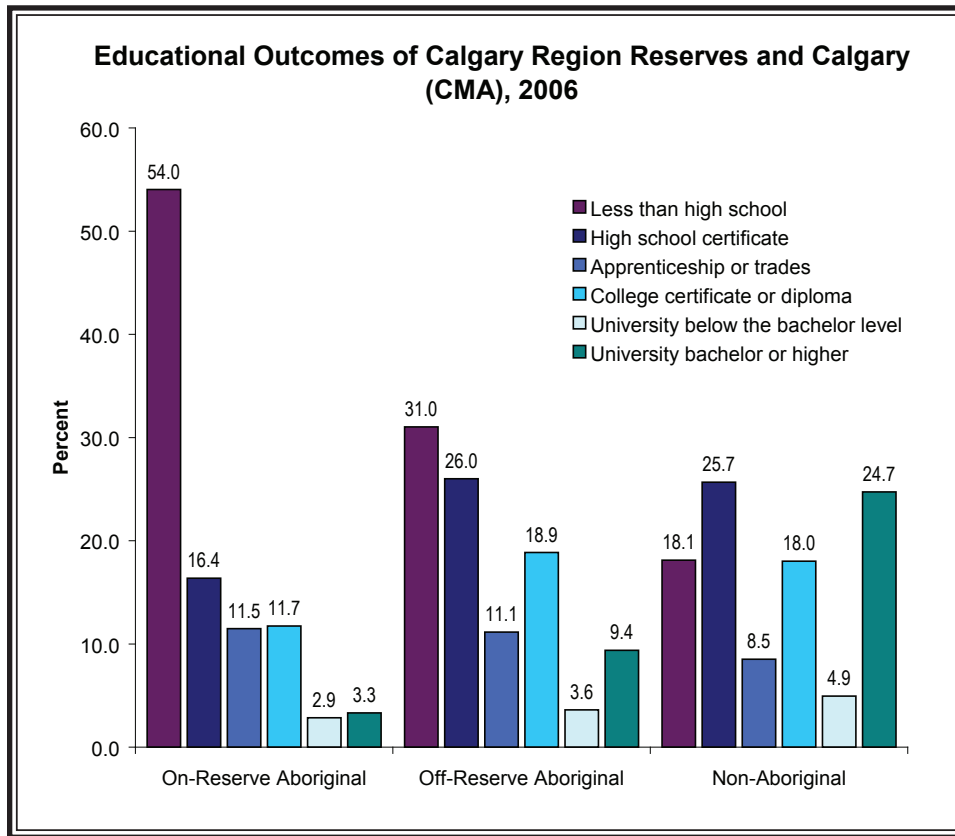


Figure 1.7 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Aboriginal Population Profile and Community Profile for Calgary

Predictably, lower educational attainment on-reserve in combination with lower levels of economic development, have led to poor labour market outcomes on-reserve (Figure 1.8).

These findings, in combination with the younger and growing nature of the on-reserve population, create a compelling case for investment in on-reserve labour force development strategies and programs.

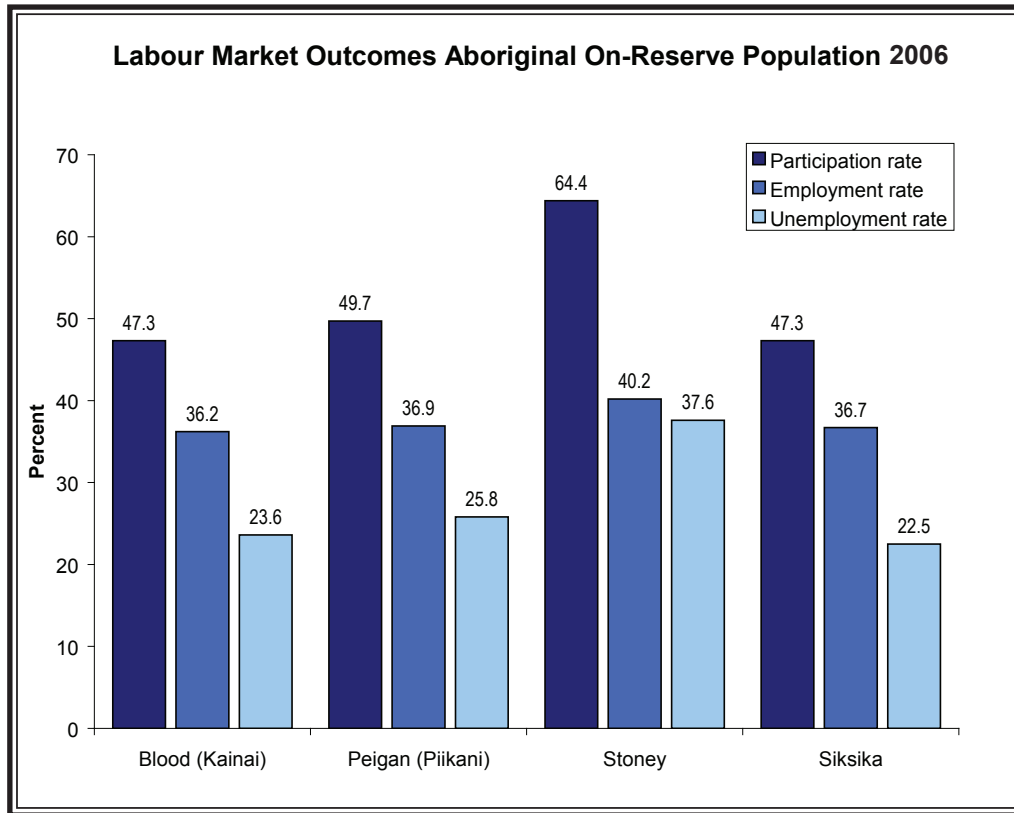


Figure 1.8 Source: Derived from Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Aboriginal Population Profile and Community Profile for Calgary

2 The Business Case for Improving Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes

There are many reasons to improve the labour market outcomes of the Aboriginal community. Government, for example, could expect increased tax revenues and reduced health care expenditures that come with an employed and healthy Aboriginal population. Socially, improved labour market outcomes will lead to a higher quality of life in Aboriginal communities both on- and off-reserve. Resulting benefits include less poverty, lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse, and more business and economic development opportunities on-reserve. Businesses that choose to prioritize Aboriginal employment can also expect to gain advantages over their competitors. There is, in fact, a strong business case for employment programs that target the Aboriginal population, some of which are discussed below.

2.1 Build a Stable, Local, Skilled and Reliable Workforce

In spite of the economic downturn of 2008, Alberta can still expect to experience a labour shortage over the long-term, due to demographic pressures and economic opportunities. A slowdown is an ideal time for business and government to invest in both physical and human capital. For business, the combination of underemployment, a younger than average population, and individuals rooted in the local community make the Aboriginal population an ideal pool of talent for long-term engagement.



Starting in 2005, Alberta's rapid economic expansion led to a shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour. To meet labour needs, many companies recruited from across Canada and from abroad. Companies also chose to implement capacity and skills training programs for Aboriginal populations (Alberta Chamber of Resources, 2006). Those employees that were recruited from across Canada and abroad are likely to be highly mobile. They can easily move to another location for other employment opportunities or back home once they have taken advantage of opportunities available to them, as evidenced by Alberta's extremely low interprovincial migration numbers in the last two quarters of 2007 (Alberta Finance and Enterprise, 2008:3).

In contrast the Aboriginal population which places a heavy emphasis on community and family, is firmly rooted in Alberta and, as such, serves as a key labour resource in a long-term human capital strategy. By becoming an employer of choice now, businesses of any size will improve the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people in the future. Such employers will be able to offer effective mentoring programs and a more representative and welcoming environment for incoming Aboriginal employees in the future.

2.2 *Achieve Diversity in the Workforce*

Diversity can be a value in itself, but there are genuine business advantages gained from employing people from a diverse set of social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. The employment of Aboriginal people can help tap into an emerging market.

As the Aboriginal population continues to increase, and labour market outcomes continue to improve, employing members of the Aboriginal community will likely result in easier access to the Aboriginal market. The employment of Aboriginal people creates a welcoming environment in perception and actuality, demonstrating to the public and prospective clients that your organization welcomes and embraces diversity, improving public image and profit. One retailer interviewed by the Chamber explained how its diversity policy improved the knowledge of the local market and correspondingly, helped to develop a tailored product offering to the markets it served in different parts of the city.

2.3 *Develop a Capacity and Reputation for Corporate Social Responsibility*

Aboriginal engagement and employment programs help gain stakeholder support for projects. In the past, businesses may have been able to operate in relative isolation from the communities surrounding them. Now, those communities, government and even the public at large expect much more. To be competitive, attractive to shareholders, and gain regulatory approval, corporations must show a real commitment to environmental and social considerations.

Regulators often look for evidence of community engagement and sometimes require the creation of employment opportunities for affected Aboriginal communities. The risks of inaction are major, as one Government of Canada guide states, "there have been instances where failure to participate in a process of early engagement with Aboriginal people has led to avoidable project delays and increased costs to proponents." (Government of Canada, Major Project Management Office, 2008).



For large businesses that operate internationally, generating best practices for Aboriginal engagement and employment programs at home will help with developing indigenous engagement and employment strategies abroad and may make a company a more attractive partner to foreign governments. Saskatchewan's Cameco Corporation, due in part to its strong reputation in corporate social responsibility, was awarded a contract in Kazakhstan (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1998, p. 3-8).

2.4 Reducing Support Service Costs to the Aboriginal Community

There is also one broad business case for improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes that impacts all taxpayers, and this is known as the opportunity cost of status quo Aboriginal programming.

As a result of poor Aboriginal social, health and labour market outcomes, the federal and provincial governments incur excess expenditures on remedial and support services that are over and above those consumed by the population at large. In addition the government forgoes significant employment income tax revenues as a result of Aboriginal employment rates being well below those of the mainstream.

Improving Aboriginal employment outcomes will not only improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people, it will also increase employment income tax revenues and reduce excess government spending on remedial health and social support programs – ultimately reducing the tax burden on all Canadians and businesses in Canada.

It is estimated that the opportunity cost of status quo Aboriginal programming, as measured through the following: [1] foregone income tax revenue; [2] excess expenditures on income support programs; and [3] excess expenditure on health, social service and correctional programs, was \$6.4 billion in 2001 (\$213 per Canadian per year). This amount is forecasted to increase to \$145 billion by the year 2020 (\$4,100 per Canadian per year) due to population growth (Brunnen 2005).

3 What are the Key Strategies to improve Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes?

So far, this report has undertaken a socio-demographic analysis of the labour market challenges confronting Aboriginal people, and presented a compelling business case for improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes. This section identifies strategies that businesses, service providers, governments and other stakeholders can apply to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

In an effort to understand these key strategies, the Calgary Chamber Commerce conducted a series of focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders involved in Aboriginal labour force, economic and business development programming and activities. Two focus groups were held. The first elicited input from employers and human resource practitioners regarding successful strategies for hiring and retaining Aboriginal people. The second targeted Aboriginal employment-related service providers, programs and agencies to gain an understanding of successful strategies and approaches for preparing and supporting Aboriginal people in achieving workforce success.



The Chamber also conducted 10 personal interviews with key stakeholders to build upon the discussions of the focus groups and capture the perspectives of constituencies not represented. Interview subjects were selected based on the snowball method of non-probability sampling. Stakeholders were asked to provide an overview of their experiences and mandates in working with Aboriginal labour force issues, and to discuss key challenges and strategies that, in their experience, contribute to improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes.

In total the Chamber solicited input from 26 stakeholders representing a broad cross-section of interests and perspectives including human resource practitioners, Aboriginal liaison professionals, entrepreneurs, employment service providers, correctional and post-secondary institution representatives, major retail and resource sector organizations, community economic development agencies, youth service providers and friendship centres.

The information collected in the interviews and focus groups was augmented with the findings of a literature review, and distilled to their common themes. Four overarching strategies for improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes were identified. These include: [1] aligning business, government and Aboriginal priorities; [2] creating a single access point for Aboriginal employment services, [3] workplace preparation and support; and [4] skills development and business capacity building. These strategies form the basis for a successful approach to improving Aboriginal labour market outcomes, and are discussed below.

3.1 *Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities*

Employment and economic development initiatives, be they Aboriginal or otherwise, are most successful when the priorities and goals of all parties involved are aligned. Seizing strategic opportunities to improve individual, community and/or business prosperity requires a comprehensive assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, goals and aspirations. Where Aboriginal opportunities differ from the mainstream, and therefore require a different approach, it is in the cultural, social and structural distinctions that Aboriginal people and communities are separated from the mainstream. It is important to be aware of these distinctions when seeking to align Aboriginal community objectives with business objectives both on- and off-reserve.

Culturally, Aboriginal people have a unique history and value system that differs from mainstream society. Some of the characteristics of Aboriginal culture include the following: consensus building as an approach to decision making; oral story-telling as a means of sharing knowledge and recording history; respect and reverence for Elders; strong family and community ties; working and learning styles that emphasize oral techniques and hands-on instruction; and a flexible approach to scheduling and task management.

Social challenges also influence Aboriginal labour market outcomes. In addition to low education levels, Aboriginal people exhibit higher rates of homelessness, are over-represented in the criminal justice system, have poorer health status, are more likely to come from single-parent families and experience domestic violence (Hanselmann 2001). Just as the link between education and employment was strongly identified in the socio-demographic analysis presented in Section 2, the link between socio-demographic conditions and education is well-documented in the literature (Thiessen 2001:20, First Nations Education Council 1999:7, BC Ministry of Education 2003:20, Bell *et al* 2004:35, Malatest *et al* 2002:12).⁵

⁵ For a discussion of strategies to improve Aboriginal K-12 outcomes off-reserve, see Brunnen 2006.



Structurally, Aboriginal people, particularly those of First Nations ancestry, have historically resided in reserve communities that are separate and distinct from the mainstream. As a consequence, Aboriginal people in rural communities are confronted with structural barriers to employment, and those in urban areas often experience challenges when integrating into mainstream environments – an experience that has been characterized as a “culture shock” similar to the experiences of new immigrants transitioning into Canada (Brunnen 2003:18).

As a result of these structural, cultural and social differences, any initiative designed to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes needs to adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach to identifying opportunities, assessing capacity, aligning objectives and developing programming, with particular sensitivity to these distinctions – and different approaches required both on- and off-reserve.

3.1.1 Alignment of Aboriginal Community Objectives and Business Opportunities

Businesses seeking to work with Aboriginal communities need to align their objectives with those of the Aboriginal community. As one interview subject representing a major resource company indicated, “It starts by understanding a community’s vision. Where do you want to go, how do you want to get there, how do you want us to be involved?” This individual noted that while some communities will have a well-developed vision, others need assistance and will often engage the business organization in developing this capacity.

Understanding a community’s vision is critical to success. If the intrinsic value system of the community is not aligned with the business opportunity, then there will be no stakeholder buy-in, no community legitimacy for the project and ultimately no long-term success. Fundamental to the process for achieving success is respect. Like any organization or group, establishing and maintaining good relations and partnerships requires that all parties respect one another. With Aboriginal communities, this means approaching issues in a manner that considers the perspectives, interests and culture of the community, and then assessing how the business opportunity can align with these values. As one interview subject stated, “rather than approaching issues with the mindset of we are doing you a favour by offering you work, businesses need to step out of their shoes and ask communities what they want, and how we can work together.”

Equally critical to the process is the concept of trust. Companies that approach Aboriginal communities to access prospective business opportunities require an in-depth understanding of community operations, management practices, local capacity and decision making processes. Aboriginal communities will respond positively to those organizations that, in turn, provide insight into their operations, decision making processes and mandate. By creating this trust, Aboriginal communities will gain a better sense of the company’s corporate culture and overarching policies and practices, thereby facilitating understanding and respect on both sides, creating a stronger relationship and, ultimately, improving the chances of success. As Savitch and Kantor note, trust “entails the recognition of a common future, a willingness to engage in reciprocal endeavours and invest in one another’s enterprise – psychologically and materially” and is the essence of community relationships (2003:1011). In some cases, larger companies have established this trust by working with smaller, intermediary-type businesses that have an established track record and positive relations with Aboriginal communities.



The most successful companies identified in the research are those with a long-term vision for success, and a willingness to invest in the community – regardless of their level of development. In areas where the education levels and expectations are low, organizations must work closely with the community to build a strong business case that speaks to the incentives of everyone involved – including the band council who may seek re-election through job creation; the Elders who seek to preserve culture and traditions; the youth who seek opportunity and prosperity through skill development; and the community as a whole who seek long-term prosperity balanced through land stewardship.

Working with Aboriginal communities necessitates an approach that encourages creative and innovative solutions and the development of formal and informal relations. Aboriginal relations professionals are integral to nurturing and maintaining these relationships. The Circle for Aboriginal Relations Society (CFAR) is a fledgling association of Aboriginal relations professionals with a mandate to “...encourage the establishment of recognized qualifications of Aboriginal relations professionals” (CFAR 2008). CFAR is a valuable resource for organizations seeking to better connect with Aboriginal relations professionals.

The government of Alberta is currently working with Aboriginal communities and elected leaders through an engagement process known as the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Workforce Planning Initiative*. The initiative seeks to work with all First Nation communities in the province to create joint workforce action plans. According to the initiative “this new engagement process is a focused dialogue joining Government and Aboriginal partners and other stakeholders to identify issues, develop actions, and assign responsibility for achieving those actions” (Government of Alberta 2008:2). As an initial step the government formed a MLA committee to “engage with First Nations and Métis elected leaders and communities to seek their support for partnering on Aboriginal workforce action planning.”

This initiative, while still in its early stages, has the potential to support Aboriginal communities in developing visions for success, and establishing an inventory of key skill sets and opportunities for businesses seeking to invest in Aboriginal communities. Critical to the success of this initiative, however, is the need for business to engage Aboriginal communities and the province in identifying workforce and economic investment opportunities that align with the strategic direction of Aboriginal communities.

The *FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative* could also benefit from increased coordination with the federal government’s *New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development* (NFFAED). This framework, announced in spring of 2008, is a consultative initiative that seeks to “increase the participation of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian economy” (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008:2). Key discussion questions identified in the framework include:

- How could investments in people, such as education and social assistance, be better connected to economic development?
- How could a demand-driven employment strategy connected to education and Aboriginal business development better facilitate economic development?
- How could there be a systematic identification of the economic potential of community assets and opportunities?
- Do the communities have the tools and supports to identify their economic potential and plan for its development?



- Are the right supports in place for labour market development? Business development? Community development?
- How can linkages and partnerships be established with the private sector, especially with energy and major resource development projects?

These discussion questions compliment the direction of the Province's *FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative*, and both the province and the federal government would be well-served to coordinate their efforts to achieve improved Aboriginal economic and labour market outcomes through these complimentary initiatives.

3.1.2 Alignment of Aboriginal Off-Reserve Objectives and Business Opportunities

Aligning the objectives of Aboriginal people with business opportunities in urban areas involves an entirely different approach than in Aboriginal communities. While the cultural, social and structural characteristics that distinguish Aboriginal people from the mainstream continue in an urban context, the primary difference off-reserve is that the emphasis needs to be on the individual.

Indeed such diversity exists within the urban Aboriginal population, that no singular approach or template can be applied to all Aboriginal people seeking to improve their labour market outcomes. Culturally, the urban Aboriginal population is comprised of individuals representing a variety of identities including Métis, Inuit and any number of First Nations. These individuals can be at a variety of life stages and have any number of aspirations. From an education and employment perspective, they could be single parents looking to re-enter the workforce to gain stable income, they could be Aboriginal youth seeking to access post-secondary education, they could be adult high school drop-outs seeking to access meaningful career opportunities, or they could be budding entrepreneurs seeking business development opportunities.

Socially these individuals could be confronted with any number of challenges. They may be in transition from reserve communities and lacking mainstream cultural knowledge or life skills, such as workplace etiquette, establishing credit, accessing public transit, obtaining identification or finding stable, affordable housing and childcare. They may have moved off-reserve to escape from lives of poverty or abuse, they could be grappling with the psychological damage inflicted by the residential school system (either directly themselves or indirectly through their parents' experiences), or they could be coping with drug or alcohol additions. Culturally, they could be facing identity crises and in need of mentorship and support.

In any case, the urban Aboriginal community is both a microcosm of society as a whole, and a sub-culture unto itself with its own unique characteristics and challenges. This depth and complexity is precisely why efforts to improve off-reserve Aboriginal labour market outcomes need to take a holistic approach to individuals, and align with all of their social, cultural and economic needs, aspirations and expectations.

3.2 Single Access Point for Aboriginal Employment Services

The complexity of issues and challenges confronting Aboriginal people, and subsequent programmatic requirements needed to meet all of their social, cultural, training and employment needs necessitates significant integration and flexibility in program delivery among service providers, Aboriginal people and employers.



What is needed, therefore is a single access approach to meeting Aboriginal employment, training, cultural and social needs – one that connects Aboriginal people to the services, training, programming and employment opportunities they need to succeed in the workplace. Critical among these, from an employment perspective, are connections that link prospective employees to workplace preparation services, prospective students to skills upgrading and academic opportunities, and linking graduates of post-secondary and workplace preparation programs to employment opportunities.

3.2.1 Linking Prospective Employees to Employers

A number of programs and services are currently in place in the Calgary region to support Aboriginal people in finding meaningful employment. *Aboriginal Futures Career and Training Centre* is one of the most comprehensive of these. It is funded through Community Futures, which is the Treaty 7 Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement (AHRDA) holder – a federal program designed to assist Aboriginal communities in delivering labour market programming in over 400 locations (HRSDC 2009). Aboriginal Futures offers career and skills assessment and referral components, as well as workplace preparation, resume building, life skills development, post-secondary and upgrading program information, funding application support, job boards and peer supports to First Nations and Inuit people in the Calgary region. Where individuals are confronted with mental health, addictions and other social challenges, or are seeking to access housing, childcare or cultural activities, Aboriginal Futures will connect the individual to an appropriate service provider. Métis Employment Services is a separate AHRDA holder and provides similar employment services for Métis people in the Calgary region (Métis Employment Services 2008). Both programs provide basic career and employment services to all Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal Futures partners with other service providers and select employers seeking to hire and retain Aboriginal employees on a project-specific basis. In such instances, Aboriginal Futures will assist employers in identifying and interviewing prospective employment candidates, hosting pre-employment training sessions, and providing support to the newly acquired employees. One of the most recent examples of this was the Safeway Canada Ltd.-Aboriginal Futures partnership (Text Box 1).



**Text Box 1:
The Safeway Canada Ltd. – Aboriginal Futures Partnership**

Safeway Canada's corporate diversity policy seeks to establish a representative workforce, with a goal to mirror the cultural makeup of the community within the store. This diversity policy presents a compelling business case for the organization, because, according to one interview subject, "Ensuring the workforce is representative in the local area helps meet the needs and demands of the local residents, and helps attract customers...diversity is so important to Safeway that part of the store manager's bonus is based on diversity."

In June 2007, Safeway Canada signed an Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI) Agreement with the federal government. The AWPI seeks to raise awareness of Aboriginal employment issues; enhance the capacity of employers to recruit, promote and retain Aboriginal employees; and promote information-sharing and networking among stakeholders (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008).

Since signing the AWPI agreement, Safeway Canada partnered with Aboriginal Futures to develop an initiative to hire and retain Aboriginal people in the Calgary region. Safeway worked with Aboriginal Futures to conduct pre-screening interviews and identify candidates who would be best suited for careers at Safeway Canada.

Candidates were then put through a 10 day pre-employment training course. For the first seven days, Aboriginal Futures led sessions on pre-employment preparation of specific interest to Aboriginal people. As the interview subject indicated "Sessions were all about keeping your traditions while managing in the corporate world, how to write a resume, punch a clock, phone in sick, conflict resolution, knowing where you want to go, and who to talk to for career advancement." For the next two days Safeway gave an overview regarding what it was like to work in retail, some of the key job requirements, and information regarding Safeway's corporate culture, its diversity policy and potential career opportunities.

Ten candidates completed the two-week program and were given a certificate of completion. Successful candidates were then streamed into their chosen career paths, some of which entailed further on the job training, such as a 316-hour paid program for career meat cutters.

While it is too early to determine the success of the program, which formally ended in February 2009, the class graduated with a 100 per cent completion rate, all of whom are currently employed by Safeway Canada. The company and Aboriginal Futures plan to monitor employee progress until August 2009.

The Safeway Canada Ltd-Aboriginal Futures Partnership is just one example of an initiative in which employment training was tailored to the unique needs of an organization motivated to hire and retain Aboriginal people. The flexibility of this program was critical to its success.



Such partnerships, however, are not common. Employers are usually involved in the process through the provision of job postings on a one-off basis, rather than through specific hiring and training partnerships. Identifying and engaging prospective employers for these types of projects was identified in the interviews as one of the key barriers to expanding these types of projects. Consequently, increasing efforts to systematically connect with prospective employers should become a priority of government and service providers moving forward.

3.2.2 Linking Aboriginal Post-Secondary Students to Employment

From a post-secondary perspective, all of the major educational institutions in Calgary, including the University of Calgary, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology Polytechnic, Mount Royal College and Bow Valley College provide some form of Aboriginal specific support and outreach services to Aboriginal students through their various campus native centres.

For new graduates, however, securing and retaining employment upon graduation can be particularly challenging. As one interview subject at a post-secondary institution said “There needs to be a better job messaging the realities of graduation – there is a myth that a degree will get you a job with high pay. While this may be the case for the professional faculties, it is not so for the liberal arts and science students. Career planning and resume building needs to begin in year one.”

Cooperative programs are one method for developing applied workplace skills for post-secondary graduates. SAIT Polytechnic, with its 97 per cent post-graduate employment rate, seems to have mastered this approach. One of the challenges with adopting cooperative programs in other institutions, however, is that these decisions tend to be a faculty choice and, therefore, are adopted on an ad hoc basis. The Faculty of Indigenous Studies at the University of Calgary, for instance, could choose to partner with the Circle for Aboriginal Relations Society (CFAR) to develop applied work programs for students seeking careers as Aboriginal relations professionals; however, such an approach would require coordinated and concerted efforts to work together on behalf of both parties, and would only address a very select market niche.

An additional challenge for Aboriginal students is that career services at post-secondary institutions generally do not tailor services by ethnicity, making it difficult for Aboriginal students to meaningfully access campus career development programs. This has created a service delivery void that became evident when employers started approaching the campus native student centres for assistance in hiring Aboriginal graduates. As these centres were not mandated to provide employment services, the Aboriginal LYNX program was created with the mandate to better link “Aboriginal post-secondary students and alumni with employers who are hiring skilled individuals for co-ops, internships, full-time or summer employment” (Aboriginal LYNX 2009). The Aboriginal LYNX program is a partnership among eight post-secondary institutions across western Canada that essentially serves as a job centre to connect Aboriginal post-secondary students and graduates to employers. While the program has yet to develop a comprehensive career planning and workplace preparation component for students, it is one example of an initiative that has evolved to meet industry employment demands.

Another opportunity to better connect Aboriginal students to employment is through stronger linkages among existing service providers. Community Futures Treaty 7, for instance, offers a wage subsidy



program for employers who will train an Aboriginal person with no work experience for three to six months - provided that the employer permanently hires the person afterward. Up to 60 per cent of the wage can be covered. One interview candidate speculated that this would be an excellent program for a recent university graduate seeking employment experience.

3.2.3 Linking Employers to Other Stakeholders

Building on the Aboriginal LYNX concept is the notion of creating a stronger linkage between employers, service providers and Aboriginal talent. As one individual speculated “The real connection that is needed is a stronger link to employers – how can they be identified and engaged more systematically in the process?”

One suggested mechanism was to create the equivalent of an Aboriginal-specific online service similar to monster.ca or workopolis.com service. However, such a venture is likely to succeed only if there is a sufficiently broad scope to create a critical mass of demand – similar to the Aboriginal LYNX program, which has participation from eight post-secondary institutions.

The Aboriginal Canada Portal (ACP) is one mechanism for achieving this objective. The ACP is a one-window online service that provides resource, contact, and government program information for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people (Aboriginal Canada Portal, 2008). It is a collaborative initiative involving all major Aboriginal groups and the Government of Canada, and serves as a forum for all Aboriginal stakeholders to share information. Among its services, the ACP offers an Aboriginal job centre with posting services for Aboriginal job seekers and employers. As of March 14, 2009, 379 jobs Canada-wide were posted on the ACP site.

Consolidating Aboriginal employment postings (including those posted by employers and employment service providers) onto the ACP site would effectively create a streamlined, accessible and integrated single access resource for Aboriginal job seekers and all employers seeking to engage Aboriginal people in the workforce.

For those employers seeking to establish specific partnerships with Aboriginal communities and service providers, a stronger linkage between Aboriginal career centres and businesses could be beneficial. Sharing Aboriginal employment service information, online information, and employer resources could assist employers in connecting with Aboriginal service providers and employees, creating greater opportunities for successful partnerships, similar to the Safeway Canada-Aboriginal Futures Partnership model.

The Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative (CUAI) is a potential vehicle for establishing a stronger connection between employers, Aboriginal people, programs and service providers. CUAI is a partnership initiative jointly funded by the Province of Alberta, the Government of Canada and the City of Calgary, with a mandate to engage “broad bases of stakeholders in order to effect real and sustainable advances for urban Aboriginal people in Calgary...CUAI is a true collaborative, and its potential is a function of the degree to which it engages community members, stakeholders and government around common goals” (Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, 2008).



CUAI serves to facilitate linkages and information sharing among stakeholders and service providers to improve Aboriginal outcomes in eight areas of specialization called Domains. The 2009 priorities of CUIA's *Employment Domain* group are to: [1] support the continuation and/or development of programs and/or services for Aboriginal persons with disabilities; [2] provide opportunities for community collaborations and partnerships through networking opportunities and presentations; [3] create a project team to focus on cross cultural understanding, database creation, and issues pertaining to hiring and retention; and [4] support the continuation and/or development of employment programs and/or services for the Aboriginal community.

While the mandate of the CUIA Employment Domain is sufficiently aligned with the identified need to connect employers to other stakeholder groups to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes, the Employment Domain has struggled to connect with prospective employers on a consistent basis. According to one interview subject "One of the biggest struggles that the Employment Domain core group has had is reaching out to the business community." While the core group has undertaken various methods in the past to reach out to the business sector to become more engaged, the majority of Domain members tend to be staff of program agencies, service providers and community members.

To improve connections between key stakeholders and prospective employers, it is suggested that the CUIA Employment Domain and business community stakeholders such as the Calgary Chamber of Commerce work together to adopt a stronger focus on engaging and tailoring its programming to the interests of the business community. Employment Domain core membership seats are open to anyone who express interest (when a seat is available), a specific seat on the Employment Domain core group could be reserved for a business representative. This representative would bring a business-oriented perspective to Domain decision-making and programming, and could work with the Domain to better link the business community to Aboriginal talent by, for instance, adopting targeted and concerted business outreach initiatives as part of its mandate and focus; developing strategic marketing partnerships with key with business associations such as the Retail Council of Canada and/or the Calgary Chamber of Commerce; and tailoring its events and programming topics to a business audience.

3.3 Workplace Preparation and Support

Similar to the international immigrant community, the Aboriginal population, especially those making the change from life on-reserve, need support to transition to Western cultural and business practices. As with international immigrants, adjusting to life in a new culture is a difficult process, but because Aboriginal people live within such close proximity to mainstream Canada, there is less awareness of the culture shock experienced by Aboriginals as they try to participate in mainstream Canadian society.

3.3.1 Pre-Employment and Educational Support

Upon arrival from an entire life in a different socio-cultural milieu, taking care of basic needs can be challenging. As one focus group participant described the situation, "Some people coming in from reserves lack skills like catching the C-Train (Calgary's light rail transit system) or renting an apartment. If you have lived on a reserve all your life, you might not know how to do simple things like that. These basic skills are essential to the ability to obtain and retain employment. For example, knowing how to access schedules



for public transit, can mean the difference between being on time for a job interview and coming fifteen minutes late and thus adversely affecting prospects for employment.

In response, employers, educational institutions and governments have developed programs that teach these basic and essential skills. A focus group participant from the oil & gas sector explained, “If you take an Aboriginal person off-reserve, out of a community of support, you need to bring them into another community of support.” If these transitional supports do not exist: “They fall back on their previous support. They call home with the problems they face, and their family tells them to come back home. They will protect them.” Such developments frustrate employers that sometimes make significant investments to have an inclusive working environment but forget that, even with their efforts, Aboriginal recruits have a huge adjustment to make.

Learning from post-secondary institutions, employers can increase retention of Aboriginal employees through orientation sessions that help their employee understand the norms and culture of their particular work environment, and make sure that the new employee knows where to go for guidance on issues that arise in the workplace (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003). Programs like Calgary’s Aboriginal Futures are available to partner with business for pre-employment training. The Aboriginal agencies of post-secondary institutions like the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology and the University of Calgary make this type of support program part of their orientation sessions. While these programs are available and accessible, it is not clear that enough Aboriginal people are aware of the support available to them and it is possible that a more tightly woven network of referrals is necessary.

Awareness of cultural support programs must begin in junior high and high school. Calgary’s post-secondary institutions, for example, have done considerable outreach to local schools through their Native Ambassador Post-Secondary Initiative (NAPI). In addition to informing students of the benefits of post-secondary education and the services available to Aboriginal students through post-secondary institutions the program strives “...to provide youth with a sense of empowerment, self-awareness and knowledge...” (University of Calgary, Native Centre). The University of Calgary facilitates entry into its institution through the Aboriginal Student Access Program. This program allows incoming Aboriginal students to take University classes with more support and expanded timelines to ease the transition from the high school / workplace environment to life on campus.

Engaging Aboriginal youth often requires using new media. An Aboriginal service provider commented on the reticence of program funding for web-based endeavours: “Governments are still hesitant to provide funding for online programming, as many are afraid that once a website is established it will not be maintained. It’s a shame because that’s where we’re most likely to reach Aboriginal youth.”

A recurring theme in the interviews and focus groups was the importance of sobriety prior to pre-employment or educational training. Access to many programs is contingent upon being free of drugs and alcohol for a minimum period of time, and for those still fighting addictions, referrals to relevant services are provided. One focus group participant was concerned about the availability of addictions counselling for Aboriginal youth, “I don’t think there are enough treatment centres for youth. There is one centre north of Edmonton, but that’s it. It makes a difference – Aboriginal youth-oriented addictions counselling.”

While many Aboriginal people are suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, the overall tone of both the interviews and focus groups was one of tremendous hope. One Aboriginal service provider shared her



experience, “There are a growing number of people, especially among Aboriginal youth, who are against drinking, drugs, smoking, and are adamant about staying away from them, especially after seeing what it has done to their communities.”

3.3.2 Cross-Cultural Awareness Inclusion

Alleviating culture shock is not the sole responsibility of the individual. Success in retaining Aboriginal employees is sometimes contingent on the provision of Aboriginal awareness training of management and employees.

In the focus groups and interviews conducted for this project, the overwhelming majority of service providers agreed that awareness training was a key tool in the retention of Aboriginal employees.

There were different philosophies among employers regarding the implementation of awareness programs. Some questions as to whether Aboriginal awareness sessions should be mandatory or voluntary. All agreed, however, that it was important for management to have awareness training.

The most progressive employers featured mandatory Aboriginal awareness programs as part of their human resources strategy. The focus on Aboriginal awareness training for one oil and gas employer was based, in large part, on the business case: “Next year every one of our employees must have Aboriginal awareness training. The intensity of the training will be dependent on one’s position in the company. For us, this training is important because, at every stage of our business, an Aboriginal contractor or community member will be engaged. So it is essential for us to understand the nuances of Aboriginal culture.” These businesses try to ensure Aboriginal awareness programs are “as integrated as any other training programs. From early history to residential schools, the people we are trying to hire are living with their history and we have to be sensitive to their needs.”

While large corporations may be able to afford the time and expense of Aboriginal awareness training, small- and medium-size enterprises with limited human resource capacity find the process difficult, though they are in as much need of talent as larger companies. Developing and marketing Aboriginal awareness programming for small- and medium- sized businesses, and tying that training to access to Aboriginal employment service providers, may provide a significant opportunity to improve the labour market outcomes of the entire Aboriginal population - by improving not only the hiring but also the retention of members of the Aboriginal community.

Lower cost alternatives exist. The Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY) developed web-based video training available for free to anyone who is interested. Their modular Aboriginal awareness training course allows those employers with an interest in hiring and retaining Aboriginal people but limited time and budgetary resources to proceed with training at their own pace (Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth, 2009).

Building a diverse workforce may require setting targets for representation of different groups. In an interview, one retailer said that, on top of diversity being a fundamental value of the company, “Having a representative workforce allows us to tailor our product offering to the surrounding community.” Developing a representative workforce may also require a change in hiring practices.



Often employers develop hiring criteria that do not necessarily coincide with the requirements of the roles and responsibilities of the position. Many employers, for example, require a minimum of a high school diploma for labourer positions that could easily be filled by someone with a grade 9 education. Some employers have chosen to lower their minimum requirements for all applicants and found that they are able to recruit and train high quality Aboriginal employees, who would have otherwise been looked over in their search for new talent. In addition, some employers have altered their recruitment practices to target Aboriginal pools of talent. Advertising through Aboriginal publications or Aboriginal job boards significantly improved their capacity to hire new Aboriginal employees.

3.3.3 Career Development, Mentoring and Recognition

When asked about the most effective retention tools for Aboriginal employees, three strategies were consistently mentioned: tying current or potential employment to a rewarding career; recognizing the successes of employees; and offering mentorship in the early stages of employment. These strategies are useful for all employees but there are techniques that are Aboriginal-specific.

An employer interviewed by the Chamber talked about his struggles retaining Aboriginal employees: “There is a very definite need for someone to help young people determine their career paths. From my experience, and this is true internationally, indigenous people are generally an immediate people. Their long-term visioning is not extensive because they’ve grown up in a culture of immediacy, a culture of subsistence.” Of course, the same is not true of every Aboriginal person, but placing special emphasis on the long-term employment prospects of new Aboriginal employees will help mitigate this feature of some Aboriginal people’s cultural heritage to the benefit of everyone involved. One employer stated their goal was to see more Aboriginal people ascend the ranks, “They start at an entry level position, but it is our hope that they move up to a managerial position.”

Integrating the recognition of achievement with an overall career path has worked well for a number of employers. One business that also provides training to its Aboriginal employees described their recognition program, “We provide an Environmental Technician Certificate if they put in a set amount of hours and they feel proud that they have earned external recognition. We also have a skills booklet that we sign that describes the training that they have received and they can use as a mini-resume.” When implementing such programs, recognition must have value in mainstream society. The program offered above, for example, is recognized by the Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada, and course credit can be received at some post-secondary institutions such as SAIT Polytechnic.

Recognition of this sort can lead to positive outcomes throughout a community. One employer witnessed how their employees, “set a positive example of prosperity and success within their communities, encouraged others to improve their lives and were, in turn positioned as role models in the community, further reinforcing their incentive to set an example.” Indeed, role modelling and mentoring are tools that are key to increasing retention of Aboriginal employees.

Through the Native Ambassador Post-Secondary Initiative, Calgary post-secondary institutions deliver Aboriginal ambassadors to schools throughout the Calgary area. Students take part in a “train the trainer” program and then present practical information regarding admission criteria and offer group tours of post-secondary campuses. Aboriginal mentors are essential to the success of these types of programs because they expand the scope of possibilities available to Aboriginal youth, who may still carry around



negative associations with their Aboriginal identity after years of structural discrimination.

As a demonstration of the impact of mentoring programs one employer related the following story of success, “We hire a couple of Elders that are clean and sober to go and mentor the new guys. We ask the elders to sit in on safety training, and educational programs and they love it. It’s the only way we can see getting Aboriginal people who are not working excited in the work itself.”

Service providers had similar observations: “We have a unique group with their own needs that differ from most other programs and we need cultural sensitivity. Our results are always better with an Aboriginal mentor. The youth ask for cultural guidance and so we send them to sweatlodges and facilitate connections with Elders.” A model of success, this program sees perfect attendance from the majority of its participants.

3.4 Skills Development and Business Capacity Building

In nearly all the interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this study, employers and service providers alike referred to the trend among Aboriginal people to seek empowerment and build their capacity through training and experience.

3.4.1 Educational Opportunities

Education is fundamental to seeing positive change in labour market outcomes of the Aboriginal population. As seen in the socio-demographic analysis above, the on-reserve education system is in dire need of reform. There are diverse approaches to the problem of on-reserve education (Richards, 2008; Brunnen, 2003) but so far, in spite of calls from politicians, academics, and the Auditor General, there has been little substantive progress to solve this very complex problem.

The current Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement for the Calgary region does not prioritize high school equivalency or literacy programs that could provide the tremendous returns of education in the form of better labour market outcomes. Bow Valley College, however, partners with reserves in the Calgary region to provide an upgrading program to Aboriginal people from the reserve population, which is a program funded by Alberta Employment and Immigration.

Success in other provinces was achieved through provincial involvement in Aboriginal education. In British Columbia, for example, the provincial government, local school districts, and Aboriginal communities collaborate to enhance the educational outcomes of B.C.’s Aboriginal population through a mechanism called Educational Enhancement Agreements. Success is driven by “shared decision-making and setting specific goals to meet the educational needs of Aboriginal students” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2003). The percentage of the overall Aboriginal population with at least a high school certificate in British Columbia is 61 per cent compared to just under 56 per cent in Alberta (Statistics Canada 2008b).

The Sunchild e-learning program is another innovative program that allows Aboriginal students flexibility in achieving their educational goals. Funded in large part by private partners, the Sunchild program allows reserves to pool resources and hire high-quality teachers for a larger pool of students. This program effectively engages students both on- and off-reserve and operates “...outside of the usual



political environment within which most First Nations' schools are subject—giving it more fiscal autonomy and authority to make decisions and act on them” (Watt, 2005). Considered an exemplary program so far students enrolled in Sunchild e-learning, especially those on-reserve, have exhibited higher attendance and graduation rates.

3.4.2 Applied Skills Development

While improving educational outcomes is the most effective long-term strategy to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes, for some, high school upgrading is simply not an option. This cohort, with responsibilities to family and children, need stable and steady employment but still want solid career opportunities over the long-term. The most effective way to bridge this gap is through applied skills development.

Skills development and upgrading programs often require a willingness to hire Aboriginal people with less than a high school education, but reward employers with loyal, hard working employees. An employer with an extensive skills upgrading program illustrated how their program worked: “Usually the area that Aboriginal people need to concentrate on is skills learned in high school, but they can do the field work because they have been exposed to it enough times and learned by doing. After that, they start to understand how math and science applies to everyday work.” Going further on this model the employer stated: “We work backwards from the regular educational system. We don’t focus on education as a prerequisite for success.” With a cultural bias towards hands-on learning, developing programming that starts with basic skills and works backwards to the conceptual, may be more effective for Aboriginal learners as a whole.

The success of these types of programs sometimes hinges on patience. Talking about the challenges of implementing his program one employer recounted: “If we have six people enrolled in a training program, we might lose three, but those that complete the program will be valuable employees. If we keep this scenario going for a few years, we have the original three plus another three the next year and so on. Over the long-term it makes a big difference.”

A focus group participant commenting on a theme of the employer session observed: “The major theme for me, is a move away from enabling and to empowering, and the best way to do this is understanding the community’s strategic vision.” So, when developing skills upgrading programs it is important to take a collaborative approach. A focus group participant explained: “One thing I hear quite often is ‘Don’t come to us with an idea to help us, work with us to find a way to help ourselves.’”

3.4.3 Business Development Capacity

Even with improved educational attainment, skills training, and a more accepting and inclusive work environment, a major barrier to improved labour market outcomes is the level of economic development on-reserve.

As with all business ventures, developing business capacity starts with a vision of what an organization wants to accomplish. In describing successful communities, one focus group participant said: “There are communities where education levels are quite low, however, they have a strategic vision of the specific skill set that they want to develop within their communities.” Such communities have ambitious



agendas, “The primary goal is not just to put people in the community to work for their company, they want them to be globally competitive.” Facilitating economic development is also a product of education and diversifying the skills sets of on-reserve residents, as one focus group participant explained: “You need the whole gamut of training for a healthy community.”

Industry partnerships are playing a key role in the economic development of many Aboriginal communities. These relationships, as a participant in the industry focus group detailed, stem from mutual interest of companies and communities: “Industry wants access to land and ease of operation. First Nations want capacity building, involvement, and respect.” Aboriginal resource companies have found successful partnerships with corporations in the mining, logging, extraction, and oil and gas services sectors (Alberta Chamber of Resources, 2006; Sisco & Nelson, 2008). Text box 2 describes the Savanna Energy Services Corp unique community partnership model.

Text Box 2: Savanna Energy Services Corp.

Savanna Energy Services Corp. is a premiere contract drilling and well servicing company providing safe, efficient, and cost-effective energy services for the petroleum and natural gas industry throughout western Canada and the United States (Savanna Energy Services Corp. 2008). In 2001 Savanna began working closely with many key Aboriginal communities to develop and maintain strong business relationships and genuine partnerships on its drilling and well servicing rigs.

A key part of Savanna’s business strategy is based on operating drilling and service rigs in partnership with First Nation and Métis communities. This presents benefits for both sides of the partnership, as well as for Savanna’s oil and gas customers. For the First Nation and Métis communities, equity investment in a new drilling or service rig provides a very attractive return as well as many associated employment and training opportunities. Savanna has also provided assistance towards First Nation communities becoming owners in drilling or service rigs by providing unsecured loans to the community for their equity portion.

Savanna’s partnership model is unique as it acts as the general partner arranging bank and other financing as required, coordinating rig construction and commissioning, arranging drilling contracts with oil and gas customers, and acting as the manager and operator of the entire drilling operation on a day-to-day basis. In addition, Savanna makes a strong employment and training commitment to the community of the First Nation and Métis partners, a commitment that offers an equally important return on investment to partners. Savanna’s current partners represent First Nation communities throughout the Treaty 6, 7 and 8 areas of Alberta.

As part of Savanna’s employment and training commitment to the partner communities, the Partner Training Program was developed, which is a six day course that includes one day prescreening and interviews, two days employment readiness, one day Hydrogen Sulfide H₂S safety certification and two days of Greenhand Orientation. The employment readiness portion was designed with the goal of preparing First Nations trainees with the skills to maintain employment and seek advancement opportunities in the oil and gas industry. Some of the topics addressed range from the history of Savanna’s rig partnerships, family issues, budgeting, communication and preparation for employment in the drilling industry. The two days of Greenhand Orientation includes hands-on training on a training drilling rig along with classroom instruction from a seasoned instructor. The hands-on training portion



focuses on the different components and equipment of the rig and also addresses important safety issues which is vital knowledge for a new trainee.

Some of the critical elements of success for this initiative include the following:

Vision/ Trust/ Reputation

- Savanna established respectful and mutually beneficial long-term relationships with its partnering communities, which evolved from rig ownership to employment and skill development based on community needs.

Workplace Preparation and Skill Development

- Pre-employment preparation and intensive job training were provided to all Aboriginal applicants to help position them for long-term employment success.

Cultural Awareness

- Cultural awareness training was provided to organization employees and managers to raise awareness of unique Aboriginal characteristics and realities.

Equity

- All employees – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – were held to the same level of performance, paid at the same rate and promoted based on performance.

Business Capacity

- Aboriginal communities were supported in their business development capacity through the mutually beneficial partnership created as a result of Savanna's strategic interest in the energy resources of the land.

Recognition, Mentorship and Role Modelling

- As a result of the program, Aboriginal employees were recognized for their work, and set a positive example of prosperity within their communities, thereby inspiring others to improve their lives.

Communication and Outreach

- Communication with Aboriginal communities was critical in raising awareness of employment and partnership opportunities.



A somewhat surprising obstacle to economic development is the internal operation of some reserves. An interviewee commented on the politics of starting up a new business in a Calgary region reserve: “You need to go through a number of hoops to get an entrepreneurial endeavour going. You have to get approval from the band council and from INAC, and sometimes entrepreneurs are seen as competition for band operations, which will set rents and create regulations to discourage business development.”

A practice used by some businesses to obtain community buy-in is to talk directly to leaders, “You have meet with the Chiefs and Counsellors, and communicate the importance of looking long-term...that the community could do much better financially and politically by investing in training. We communicate a business case: people with no skills are worth no dollars. If we come in, we can train those people so they can be billed out, and generate revenue for the band. If people are billed out at \$35, they get \$20, and the band gets \$15,” said one interviewee.

Another challenge that arises is the process of working with government departments. The level of bureaucracy and regulation that can surround public funding decisions and agreements is enough to turn some companies away. As one interview subject stated: “Because of red tape our company is now going away from government funding and using partnerships to fund programming.”

Where these partnerships are not available, one interview subject indicated: “What you need is innovative people in band offices to push government to the limit so that you can make funding work for the people in the community. You have to be in tune with political organizations – find the right people and establish the right contacts to make things happen. If people don’t understand, you have to go to the government and really explain what you need, and meet the people making the decision.”

This latter point speaks to the concept of social capital, defined as “the supporting human relationships that enable people to work together for common purposes”, which are built on trust developed through “common patterns of socialization and an acceptance of institutions, rules, norms, identities, and beliefs” (Savitch and Kantor 2003:1010). Nurturing social capital relationships and contacts is critical to establishing the trust and accessing the necessary resources to developing successful economic development strategies.

4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward for government, business community, Aboriginal service provider and Aboriginal community consideration:

Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities

Businesses seeking to work with Aboriginal communities need to align their objectives with those of Aboriginal communities. This means approaching issues in a manner that considers the perspectives, interests and culture of the community, and then assessing how the business opportunity can align with these values. The Government of Alberta’s *First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative* is working with Aboriginal communities and their leadership to develop collaborative community workforce action plans.



1. It is recommended that the business community support the Government of Alberta's First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative and seek opportunities to engage Aboriginal communities and the province in partnering to achieve economic and labour market success.

The *FNMI Workforce Planning Initiative* compliments the objectives of the federal government's *New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*. This framework, announced in spring of 2008, is a consultative initiative that seeks to "increase the participation of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian economy" (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2008:2).

2. It is recommended that Alberta Employment and Immigration and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada coordinate their efforts in working with Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal economic and labour market outcomes through the collaborative *FNMI Workforce Action Plan* initiative and the *New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*.

Single Access Point for Aboriginal Employment Services

Multiple Aboriginal career and employment service providers operate within the Calgary region yet these organizations do not fully coordinate in linking and referring clients to services. What is needed is a single access point to connect Aboriginal people to the services, training, programming and employment opportunities they need to succeed in the workplace. The Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, through its established ability to serve as a "true collaborative" is aptly positioned as the conduit for this role.

3. It is recommended that the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, Aboriginal employment agencies and other Aboriginal service providers work together to continue to build on their success in coordinating their efforts and resources to strengthen their network linkages and better connect clients to services.

Stronger connection to the business community was identified in the research as one of the key areas for improvement. It is imperative that the business community and the network of Aboriginal employment service agencies work together to connect Aboriginal talent to business needs.

4. It is recommended that business community associations, such as the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, work together with the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative and Aboriginal service providers to better connect Aboriginal employment programs and services to business needs.

The process for connecting employers to prospective employees needs to be as streamlined, accessible and coordinated as possible.

5. It is recommended that all Aboriginal employment postings (including those posted by employers and employment service providers) be consolidated onto a single website (such as the Aboriginal Canada Portal) to create an Aboriginal equivalent of "monster.ca" – a national single access resource for all Aboriginal job seekers and employers seeking to connect with one another.



Workplace Preparation and Support

Cross cultural awareness training was identified in the research as critical to Aboriginal employment success. For Aboriginal employees, this was manifested in pre-employment preparation training. From an employer perspective, Aboriginal awareness training at the managerial level seemed to be the most effective.

6. It is recommended that accessible, competency-based Aboriginal awareness programming be developed and marketed to small- and medium-sized businesses, and that this training serve as recognition of these organizations as Aboriginal employers of choice for potential pools of talent.
7. It is recommended that government funding agencies develop funding structures that facilitate and encourage the building and maintenance of web-based program delivery and marketing for Aboriginal employment service providers, to better connect with Aboriginal youth.

Skills Development and Business Capacity Building

Engaging Aboriginal youth often requires using new media. This means overcoming current tendencies to favour traditional forms of communications in government funding decisions.

8. It is recommended that government study the Sunchild e-learning program and develop best practices that can then be used to implement e-learning strategies within band school systems.

The current Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement for the Calgary region, which expires this year, does not prioritize high school equivalency or literacy programs, which could provide the tremendous returns of education in the form of better labour market outcomes.

9. It is recommended that government ensure applied high school upgrading and literacy programs are available as key components of any new Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement program.

Education levels on-reserve are well below those of the population at large. Success in other provinces has been demonstrably achieved through provincial involvement in Aboriginal education, as a result of well-developed educational capacity at the provincial level.

10. It is recommended that the Province and Aboriginal communities continue work in collaboration to achieve meaningful gains in Aboriginal K-12 outcomes.

Even with improved educational attainment, skills training, and a more accepting and inclusive work environment a major barrier to improved labour market outcomes is the level of economic development on reserve.



11. It is recommended that Aboriginal entrepreneurs on-reserve work with community leaders interested in enhancing opportunities to develop business friendly governance and regulatory practices such as competitive rents and streamlined approval processes.

Another challenge that arises is in the process of working with government departments. The level of bureaucracy and regulation can discourage otherwise successful and much needed projects from accessing funding.

12. It is recommended that businesses seeking economic development opportunities on-reserve, work together with Aboriginal communities and government to adopt an ethos of innovation and flexibility in creating mutually beneficial economic development partnerships.



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A close-up portrait of Lois Mitchell, a woman with shoulder-length brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark purple top and a necklace with a square pendant. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be an office or indoor setting with warm lighting.

Lois Mitchell, 2009 Chair, Board of Directors
President, Amherst Consultants Ltd.
(Chamber member since 1999)

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