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Centre for the North

# Working Together.

Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada



REPORT MARCH 2019

## **Working Together: Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada**

Cameron MacLaine, Melissa Lalonde, and Adam Fiser

### **Preface**

This report examines the current situation of Indigenous recruitment and retention for organizations operating in Canada's Northern and remote regions. Its mixed methods approach integrates findings from a survey of Northern and remote employers conducted by the Centre for the North, along with expert interviews, and an environmental scan of policy and research. The report identifies persistent challenges that employers and Indigenous employees continue to face and highlights best practices to help employers develop effective recruitment and retention strategies suitable for Canada's Northern and remote regions. Our discussion of challenges and best practices also guides readers through the evolving landscape of policy and public opinion surrounding Indigenous recruitment and retention issues in Canada.

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# CONTENTS

## **i EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Chapter 1**

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 Method and Approach**

### **Chapter 2**

- 6 The Business Case for Employing Indigenous Workers**
- 7 The Benefits of Employing Indigenous Workers**
- 8 Social Licence, Productivity, and Mutual Benefit**
- 9 Benefits of Diversity**
- 11 Indigenous Population Growth**
- 12 Building a Stable, Local Workforce**
- 12 Outcomes, Costs, and Benefits of the Government of Canada's Programs**
- 14 Wage Subsidies and Tax Credits for Employers**
- 16 Potential Return on Investment Challenges**
- 16 Conclusion**

### **Chapter 3**

- 18 The Evolving Landscape: Reconciliation, Implementation of UNDRIP, and Federal Government Policies**
- 19 Canada's Reconciliation Agenda**
- 24 The Current Federal Context**
- 28 Adopting and Implementing UNDRIP: Implications for Indigenous Employment, Recruitment, and Retention**
- 33 Conclusion**

### **Chapter 4**

- 34 Key Issues and Context**
- 35 The Employee Side**
- 50 The Employer Side**
- 58 Conclusion**

### **Chapter 5**

- 59 Survey Analysis and Interview Findings: An Empirical Lens**
- 60 Profile of Survey Respondents**
- 65 Recruiting Indigenous Employees**
- 67 Retaining Indigenous Employees**
- 71 Recruitment and Retention Strategies**
- 81 Conclusion**

## **Chapter 6**

### **82 Case Examples of Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Practices**

- 83 International: Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement
- 86 Training and Job Preparedness/Readiness Organizations: Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment & Training Services
- 88 Development Corporation: Det'on Cho Corporation
- 90 Natural Resources Sector: Mining Best Practices—Focus on Agnico Eagle
- 95 Provincial Government: British Columbia's Aboriginal Youth Internship Program
- 97 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium
- 99 Conclusion

## **Chapter 7**

### **100 Recommendations for Employers**

- 102 Success Factors and Recommendations

## **Appendix A**

### **108 Bibliography**

## **Appendix B**

### **124 Participating Organizations**

- 124 Advisory Committee
- 125 Interviewees
- 125 Survey Respondents

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## Centre for the North Member Organizations

Assembly of First Nations	Government of Quebec (Société du Plan Nord)
Business Development Bank of Canada	Government of the Northwest Territories
Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Government of Yukon
Cisco Canada	Makivik Corporation
First Air	Métis National Council
Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (Northern Affairs Organization, and Lands and Economic Development)	Natural Resources Canada
Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami	Royal Bank of Canada
Government of Nunavut	TDBank Group
Government of Ontario	Transport Canada
	University of Saskatchewan



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Working Together: Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada

### At a Glance

- The most important strategies for improving Indigenous recruitment and retention target education, training, collaboration, and cultural awareness.
- Understanding the unique barriers to employment that Indigenous people face in remote regions, including a lack of education and training opportunities, key infrastructure, basic services, and the legacies of colonialism—and adapting policies and strategies accordingly—will help employers stay on top of best practices.
- This report presents 12 recommendations for employers looking to improve their recruitment and retention efforts in Canada's Northern and remote regions.

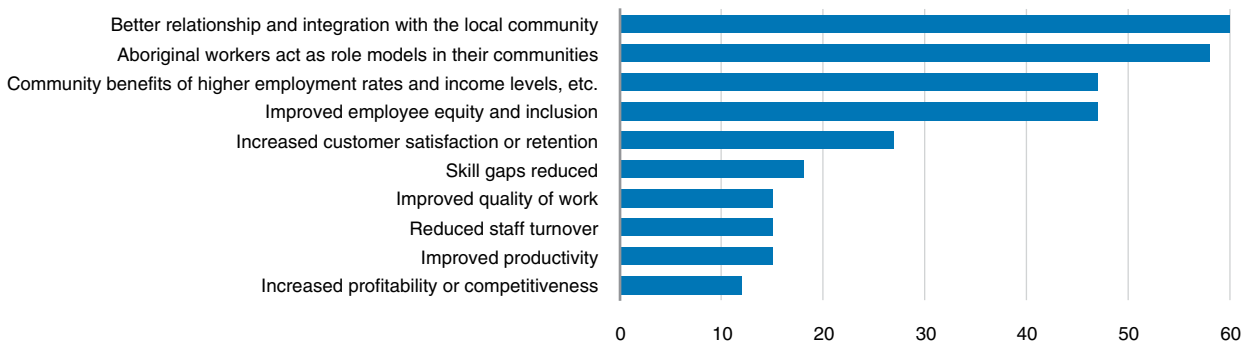
**Despite the emergence of promising strategies and practices, many employers in Canada's North are still having a hard time finding new workers. At the same time, the Indigenous population in the North is younger and growing faster than the non-Indigenous population, and has an unemployment rate over 17 per cent higher. This means Indigenous populations could help to fill these labour gaps and benefit from the associated employment opportunities.**

In 2012, nearly 60 per cent of the employers we surveyed said employing Indigenous workers improves relationships and integration with local communities. (See Chart 1.) Many organizations have determined it improved their reputation and made them an employer of choice in the communities where they operate.

Chart 1

**Employing Aboriginal Workers Generates Benefits for Businesses and Communities**

(number of businesses indicating positive impact, per cent, n = 137)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

While many companies operating in Northern and remote regions of Canada are having remarkable success recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees, some still face challenges.



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There is no one “right” approach to recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees.

Why do these challenges persist? And what are successful organizations doing to effectively recruit and retain Indigenous workers in these regions?

There is no one “right” approach to recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees. Processes and policies must evolve over time and be tailored to the community and organization involved. Based on the findings of this report, we have developed 12 recommendations for employers looking to improve their recruitment and retention efforts in Northern and remote Northern areas.

## Recruitment Recommendations

1. **Build trust and genuine understanding with Indigenous communities and leaders.** This is key, and will help to build a mutually beneficial relationship.
2. **Partner with Indigenous communities on recruitment campaigns and to design job opportunities.** This will help employers improve their outreach efforts in Indigenous communities.
3. **Adjust the hiring process to meet Indigenous realities.** Non-essential requirements may prevent otherwise qualified candidates from applying. Employers should also provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates to help them with their next application.
4. **Offer pre-employment training.** This can be foundational (getting a driver’s licence, opening a bank account) or more technical, and can be achieved in partnership with other organizations/communities. This will prepare employees for success and provide employers with confident staff.
5. **Identify and, where possible, address underlying barriers.** People in remote communities face barriers that are taken for granted in urban areas, such as access to potable water and adequate housing.
6. **Partner with educational institutions.** Organizations can offer co-op or internship positions, or full-time positions for recent grads. Staff at post-secondary institutions can often help to identify students with the right skills.
7. **Offer youth development programs.** Besides leadership programs and practical experience, organizations can motivate youth with exposure to different jobs and educational environments.

## Retention Recommendations

8. **Implement effective and meaningful inclusion practices.** Ensuring that employees feel valued, understood, and included can help entice people to stay.
9. **Mandate cultural awareness training.** Virtually all workplaces can benefit from this. It will help non-Indigenous employees appreciate the discrimination and challenges faced by Indigenous people, and can also include cross-cultural conflict resolution training.
10. **Accommodate traditional practices and community/family obligations.** Indigenous employees may prefer work schedules that allow them to fulfill community obligations and participate in traditional activities, such as hunting/fishing. This flexibility can build trust and loyalty.
11. **Clarify career paths and provide professional development opportunities.** Demonstrating that there is a future in the organization can build trust and loyalty for employees.
12. **Offer mentorship, coaching, and/or cohort programs.** These programs can help Indigenous people integrate into the workplace and can be enhanced by including Elders, culturally sensitive support programs, and/or support for cultural and traditional activities.

## Challenges for Employers

Employers indicated that their top challenges to recruitment are a lack of education and training, as well as job-related skills on the part of Indigenous candidates, and difficulties in identifying and attracting qualified candidates.

For retaining employees, many challenges come down to a lack of understanding. Cultural biases and poor inclusion practices, even when unintentional, can discourage Indigenous employees, making them more likely to voluntarily leave the organization. Understanding and accommodating cultural practices can help employers to stabilize their workforce.

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Increasing  
Indigenous  
employment is  
an important  
step toward  
reconciliation.

A return on investment for employers is not always immediate. For example, it may seem more expedient to hire “Southern” workers who already have the required skills; however, these workers will likely return to the South—taking valuable experience with them. “By employing the local labour force, employers have access to a stable, local workforce with employees who ... want to remain near their communities. The cost associated with transporting these employees to work sites is significantly less than those from larger centres.”<sup>1</sup>

## Challenges for Candidates

As employees or potential employees, Indigenous people in Canada’s Northern and remote regions face challenges that are often more complicated. Canada’s historical mistreatment of Indigenous people has, both deliberately and inadvertently, created generations of challenges that make it difficult for Indigenous people to find and keep meaningful employment. Many of the underlying barriers that Indigenous people face, such as inadequate infrastructure and housing, not to mention stereotypes and racism, can affect people’s physical and emotional health. Indeed, it is a challenge to “present well in a job interview when one is struggling with low self-esteem.”<sup>2</sup>

Most employers we surveyed did not think biases of current staff were significant barriers to Indigenous recruitment; however, the third most-common reason Indigenous employees voluntarily left an organization was “current employees’ lack of awareness of Indigenous culture.” This reflects the fact that there is, at times, a clear disconnect between the perceptions of employers and the experiences of employees.

1 Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, *Hiring and Retaining Aboriginal Apprentices*.

2 Joseph, “8 Basic Barriers to Aboriginal Employment.”

Education is one of the biggest barriers to employment, as most organizations require at least a high school diploma or GED. Employers also expect people to have certain skills that are common in the South, such as resumé writing, career development, and time management. But a skill important to daily life in Southern and urban contexts, such as resumé writing, may not be as useful in remote communities, where on-the-land and other skills may be of greater value.

Increasing Indigenous employment is an important step toward reconciliation. According to Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO of Indigenous Works, “The general picture ... is that businesses across most sectors need help with their Indigenous partnerships.” To stay on top of best practices, employers will need to understand the movement toward reconciliation and be familiar with framing documents such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

### Chapter Summary

- Indigenous people in Canada's Northern and remote communities face a variety of challenges to finding meaningful long-term employment.
- Employers in Canada's Northern and remote regions often struggle to recruit and retain Indigenous employees, despite the emergence of promising strategies and practices.
- Best practices for Indigenous recruitment and retention are becoming aligned with broader movements to advance reconciliation and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canada.



**Métis, First Nations, and Inuit people in remote communities face a variety of challenges to finding meaningful, long-term employment. At the same time, employers from industry, public sector organizations, and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in Northern and remote Canada often struggle to recruit and retain local employees.**

This report will examine the following research questions:

- Why do Indigenous recruitment and retention challenges persist for organizations operating in Canada's Northern and remote regions?
- What best practices characterize effective Indigenous recruitment and retention strategies in Canada's Northern and remote regions?

## Method and Approach

An expert advisory committee of Centre for the North members and collaborators guided the development of our research approach, providing input on our research questions, initial project plan, and research methods. As our research progressed, the committee also provided feedback on an annotated outline used to structure our discussion of findings as well as the Centre for the North's survey of employers operating in Northern and remote Canada. The committee also provided comments on drafts of the final report.

The research informing this report incorporated a mixed-methods approach that included:

- guidance from our expert advisory committee, balancing perspectives of relevant government, industry, and Indigenous organizations from Canada's Northern and remote regions;
- an environmental scan of relevant policy and research literature, and where possible, a review of data/statistics from relevant public sector and private sector organizations;

- an online survey<sup>1</sup> of employers operating in Canada's Northern and remote communities;
- interviews with subject matter experts representing the perspectives of employers, employees, and other labour market stakeholders in Canada's Northern and remote regions;
- a series of case illustrations of international and domestic best practices associated with successful recruitment and retention initiatives tailored to the needs of Indigenous communities in Northern and/or remote environments.

We begin discussing these findings in Chapter 2, which summarizes the leading benefits of employing Indigenous workers and discusses the types of costs that are frequently associated with recruiting and retaining Indigenous workers. What frames these benefits and costs is a broader movement of public policy, public opinion, and corporate social responsibility, exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and Canada's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).<sup>2</sup> In Chapter 3, we provide employers with insight into this broader context of reconciliation and UNDRIP while presenting a range of initiatives and programs to help readers understand the practical implications of this context. Our discussion highlights relevant federal government policies and programs to advance reconciliation and UNDRIP, alongside new human resources development approaches to recruitment and retention, skills development, and worker readiness.

Throughout the remainder of the report, we apply an analytical framework that organizes our research findings around employee-side challenges, practices, and programs and employer-side challenges, practices, and programs. Chapter 4 highlights key issues and persistent challenges that are common across Canada's Northern and remote regions, and identifies the unique challenges that can affect different kinds of employers, including public sector organizations, SMEs, and

1 Conference Board of Canada, *The Recruiting and Retaining Indigenous Employees: Strategies for Remote Employers Survey*, unpublished.

2 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*; United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.

companies in the natural resources sector. In this context, Chapter 4 examines the following employee-side challenges:

- education and skills attainment
- family relationships and community obligations
- mental and physical health
- social and geographic isolation
- lack of business expertise
- the “politics of smallness”

Chapter 4 then examines the following employer-side challenges:

- cultural stereotypes and racism
- poor accommodation and inclusion practices
- unresponsiveness to employees’ and applicants’ cultures, lifestyles, and ways of communicating
- geographic distance between work locations and Indigenous communities
- ineffective marketing and outreach techniques
- salary and investment disparities between natural resources employers, public sector employers, and SMEs

To supplement the literature, data, and interview results reviewed in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 zooms in to examine key findings from the Centre for the North’s survey of employers operating in Canada’s Northern and remote regions. It gathers insights from these employers about their specific challenges and strategies around Indigenous recruitment and retention. We also compare our survey findings with insights from the interviews we conducted with subject matter experts in relevant public and private organizations. In Chapter 6, we then illustrate salient features from our discussion of survey findings and expert insights, with a series of case illustrations. The case illustrations highlight best practices and lessons learned from successful recruitment and retention initiatives by natural resources sector companies, provincial/territorial governments, and SMEs. Case studies include:

1. Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement from Australia
2. Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment & Training Services (KKETS) from Northern Ontario

3. Det'on Cho Corporation from the Northwest Territories
4. Agnico Eagle Mines in Nunavut
5. British Columbia's Career Path Program and Aboriginal Youth Internship Program
6. Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium

Each of these featured initiatives illustrates how leading organizations in Canada and Australia have addressed barriers to Indigenous recruitment and retention in remote regions. Finally, Chapter 7 provides a series of 12 recommendations to help employers develop more effective approaches to recruitment and retention in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

In most cases, this report refers to Indigenous employees, candidates, and communities. However, this report also uses the term “Aboriginal” when it appears in titles of organizations or employment programs, or when it is used in literature or data.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Business Case for Employing Indigenous Workers

### Chapter Summary

- Canadian organizations face attrition and hiring issues that are expected to worsen in the future. These issues are most prevalent in remote and Northern Canada, where Indigenous workers could fill labour market needs.
- Organizations looking to operate on Indigenous land will benefit by hiring and working with Indigenous people. Organizations with poor reputations will have difficulty moving forward with proposals and projects.
- Companies that recruit and retain Indigenous workers benefit from better relationships with local communities, a local workforce, improved quality of work, and increased profitability and competitiveness.



**As this chapter will explain, employers can receive a variety of benefits from actively supporting Indigenous employment. While some companies continue to face challenges in making a business case for Indigenous recruitment and retention, many companies are having remarkable success. It is recommended that companies exercise patience and look to best practices and recommendations to design effective strategies.**

This chapter also provides a brief examination of the outcomes, costs, and benefits associated with public sector investment in the two Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) training programs discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 (the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund training programs). It also explores the merits of public sector incentives, such as wage subsidy and tax credit programs, designed to encourage private sector and other organizations to hire Indigenous employees.

## The Benefits of Employing Indigenous Workers

From January to March 2012, The Conference Board of Canada surveyed Canadian businesses about their approaches and challenges to hiring Indigenous workers. Survey results show that employing Indigenous workers benefits businesses and communities in several ways. Nearly 60 per cent of employers surveyed stated that employing Indigenous workers leads to a better relationship and integration with the local community. (See Chart 2.) These improved relationships may be partly due to increases in economic benefits for Indigenous people and communities. Indeed, 47 per cent of employers surveyed believed that employing Indigenous workers leads to a reduction in

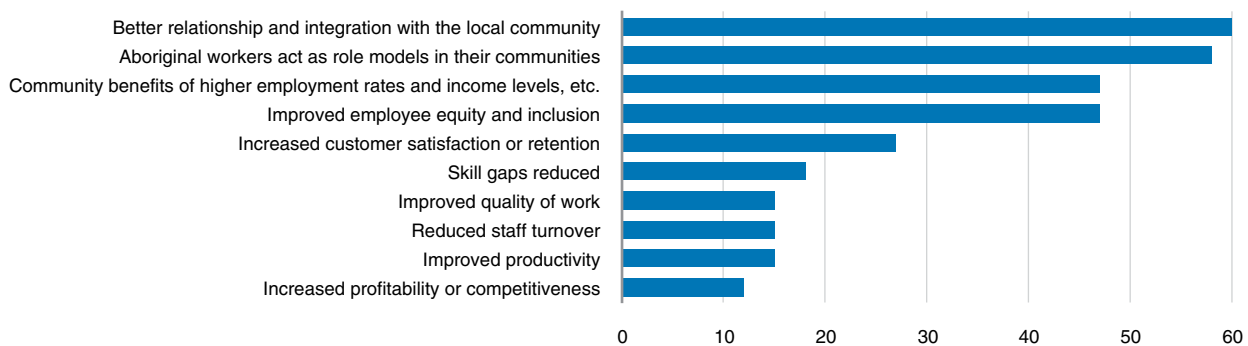
local unemployment and an increase in income levels.<sup>1</sup> Further benefits to Indigenous communities include Indigenous workers acting as community role models (58 per cent) and improved employee equity and inclusion (47 per cent). (See Chart 2.)

Survey respondents also identified direct benefits that their companies experienced as a result of employing Indigenous workers, including increased customer satisfaction or retention (27 per cent); improved quality of work (15 per cent); reduced staff turnover (15 per cent); and increased profitability or competitiveness (12 per cent). (See Chart 2.)

## Chart 2

### Employing Aboriginal Workers Generates Benefits for Businesses and Communities

(number of businesses indicating positive impact, per cent, n = 137)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

## Social Licence, Productivity, and Mutual Benefit

The ethical and social arguments entice many companies to hire Indigenous workers. Ensuring that Indigenous workers are prepared for their roles, in addition to enabling them to succeed in their companies, helps employers acquire the social licence needed to operate in Indigenous communities or on traditional Indigenous lands. This social

<sup>1</sup> Howard, Edge, and Watt, *Understanding the Value, Challenges, and Opportunities of Engaging Métis, Inuit, and First Nations Workers*, 30.

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Diversity is an important strategic consideration for organizations in the 21st century.

licence is indicative of a community's support for a project, without which it may be more challenging to secure necessary governmental approvals and permits, and to operate smoothly and efficiently. In addition, acquiring the social licence to operate is a key employer contribution to Canada's reconciliation agenda. In the case of the mining industry in Canada's North, it is essential to ensure that Indigenous people are involved in decision-making, and that the employment and business relationships they participate in are respectful and equitable.<sup>2</sup>

For organizations looking to operate on Indigenous land, the business case has been made to engage with and hire Indigenous people, since the alternative can have negative financial consequences. Organizations with a negative reputation can find that their proposals are declined. In addition, the result of such a reputation can "result in loss of operational time and profits, and ... can put future investment opportunities at risk. [Moreover] failure to recognize local communities ultimately inhibits business performance, whether through disruptions to production, time-consuming and costly conflicts with neighbours, or even closure."<sup>3</sup> Successful organizations demonstrate their understanding of Indigenous culture and values, work to build relationships with Indigenous community groups, and ensure that Indigenous people are able to participate in and provide consensus for the development of any projects. Many mining companies provide Impact Benefit Agreements (IBA), which often include labour, economic, and community provisions that ensure preferential hiring for Indigenous people, training budgets, and support for local Indigenous businesses.

## Benefits of Diversity

Diversity is an important strategic consideration for organizations in the 21st century. Organizations that strive to recruit and retain Indigenous employees in their workforce can experience a variety of benefits from their cultural perspectives and related competencies. According to Indigenous Works, "Some companies cite that Indigenous people bring

2 Pulla, *Responsible Resource Development, Indigenous Rights, and Social Engagement in Canada's North*, vi.

3 Ibid., 8.

unique decision-making processes to their workplace, along with their traditional knowledge of lands and environmental stewardship, and other characteristics that make their contribution to workplaces especially valuable.<sup>4</sup> According to a Conference Board of Canada survey, the top business reasons to invest in diversity are to access a broader talent pool, to be an employer of choice, and corporate social responsibility. (See Table 1.)

**Table 1**  
**Top Business Reasons for Investing in Diversity**  
(per cent, n = 120)

Reason	Per cent
To access a broader talent pool	58.3
To be an employer of choice	55.0
Corporate social responsibility (“the right thing to do”)	41.7
To mirror the organization’s customer base	26.7
To improve or create customer/citizen relationships	25.9
To meet legal requirements	24.2
To mirror local demographics	21.7
To improve innovation capabilities	17.5
To access new domestic markets	8.3
Other	5.0
To access new global markets	3.3

Source: Parris, Cowan, and Huggett.

The same survey identified strategic diversity-related priorities that organizations could use to enhance the workplace, including creating a culture of inclusion; increasing representation of diversity groups; offering management and leadership development training for diversity groups; and building diversity management competencies.<sup>5</sup> Organizations are also encouraged to provide diversity training for management and employees, offer cultural events, target recruitment campaigns, and offer diversity-related learning events. Many organizations that have achieved workplace diversity have determined that it has improved their

4 Indigenous Works, “Diversity.”

5 Parris, Cowan, and Huggett, *Report on Diversity*, 15.

Indigenous populations have potentially important roles to play in filling labour market needs.

reputation and makes them an employer of choice, which also helps them improve retention.<sup>6</sup>

## Indigenous Population Growth

It is known that the Indigenous population in Canada is younger and growing more rapidly than Canada's non-Indigenous population. According to Statistics Canada, "In 2016, there were 1,673,785 Indigenous people in Canada, accounting for 4.9% of the total population. This was up from 3.8% in 2006.... Since 2006, the Indigenous population has grown by 42.5%—more than four times the growth rate of the non-Indigenous population over the same period."<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada projects that by 2036 the Indigenous population will exceed 2.5 million. The territories have the highest proportion of Indigenous people; however, the largest population of First Nations resides in Ontario, and over half of First Nations people live in Canada's four western provinces.<sup>8</sup>

Currently, the median age of the Indigenous population is 23 for Inuit, 26 for First Nations, and 31 for Métis, compared with 41 for the non-Indigenous population.<sup>9</sup> This puts Canada's Indigenous people in a unique position for employment. Meanwhile, Canada's natural resources sector faces attrition and hiring issues—a challenge that is expected to worsen in the future. In fact, many major natural resources sector projects are experiencing a shortage of workers with skilled trades backgrounds.<sup>10</sup> Since the natural resources sector is most active in Canada's remote and Northern reaches, Indigenous populations prevalent in these regions have potentially important roles to play in filling labour market needs. According to the Forest Products Sector Council, "Employers able to attract and retain a diverse workforce will be well-positioned to cope with this changing demographic make-up of

6 Indigenous Works, "Diversity."

7 Statistics Canada, "Aboriginal Peoples in Canada."

8 Ibid.

9 Statistics Canada, "National Aboriginal Day."

10 Natural Resources Canada, "Impacts of Resource Development."



the Canadian labour market.”<sup>11</sup> In fact, a 2015 study by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) asserts that “if Indigenous people in Canada reach the same education and employment level as non-Indigenous people, our country’s GDP would increase by \$401 billion by 2026.”<sup>12</sup> This kind of impact on Canada and its industries, however, will take longer to realize if appropriate investments in training, hiring, and retaining Indigenous talent are not expanded.

## Building a Stable, Local Workforce

Employers with immediate technical and specialized skills needs may find it more expedient to hire external workers who already possess qualifications such as Red Seal certification. However, “Southern” workers with in-demand skills may be more likely to return to their point of origin. Therefore, it can be more cost-effective over the long term for companies operating on Indigenous land or near an Indigenous community to invest in training for the local workforce. In addition, as recently concluded by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, “By employing the local labour force, employers have access to a stable, local workforce with employees who are acclimatized to local conditions and want to remain near their communities. The cost associated with transporting these employees to work sites is significantly less than those from larger centres.”<sup>13</sup>

## Outcomes, Costs, and Benefits of the Government of Canada’s Programs

The Government of Canada recently assessed the outcomes, costs, and benefits of its leading programs to increase Indigenous worker preparedness. In February 2015, ESDC released its *Evaluation of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund*, which provided an outcome analysis for two programs

11 Forest Products Sector Council, *Hiring + Retaining Aboriginal Peoples in the Workforce*, 1.

12 Indigenous Works, “Increasing Market.”

13 Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, *Hiring and Retaining Aboriginal Apprentices*, 5.

ASETS and SPF programs have built 3,500 lasting partnerships with companies aimed at training and employing Indigenous people.

(which we discuss in Chapter 3).<sup>14</sup> ESDC's evaluation concluded that the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS)<sup>15</sup> and the Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) programs are working to increase Indigenous employment in Canada, and have successfully built approximately 3,500 lasting partnerships with companies aimed at training and employing Indigenous people. Of these partnerships, approximately 90 per cent of ASETS partners and 80 per cent of SPF partners stated that they expect their partnerships to continue.<sup>16</sup>

ESDC also assessed the incremental impacts of ASETS and SPF, looking at the outcomes experienced by clients (potential Indigenous employees who participated in ASETS/SPF training programs) who participated in programming in 2012–13. Of the ASETS clients, approximately 30 per cent were employed and nearly 10 per cent had returned to school. For SPF, approximately 20 per cent of program participants were employed and 4.5 per cent had returned to school. In terms of associated costs, ESDC determined that since program costs for ASETS in 2011–12 and 2012–13 totalled \$589 million, and 42.3 per cent of clients found employment or returned to school following training, the cost per successful client was \$14,700.<sup>17</sup>

In terms of associated outcomes, ESDC provided a labour market outcomes evaluation that concluded that Indigenous employees who participated in the program experienced an average annual employment earnings increase of 17 percentage points as a result of their participation in ASETS programming.

14 See Chapter 3 for a detailed description of these programs.

15 A government program that funds organizations that provide training opportunities for Indigenous people looking to upgrade their skills or find a job, and most importantly, ensures that the training they receive suits labour market needs.

16 Employment and Social Development Canada, *Evaluation of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund*.

17 Ibid.

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Formalized work agreements between employers and Aboriginal Agreement Holders resulted in more positive employment outcomes and trust between partners.

Although a cost-benefit analysis of the ASETS and SPF programs was not conducted for the 2015 evaluation, associated labour market outcomes appear to be positive. For instance, 45 per cent of ASETS employer partners and 31 per cent of SPF partners hired program participants. In fact, most employers hired more than one participant, with an average employer hiring 8.5 participants.<sup>18</sup> ESDC found that formalized work agreements between employers and Aboriginal Agreement Holders (AAH) resulted in more positive employment outcomes and trust between partners. ESDC also concluded that AAHs that focus on a labour market demand-driven approach to their programming also see better results since they can target their training to suit occupational needs.

While these are positive trends, there are also indications that not enough is known to definitively ascertain the effectiveness of the programs. More detailed information would be beneficial on the quality of ASETS clients' training and post-training job opportunities, particularly as it relates to the number of hours and days worked.<sup>19</sup>

## Wage Subsidies and Tax Credits for Employers

In our interviews with Northern and remote employers, we learned that their return on investment from recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees was not always immediate.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, some companies require additional incentives.

Two incentives are wage subsidy and tax credit programs. The Government of Canada provides a variety of such programs for employers looking to hire and train workers, including specific programs for Indigenous workers, youth, and Northern workers. Such funding programs offset employment costs that would not be covered if a non-Indigenous employee was hired.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Report 6."

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 6 for a detailed overview of interview and survey results.

For example, the Housing Internship Initiative for First Nations and Inuit Youth (HIIFNIY) offered by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation is a youth employment initiative aimed at providing employment training for First Nations and Inuit youth who are looking to work in the housing sector (jobs include administration, maintenance, construction, renovation, and/or client counselling.) CMHC provides wage subsidies to cover mandatory expenses (Employment Insurance, Canada and/or Quebec Pension Plans, Workers' Compensation premiums, vacation pay) of the sponsor, which is expected to cover the youth's wages, travel, and accommodation costs for eight to 24 months.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC, formerly Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) funds two programs under the First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy (FNIYES.) The Government of Canada has invested approximately \$100 million over three years to support these programs.<sup>22</sup> The First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program (SLP) aims to promote education for employment; supports skills development; introduces youth to career options; and provides wage subsidies for mentors. Through the program, private sector employers are eligible for 50 per cent of the wages paid, whereas non-profit sector employers can receive up to 100 per cent of the applicable wages plus mandatory employment-related costs.<sup>23</sup> An additional program, the First Nations and Inuit Summer Work Experience Program (SWEP) is specifically for secondary and post-secondary school students.<sup>24</sup>

There are a variety of other programs offered through ASETS that are also available to employers for hiring Indigenous workers. For example, Indigenous Futures in Calgary offers a Wage Subsidy Program that provides “financial assistance towards the wage of an individual experiencing difficulty finding work [and] ... encourage[s] employers to hire individuals whom they would not normally hire in the absence of a subsidy.”<sup>25</sup> Employers must hire the new employee on a full-time

21 Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, “Housing Internship Initiative,” 1.

22 Indigenous Services Canada, “First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy.”

23 Indigenous Services Canada, “First Nations and Inuit Skills Link Program.”

24 Indigenous Services Canada, “First Nations and Inuit Summer Work Experience Program.”

25 Aboriginal Futures, “Wage Subsidy Program.”

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Companies that work to recruit and retain Indigenous employees experience goodwill as well as less pushback on projects.

basis, and the length of the subsidy and percentage of wages covered under the program are negotiable. Employers are also expected to hire the individual full time after completion of the subsidy program.

## Potential Return on Investment Challenges

The purpose of this report is to answer the question: Why do recruitment and retention challenges persist for organizations operating in Canada's Northern and remote regions, despite the emergence of well-designed attraction and retention strategies as well as employment and training programs? Since these challenges do exist, this indicates that not all organizations receive a return on their investment when working to recruit or retain Indigenous employees. In fact, some organizations invest substantial amounts of time and capital in their recruitment programs and experience very little in terms of return and, in some cases, experience an actual loss. There are several reasons for this, many of which are unique to the company looking to hire or retain Indigenous employees. As we discuss in Chapter 5, Indigenous employees often voluntarily leave organizations for family or personal reasons, because they have found better employment opportunities, or the company or employees are not doing enough to accommodate Indigenous cultural differences, among other reasons.

## Conclusion

Despite the low returns some companies experience, the benefits and business case for investing in and hiring Indigenous employees remain, in general, sound. For example, companies still save if they do not have to relocate employees, even if the turnover rates for local employees are high. Moreover, companies that work to recruit and retain Indigenous employees experience goodwill as well as less pushback on projects. The main benefits identified through quantitative and qualitative research include better relationships and integration with local communities; a locally based workforce; improved employee equity and inclusion; the introduction of diverse and unique skill sets into the workplace; increased



customer satisfaction or retention; improved quality of work; reduced staff turnover; and increased profitability or competitiveness. To be sure, not all of these benefits are experienced by each individual organization, with some organizations experiencing little or none of them. We recommend that companies be patient and focus on implementing best practices, while using the recommendations outlined in Chapter 7, to guide internal recruitment and retention strategies.

## CHAPTER 3

# The Evolving Landscape: Reconciliation, Implementation of UNDRIP, and Federal Government Policies

### Chapter Summary

- The work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) represents a renewed public mandate to overcome the devastating effects of residential schools on Canada's Indigenous people.
- Call to Action 92 of the TRC's final report urges private sector corporations to apply UNDRIP's principles to operational activities that involve Indigenous peoples and resources.
- In 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to fully implementing UNDRIP in Canada to facilitate reconciliation between Canada and its Indigenous people. The Canadian government also introduced Bill C-262, an act that aims to ensure that Canada's laws align with UNDRIP.

**The benefits and costs identified in Chapter 2 can be framed by public policy, public opinion, and corporate social responsibility, exemplified by the TRC Calls to Action and the federal adoption of UNDRIP. This chapter will describe the key elements of this context, focusing on the TRC, UNDRIP, and other Government of Canada initiatives.**

## Canada's Reconciliation Agenda

In 2015, Canada's TRC produced its final report, concluding six years of hearings on the experiences of over 6,000 witnesses, most of whom were residential school survivors. The Commission's work, particularly its 94 Calls to Action, represent a renewed public mandate to overcome the devastating effects of residential schools on Indigenous people across Canada. The TRC stated that it was difficult to ascertain the truth, but accomplishing reconciliation will be more challenging.

The Commission asserts that the overarching goal of reconciliation is to establish and maintain "a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples"<sup>1</sup> in Canada. The TRC acknowledges that significant barriers to reconciliation exist, and through implementation of the 94 Calls to Action, Canada can take steps to work toward reconciliation. Increasing access to education and meaningful employment is a crucial step in the reconciliation effort. In fact, according to the TRC:

Poor educational achievement has led to the chronic unemployment or under-employment, poverty, poor housing, substance abuse, family violence, and ill health that many former students of the schools have suffered as adults. Although educational success rates are slowly improving, Aboriginal Canadians still have dramatically lower educational and economic

<sup>1</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 6.

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Call to Action 92 urges private sector corporations to adopt UNDRIP and apply its principles to operational activities that involve Indigenous peoples.

achievements than other Canadians. Education is a fundamental human and Aboriginal right, guaranteed in Treaties, in international law, and in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.<sup>2</sup>

Several Calls to Action are especially relevant to recruitment and retention, particularly those that pertain to the private sector (# 92); education and employment (#s 7 to 12, 62 to 66); and public servants (# 57).<sup>3</sup>

## Call to Action 92

Call to Action 92 is especially important, because it urges private sector corporations to adopt UNDRIP and to apply its principles and standards to operational activities that involve Indigenous peoples, lands, and resources. Call to Action 92 focuses on businesses and reconciliation, and includes three components. Part I requests that businesses undertake meaningful consultation and build respectful relationships with Indigenous groups before advancing economic development projects that affect Indigenous people. This is particularly essential for natural resources companies, especially those that operate on or near Indigenous land or use Indigenous resources. Part II requests that companies provide Indigenous people with equal access to jobs, training, and educational opportunities. Beyond this, Part II also asks that Indigenous people continue to receive “long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.”<sup>4</sup> Part III requests that organizations provide their management and staff with cultural awareness training, including educating them on Indigenous history, UNDRIP, and the legacies of the residential school system, in addition to providing conflict resolution training.

The vast majority of Canadian companies have not implemented many of the principles or components of Call to Action 92. In fact, a national survey of Canadian corporations completed in October 2017 revealed that most companies “do not actively seek to engage Indigenous Peoples

2 Ibid., 145.

3 See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, 1–2, 7–8, 10.

4 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 306.

or cultures, and do not recognize the importance of it.”<sup>5</sup> Following this, Indigenous Works commissioned another survey that found that only 25 per cent of companies surveyed knew about Call to Action 92. (See “Indigenous Works: Including and Engaging Indigenous People in the Canadian Economy.”) The Canadian Chamber of Commerce suggested in a May 2017 report that the Canadian government should provide greater clarity for the private sector to inform it about Call to Action 92 and its role regarding implementations.<sup>6</sup>

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## Indigenous Works: Including and Engaging Indigenous People in the Canadian Economy

Indigenous Works, formerly known as the Aboriginal Human Resource Council, is a national, not-for-profit organization founded in 1998 out of a mandate from the 1996 *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, which aims to “improve the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous people in the Canadian economy.”<sup>7</sup> Indigenous Works is focused on using partnerships between Indigenous organizations and Canadian companies to increase Indigenous employment, engagement, and inclusion within the workforce. It offers a wide array of programs and services aimed at assisting organizations to create a positive and inclusive workplace for Indigenous employees. One example is the Accelerate Program for Employment Equity, designed for companies that are looking for strategies to achieve their employment equity goals.

Also, among Indigenous Works’ initiatives is the Inclusion Continuum, which is a seven-step road map that assists companies in determining how they can “climb” through different stages to include Indigenous employees in their organization. The seven stages are:

1. **Indifference** (companies that do not prioritize workplace morale, and are not focused on eliminating harassment and discrimination);
2. **Intimidation** (companies that act out of fear and implement only the minimum legal requirements with regard to Indigenous inclusion);

5 CBC News, “Beyond 94.”

6 Canadian Chamber of Commerce, *Coming Together*.

7 Indigenous Works, “About Indigenous Works.”

3. **Image** (companies that are focused on human resources issues because of the public relations benefits, and showcase the benefits of their Indigenous employees for public relations reasons);
4. **Initiation** (companies that are focused on continued improvement and that provide a workplace focused on its inclusion commitments);
5. **Incubation** (companies that integrate inclusion goals within the entire company's overall goals, including organizations that are focused on positive Indigenous relations and that promote these values to other organizations);
6. **Integration** (companies with executives who are committed to inclusion and acknowledge its role in organizational growth, and that turn inclusion into a core competency);
7. **Inclusion** (companies that have a culture where inclusion of diverse groups is the norm, leading to a more productive workforce that is attractive to Indigenous workers).<sup>8</sup>

In October 2017, a report commissioned by Indigenous Works that surveyed over 500 Canadian large and medium-sized businesses determined that 85 per cent of businesses in Canada are not engaged with Indigenous communities in any way, and are not aware of the value of an Indigenous partnership. According to Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO of Indigenous Works, “The general picture which emerges from the research is that businesses across most sectors need help with their Indigenous partnerships.... Indigenous people will continue to struggle socially and economically until they are able to participate more fully in the Canadian economy.... Only one in four companies are [*sic*] aware of the 2016 Truth and Reconciliation Commission call to action to businesses.”<sup>9</sup> For this reason, Indigenous Works has affirmed that Canadian businesses must support reconciliation efforts. To this end, the organization has created a new program, Creating Partnership Intersections, which aims to build awareness around partnership-building, while assisting organizations to strengthen their understanding of Indigenous culture and history. At the same time, the program works to support Indigenous people in understanding corporate culture.

Source: Indigenous Works.

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8 Indigenous Works, “Products & Services.”

9 Indigenous Works, “New Research Reveals Large Partnership Gaps.”

Eleven Calls to Action deal directly with education, including calls to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous people.

## Calls to Action 7 to 12 and 62 to 66

Eleven Calls to Action deal directly with education, including calls to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous people, as well as calls for funding to educate Canadians about Indigenous history. Five Calls to Action aim to improve the Canadian educational system to ensure that Indigenous students receive the same quality of education at all levels as non-Indigenous students. This includes monitoring funding gaps in education, and associated education and income gaps (# 9), improving on-reserve education to close the education and employment gap, as well as providing greater access to post-secondary education and ending funding discrepancies between on- and off-reserve students (#s 7, 8, 11).<sup>10</sup> In addition, there has been a call to draft new education legislation as well as a call to the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to commit to improving Indigenous educational issues (#s 10, 63).

Several other Calls to Action focus on educating Canadians about Indigenous history, including spiritual history, and improving their understanding of reconciliation (#s 62, 64, 65, and 66). These Calls to Action would support public and private sector institutions in Canada as well as the general population in developing a better understanding of Indigenous people, their cultures, the struggles they have faced as a result of colonization, and the need for reconciliation. This may in turn have a positive effect on the workplace, particularly if it is paired with Call to Action 92.

## Call to Action 57

Call to Action 57 focuses on the public sector and aims to provide public servants with educational training on the history of Indigenous people, including information about treaties, Indigenous rights, UNDRIP, and Indigenous–Crown relations. The Canadian School of Public Servants is currently developing such a curriculum that focuses on the TRC report findings and reconciliation, which will be influenced by engagement sessions with Indigenous stakeholders. This training will be available for

<sup>10</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, 147–51.

federal public servants—the provinces and territories must create their own cultural awareness training. The Northwest Territories and Ontario already require their provincial government public servants to take Indigenous cultural awareness training.<sup>11</sup> The aim of cultural awareness training programs is to provide all employees with a greater level of understanding of the issues faced by Indigenous people over the course of Canadian history, as well as to provide them with conflict resolution training geared toward anti-racism. This training is not only essential for public servants, it is also suggested for employees in all other organizations across Canada.

## The Current Federal Context

Building on UNDRIP and Reconciliation is a renewed commitment to Indigenous recruitment and retention in the federal public service. Several federal departments provide programs to improve job readiness and access to employment for prospective Indigenous employees in remote and Northern communities, including ESDC, Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), and Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada (ISED)—three departments whose programs we profile below. The federal government has also recently released a report by the Interdepartmental Circles on Indigenous Representation, which weighs in on the needs and perspectives of federal Indigenous employees more generally.

## Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation

In December 2017, the Interdepartmental Circles on Indigenous Representation, led by Gina Wilson, Canada's federal Deputy Minister Champion for Indigenous Federal Employees, released its final report, *Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation*.<sup>12</sup> This is a key initiative that helps to define the current environment and emerging policy context surrounding Indigenous recruitment and retention within the

<sup>11</sup> CBC News, "Beyond 94."

<sup>12</sup> Interdepartmental Circles on Indigenous Representation, *Many Voices One Mind*.



The Government of Canada advocates engaging with Indigenous youth to encourage them to consider the occupational opportunities available to them.

federal public service. The report found that Indigenous public servants want to work in an inclusive, respectful, and supportive environment. In addition, “they do not wish to be required, in the absence of appropriate cultural awareness training, to educate their colleagues about Indigenous histories and cultures. Nor do they want to feel responsible for dispelling stereotypes that should be addressed using a systemic approach.”<sup>13</sup> Some employees said that because they are Indigenous, senior government officials and ministers want to take photos with them, making them feel “tokenized.” However, they are not invited to share their Indigenous experience when it can have a meaningful impact, such as in the policy design process.

An important part of the report focuses on the results of the Indigenous Workforce Retention Survey. The survey identified potential ways of improving the recruitment process, including “collaboration with Indigenous institutions to expand [recruitment]; [offering] more Indigenous co-op and internship opportunities; [working with] Indigenous recruiters; and [providing] personalized support to Indigenous applicants.”<sup>14</sup> Indigenous employees identified the creation of targeted leadership development opportunities, as well as training and development, and mentoring opportunities as a means to enable them to thrive and succeed in the workplace. The Government of Canada also advocates engaging with Indigenous youth and working to encourage them to consider the occupational opportunities available to them, while working with them to anticipate future gaps.<sup>15</sup>

*Many Voices One Mind* also provides several practices that can be adapted to suit both public and private workplaces. These include clarifying available mentoring and coaching opportunities; offering career management coaching to clarify career and skill promotion and success routes; implementing culturally sensitive employee support programs; surveying Indigenous employees regularly; addressing unconscious bias and racism, and integrating expectations of conduct into the employee

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

review process; and strengthening recruitment processes through collaboration with Indigenous institutions.

## Employment and Social Development Canada

ESDC offers the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, or ASETS program. The program helps Indigenous people find employment by assisting them with training, job searches, youth and disability programming, and child care. A related program, the Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF), complements the ASETS program by funding innovative projects that “contribute to the skills development and training-to-employment of Indigenous workers towards long-term, meaningful employment.”<sup>16</sup> Both programs are open to First Nations, Inuit, Métis, as well as status and non-status Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve. ESDC released an evaluation report for the ASETS and SPF programs and determined that they were successfully “working towards achieving their intended outcomes.”<sup>17</sup> In fact, ASETS created 2,350 partnerships and SPF created 1,150 partnerships between April 2010 and January 2014. Forty per cent of their partners were private sector organizations and 31 per cent were public sector organizations.<sup>18</sup> ASETS, SPF, and their partners aim to continue to increase employment rates and labour market integration opportunities for Indigenous people. The costs and benefits of these programs were discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

The Government of Canada’s Budget 2018 replaced the ASETS program with the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISETP). Budget 2018 pledged \$447 million over five years<sup>19</sup> for ISETP. The goal of the program is to focus on training for higher-quality, better-paying jobs to close the pay and employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Funding is intended to assist 15,000 more clients to find jobs and gain greater skills, contributing to long-term career success.<sup>20</sup>

16 Employment and Social Development Canada, “Skills and Partnership Fund.”

17 Economic and Social Development Canada, “Evaluation of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund.”

18 Ibid.

19 Morneau, *Equality + Growth*, 333.

20 Ibid., 132.

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ISED provides valuable skills training through a variety of economic development programs.

Notably, a 2018 report produced by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada found that more detailed information would be beneficial on the quality of ASETS clients' training and post-training job opportunities, particularly as it relates to the number of hours and days worked.<sup>21</sup>

## **Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada**

ISED provides valuable skills training through a variety of economic development programs. Some of these are delivered through the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor), launched in 2009 to help ensure economic prosperity in Canada's three territories. For example, through the Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development (SINED) program, CanNor provides support for training, standards and curriculum development, capacity development, and expert guidance. In addition, the Northern Adult Basic Education Program (NABEP) is designed to help adult Northerners develop the literacy, numeracy, and other skills, or occupational training, necessary to succeed in the workforce.<sup>22</sup> NABEP is a partnership between CanNor and three territorial colleges: Yukon College, Nunavut Arctic College, and Aurora College.<sup>23</sup> ISED also funds a variety of economic development activities, including youth internships and capacity-building, through FedNor, CanNor's Northern Ontario counterpart. FedNor is noteworthy in its focus on collaborating closely with community and regional organizations across the north of the province.<sup>24</sup>

## **Natural Resources Canada**

NRCan also offers programs geared to remote Indigenous communities and the participation of their residents in a variety of employment opportunities. One of these programs is the Indigenous Forestry Initiative (IFI), which funds technical, training, logistics, and other costs for clean technology, environmental stewardship, and resource

21 Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Report 6."

22 Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, "Skills Development."

23 Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, "Northern Adult Basic Education Program (NABEP)."

24 FedNor, "Grow Your Community's Economy."

management. In June 2017, the Canadian government announced that it would commit \$10 million over three years to expand the IFI program.<sup>25</sup> Indigenous communities and governments, as well as organizations partnering with Indigenous organizations, can apply for funding through NRCan's regional coordinators, including the Northern Forestry Centre, which services the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. In addition, NRCan provides a variety of materials on Indigenous people and mining, including the *Exploration and Mining Guide for Aboriginal Communities*, which contains a series of short case studies on Indigenous participation in the mining industry.<sup>26</sup>

## Adopting and Implementing UNDRIP: Implications for Indigenous Employment, Recruitment, and Retention

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People was released by the UN General Assembly in 2007.<sup>27</sup> UNDRIP contains 46 articles related to the protection and promotion of the individual and collective rights of Indigenous people. UNDRIP is a declaration as opposed to a convention or treaty. Accordingly, it is aspirational in nature and not legally binding. However, developments in Canada over the past few years are changing the normative and, arguably, the legal landscape surrounding UNDRIP.

In 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau committed to fully adopting and implementing UNDRIP in Canada to facilitate reconciliation and the restoration of the relationship between Canada and its Indigenous people.<sup>28</sup> The Canadian government also introduced Bill C-262, an act that aims to ensure that Canada's laws align with UNDRIP. Likewise, some provincial governments have also expressed support for UNDRIP. On the 10th anniversary of UNDRIP's UN adoption, British Columbia's Premier, John Horgan, released a statement declaring that the province

25 Natural Resources Canada, "Indigenous Forestry Initiative."

26 Natural Resources Canada, *Exploration and Mining Guide for Aboriginal Communities*.

27 United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 1.

28 Coates, *First Nations Engagement in the Energy Sector*, 8.

UNDRIP encourages companies to approach Indigenous recruitment and retention in a manner that is respectful of Indigenous people.

fully recognizes the declaration and is reviewing policies, programs, and legislation to determine ways the principles can be implemented.<sup>29</sup>

## UNDRIP, the TRC, and Indigenous Employment

The TRC's Call to Action 43 asks governments to fully adopt and implement UNDRIP as a reconciliation framework.<sup>30</sup> And as noted above, Call to Action 92 calls upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt UNDRIP by committing to meaningful consultation; building respectful relationships; obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous people; providing long-term sustainable benefits for communities; and educating management and staff on Indigenous cultures and histories.<sup>31</sup> Regarding Indigenous employment, recruitment, and retention, this means ensuring Indigenous people have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities, as well as culturally appropriate and inclusive places to work that are free from discrimination.<sup>32</sup> Notably, the United Nations also produced *A Business Reference Guide to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which urges businesses to fulfill their corporate social responsibility to respect the human rights of Indigenous people in their operations and relationships.<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, UNDRIP and its principles encourage companies to approach Indigenous recruitment and retention in a manner that is respectful of the rights and aspirations of Indigenous people.

## Relevant UNDRIP Articles

UNDRIP is fundamentally targeted toward states and the actions of states. Some of UNDRIP's articles will therefore be more relevant than others to employers and to the issues that surround and affect Indigenous employment, recruitment, and retention. Of particular relevance are articles 17, 22, 25, and 26, which deal with such things

29 Office of the Premier, "Statement From Premier John Horgan."

30 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, 4.

31 Ibid., 10.

32 Ibid.

33 United Nations Global Compact, *A Business Reference Guide*, 6.

as economic and social development, lands, traditional practices, and labour law. Other articles are also worth considering. What follows is a brief overview of the relevant articles from an employer and Indigenous employment perspective. These articles are grouped under key overarching principles.

## **Equality and Freedom from Discrimination**

Articles 1 and 2 address Indigenous peoples' rights to equality and freedom from discrimination based on culture, language, traditions, and customs.<sup>34</sup> By following the principles within these articles, employers can help ensure that recruitment and retention strategies are free from various forms of discrimination.<sup>35</sup>

Article 17 addresses labour rights and employment. It affirms that Indigenous people have the right to enjoy all labour rights under domestic and international law, including the International Labour Organization's (ILO) fundamental conventions.<sup>36</sup> ILO Convention 169 addresses Indigenous and Tribal Peoples with Article 20 addressing recruitment and conditions of employment.<sup>37</sup> Employers can improve retention by ensuring that Indigenous employees' labour rights are protected.

Article 22 addresses discrimination against Indigenous women, Elders, youth, children, and persons with disabilities.<sup>38</sup> To fulfill this article, employers are asked to provide equal work opportunities for all Indigenous people during the recruitment process.

## **Respect for Culture, Language, Identity, Tradition, and Spirituality of Indigenous People**

Many articles, including 11, 12, 13, and 15, address culture, language, identity, tradition, and spiritual rights.<sup>39</sup> Here, UNDRIP challenges employers to respect cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and customs.

34 United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 4.

35 United Nations Global Compact, *A Business Reference Guide*, 36.

36 United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 8.

37 United Nations Global Compact, *A Business Reference Guide*, 54.

38 United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 9.

39 *Ibid.*, 6–7.

Recruitment and retention can be improved through the incorporation of local land management strategies and traditional ecological knowledge.

Employers can potentially improve their recruitment efforts in this space by becoming aware of the history and cultural protocols that are of relevance to Indigenous communities. The same principles apply to retention, which can be improved by respecting and creating work schedules that accommodate traditional activities, including hunting, fishing, gathering, and harvesting; providing work conditions that enable Indigenous people to maintain cultural obligations; and providing cultural support and mentoring programs for Indigenous employees, especially those who are away from their communities for extended periods of time.

### Land and Natural Resources

Article 25 affirms Indigenous peoples' rights to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with the land and resources.<sup>40</sup> Article 26 addresses Indigenous peoples' right to own, use, develop, and control the lands and resources that were traditionally owned or occupied.<sup>41</sup> Employers can ensure they show respect for Indigenous peoples' connection to the land and their land rights. In the natural resources sectors, recruitment and retention can be improved through the incorporation of local land management strategies and traditional ecological knowledge in the workplace or in job tasks.

### Uncertainty and Varied Applications of UNDRIP and the TRC Calls to Action in Canada

There is uncertainty and differing understandings around UNDRIP and its associated principles and concepts, such as the principle of Free Prior and Informed Consent. Since UNDRIP was not drafted with Canadian law in mind, it does not account for the complex relationship between Canada and its Indigenous people, or the Canadian constitution. According to experts, "Important relationships could be thrown into disarray if, for example, the courts decided that modern treaties did not meet the UNDRIP test, even though they had the strong support of Indigenous communities. Resources projects could be delayed as opponents use a new legal avenue to contest the difference between Canada's standard—the 'duty to consult and accommodate'—and

40 Ibid., 10.

41 Ibid.

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Legal practitioners and policy-makers are not always on the same page about the legal significance of UNDRIP.

UNDRIP's call for 'free, prior and informed consent.'<sup>42</sup> Also, legal practitioners and policy-makers are not always on the same page about the normative weight and legal significance of UNDRIP. For their part, businesses, especially across the natural resources sector, want to know what the implications of the Crown's commitment to supporting Indigenous self-determination and fostering a nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous groups will be.

Feedback from interviewees reflects this uncertainty. The feedback also highlights a significant degree of variation with respect to awareness and knowledge of the Declaration. And there are differing opinions about the impact of UNDRIP on the operations, programs, and policies of Canadian organizations, including their practices surrounding recruitment and retention. As part of the expert and practitioner interviews conducted for this research project, we asked whether "Canada's reconciliation agenda and/or its adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* has affected organizational policies and practices, specifically those targeting recruitment and retention." Interviewees were split on the effectiveness of UNDRIP and reconciliation thus far. Some responded that yes, there has been an effect, since more companies are now aware of TRC and Call to Action 92, given their increasing prominence as topics of discussion within the media. At the same time, they noted that many of the companies that are seen to be abiding by the Calls to Action were already proactive. Similarly, representatives of some organizations felt that their policies were already reflective of the Calls to Action, prior to the advent of the TRC or the adoption of UNDRIP. Indeed, some interviewees feel that their organizations do not need to change their policies, because they have been in line with Call to Action 92 and the principles of UNDRIP for some time now.<sup>43</sup>

Interviewees also shared that there has been very little progress on the corporate front (particularly outside of the natural resources sector), since many organizations are under the impression that the treatment of, and responsibility for, Indigenous people lies with government. They

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Participant interview, February 21, 2018; Participant interview, February 28, 2018.



also indicated that the average person in Northern Canada is not aware of UNDRIP.<sup>44</sup> Taken as a whole, the interviews suggested that while reconciliation and UNDRIP are discussed in meetings with government representatives, industry and training institutions do not discuss them to the same degree. On the other hand, an Indigenous public servant felt that reconciliation is the driving force behind a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. The interviewee suggested that UNDRIP and reconciliation will help to crystalize Indigenous rights, particularly if reflected in Canadian law.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, the interview feedback indicates that Canadian public sector organizations and businesses are, on average, still in the preliminary stages of implementing UNDRIP and the TRC Calls to Action. This is supported via the findings within the survey undertaken by Indigenous Works (see above).

## Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed the evolving landscape of public policy, corporate strategy, and public opinion surrounding Indigenous recruitment and retention issues in Canada. To stay on top of emerging best practices, employers will need to ensure they understand the movement toward reconciliation in Canada and familiarize themselves with important framing documents such as UNDRIP, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. While their full impact remains to be determined, these two framing documents, in particular, are already shaping federal government policies and inspiring companies to reassess the relevance of their Indigenous recruitment and retention practices.

44 Participant interview, February 8, 2018.

45 Participant interview, February 27, 2018.

## CHAPTER 4

# Key Issues and Context

### Chapter Summary

- Key issues facing Indigenous job candidates and employees include education and skills attainment; family relationships and community obligations; and social and geographic isolation.
- Key issues faced by employers include poor inclusion practices and cultural awareness; ineffective outreach and relationships with communities; and irregular compensation practices across sectors.
- Employees and employers share many issues and concerns. These include the need to balance Indigenous employees' work commitments and community obligations; the geographic distance between work locations and Indigenous communities; and the politics of smallness.

**Many of the challenges confronting employers with respect to recruitment and retention, and employees or potential employees regarding skills development and worker readiness, are well known. However, some challenges continue to be less well understood. This chapter delves into these challenges from the perspective of the employee or applicant side, as well as the employer side, with the intent of providing context for the discussion of survey and case study research findings that follows in chapters 5 and 6.**

In many cases, employees and employers face shared challenges. These include the need to balance Indigenous employees' work commitments and community obligations; the geographic distance between work locations and Indigenous communities; and the politics of smallness. However, to maintain readability, such shared challenges will be discussed in only one of this chapter's two sections—either the employee or employer side—based on the side they are most frequently associated with in the research and policy literature.

## The Employee Side

### Education

A lack of education or relevant training significantly affects how Indigenous applicants and employees participate in the wage economy. For many, formal education is one of the largest barriers to employment, since most organizations require at least a high school diploma or a GED.<sup>1</sup> This is also the case for specialized, technical positions (such as heavy equipment operations), which often require post-secondary education or relevant vocational training.<sup>2</sup> Canada's census data

<sup>1</sup> Martin, *Building Labour Force Capacity*, 9, 20; Employment and Social Development Canada, *Nunavut Inuit Labour Force Analysis Report*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, *Building Labour Force Capacity*, 34.

continue to indicate that on average, Indigenous high school graduation rates are lower than those of non-Indigenous populations, although improvements have been made in recent years. As of 2016, across all provinces and territories, 33 per cent of Indigenous youth aged 15 to 24 had obtained no more than a high school diploma, compared with 40 per cent of non-Indigenous youth. (See Table 2.)

In some cases, Indigenous people fare slightly better than their non-Indigenous peers. For example, 12.7 per cent of Canada's Indigenous population was awarded an apprenticeship or trades certificate, compared with 10.7 per cent of the non-Indigenous population. Similarly, at 23.0 per cent attainment for college, CÉGEP,<sup>3</sup> or other non-university certificates and diplomas, Indigenous Canadians were on par with non-Indigenous Canadians (22.4 per cent attainment). (See Table 2.)

**Table 2**  
**Highest Degree, Diploma, or Certificate Attained, 2016**  
(per cent of population)

	Aboriginal identity	Non-Aboriginal identity
No certificate, diploma, or degree (aged 25 to 64)	25.6	10.8
Secondary (high) school diploma or equivalency certificate (aged 15 to 24)	33.7	40.7
Apprenticeship or trades certificate, or diploma (aged 25 to 64)	12.7	10.7
College, CÉGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma (aged 25 to 64)	23.0	22.4
Bachelor's degree (aged 25 to 64)	8.0	19.5
University certificate, diploma, or degree above Bachelor's level (aged 25 to 64)	2.9	9.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016178.

While summary statistics for remote regions in Canada's provinces were not available, we are able to contrast the national profile with those of the territories. In Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, the gaps in high school attainment can be substantially larger than for Canada as a whole. For example, in Nunavut, approximately 48 per cent of the Indigenous population aged 25 to 64 had attained at least a high school diploma, compared with 96 per cent of the non-Indigenous population,

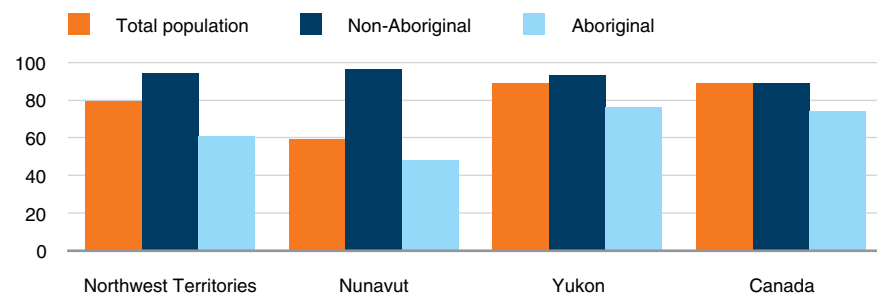
3 CÉGEP = Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel.

a gap of nearly 50 percentage points. Large gaps also exist in the Northwest Territories (32 per cent) and Yukon (16 per cent), though improvements are noticeable in each of these regions. (See Chart 3.) The 2011 Census data showed that 40 per cent of the Indigenous population had attained at least a high school diploma in Nunavut, a figure that has increased to 48 per cent over the last five years. The gap in the Northwest Territories remains the same. Since 2011, Yukon has seen a 4 per cent reduction in its attainment gap.<sup>4</sup>

**Chart 3**

**Aboriginal High School Attainment Gaps, 2016**

(percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 with at least a high school diploma)



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016178.

Community-level census data illustrate that educational attainment is an issue for Indigenous communities in Canada's Northern provincial regions. For example, there is a substantial difference in educational attainment between Sturgeon Lake Indian Reserve No. 101, Saskatchewan, Eeyou Istchee Baie-James, Quebec, and the non-Indigenous Canadian population. (See Chart 4.) In Sturgeon Lake, approximately 60 per cent of residents have obtained no certificate, versus approximately 28 per cent in Eeyou Istchee and approximately 11 per cent of non-Indigenous Canadians. However, Eeyou Istchee, situated in the resource-rich region of Northern Quebec, greatly surpasses the Canadian average for attainment of an apprenticeship

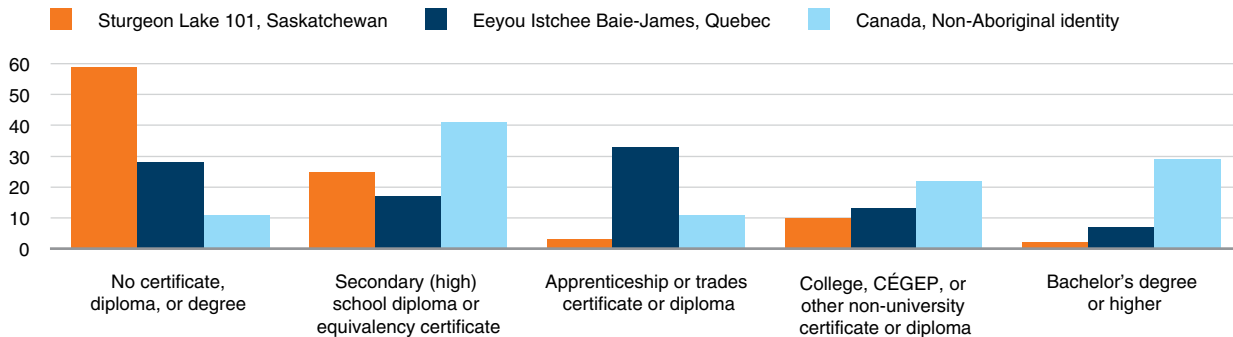
<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada, Table 99-011-X2011037; Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016178.

or trades certificate or diploma, since nearly 33 per cent of 25- to 64-year-old residents have one.<sup>5</sup>

Chart 4

#### Educational Attainment Gaps in Canada's Northern Indigenous Communities

(population aged 25 to 64 years, per cent)



Sources: Statistics Canada, Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census, Sturgeon Lake 101; Statistics Canada, Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census, Eeyou Istchee Baie-James; Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey: Data Tables.

In terms of gaps in post-secondary qualifications, the difference is most pronounced at the university undergraduate level, where, as of 2016, only 8 per cent of the Indigenous population had attained a Bachelor's degree, compared with around 20 per cent of the general population. (See Table 2.) Differences are less pronounced for graduate students. The 2011 Census data indicate that at the master's level, Indigenous attainment lagged non-Indigenous attainment by 3.7 per cent; and at the doctorate level, Indigenous students lagged their non-Indigenous counterparts by 0.7 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

Educational attainment directly affects labour market outcomes. Table 3 shows the average employment income, participation rate, employment rate, and unemployment rate for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In terms of employment income for full-year full-time workers, the 2016 data indicate that Indigenous people earn less than their

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census, Eeyou Istchee Baie-James; Statistics Canada; Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census, Sturgeon Lake 101; Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016178.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey.

Gaps in unemployment rates suggest that Indigenous people continue to have trouble finding work.

non-Indigenous counterparts, except for those who have attained an apprenticeship or trades certificate. (See Table 3.) Indigenous people are generally less likely to participate in the labour force and are more likely to be unemployed than their non-Indigenous counterparts. In particular, the unemployment rate for Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat is 25 per cent, compared to 3 per cent for non-Indigenous people. A similar gap exists in Nunavut, where 28 per cent of Inuit are unemployed, compared to 3 per cent of non-Indigenous people.<sup>7</sup>

As Table 3 also shows, participation, unemployment, and employment rate gaps become larger for Indigenous people with lower levels of education. Many of these gaps are smaller than they were in 2011, and several participation rates—notably, for Indigenous people with high school education or with Bachelor's degrees and above—are higher than for non-Indigenous people. However, persistent gaps in unemployment rates suggest that Indigenous people continue to have trouble finding work, despite their desire to do so.

With respect to income, the relative benefits of a higher education can be significant. In Canada's territories, Indigenous university graduates consistently earned over \$160 for every \$100 earned by an Indigenous high school graduate in 2010.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, income inequality is persistent across the territories as well.<sup>9</sup> In Nunavut, Indigenous men earned 61 per cent less than non-Indigenous men. Although the gap is less in the Northwest Territories and Yukon, Indigenous men there still earned 46.1 per cent and 38.7 per cent less than non-Indigenous men, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

7 Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016266.

8 Conference Board of Canada, The, "Social Outcomes in the Territories."

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

**Table 3**  
**Indigenous People Earn Less Than Their Non-Indigenous Counterparts**  
(ages 25 to 64, Canada, 2011)

Highest level of education attained	Average employment income (full-year full-time workers, 2010, dollars)			Participation rate (per cent)			Employment rate (per cent)			Unemployment rate (per cent)		
	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Gap	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Gap	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Gap	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Gap
None	43,067	43,720	653	39.0	38.3	-0.7	29.0	33.5	4.5	25.7	12.4	-13.3
High school or equivalent	47,917	52,030	4,113	67.3	63.4	-3.9	56.9	57.6	0.7	15.5	9.2	-6.3
Apprenticeship or trades certificate	59,154	58,199	-955	71.5	70.3	-1.2	60.6	65.1	4.5	15.2	7.5	-7.7
College or CEGEP certificate	56,516	61,290	4,774	76.5	74.2	-2.3	68.6	69.9	1.3	10.3	5.8	-4.5
University certificate below bachelor's	60,807	66,439	5,632	73.7	67.7	-6.0	66.7	63.7	-3.0	9.5	5.9	-3.6
Bachelor's degree or above	77,183	89,135	11,952	82.8	78.0	-4.8	77.5	73.8	-3.7	6.3	5.4	-0.9
All categories	55,734	66,376	10,642	61.4	65.4	4.0	52.1	60.5	8.4	15.2	7.4	-7.8

Sources: Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016357; Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016266; Calver.

Overall, there is a gap between labour market outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. The unemployment rate for Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 is 7 per cent higher than for non-Indigenous people. Indigenous people also earn nearly \$10,000 less than their non-Indigenous counterparts. (See Table 4.) Accordingly, education is a key factor in influencing the employment opportunities of Indigenous people in Northern and remote Canada due to the prerequisites and certification that many positions require. Education is also an important consideration when looking at the issue of retention, due to the links between educational outcomes and pay equity.



Table 4

**Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes Lag Non-Aboriginal Outcomes**

(population aged 25 to 64, Canada, 2011)

Labour market outcome	Aboriginal	Non-Aboriginal	Gap (per cent)
Employment rate (per cent)	63	76	13
Participation rate (per cent)	72	81	9
Unemployment rate (per cent)	13	6	–7
Average 2010 employment income of full-year full-time workers (\$)	50,928	60,296	9,368

Source: Calver.

## Employability Skills

A lack of employability skills presents a major barrier to securing employment for Indigenous Canadians. Employability skills are defined as “the skills you need to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work—whether you work on your own or as part of a team.”<sup>11</sup> Two key employability skills are literacy and numeracy, both of which are associated with high school and post-secondary education completion rates, as well as positive labour market outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

Indigenous Canadians continue to fall behind their non-Indigenous counterparts on internationally standardized tests of literacy and numeracy. For example, literacy scores for Indigenous participants, aged 16 to 55 years, across Canada, were 5.4 per cent lower than scores for their non-Indigenous counterparts in 2012. Similarly, their numeracy scores were 9.0 per cent lower. The greatest gaps were also reported from Canada’s territories. In Nunavut, Indigenous literacy scores were 40.1 per cent lower than non-Indigenous scores, while numeracy scores were 49.2 per cent lower. Scores in Yukon and the Northwest Territories were between 19 and 29 per cent lower. (See Table 5.)

11 Conference Board of Canada, The, “Employability Skills.”

12 Gulati, *Literacy Matters*, 7; Shomos and Forbes, *Literacy and Numeracy Skills and Labour Market Outcomes in Australia*; Kingdon and Söderbom, *Education, Skills, and Labour Market Outcomes*.

Table 5

# **Evidence of Gaps Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Literacy and Numeracy Scores, 2012**

(population aged 16 to 55 years, by Aboriginal identity, Canada and over-sampled populations)

	Literacy score			Numeracy score		
	Aboriginal identity population	Non-Aboriginal identity population	Per cent difference	Aboriginal identity population	Non-Aboriginal identity population	Per cent difference
Canada	260	274	5.4	244	266	9.0
Ontario	269	276	2.6	252	267	6.0
Manitoba	259	276	6.6	245	267	9.0
Saskatchewan	248	274	10.5	232	266	14.7
British Columbia	266	275	3.4	250	267	6.8
Yukon	242	288	19.0	224	274	22.3
Northwest Territories	229	280	22.3	210	271	29.0
Nunavut	207	290	40.1	187	279	49.2

Note: Aboriginal populations were over-sampled to facilitate analysis of proficiency in literacy and numeracy.

Source: Statistics Canada, *Literacy and Numeracy*.

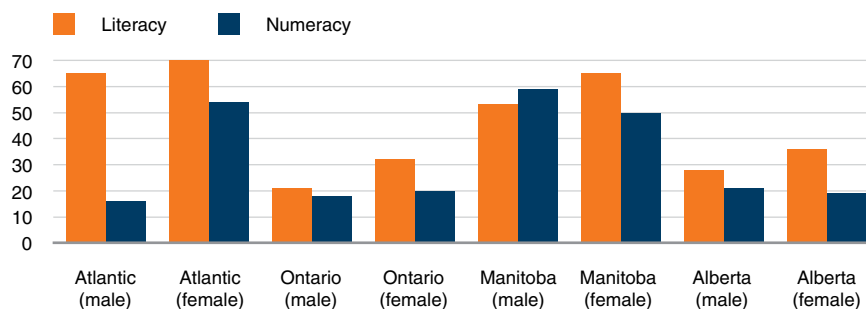
Evidence from remote regions and reserves suggests that such gaps can set in early. A 2014 Government of Canada report shows that in Ontario, 21 per cent of boys and 32 per cent of girls living on-reserve who participated in provincial assessments (typically administered to grades 3, 6, and 9 students) met the provincial standard for literacy.<sup>13</sup> (See Chart 5.) For numeracy, 18 per cent of boys and 20 per cent of girls in Ontario met the standard. Comparable results were seen in Alberta, where 28 per cent of boys and 36 per cent of girls met the provincial literacy standard, and 21 per cent of boys and 19 per cent of girls met the provincial numeracy standard. Results were significantly better in Atlantic Canada and Manitoba, apart from numeracy skills for boys in Atlantic Canada, where only 16 per cent met the provincial standard. (See Chart 5.) (See “Looking Beyond Numeracy and Literacy: Integrating Western and Indigenous Conceptions of Knowledge.”)

13 According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the numeracy and literacy rates presented in Chart 5 were “provided by First Nations recipients only for students who were tested. Provincial assessments are administered at selected grade levels, unique to each province (e.g., grades 3, 6 and 9).” Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, *Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Canadian Polar Commission, 2013–14 Estimates*, 43.

Chart 5

**On-Reserve Indigenous Literacy and Numeracy Gaps Develop Early, 2013–14**

(per cent meeting provincial standard)



Source: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

## Looking Beyond Numeracy and Literacy: Integrating Western and Indigenous Conceptions of Knowledge

Michael Lickers, Senior Advisor for Aboriginal Community Development at Suncor Energy, notes that while numeracy and literacy are important skills for employment, employers also have an opportunity to build bridges between Western and Indigenous conceptions of knowledge. Western approaches to knowledge centre on the literacy and numeracy skills described above. In contrast, Indigenous ways of knowing often focus on personal relationships and oral transmission, and incorporate experiential, holistic, and narrative approaches to learning.<sup>14</sup> Balancing and incorporating these two approaches could lead to a host of benefits and position both employers and employees for greater success.

Source: Michael Lickers.

14 Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, "Indigenous Ways of Knowing."

Many of the skills required for success in the workforce may be commonly understood in one culture, but not another.

## Life Skills and Essential Skills

Indigenous job applicants, particularly those living in remote communities, may also lack necessary life skills for succeeding in the job market and formal workplace. Examples of life skills important for job readiness include building resumés [and] drafting cover letters; defining appropriate career paths; mapping and pursuing educational needs; navigating career changes; career development job search skills; interview skills; time management; professional networking; and teamwork.<sup>15</sup> Also important are other essential skills (such as oral communication, document use, and digital literacy) that are critical to finding meaningful employment and progressing in the workplace.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, a 2014 report from the British Columbia First Nations Forestry Council finds that a lack of these skills is a significant barrier to employment for First Nations people across the province.<sup>17</sup>

Subject matter experts interviewed for this research project emphasized life skills as a barrier to Indigenous employment and retention. One interviewee noted that if life skills, such as reliability and accountability, can be obtained, an employer can provide training for technical skills.<sup>18</sup> According to an assistant superintendent at Agnico-Eagle Mines, “The biggest thing we see now is a lack of education and training, and having the right skills to find jobs....This goes back to high school and technical skills, but also the life skills to occupy a job, including being ready for work.”<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that many of the skills required for success in the workforce—such as showing up to work on time or notifying a supervisor when one is sick—may be commonly understood in one culture, but not another. Indeed, Indigenous workers may not be aware that they require a certain type of credential or licence to work, so companies and skills-training services in remote communities are increasingly helping

15 Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan, *Kamloops Homelessness Action Plan Life Skills Development Project Report*, 35; Employment and Social Development Canada, “Understanding Essential Skills”; GMG Consulting Services, *First Nations Forestry Workforce Supply and Opportunity Study*, 22–25; Employment and Social Development Canada, *Nunavut Inuit Labour Force Analysis Report*, 12.

16 Employment and Social Development Canada, “Understanding Essential Skills.”

17 GMG Consulting Services, *First Nations Forestry Workforce Supply and Opportunity Study*, 22–25.

18 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

19 Participant interview, February 21, 2018.

to introduce and reinforce life skills through pre-employment training.<sup>20</sup> Organizations should take care to ensure that life skills training for Indigenous workers respects and takes into account Indigenous cultures and life experiences.<sup>21</sup>

## Colonial Legacies: The Effects of Historical Mistreatment and Racism

Indigenous employees and job applicants also suffer from the effects of Canada's historical mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, including the harmful legacy of the Indian residential school system.<sup>22</sup> As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada notes in its final report, "These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Indigenous children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture."<sup>23</sup> The Government of Canada's system of Indian reserves also led to the loss of traditional lands and contributed to the degradation of Indigenous self-determination and economic self-sufficiency. Moreover, many policies, programs, and practices throughout the post-Confederation period served to discriminate and disadvantage Indigenous people in Canada, whether deliberately or inadvertently.<sup>24</sup>

This colonial legacy has resulted in social and economic challenges that negatively affect an Indigenous person's chances of finding meaningful and stable employment.<sup>25</sup> A number of associated challenges identified in the research literature include depression, low self-esteem, alcoholism, social dysfunction, and suicide.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it is a challenge to "present well in a job interview when one is struggling with low self-esteem."<sup>27</sup> And as one attendee to The Conference Board of Canada's National Summit on Indigenous Youth and Natural Resource

20 Participant interview, February 23, 2018.

21 National Education Association, "Diversity Toolkit."

22 Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke, "Residential Schools and the Effects on Indigenous Health," 2.

23 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, v.

24 Ibid., 1–3.

25 Barclay, Parmenter, and Barnes, *Good Practices*, 8–9.

26 Ajunnginiq Centre, *What Sculpture Is to Soapstone, Education Is to the Soul*, 11; Bruce, Marlin, and Raham, *Literature Review*, 48–49.

27 Joseph, "8 Basic Barriers to Aboriginal Employment."

Infrastructure and housing issues tend to be more pronounced in remote and Northern regions.

Development noted, “We can’t start thinking about engaging with natural resource companies when we’re dealing with suicide epidemics.”<sup>28</sup>

These challenges are in addition to the fact that in Canada, as in many other countries with colonial legacies, Indigenous people generally have poorer health and wellness outcomes than their non-Indigenous counterparts.<sup>29</sup>

## Underlying Barriers

The infrastructure and housing challenges on reserves and in remote communities are well known. For example, as of January 2017, 71 of the on-reserve drinking water systems funded by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada were under long-term drinking water advisories.<sup>30</sup> In addition, a sizable proportion of Canada’s Indigenous population lives in sub-standard housing conditions. Data from the 2016 Census show that approximately 19 per cent of Indigenous Canadians live in homes needing major repairs to plumbing or electrical systems, or to walls, floors, and ceilings. This is more than three times the proportion of non-Indigenous Canadians whose homes require similar repairs.<sup>31</sup> These types of issues tend to be more pronounced in remote and Northern regions. In 2016, the federal government budgeted \$150 million for housing repairs on reserves across Canada; it is estimated that it will cost 13 times that—approximately \$2 billion—to eliminate overcrowding and mould in Manitoba alone.<sup>32</sup>

Numerous interview participants referenced housing as a significant employment barrier in Canada’s North. One interviewee suggested that job offers that include housing can be appealing to some Indigenous workers, particularly in Nunavut. The interviewee said that many employees who dislike their jobs stay because housing is provided. On the other hand, a lot of people may be a good fit for jobs that they choose not to take because they are not provided with housing.<sup>33</sup>

28 Participant comment at The Conference Board of Canada’s National Summit “Our Land, Our Future.”

29 Gray, Hunter, and Lohar, *Increasing Indigenous Employment Rates*, 10.

30 Newsire.ca, “Government of Canada on Track.”

31 Statistics Canada, *The Housing Conditions of Aboriginal People in Canada*, 12; Statistics Canada, “Dwelling Condition.”

32 Puxley, “Billions Needed to Fix Crumbling First Nations Homes in Manitoba.”

33 Participant interview, February 8, 2018; Participant interview, February 21, 2018.

Interestingly, interviewees stated that if people choose to take a job that does not provide housing but pays enough to disqualify them for housing assistance, their rent can be raised significantly.<sup>34</sup> In these instances, having a job that does not include housing may be especially unappealing. (See “Housing and the Importance of Underlying Barriers to Recruitment and Retention.”)

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## Housing and the Importance of Underlying Barriers to Recruitment and Retention

Housing is an underlying, foundational challenge to Indigenous employment, recruitment, and retention outcomes for many individuals in remote communities. Housing issues can contribute to, or exacerbate, a number of the proximate challenges listed above and below. For example, living in inadequate, overcrowded housing may make it difficult to undertake homework or vocational training. This, in turn, can affect educational performance or successful outcomes when undertaking skills and training development. Housing in Northern and remote Indigenous communities is frequently in a state of disrepair; subject to mould; poorly insulated; poorly ventilated; dependent upon unclean sources of energy (diesel, wood stove, etc.); and not supplied with potable drinking water.

All of these characteristics can have implications regarding health—both physical and mental. The latter may be especially acute in instances where overcrowded housing converges with the legacies of the residential school system, wherein family members in the home may be struggling with past trauma, substance abuse, or social dysfunction. Other examples of underlying barriers include various forms of community infrastructure and services, such as recreation and sports centres, good educational and health facilities, effective water treatment facilities, and standard telecommunications infrastructure. These can be the kinds of things that make people want to move to, or stay in, communities.<sup>35</sup>

Sources: GE National.

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<sup>34</sup> Participant interview, February 8, 2018.

<sup>35</sup> GE National, *Towards a Remote Communities Investment Strategy for Canada*, 9–14. See also Canadian Chamber of Commerce, *The Business Case*, 15, 16.

Managing food security challenges are more pronounced among Canada's Northern and Indigenous populations.

## Family Relationships, Community Obligations, and Traditional Activities

For many Indigenous peoples in Canada, “family” is a broadly encompassing concept that includes cousins, aunts, uncles, and even other community members beyond the immediate (or nuclear) family.<sup>36</sup> Family and community responsibilities may also be of significant importance to community and cultural well-being in many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. As a result, Indigenous workers may need to take time off work to attend an important community event or emergency, such as a death, a natural disaster, or a social crisis.<sup>37</sup> A funeral, for instance, can last for multiple days, requiring a delicate balance of family, community, and work obligations.<sup>38</sup> These community and cultural commitments are categorized as an employee-side challenge, but they can also become an employer-side issue if employers are unable or unwilling to adjust their work schedules to allow employees to meet family or cultural obligations.

In addition, traditional seasonal activities, such as hunting, fishing, and harvesting, are of central importance to many Indigenous communities. These and other traditional activities are key characteristics of Northern Canada's mixed economy, which features “wage-based work combined with traditional activities.”<sup>39</sup> These activities are important for two reasons. First, they provide an opportunity for Indigenous people to connect with the cultural traditions and identity that were significantly weakened by residential schools and other colonial policies. Second, hunting and fishing may be important for managing food security challenges, which are more pronounced among Canada's Northern and Indigenous populations. Indeed, 2011–12 data from the Canadian Community Health Survey revealed that household food insecurity in Nunavut was three times higher than for Canada overall. In addition, Indigenous households were 27 per cent more likely than non-Indigenous households to be food insecure.<sup>40</sup>

36 Indigenous Corporate Training Inc., “Aboriginal Retention Strategies and Cultural Leave.”

37 Ibid.

38 Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, *Hiring and Retaining Aboriginal Apprentices*, 11.

39 Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, *Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, Building a Strong North Together*.

40 Canadian Council of the Academies, *Aboriginal Food Security in Northern Canada*.



## The Politics of Smallness

Because of the small, close-knit nature of many Northern and remote communities, personal networks can at times play a significant role in shaping one's access to local and regional job markets.<sup>41</sup> In some regions, such as the Northwest Territories and other communities that use consensus-based decision-making, personal relationships are important to effective governance.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in jurisdictions with small populations, the fact that community members can easily access decision-makers means that there may be particular pressure on governments to respond to the wishes of their constituents.

This closeness of interaction means that official decisions can sometimes affect those with personal connections to politicians, natural resources projects, or other important economic opportunities and activities more positively than those without connections. Indeed, in small jurisdictions where citizens and public officials know each other personally, it sometimes becomes more common to work through these connections than through official channels.<sup>43</sup> This means that special care needs to be taken to ensure that remote and Northern employers consider a diversity of voices, interests, and needs when seeking to recruit from neighbouring communities.<sup>44</sup>

The politics of smallness is a challenge for the employee side of recruitment because those without personal connections to community leaders may have limited access to employment and training opportunities. Living in a small community may also create stress for those in leadership roles, since managers will often know their employees and their kin on a personal level. According to a director general at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, "Pressure becomes high if you are in a leadership role in a small community—a role with a lot of power can put an undue amount of pressure on the individual. A corollary of this, the pressure may be coming from people you may run into at the grocery store, or even families."<sup>45</sup> To avoid this type of

41 Coates and Poelzer, *An Unfinished Nation*, 23.

42 Ibid.

43 Veenendaal, "Democracy in Microstates."

44 Coates and Poelzer, *An Unfinished Nation*, 23.

45 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

Developing and offering the right incentives to potential managers is an important first step.

situation, people may be inclined to turn down management roles. One interviewee said, “One of the other barriers for Indigenous people progressing is community impact. There have been some very skilled technicians. [We tell them] that they are doing a great job and ask them to be team leads, and they say that they do not want to discipline or lead people and then face the same community members back home, particularly during their time off.”<sup>46</sup>

Smallness is also an employer-side challenge, because it can limit the size of the pool of potential employees and make it challenging for employers to accurately assess skill sets and qualifications. As described by an executive director at Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “When the community or local government is the employer, it can run into challenges with how to do HR, manage HR, recruit, and succession plan. It tends to be the same small group of individuals in remote communities. They are frequently overloaded and overburdened, and are not trained to build up HR capacity.”<sup>47</sup>

There is little research that focuses on how Canada’s Northern communities can work to overcome the challenges posed by smallness. However, experiences from other countries suggest that developing and offering the right incentives to potential managers is an important first step. Equally important is the need to create open channels of communication, to allow employees and communities to acknowledge and discuss both the benefits and challenges of smallness, and how to contend with some of the negative effects.<sup>48</sup>

## The Employer Side

### Cultural Biases

Despite improvements in Indigenous relations, negative stereotypes and racism continue to persist, and can present a substantial challenge for Indigenous people looking for work. In some cases, the potential

46 Participant interview, February 16, 2018.

47 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

48 Loewe and others, *The Impact of Favouritism on the Business Climate*, 110, 112; Mayhew, “How to Handle Nepotism in the Workplace.”

for these perceptions to negatively affect their chances of finding work prompts Indigenous applicants to conceal their cultural and personal backgrounds on their resumé or during the interview process.<sup>49</sup> In addition, cultural biases can also affect skills, aptitude, and personality tests that are common to interview processes at many companies. For example, a recent study of the Australian minerals industry found that there is a potential for the results of psychometric tests to be influenced by cultural biases, sometimes leading to misguided perceptions of inferior performance among Indigenous applicants. A key reason for this perception is that applicants' test results are often related to cultural, educational, and social factors that have not been considered during the design of tests and testing procedures.<sup>50</sup>

Cultural stereotypes can negatively affect employers as much as employees, because they can prevent employers from discovering, and leveraging, employees' skills. If, for example, an employer believes an Asian employee is a “numbers” person but not a “people” person, the employer may never have the opportunity to discover and nurture the employee's people skills. Stereotypes regarding Indigenous people have the same effect—some stereotypes include reliance on welfare, or that Indigenous people do not want to work or contribute to society—and can prevent employers from hiring Indigenous people. Moreover, biased treatment can also negatively affect employers by increasing voluntary turnover rates—if employees feel that their cultural backgrounds restrict their opportunities for advancement or affect how they are regarded by superiors and colleagues, they are more likely to leave voluntarily. Additionally, disregarding employees' distinct skills and views can limit a company's overall creativity and capacity to innovate.<sup>51</sup>

## Poor Inclusion Practices and Cultural Awareness

Creating a work environment and implementing workplace practices that ensure Indigenous employees feel valued, understood, accepted,

49 Expert Panel on Youth Employment, “13 Ways to Modernize Youth Employment in Canada,” 23.

50 Tiplady and Barclay, *Indigenous Employment*, 28.

51 Chinn, “Effects of a Cultural Stereotype in the Workplace.”

and included is important for both recruitment and retention. While there are multiple positive examples of inclusion practices among Canadian employers (some of which are discussed in Chapter 6), intensity and awareness of the importance of inclusion varies from employer to employer. Indeed, as Indigenous Works notes, employers in Canada are spread across an “inclusion continuum.” The least advanced organizations on this continuum are completely unaware of inclusion or institute inclusion practices only to meet minimum legal standards. At the other end of the continuum are organizations where inclusion is fully integrated with overall company policy and is “fully embraced ... as the cultural norm.”<sup>52</sup>

Poor inclusion practices and a lack of cultural awareness also extend to the recruitment phase, where many Indigenous people, especially those living in remote or rural regions, are disadvantaged by mainstream strategies. Australia’s Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRM) notes that it is often “easy for Indigenous people to be overlooked in interview situations” because of cultural differences in communication styles.<sup>53</sup> For example, Indigenous employees may prefer verbal and experiential communication and learning, in contrast to the prevalence of written communication in many workplaces. Indigenous employees may also come from community-focused cultures, which may result in more pronounced responses to team (rather than individual) praise; a preference for consultative decision-making; and a focus on team and group needs instead of individual aspirations.<sup>54</sup> In addition, traditional interview approaches at many organizations rely on asking job applicants to speak about their professional accomplishments; however, Indigenous applicants may resist speaking about themselves in this way, as it can overstep community norms.<sup>55</sup>

Understanding and accommodating the cultural practices of their Indigenous workers can help employers stabilize their workforce. These practices may include a worker’s community obligations (mentioned above) or need to participate in traditional practices such as hunting,

52 Indigenous Works, “Products & Services: Inclusion Continuum.”

53 Tiplady and Barclay, *Indigenous Employment*, 14.

54 Aboriginal Construction Careers, “Defining Culture.”

55 Deloitte, *Widening the Circle*, 13.

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Understanding and accommodating the cultural practices of their Indigenous workers can help employers stabilize their workforce.

trapping, and fishing. In this context, standard work schedules may not allow Indigenous workers to participate in these vital cultural activities.<sup>56</sup>

However, it should be noted that there is sometimes a risk that employer efforts to create inclusive environments for Indigenous employees may result in Indigenous employees being “singled out,” despite best intentions. For example, to help non-Indigenous employees better understand Indigenous culture, Indigenous employees are sometimes called on to help explain Indigenous issues. While often well-intentioned, this approach can become tiresome for Indigenous employees who wish to remain focused on their day-to-day responsibilities.<sup>57</sup>

## Geographic Distance Between Work Locations and Indigenous Communities

Employers, especially those in the natural resources sector, do not always have control over work locations, many of which are at considerable distances from Indigenous communities. When Indigenous employees need to leave their communities and families for extended periods of time, it can reinforce their feelings of social and cultural isolation. This isolation, combined with transportation and infrastructure challenges in many remote and Northern communities, makes it difficult for businesses to retain employees over the long term.

While some work locations may be close enough to remote communities so as not to require employees to leave home, employees may still need to find their own local transportation. However, transportation options can be limited and/or inconvenient in many Northern and remote communities. For example, it may be difficult for residents or remote communities to obtain their driver’s licences (which they might need to travel to work) because initial writing tests may be located at considerable/inconvenient distances. Similarly, learning to drive in remote communities can be especially challenging because driver training centres and training vehicles can be difficult to access. The costs of owning and maintaining vehicles limit access to self transportation

56 Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. “6 Steps to Create an Inclusive Environment for Aboriginal Workers.”

57 Deloitte, *Widening the Circle*, 15.

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To effectively recruit workers from Indigenous communities, employers need to communicate their opportunities through appropriate channels.

and, when vehicle access is limited, Indigenous people in remote communities may also be challenged by a lack of public transit.<sup>58</sup>

## Ineffective Marketing and Outreach Strategies for Indigenous Realities

To effectively recruit workers from Indigenous communities, employers need to ensure that they are communicating their opportunities through appropriate channels. Many employers deliver information about job opportunities and recruitment programs on their company website or on those of recruitment firms. However, Indigenous workers in remote communities may be hard-pressed to view these notices if they live in communities with limited Internet access, or if these are not avenues they are likely to frequent. More effective approaches might involve visiting remote communities in person, hosting community information gatherings, distributing job notices by hand, and visiting with families and individuals.<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, employers might typically request that job applications be submitted online, by e-mail, or in hard copy. However, in remote communities with limited Internet access and/or unreliable transportation and mail delivery service, these submission processes may prove challenging. Other strategies, however, may prove more appropriate, such as gathering job applications during visits to communities. In addition, given that some Indigenous applicants may lack experience applying for jobs, employers may need to offer to help potential employees write resumé or complete job application forms.<sup>60</sup>

## Irregular Compensation Practices Across Sectors

Irregular compensation practices across sectors lead to recruitment and retention challenges in the individual sectors. For instance, public sector positions in remote and Northern communities often require more education than positions in the natural resources sector, but may also

58 Joseph, "8 Basic Barriers to Aboriginal Employment."

59 Tiplady and Barclay, *Indigenous Employment*, 25.

60 Ibid.

offer only comparable or lower compensation in return. In comparison, SMEs may require fewer qualifications than public sector positions, but cannot compete on salaries or wages with larger, well-resourced employers in the natural resources sector and government.

Accordingly, SMEs, and some local governments, may at times be at a disadvantage when recruiting, compared with their larger industry counterparts. (See “Governments and SMEs Working Together to Improve Local Employment in Small Remote Communities.”) According to a federal employee with a mandate that focuses on economic development in remote communities, competition for workers between SMEs and the public sector is “not as big of a challenge in Northern Ontario [as is competition between local government and the natural resources sector]. Many communities are in constant hiring mode. In Nunavut, if you [have the choice to] work for a big mine for \$90,000 that requires little training and skills development, or go south to get a university degree so you can be a policy analyst, you are likely going to take the mining job. It is tough to get people to be attracted to public sector jobs.... Sometimes up to 25 to 50 per cent of positions are unfilled. We see this in small and remote communities for several reasons. [The government] competes with the private sector if a big mine moves in.”<sup>61</sup>

People who choose to work at a SME versus the public sector or mine may have different motivations, whether they are Indigenous or not. Indigenous SMEs may be more likely to hire friends and family members, especially if the company has a collective vision. These SMEs may see less overall competition for jobs with the public sector.<sup>62</sup>

61 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

62 Ibid.

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## Governments and SMEs Working Together to Improve Local Employment in Small Remote Communities

In an effort to strengthen recruitment and retention efforts in small Northwest Territories' communities, the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) provides \$4.2 million in contribution funding annually for the Small Community Employment Support program. This program and its associated strategy aim to create diverse employment and training opportunities in small communities. The government is working with community leaders to allocate funding and has linked these efforts with its broader Skills for Success (S4S) Strategy.<sup>63</sup> As a complement to S4S, the GNWT's Small Communities Employment Strategy recognizes that the territory's small communities "operate in a mixed economy consisting of domestic, traditional (e.g., trapping, hunting, fishing, arts and crafts) and wage-earning activities."<sup>64</sup> Associated initiatives, such as the Small Community Employment Support program, seek to create a more balanced local mixed economy and sustain the employment opportunities created by the small-scale employers that typically operate in the small communities of the territory. GNWT has also identified a variety of wage-earning opportunities in small communities linked to local innovation in sectors such as tourism and cultural enterprises, agriculture, aquaculture, and the knowledge economy.<sup>65</sup>

Another exemplary program is the Nunavut government's Getting Ready for Employment and Training Program (G.R.E.A.T. Program). The program, which is focused on preparing Nunavummiut for employment through a combination of in-class training and work placements, has been delivered in 21 remote Nunavut hamlets since winter 2017, including Hall Beach, Pond Inlet, and Kugaaruk. A significant number of program participants have been placed with local and regional public sector organizations for their work terms, including city/hamlet governments and Inuit associations. Over half of surveyed past participants had worked in the three months following the program. Among the program's recognized successes is its engagement with local employers in the design and delivery of training to ensure that students graduate with the skills necessary to meet job requirements and succeed at their placements.<sup>66</sup>

63 Government of Northwest Territories, "Alfred Moses."

64 Government of Northwest Territories, *NWT Small Communities Employment Strategy*, 10.

65 Ibid.

66 Government of Northwest Territories, "Alfred Moses," 19.



To increase employment in remote communities, local public and private sector organizations must engage with members of the local community consistently. Local governments can achieve success by providing support and training for potential employees and professional development opportunities to help with career advancement and retainment.

Source: Government of Northwest Territories.

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## Restricted Opportunities for Job Advancement and Unclear Career Paths

Some organizations are increasingly realizing that to effectively recruit and, in particular, retain Indigenous workers, job satisfaction and a career path that includes genuine potential for upward mobility are pivotal. Yet many organizations often lack opportunities for workplace advancement. And where opportunities do exist, organizations may not have the required training and professional development processes in place for employees to seize them.<sup>67</sup>

A recent report published by the Government of Canada clearly highlights the pitfalls facing an employer in not providing clear opportunities and pathways for advancement, including the skills and training development needed for career progression. This report relays that one of the main reasons Indigenous employees feel unsatisfied in their roles is “a lack of career progression opportunities and the view that some recruitment and promotion processes are neither fair nor transparent.”<sup>68</sup> In these situations, employees are more likely to look elsewhere for employment. Moreover, when advancement and higher-level positions are not filled by internal employees (whatever the reason may be), organizations are forced to spend time, effort, and resources looking elsewhere for qualified candidates.<sup>69</sup>

67 Interdepartmental Circles on Indigenous Representation, *Many Voices One Mind*; International Council on Mining and Metals, *Good Practice Guide*, 70.

68 Interdepartmental Circles on Indigenous Representation, *Many Voices One Mind*.

69 Howard, Edge, and Watt, *Understanding the Value*, 4.

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Irregular compensation practices across sectors can leave some groups of employers at a disadvantage when competing for talent.

A number of employers in Canada's Northern and remote communities have been recognized for their innovative Indigenous recruitment and retention programs. Two examples include Agnico Eagle Mine's Career Path program, which features training and advancement opportunities, and the Government of British Columbia's Youth Internship Program, which provides paid public sector internships for Indigenous youth. These and other examples will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we presented the results of our environmental scan, integrated with insights from our interviews with subject matter experts. Our scan reviewed the range of common employee-and employer-side challenges to Indigenous recruitment and retention in Canada. Challenges for prospective and existing employees related to education and skills are persistent across Canada's Northern and remote regions, as are broader remote community issues such as community and family obligations, inadequate housing and other underlying barriers, and a lack of diverse employment opportunities—especially in small communities.

Our environmental scan also identified some of the unique challenges that affect different kinds of employers in Canada's Northern and remote regions, including public sector organizations, SMEs, and companies in the natural resources sector. Key challenges include cultural bias, poor inclusion practices and cultural awareness, ineffective outreach and marketing strategies, and distance and isolation issues. In addition, irregular compensation practices across sectors can leave some groups of employers at a disadvantage when competing for talent. This challenge can be particularly acute for small firms and local community governments based outside of Northern urban centres and away from major project opportunities (such as in the natural resources sector).

The next two chapters provide insights into the strategies and best practices that employers are adopting to address Indigenous recruitment and retention across Canada's Northern and remote regions.

## CHAPTER 5

# Survey Analysis and Interview Findings: An Empirical Lens

### Chapter Summary

- Our primary research highlights the challenges employers face in seeking to recruit and retain Indigenous employees in Canada's Northern and remote regions.
- The majority of employers engaged in our research listed the lack of education or training credentials of Indigenous candidates as the largest barrier to employment. This was followed closely by candidates' lack of technical skills, and finding Indigenous candidates to interview/recruit.
- Collaboration was highlighted by most employers as critical for recruiters, suggesting that employers should engage with prospective employees through recruitment agencies, educational institutions, local governments, and community groups.

## Profile of Survey Respondents

**As part of this research project, the Conference Board designed and administered an online survey of employers operating in Canada's North. While purposive in nature, the survey captures a diverse cross-section of employers in each of Canada's territories and Northern provincial regions. (See "Survey Method.") Of the 176 employers that responded to the survey,<sup>1</sup> approximately one-third were from private sector corporations, followed by not-for-profit organizations (21 per cent), and provincial or territorial government departments/agencies (18 per cent). Responses from local and community governments, including hamlets and municipal districts, are included within the "municipal government department/agency" category. (See Chart 6.)**

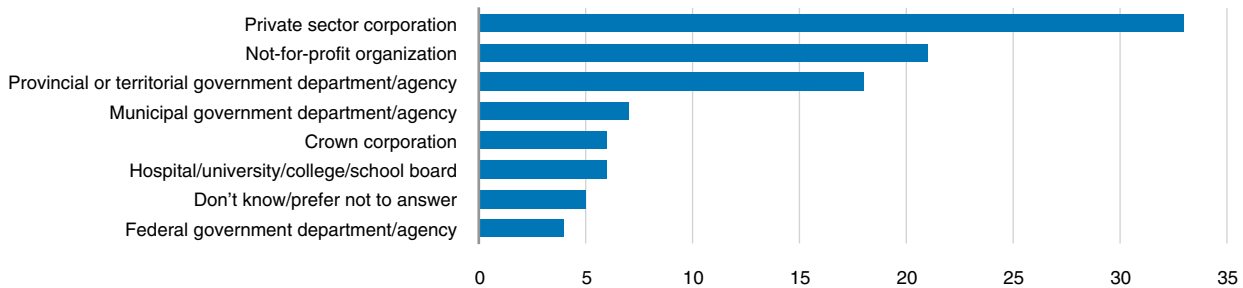
Of the private sector corporations that responded, approximately 15 per cent indicated their organization was Indigenous-owned or had a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous owners. In terms of size, 33 per cent of the respondents employed 500 or more workers, 21 per cent employed between 100 and 499, and 38 per cent employed fewer than 100. In addition, five respondents were self-employed at the time of responding to the survey, and eight preferred not to disclose this information.

<sup>1</sup> Not all questions in the survey were mandatory, and so not every question received 176 responses.

Chart 6

**Most Organizations Surveyed Come From the Private or Not-for-Profit Sectors**

(per cent, n = 176)



Note: Respondents could select more than one response.  
 Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

## Survey Method

An initial prototype survey was designed around our guiding research questions early on in the project. The prototype was then refined based on findings from our review of relevant research and policy literature, and further revised to address feedback from our advisory committee. The finalized survey instrument included 29 questions divided into three sections: 1) About Your Organization; 2) Understanding Recruitment and Retention Challenges; and 3) Evaluating Recruitment and Retention Strategies. Respondents were also given the option to participate in a follow-up telephone interview.

Survey questions included a mix of multiple response checkbox, multiple choice, and open-ended text responses. Some questions were made optional to reduce the risk of survey fatigue. These questions were uploaded to Voxco's online survey software and were later made available to respondents using an URL sent by e-mail. The online survey explained the purpose of the study on the main page and required consent from participants before proceeding.

With assistance from the Conference Board's marketing team, we used Marketo to connect with approximately 3,300 contacts of employers from across Canada. This resulted in five e-mail blasts.

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Forty per cent of organizations surveyed were required by law or another formal agreement to hire Indigenous employees.

After limited uptake from our first three outreach attempts to survey respondents, the team decided to implement a purposive maximum variation sampling strategy<sup>2</sup> to target as broad a cross-section of Northern employers as possible, by size, region, and organizational structure. Because many large companies operating in Northern regions are headquartered in Southern Canada (including major mining companies), we also included representatives from these companies. We also purposely focused outreach efforts on attracting survey responses from Northern Indigenous development corporations and Indigenous regional governments. The resulting two blasts from our purposive sampling strategy were smaller and more targeted—one was only to human resources representatives of relevant companies known to operate in the North; the other was only to residents of Northern and remote regions (including Indigenous organizations, governments, and SMEs). Based on this outreach work, 176 employers participated in the survey. See Appendix B for a partial list of participants who chose to waive anonymity.

Due to the purposive nature of our final survey method, the findings presented in this chapter are not intended to be statistically representative of the population of employers operating in Canada's North. Nevertheless, based on our knowledge of the area, and with validation from our advisory committee, we believe that the diversity of employers captured provides credible insights into the experiences of small, medium, and large Northern employers that actively seek to recruit and retain Indigenous employees.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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Responses were received from across a variety of industries. Of the respondents, the leading industry sectors that participated were public administration (12 per cent), mining and quarrying (9 per cent), health care and social assistance (9 per cent), and educational services (7 per cent).

Survey respondents were asked to look at the Centre for the North's map to determine if their company operates in Northern and remote Canada, which is defined as all territory situated above the red line. (See Exhibit 1.)

2 Palinkas and others, "Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis."

**Exhibit 1**

**Northern and Remote Canada Map**



Source: The Conference Board of Canada's Centre for the North.

The clear majority of respondents indicated that they operate in Northern and remote Canada (87 per cent), with operations spanning the entirety of Canada's North. (See Chart 7.)

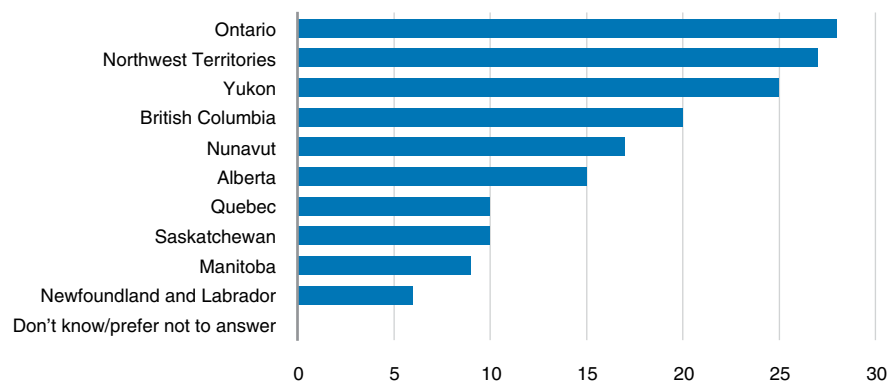
Forty per cent of organizations surveyed were required by law or another formal agreement to hire Indigenous employees. Nearly one-third of respondents indicated that they operate in a modern treaty/comprehensive land claim area, while 15 per cent are operating in a historic/numbered treaty area. Approximately 60 per cent of survey respondents track which employees at their organizations are Indigenous—48 per cent of these organizations indicated that Indigenous people make up 0 to 5 per cent of their workforce, and

49 per cent indicated that Indigenous people make up between 6 and 50 per cent of their workforce. (See Chart 8.) Nearly 60 per cent of organizations actively recruit Indigenous employees for their Northern and remote operations.

**Chart 7**

**Most Survey Respondents Operate in Ontario, the Northwest Territories, Yukon, or British Columbia**

(per cent, n = 153)

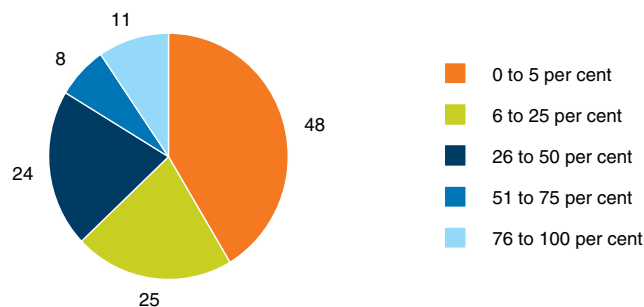


Note: Respondents could select more than one response.  
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

**Chart 8**

**Percentage of Indigenous Employees in Organizations**

(per cent, n = 112)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.



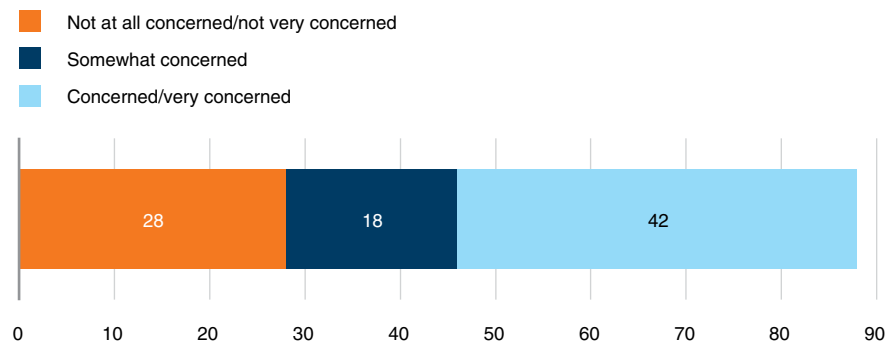
## Recruiting Indigenous Employees

Our survey affirms that it is difficult for organizations operating in Canada's Northern and remote regions to recruit Indigenous employees. About one-quarter (23 per cent) of respondents indicated that it is difficult or very difficult to find and recruit qualified employees of all backgrounds to work in their organization's Northern and remote operations. However, 50 per cent of the organizations that actively recruit Indigenous workers indicated that it is difficult or very difficult to find and recruit qualified Indigenous employees. Another 37 per cent indicated that it has been somewhat difficult. Only 13 per cent of respondents indicated that it has not been very difficult. Most survey respondents have also acknowledged that they are concerned about recruiting and retaining skilled employees in their Northern and remote operations over the next three to five years. (See Chart 9.) Properly utilizing recruitment and retention strategies for Indigenous people can be a solution to remedy this.

Chart 9

### Many Employers are Concerned About Recruiting and Retaining Employees in the Next 3 to 5 Years

(per cent, n = 117)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

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A lack of education or training credentials is listed as the largest barrier to employment.

Numerous factors were identified as barriers to recruiting Indigenous employees, the top three of which were the lack of education or training credentials of Indigenous candidates; the lack of technical, job-related skills; and finding Indigenous candidates to interview/recruit (challenges in outreach). (See Chart 10.) These barriers were closely followed by candidates' lack of awareness of the kinds of jobs available; finding candidates with the right work ethic for employment; and general skills for employment (e.g., communication, teamwork skills). One-fifth (20 per cent) of survey respondents said that Indigenous candidates lack interest in the kinds of jobs they have available. (See Chart 10.) Some of our interviewees also discussed the lack of diversity in job opportunities for those living in Northern and remote Canada. From their perspective, most of the available jobs are with the government or in the natural resources sectors. According to one interviewee, Indigenous people often struggle to decide between working in the mining sector or respecting their traditional values, which do not always synchronize with mining practices.<sup>3</sup> Or in some cases, they are interested in careers that are not available in their region, but they do not want to leave their community. Some Indigenous workers prefer short-term work, often for cultural reasons, which can also be a barrier if the employer is looking for long-term workers.<sup>4</sup>

The survey showed that over 50 per cent of respondents did not think that biases/cultural insensitivity of current staff, biases in recruitment/hiring tests and assessments, agreements on work hours, or agreements on competitive pay were significant barriers to Indigenous recruitment. (See Chart 10.) However, as we will see in Chart 13, "current employees lack of awareness of Indigenous culture" was selected as the third most-common reason Indigenous employees voluntarily leave their organization, which contradicts the lowest-ranked barrier to recruitment in Chart 10.

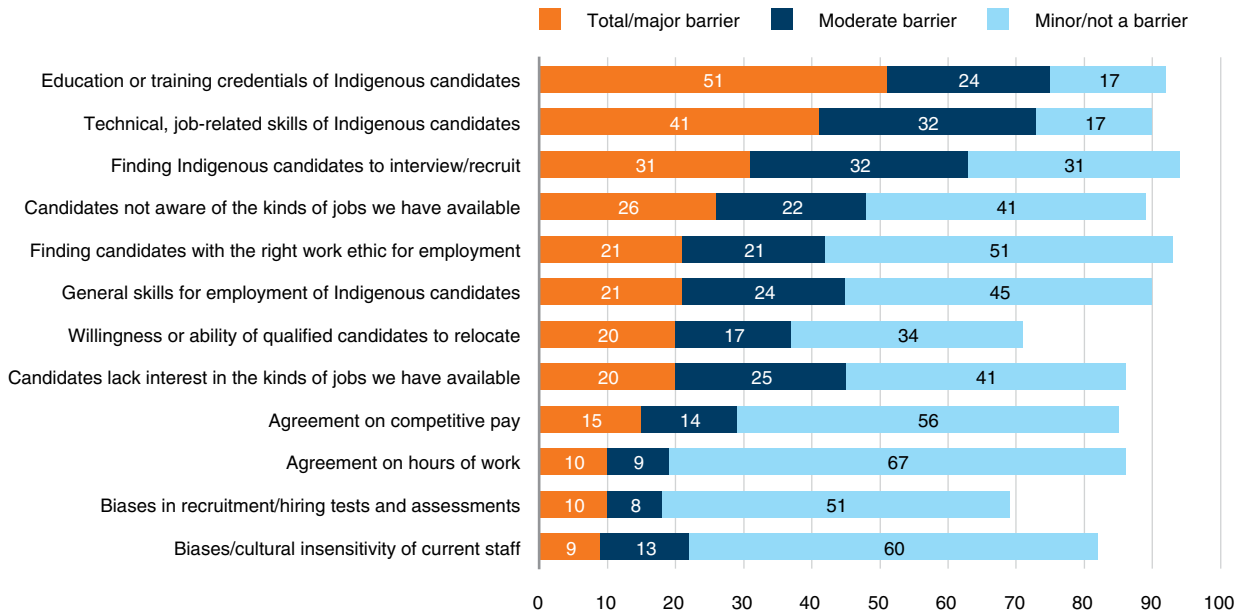
3 Participant interview, February 23, 2018.

4 Participant interview, February 21, 2018; Participant interview, February 16, 2018.

Chart 10

**Barriers to Recruiting Indigenous Employees, Ranked by Mean Response**

(per cent, n = 87)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

For Indigenous people living in Canada's Northern and remote regions to break employment barriers, they must have the required skills and education for their desired career. According to survey respondents, a lack of education or training credentials is listed as the largest barrier to employment by over 50 per cent of survey respondents, followed closely by technical or job-related skills (41 per cent), and general employability skills (e.g. communication, teamwork skills) (21 per cent). (See Chart 11.)

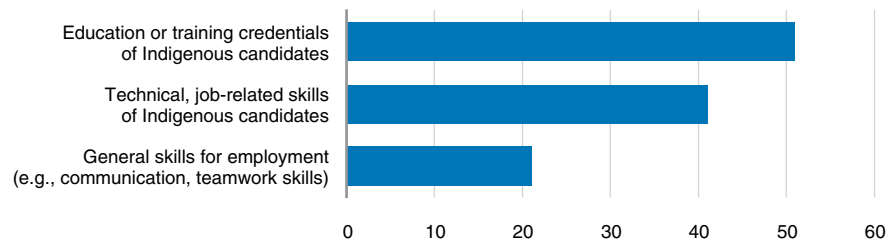
## Retaining Indigenous Employees

Retention of employees appears to be an equally, if not more, complicated issue for employees of all backgrounds in Canada's North than for Indigenous employees. (See Chart 12.)

Chart 11

### Education, Training, and Technical Skills Are Major Barriers to Employment for Indigenous Workers

(per cent, n = 87)

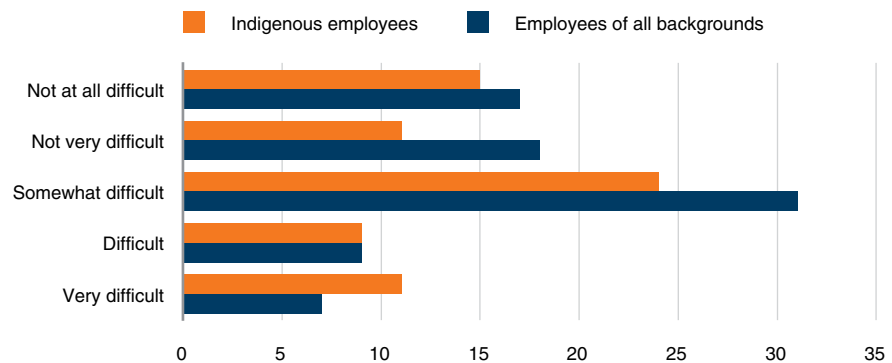


Note: For the purposes of this study, "total" can be defined as complete or absolute.  
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

Chart 12

### Nearly One-Quarter of Employers Find It Somewhat Difficult to Retain Indigenous Employees

(per cent, n = 123\*, n = 121\*)



Note: Responses in the "Don't know/prefer not to answer" category was eliminated.  
\*123 respondents answered question on difficulty retaining Indigenous employees, and 121 respondents answered question on difficulty retaining all employees in Northern and remote operations  
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

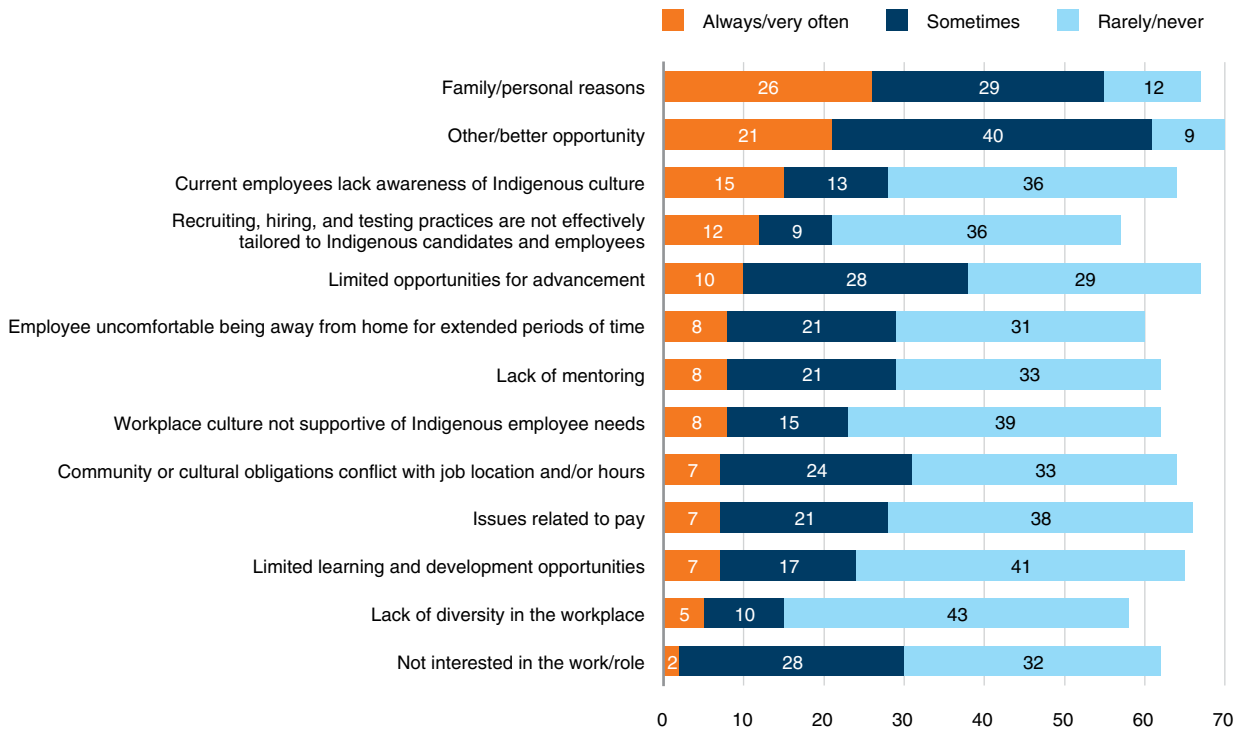
However, the reasons that Indigenous employees voluntarily leave their positions differ from their non-Indigenous counterparts. The top three reasons listed for why Indigenous employees voluntarily leave their organizations are family/personal reasons; other/better opportunity; and current employees lack awareness of Indigenous culture. (See Chart 13.) These were followed closely by recruiting, hiring, and testing practices

are not effectively tailored to Indigenous candidates and employees; limited opportunities for advancement are available; and employee feels uncomfortable being away from home for extended periods of time. (See Chart 13.) Family and culture are linked with four of the top 10 reasons why Indigenous employees leave organizations. This includes a lack of acceptance of culture by other employees and employers.

**Chart 13**

**Indigenous Employees Choose to Leave Organizations for Family/Personal Reasons, or for Better Opportunities**

(per cent, n = 87)



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

In some cases, Indigenous employees involuntarily leave organizations. Survey results showed that the three most-common factors leading to involuntary turnover on the part of Indigenous employees are issues related to reliability and/or punctuality (30 per cent of respondents

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Leading companies have developed pre-employment training programs to address challenges around life skills development.

selected always/very often), poor performance in the work/role (19 per cent of respondents selected always/very often), and interpersonal challenges (14 per cent of respondents selected always/very often).

Issues around reliability and punctuality are related to life skills development, an employment barrier that was discussed in Chapter 4. Our literature review, survey, and interviews all suggested that the absence of life skills is preventing some Indigenous people from finding or maintaining employment.<sup>5</sup> Many interviewees expressed the need for pre-employment or job-readiness training that impresses upon individuals the needs of the employer (time commitment, health and safety requirements, etc.) and how that will affect the employee (extended time away from family, long or irregular hours, etc.)<sup>6</sup> Leading companies have developed pre-employment training programs to address challenges around life skills development. (See “Agnico Eagle’s Work Readiness Training Program and Site Readiness Training Program” in Chapter 6). (Also see “AMIK—Focus on Life Skills and Cultural Sensitivity.”)

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## AMIK—Focus on Life Skills and Cultural Sensitivity

Founded in 2006 by E. J. Fontaine (Sagkeeng First Nation) and Eva Wilson-Fontaine (Peguis First Nation), AMIK is among Canada’s leading providers of Indigenous workforce engagement and training services. AMIK offers a Smart Work Ethics program that is designed to help Indigenous people develop life skills, making them well-rounded candidates. The workshop’s objectives include training in punctuality, effective communication, teamwork, dress code interpretation, emotional intelligence, and time management, among other soft skills.<sup>7</sup> Program instructors use positive reinforcement and active listening to encourage learning.

5 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

6 Participant interview, February 21, 2018; Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

7 AMIK, “Smart Work Ethics,” 3.

Beyond this, AMIK offers cultural sensitivity training for companies aimed at ensuring employers offer a positive work environment to successfully integrate Indigenous workers. It also offers a customizable recruitment and retention program that is designed to pre-screen and identify qualified Indigenous candidates. The program is based on the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation's recommendations.

Source: AMIK, "Smart Work Ethics."

## Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Survey respondents were asked about the recruitment and retention strategies they have used, and how successful these strategies have been. Table 6 ranks the top 10 most-effective recruitment and retention strategies according to our survey. These strategies can be broken down into three themes: education/training, collaboration, and cultural awareness and inclusion.

**Table 6**  
**Most-Effective Recruitment and Retention Strategies**

Strategy	Theme
1 Training and development programs	Education/training
2 Working with Indigenous communities and groups	Collaboration
3 Inclusion and diversity policies and strategies	Cultural awareness and Inclusion
4 Attending job fairs or career days	Collaboration
5 Working with community groups and agencies	Collaboration
6 Anti-racism or cultural awareness training for current employees/management	Cultural awareness and inclusion
7 Working with, and recruiting through, educational institutions	Collaboration
8 Adapting work schedules to accommodate hunting and/or other cultural activities	Cultural awareness and inclusion
9 Assistance planning career and advancement pathways	Education/training
10 Offering flexible work arrangements (e.g., late/early start/finish; four-day week; 10 days on/five days off)	Cultural awareness and inclusion

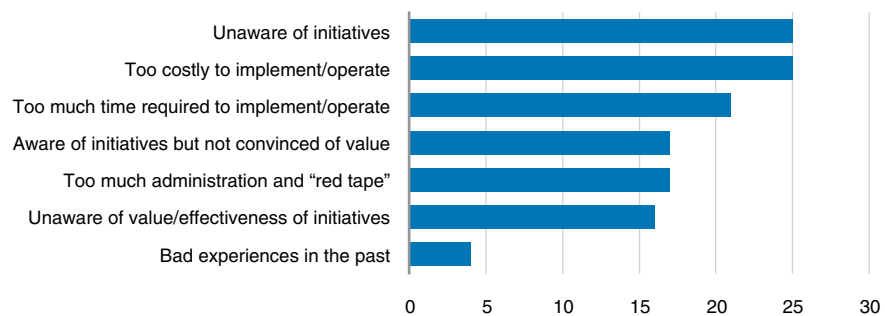
Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

The respondents who indicated they had not used any of the 22 most commonly identified recruitment and retention strategies (including those outlined in Table 6) were asked the reason why. (See Chart 14.) The most commonly cited reasons were that such programs are too costly to implement and operate, or that respondents were unaware of initiatives (20 per cent for each response).

Chart 14

**Many Employers Are Unaware of Common Recruitment Strategies, or Find Them Too Costly**

(per cent, n = 95)



Total minus "other" = "n"

Note: The "other (please specify)" response was excluded.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

It is important for employers to understand that there are many strategies they can use to recruit and retain Indigenous employees that are effective and not costly or challenging to operate. Thus, it is essential to provide employers with best practice examples that can be implemented and operated effectively. Interview participants provided a variety of such strategies, which focus on collaboration, supporting education and training, and investing in cultural awareness and inclusion.

## Collaboration

Collaboration came out overall as one of the most successful tools for recruiters. The survey found that it is important for organizations to work with Indigenous groups and communities, listing this as the second



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Collaboration efforts can go beyond relationships between companies and Indigenous communities.

most-effective recruitment and retention strategy. (See Table 6.) Thus, in-person, meaningful engagement and the development of supportive relationships between employers and prospective employees (and their broader communities) are key to a successful recruitment campaign, and ultimately employee retention.

To create collaborative work environments, interviewees suggest that organizations should work to build mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities, particularly if there is a social licence issue involved. Before approaching a community to provide job opportunities, the employer should explain its needs to community leaders, and learn about the community's needs and available skill sets. This can help to ensure that both parties understand the other's situation, interests, and concerns. Then, the employer can determine the types of jobs that should be offered to fit the community's interests and capabilities, and the community can find out if it has interested workers available to match the employer's needs.<sup>8</sup>

The survey also suggests that companies work with educational institutions, community groups, and agencies to recruit Indigenous employees. (See Table 6.) Collaboration efforts can go beyond relationships between companies and Indigenous communities. Companies can work with organizations that are connected with Indigenous communities to find potential employees, and to ensure that they receive proper pre-employment training. Organizations do not have to offer training themselves because there are organizations that are readily available to work with employers to match them with Indigenous employees. The Indigenous ASETS Agreement Holders provide a good example of these kinds of organizations. They typically have strong relationships at the local level. They also have important local or regional knowledge, as well as trust and credibility. They are mandated to connect prospective employees and employers, and support training and skills development to meet candidate interests, while being mindful of employer needs and labour market gaps. They can also offer employers incentives, and they work to provide members with training to match the needs of employers.

8 Participant interview, February 23, 2018.

Collaboration between Indigenous people on the job can also assist with retention. One way to ensure that Indigenous people feel comfortable in the workplace and can develop in their roles is through “cohort” programs. Organizations can hire a group of Indigenous people at the same time, and offer training and cultural support and programming to the entire group. Multiple interviewees described cohort programs and have touted the successes these programs have. Cohorts can be useful for Indigenous adults as well, as they can assist workers to transition into their new roles, particularly if they are not accustomed to shift work or the “9 to 5” corporate work environment. One interviewee described an initiative that the Blood Tribe in Alberta worked on that enabled 10 Indigenous workers to go together to a fly-in operation in Northern Alberta. The group of workers lives and works together and ensures that its cohort members are comfortable and supported.<sup>9</sup> When possible, offering work opportunities for cohorts of people can ensure that if workers do have issues they have support as well, which can be a retention tool, since workers learn and grow into their new roles and work environments together. (See “Role Models and Mentors in Canada’s Northern and Remote Communities.”)

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## Role Models and Mentors in Canada’s Northern and Remote Communities

Mentorship programs are used successfully across a variety of public and private sector industries, and can be adapted to fit any workplace. Role model and mentorship programs can help Indigenous people to build their confidence and leadership competencies, while empowering them to succeed in their careers. Mentors can also help to identify when someone is struggling so that solutions can be found to help the person get back on track.

Many mentorship programs are focused on youth. The Yellowknives Dene First Nation’s (YDKFN) Education Youth Mentorship Program is an example of a program that pairs adult mentors with youth who share similar interests, career or otherwise. The youth are not working or enrolled in school, and YDKFN has an education liaison coordinator who engages daily with them to get them

9 Participant interview, March 7, 2018.

motivated to participate in the program. Another exemplary program, Northern Quebec's Fusion Jeunesse, works to encourage Indigenous youth to stay in school. Through a partnership between high schools and universities, youth can participate in daily extracurricular activities that aim to deepen their relationship with the community. The program provides youth with volunteering opportunities and encourages pride in academic achievement.<sup>10</sup> In some cases, mentorship programs encourage youth to see the link between further education and job security. With this in mind, they are in a better position to focus on a specific career path.

Mentorship programs are also essential for the workplace. Role models enable other Indigenous employees, and especially new recruits, to visualize themselves in higher roles and show them what it takes to get there, while providing them with support along the way. Cameco has a dedicated process to identify employees who show management potential. They provide these employees with mentorship and coaching to help them “move up the ladder.” Participants can also participate in the Leadership Development Program, which includes week-long courses that can be taken throughout a year. Through this program, participants can build their leadership skills and work to develop solutions to issues the organization faces. BC Hydro also offers mentorship programs. It identifies “internal champions” who act as role models and asks them to attend job fairs where they can provide information about educational and job duty requirements for their careers. Some champions have acted as mentors and tutors for students, or have developed career-specific training programs.<sup>11</sup> Mentors and role models provide Indigenous employees with additional support as well as a demonstrated career path that they can work to follow.

Sources: Jeffery and others; participant interview.

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## Supporting Education and Training— Coordinated and Holistic Approaches Are Required

Companies should ensure that they have an overarching goal to collaborate, engage, and address problems early through a coordinated

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey and others, *Building a Resilient and Prosperous North*, 41–42.

<sup>11</sup> Participant interview, April 11, 2011.

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It is necessary to make it clear that Indigenous workers are being selected because they are the best candidates for the job.

and holistic approach. This approach should also work to address underlying barriers by identifying important challenges early, and should help to create an overall environment that is more conducive to job readiness. One interviewee explained how collaboration and coordination of efforts can be a crucial first step, since training programs often have different stakeholders at various levels of delivery. It is important to understand what each organization is doing to avoid duplication of efforts.<sup>12</sup>

According to one interviewee, the training that is offered may not always be aligned with potential jobs. So it is imperative that training opportunities correlate with available jobs, and that these jobs be accessible shortly after the training commences to ensure it is relevant and that credentials or certification do not lapse.<sup>13, 14</sup> Since limited advancement opportunities are often an issue that leads Indigenous workers to voluntarily leave organizations (see Chart 13), employers can focus on providing training for entry-level employees to invest in their future success, rather than relying on external hires and/or on employees from the South to fill higher-level roles.<sup>15</sup>

Organizations must also strive to ensure that workplace culture is supportive of Indigenous workers. One way to do this is to ensure that they are viewed and treated equally and fairly, but not preferentially or paternalistically, in the workplace. This is important for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees, and for the health of the relationships between them. One interviewee noted that even if organizations have agreements with Indigenous communities, they must ensure they are hiring the best possible employees to prevent bias within the workforce. The interviewee emphasized that Indigenous people want to be recognized as contributors in society. If organizations are seen to be giving their Indigenous workforce preferential treatment, it can lead to resentment and negative stereotypes on the part of other workers, and may create a division in the workforce. Thus, it is necessary to make it clear that Indigenous workers are being selected because they

12 Participant interview, February 5, 2018.

13 Participant interview, February 28, 2018.

14 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

15 Participant interview, February 8, 2018.

are the best candidate(s) for the job.<sup>16</sup> This has the added benefit of building self-esteem for workers as well as goodwill and confidence in the organization.

Employers can start early, and invest in programs that expose Indigenous youth to their company and the various careers they offer so that they can use this information to inform their educational path later in life. (See “Lakehead University’s Aboriginal Mentorship Program.”) One example of this comes from Suncor, a company that works with Bridges Social Development. This is a corporate camp initiative that brings Indigenous youth living on reserves to corporate offices in Calgary to provide them with exposure to an office environment. The urban office can be daunting for new workers coming from a remote community, especially if they are unfamiliar with the hectic bustle of hundreds of workers in a cubicle environment.<sup>17</sup> Pair this with different world views, work habits, and cultures, and it becomes clear why opportunities like this are beneficial for Indigenous youth, who through exposure to the work environment and available roles are able to become more comfortable and interested in potential future opportunities. Youth often participate in these programs in a cohort, which can be helpful, as this provides a source of peer support.

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## Lakehead University’s Aboriginal Mentorship Program

The benefits of mentorship are vast. Through mentorship programs, mentees are given the opportunity to build their skills and experience, as well as their communication and professional abilities. In Thunder Bay, Ontario’s Lakehead University created the Aboriginal Mentorship Program in fall 2013 with a budget of roughly \$20,000, one full-time staff member, around 15 volunteers, and 40 youth participants.<sup>18</sup> Since then, the program has grown to support nearly 4,000 youth in 2017.<sup>19</sup> The Aboriginal Mentorship Program matches high school students with experienced university students to provide participants

<sup>16</sup> Participant interview, March 7, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Lakehead University, “The Joyce Family Foundation Makes \$1 Million Donation.”

<sup>19</sup> Participant interview, March 23, 2018.

with inspiration and assistance, including helping them to complete a research project on a topic of mutual interest. The program began with a focus on science and has since expanded to include other disciplines. Students in the program have the opportunity to visit Lakehead University and learn about post-secondary education, the programs offered, and strategies to get accepted. Hands-on activities are planned by various departments so that participants can learn what it would be like to be a student in that program.

The Aboriginal Mentorship Program offers culturally relevant program content to help participants feel comfortable with the university environment. Mentors also identify strengths that participants may have in other areas and connect them to learning, developing, creating, and communicating opportunities so that students are able to build skills in areas that may have been employment barriers.

According to past program participant Amanda Michano:

I love working with students one-on-one and trying to promote post-secondary education because (when I was) growing up that wasn't a big part of my life and interest.... A lot of the students are really motivated and driven, but some aren't so it's really important to instill education into the system.... This is a really open environment and everyone just makes you feel very comfortable.<sup>20</sup>

University student mentors often travel to Indigenous communities to discuss the opportunities that university can provide. In 2017, the program received a \$1 million endowment from the Joyce Family Foundation.<sup>21</sup>

Sources: Lakehead University; participant interviews; Michano; Garrick.

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One of the top barriers discussed earlier was ineffective marketing and outreach strategies, resulting in employers having trouble finding Indigenous candidates to interview or recruit. Explanations for this barrier are that prospective Indigenous employees do not always have access to the Internet to apply for jobs, are not necessarily aware of how to find out about job opportunities via the Internet or elsewhere, may not know how to complete and submit a job application, or feel they do not meet the essential requirements of the job. To remedy this, multiple

20 Garrick, "Mentorship Program at Lakehead a Positive Experience."

21 Lakehead University, "The Joyce Family Foundation Makes \$1 Million Donation."

Cultural awareness training is one method that can be used to create an inclusive, accepting work environment.

interviewees noted that employers will benefit from providing barrier-free job descriptions that clearly separate essential and non-essential criteria so that applicants do not exclude themselves.<sup>22</sup> Along with this, employers can provide easy-to-complete applications, such as templated resumés, to simplify the application process.<sup>23</sup> Another interviewee echoed this idea, pointing out that organizations can assist Indigenous employees to become workforce ready by assisting them to get the proper documentation, including such things as criminal records checks, driver's licences, and proof of education (including trades certification, if necessary).<sup>24</sup>

## Investing in Cultural Awareness and Inclusion

Many Indigenous employees choose to leave organizations that are not culturally sensitive and do not respect their community or cultural obligations. In some cases, companies may not be aware that their staff have bias or cultural insensitivity. Three-fifths (60 per cent) of survey respondents said that this is not an employment barrier for Indigenous people (see Chart 10 above), and then went on to say that the third most-common reason Indigenous people leave their organizations is because current employees lack awareness of Indigenous culture. (See Chart 13 above.) One of the top recruitment and retention strategies that came out of the survey was to offer anti-racism or cultural awareness training for current employees and management. Cultural awareness training is one method that can be used to educate non-Indigenous workers and create an inclusive, accepting work environment.

It is important to build cultural awareness into company policy as well. As Chapter 4 discussed, kinship is central to Indigenous communities. Similarly, traditional seasonal activities, such as hunting, fishing, and harvesting, are of central importance to many Indigenous people. Moreover, some of these practices have more than just cultural significance—they may also be undertaken out of necessity to ensure food security for family and community members. Thus, it is important

22 Participant interview, February 16, 2018.

23 Participant interview, February 23, 2018.

24 Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

to offer flexible work arrangements and schedule accommodation for cultural activities. Numerous interviewees mentioned how important it is for employers in Canada's North to be aware that some Indigenous people will need to take time off work in the spring and fall to attend cultural festivals or to hunt. Interviewees said that employers need to be equipped to handle quick leaves and/or the loss of part of their workforce during these seasons.<sup>25</sup>

Many organizations do try to adapt their policies to enable Indigenous employees to take time off during hunting season or for cultural celebrations. Some companies and sectors are doing this exceptionally well. When discussing TRC Call to Action 92, one interviewee said, "No doubt [the mining sector companies are] seen as leaders. They have employment arrangements that respect cultural practices. When hunting season comes, they create flexibility where they do not expect people to work 12-hour shifts. Those companies 'get it' with the cultural competency piece."<sup>26</sup> Offering flexible work arrangements was one of the top 10 most-effective recruitment strategies that came out of the survey. It is clear why this is even more important when examined through a cultural awareness and inclusion lens. However, one interviewee mentioned that in some cases, unions prevent companies from offering flexible work arrangements, providing a retention barrier for Indigenous employees. Indeed, some companies that try to address the cultural requirements of Indigenous workers, such as time off during hunting season, may be prevented from doing so if the union determines that the practice does not treat all employees equally.<sup>27</sup>

Part of cultural awareness is understanding the issues communities face, and working to accommodate these issues. In this regard, interviewees have suggested that there are many frequently overlooked, underlying challenges that various organizations should work to address to improve recruitment and retention outcomes. For example, an absence of child care services can be a significant barrier to employment for Indigenous workers in Northern and remote regions.

25 Participant interview, February 23, 2018.

26 Participant interview, April 5, 2018.

27 Participant interview, February 23, 2018.



A persistent challenge was a lack of Indigenous job candidates with the required education or training credentials.

Another potential barrier at the community level, as noted previously, is housing. Interviewees explained that Indigenous people in the North may be more likely to work for companies or organizations that offer housing as a benefit. Transportation can also be a barrier to employment for Indigenous people, particularly those living in remote regions. According to one interviewee, while there are often few job opportunities available in small communities, there is also often no means of affordable public transportation between communities and larger surrounding municipalities.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter we discussed key findings from the Centre for the North's survey of employers operating in Canada's Northern and remote regions. The range of public and private sector employers captured via the survey provides insight into the diverse experiences of small, medium, and large Northern employers that actively seek to recruit and retain Indigenous employees. Persistent challenges identified by these employers included a lack of Indigenous job candidates with the required education or training credentials, along with associated technical and job-related skills. These employers also raised the challenge of marketing and outreach opportunities to potential job candidates from remote Indigenous communities. In the workplace, they also raised the issue of non-Indigenous employees lacking a suitable awareness of Indigenous cultures. Our survey findings also highlighted several common strategies that employers have adopted to address the persistent challenges they face. Key strategies include focusing on collaboration, supporting education and training, investing in cultural awareness and inclusion in the workplace, identifying and addressing important underlying barriers, and developing appropriate outreach strategies. The next chapter presents examples of leading employers adapting best practices related to the effective implementation of these common strategies in Canada and internationally.

28 Ibid.

## CHAPTER 6

# Case Examples of Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Practices

### Chapter Summary

- Australia's Newmont Mining Corporation created innovative roles for the Martu people to provide employment opportunities that suited their desired work schedule, culture, and experience.
- Agnico Eagle Mines Ltd. provides a Work Readiness Training program delivered by Indigenous instructors who teach participants life skills for a full-time mining job.
- British Columbia's Aboriginal Youth Internship Program helps participants acquire leadership experience, and improves the provincial government's relationships with Indigenous communities.

**Public and private sector employers in Canada and abroad have developed a variety of promising recruitment and retention programs for Indigenous people. Many programs focus on job readiness through training, skills development (including technical, employability, and life skills), and the removal of key barriers to employment. This chapter will examine several leading programs offered by natural resources companies (national and international); training and job preparedness/readiness organizations; Indigenous-owned development corporations; provincial governments; and SMEs. Their examples of best practice demonstrate how employers can address many of the barriers and challenges that Indigenous people face as job applicants and employees.**

## International: Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement

Canada is one of many countries looking to improve the relationship between its Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. As a result of colonialism, countries like Canada and Australia are working toward reconciliation and capacity-building in their Indigenous communities. Because of their similarities, Canada can learn from Australian best-practice examples. Our focal case from Australia involves a unique partnership agreement between government, industry, and Indigenous community representatives. Their coordinated strategy demonstrates the benefits that arise when companies work with Indigenous communities and groups to ensure that the job opportunities they offer to Indigenous people suit their needs, skill sets, and cultural beliefs.

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MWG decided that companies needed to focus on providing the Martu people with long-term jobs.

The Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement (WRPA) was a pilot initiative created by the Australian Commonwealth government and the Minerals Council of Australia under a 2005 Memorandum of Understanding. The goal was to create a formal partnership to ensure mining companies would work to create economic viability in Indigenous communities, including offering education and training opportunities to increase Indigenous participation in the mining industry.<sup>1</sup>

## 2013 Martu Attitudinal Survey

In 2013, Wiluna's Indigenous community, the Martu, formed the Muntijltjarra Wurrugumu Group (MWG) to act as its voice and partner with the WRPA. MWG was provided with funding from mining companies to launch a survey. The survey focused on addressing the employment barriers faced by the Martu people. It identified two main reasons that prevented the Martu from finding meaningful employment: many people did not have a driver's licence, and they also had extenuating family responsibilities. The survey also determined that the Martu are discriminated against and that local job opportunities are scarce. In addition, it found that the Martu people believe that a "good boss" would respect them, give them a chance, and work to understand their culture.

Survey feedback also revealed that the Martu preferred to work for the Central Desert Native Title Services (a native title service provider that offers environmental service roles), followed by the Newmont Jundee mine—although most survey respondents were not interested in working underground or in traditional mining jobs. They provided numerous reasons for their desire to not work in the mine, including racism, lack of communication, danger, shift work, contract work, low pay, and a lack of Martu colleagues.

The Martu suggested that mining companies would be more successful with their recruitment efforts if they offered transportation, on-the-job training, and worked to understand the Martu's family and cultural obligations.<sup>2</sup> Overall, MWG decided that companies needed to focus on providing the Martu people with long-term jobs, worker-readiness

<sup>1</sup> University of Melbourne, The, "Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA)."

<sup>2</sup> Wiluna Regional Partnership Agreement, "Action Research in the Bush."

Newmont Mining's pilot program is a leading example of how human rights can be combined with and converted into employment opportunities.

training, clear career pathways, and scholarships for youth. Companies working in their territory should also ensure they provide employees with cultural awareness training.

## Newmont Mine

Wiluna's Martu people own the land on which Newmont Mining Corporation's Jundee gold mine is located. Newmont was a signatory to the WIPA, and despite efforts to attract the Martu people to work at its mine site, it was initially unsuccessful because the shift work conflicted with Martu cultural and traditional practices.<sup>3</sup>

Newmont understood that it would need to work to create jobs that would suit the Martu people's culture, values, and worldview. It also wanted to ensure it was utilizing the Martu's unique existing skill sets. Newmont acknowledged that culturally, the Martu have over 40,000 years of specialized land management experience, and are well suited to work in positions that focus on water recycling and monitoring, land rehabilitation, and plant and animal control. Accordingly, it created an innovative partnership with the Central Desert Native Title Services to employ Martu members in environmental services roles around the Jundee mine. The jobs it created were designed to offer a working schedule that fit within the Martu's cultural calendar, and enabled them to fulfill their desire to care for the environment.

As of 2013, the Jundee mine was a significant employer of Martu men, and received environmental management and human rights awards from the Government of Australia and the United Nations. Since then, Newmont expanded the pilot program to include a female ranger team. The program is a leading example of how human rights can be combined with and converted into employment opportunities—opportunities that leverage the unique skill sets of the Wiluna and meet their specific interests and needs, alongside those of Newmont.

3 Newmont Mining, "A Model Partnership With the Martu People."

## Training and Job Preparedness/ Readiness Organizations: Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment & Training Services

Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment & Training Services (KKETS) is an ASETS Agreement holder through Service Canada for Matawa First Nations, and is based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The Matawa First Nations have a population of approximately 8,000 people living in nine Ojibway and Oji-Cree communities. The communities are experiencing a range of social issues and underlying barriers, including 60 to 80 per cent unemployment, inadequate housing and water, and high levels of poverty.

Since its inception in 2012, KKETS has worked to create employment opportunities for First Nations members in its service area. KKETS also offers culturally appropriate education and training initiatives. It uses a specifically designed employment training model to prepare, educate, train, and find employment opportunities for prospective employees. One example of this is the Aboriginal Skills Advancement Program (ASAP), which began as a pilot in 2013. Since that time, 258 students from four classes have graduated.<sup>4</sup> As of April 2017, KKETS had a waiting list of 2,711 members who were interested in participating in ASAP.

ASAP aims to meet labour market needs by addressing education and skills gaps, including high school incompleteness, low numeracy and literacy attainment, and a lack of skills and training.<sup>5</sup> Programming includes assistance with high school completion, job and life skills development, employment certifications (like First Aid and the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System), specialized training, and post-secondary education assistance.<sup>6</sup> The program aims to provide a stress-free transition from school to a career. It also provides members with support to ensure they successfully complete the program. This support

4 Garrick, "KKETS Holds Graduation Ceremony in Thunder Bay," 3.

5 KKETS, *The Aboriginal Skills Advancement Project (ASAP)*, 18.

6 KKETS, "Aboriginal Skills Advancement Program."

RoFATA is an exemplary collaboration between industry, Indigenous community organizations, and educational institutions.

includes access to an on-site Elder as well as academic, emotional, cultural, and social supports.

Furthering the efforts of the ASAP program, KKETS also offers its Employment Integration Services Program (EISP). The main goal of EISP is to remove barriers to employment for members. KKETS provides members with individualized job development assistance and works with them to obtain employment. This includes working with members to create resumés and cover letters, teaching members how to search for jobs, and matching members with potential employers. KKETS has many industry partners that they work with, including Aecon, ATCO, Greenstone Gold, Noront Resources Ltd., and Toromont. Both ASAP and EISP are focused on reducing employment barriers for Indigenous people, and addressing many of the top barriers identified in the previous chapter. (See Chart 11.) KKETS works to increase its members' education and training credentials, and connects employers with members to create mutually beneficial employment opportunities.

## Ring of Fire Indigenous Training Alliance

KKETS is also involved in an exemplary collaboration between industry, Indigenous community organizations, and educational institutions. The Ring of Fire Indigenous Training Alliance (RoFATA) is a partnership that was created out of a Memorandum of Understanding between KKETS, Matawa First Nations, Noront Resources Ltd., and Confederation College. KKETS works to register students for the training programs that are organized and delivered by Confederation College, which are partially funded by a \$5.9-million grant from the Government of Canada's Skills and Partnership Fund.<sup>7</sup> As part of the RoFATA program, Noront Resources Inc. has committed to creating employment opportunities for the Matawa First Nations members who participate in the training program at its Eagle's Nest mining operation. Training for 15 different careers, including basic line cutting, heavy equipment officer, pre-trades carpentry, remote camp cooks, and security guards, will be available. Training programs vary in length from five to 20 weeks.

7 Confederation College, "Ring of Fire Aboriginal Training Alliance."

## Development Corporation: Det'on Cho Corporation

Det'on Cho Corporation is a Registered Indigenous Business and is entirely owned by the Yellowknives Dene First Nations (YKDFN), located in Ndilo and Dettah, Northwest Territories. The corporation was established in 1988 with a \$15,000 grant, and is now in its 30th year. It has annual gross revenues of over \$50 million, with 15 companies under its umbrella that serve the resource sector in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut in diverse ways. Of the 600 to 800 employees, approximately 91 per cent are Northern, including 49 per cent who are Indigenous (17 per cent being directly from YKDFN).<sup>8</sup>

### Tracking Data for Results

Det'on Cho Corporation aims to show the impact that Indigenous business has on the economy. The corporation's president, Paul Gruner, is looking to track and report on key metrics surrounding Indigenous corporations, "including how many people are hired, the amount of taxes paid, the number of hours volunteered, and so on."<sup>9</sup> To this aim, Det'on Cho Corporation created an electronic dashboard system to track its Indigenous employment data, enabling it to monitor the positive impact of its hiring initiatives. The dashboard is also used to benchmark progress and monitor areas where growth is needed. For example, using the dashboard, the corporation identified that 26 per cent of its associated apprentices are Indigenous. This figure was lower than it anticipated and, because it identified this gap, it began actively working with community partners to identify local Indigenous people who may be interested in apprenticeship opportunities.

Det'on Cho Corporation aims to be an employer of choice for Indigenous people, offering a progressive environment with reduced barriers where workers are motivated and see a future within the company. In Q3 2017, 71 per cent of its new hires were Indigenous. It has experienced major success with its winter road flooders team, which is consistently 100 per

<sup>8</sup> Det'on Cho Corporation, *DCC Internal Companies*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Braden, "Diamonds May Last Forever," 5.



Det'on Cho Corporation focuses on outreach and working with community partners.

cent Indigenous. This is because it reaches out to the local community first to fill these seasonal roles.

## Focus on Outreach, Support, and Training

Det'on Cho Corporation focuses on outreach and working with community partners to ensure that members are aware of available job opportunities, a practice that has been successful.<sup>10</sup> It has a website that community members can access to discover job opportunities. However, it also ensures that all job advertisements are printed and posted in communities to ensure ease of access to information. In addition, the company offers coaching and mentoring around job applications and life skills development. This includes targeted training and assistance for those who need to work with government to obtain documentation.

Det'on Cho Corporation offers several employment programs to staff mid-level positions, such as its Graduate Internship program and the Job Creation and Capacity Building Program. The Graduate Internship program is a one-year position for a community member who has completed post-secondary education. The role is filled annually, in October, and the selected intern can experience all sides of the business, including human resources, finance, and operations, on a three-month rotation. Once the term is completed, the student is provided with recommendation letters. Depending on the number of applicants, this program may be expanded to offer two to three positions. The aim of the program is to encourage youth to return to the community once they complete post-secondary education.<sup>11</sup>

## Easing Employment Requirements and Removing Barriers: Fingerprinting Services

Since the regional diamond mines require criminal record checks, including fingerprinting, Det'on Cho Corporation invested in a fingerprinting machine that is available for use on site. This saves members time since the Det'on Cho office is closer than the alternative

<sup>10</sup> Participant interview, February 2, 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Participant interview, March 1, 2018.

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The mining sector is Canada's largest private sector employer of Indigenous people.

RCMP detachment in Yellowknife. The development corporation is also actively engaged in making a difference in employment locally, and is working to remove the stigma that members with criminal records face. Members can come into the office at any time and are not asked any questions about their criminal records. They need to provide a photo ID, and staff take their picture and provide their application to the RCMP in Ottawa. The application takes approximately 4.5 weeks to come back, versus up to 22 weeks<sup>12</sup> via traditional channels. This helps to ensure that the jobs members are applying for are still available once their criminal record check is complete. Fingerprinting costs are also covered by Det'on Cho for all YKDFN members. If their criminal record check results determine that members cannot work in the diamond mine, Det'on Cho staff are available to assist them in determining which alternative industries they can work in.<sup>13</sup>

## Natural Resources Sector: Mining Best Practices—Focus on Agnico Eagle

The mining sector is Canada's largest private sector employer of Indigenous people. Since most Indigenous communities are "located within 200 kilometres of a producing mine or an exploration property ... the mining industry is well positioned to support the government in its commitment to economic reconciliation with Indigenous peoples."<sup>14</sup> The most recent Statistics Canada census data show that 12 per cent of workers in the mining and quarrying industry in Canada identify as Indigenous. Fifty-two per cent of workers in the mining and quarrying industry who live in the Northwest Territories are Indigenous. This number rises significantly to 97 per cent for Nunavut, where a significant majority of the population is Indigenous.<sup>15</sup> However, this number does not take into account that 60 to 70 per cent of Nunavut's mining workforce consists of fly-in/fly-out workers.<sup>16</sup> Statistics Canada

12 Royal Canadian Mounted Police, "Processing Time for Criminal Record and Vulnerable Sector Checks."

13 Participant interview, March 1, 2018.

14 Mining Association of Canada, The, *Facts and Figures of the Canadian Mining Industry 2016*, 8.

15 Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016178.

16 Conference Board of Canada, The, *Territorial Outlook Economic Forecast*, 5.

data also show that the mining industry has increased Indigenous employment by 12 per cent between 2007 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> The industry is actively working to increase Indigenous employment, and offers several best practices related to training, skills development, and employee recruitment and retention.

Mines operating in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories significantly benefit the economy and Indigenous workers. For example, of the 26,000 person-years of jobs in diamond mining in the Northwest Territories, 50 per cent are held by Indigenous people. From 1996 to 2016, diamond mines have spent \$5.6 billion out of a total of \$13.1 billion in Northern business spending on Indigenous business (companies like Det’on Cho Corporation), and over \$100 million was given to communities in Impact Benefit Agreement payments, scholarships, and donations.<sup>18</sup> Many mining companies have specific hiring targets for Indigenous people. For instance, Diavik’s Socio-Economic Agreement outlines its goal of having 40 per cent of its workforce as Indigenous Northerners. Many mining companies that operate in Northern Canada work closely with Indigenous communities to ensure that their members are trained and ready to take advantage of available job opportunities.

The mining sector has over 50 different career options in entry-level, semi-skilled, skilled, and professional positions. Careers include heavy equipment operators, housekeepers, warehouse technicians, geologists, and scientists. According to Tom Hoefer, Executive Director of the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, there are more careers than most people realize. For this reason, it is important to educate youth in Indigenous communities to increase their awareness of the career opportunities available to them in the mining industry, and to spark their imagination and motivate them to learn what steps they need to take to obtain the career of their choice. Awareness is an important first step toward recruiting Indigenous employees.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, despite these mining sector initiatives, Statistics Canada’s 2016 Census shows that the income of Indigenous people working in

17 Mining Association of Canada, The, *Facts and Figures of the Canadian Mining Industry 2016*, 50.

18 NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, *Measuring Success 1996–2016*, 1.

19 Participant interview, February 21, 2018.

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MTS has been successful in recruiting Indigenous workers for mines in the Northwest Territories.

Canadian mines is an average of 16 per cent lower than their non-Indigenous peers. This number rises to 24 per cent in the Northwest Territories, while there is no noticeable salary difference in Nunavut.<sup>20</sup> The salary differences are associated with Indigenous employees often working less-skilled jobs in the mines, a situation that leading mining companies are working to change. Companies like Agnico Eagle, for example, have created unique, innovative training programs to help Indigenous recruits and employees understand their career path, access support, and move up the ladder successfully.

## Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Strategies

Mining companies in Canada's Northern and remote communities have put in place a variety of strategies to recruit and retain Indigenous employees. One way that the mines are working to attract employees is through partnerships with educational institutions. Agnico Eagle participates in career fairs with high schools, and offers trades awareness programs where subject matter experts from their mines work to teach students about the various careers on offer at the mines.

Also, the Mine Training Society (MTS) has been very successful in recruiting Indigenous workers for the various mines in the Northwest Territories. MTS evaluates, mentors, trains, and places Northerners in mining careers. Since all jobs in mines require basic training, MTS works to provide training programs to ensure that students have the necessary skills to suit a multitude of careers, beginning with pre-employment training. MTS works with each potential employee to create a Career Action Plan that outlines the steps necessary to take the employee from his or her current position to the person's ideal job, and adjusts for potential setbacks along the way. MTS also works to help individuals obtain financial assistance to cover training costs. Another barrier to employment that many people face is the criminal record check requirement that mines put in place. MTS operates a program that

20 Statistics Canada, Table 98-400-X2016178.

helps people get their criminal records suspended to make them eligible for employment.<sup>21</sup>

## **Agnico Eagle's Work Readiness Training Program and Site Readiness Training Program**

As part of Agnico Eagle's recruitment process for Nunavummiut, it offers pre-employment training to members of participating hamlets through a Work Readiness Training Program. First, representatives from Agnico Eagle visit communities to conduct information sessions with local community representatives. They provide prospective employees with information on what it is like to work in a mine and the skills they will need to develop. They also provide support and assistance for people to ensure they are able to complete their online applications. From there, they compile a list of applicants and organize a Work Readiness Training session for them. These week-long sessions are all delivered by Indigenous instructors. They teach participants life skills and provide a foundation to help them learn how they can deal with difficult situations, such as being away from their communities for two-week periods.<sup>22</sup> In 2016, 63 people successfully completed this program (which was 55 per cent of those who signed up). In 2017, these numbers significantly increased—201 people successfully completed the training, which was 85 per cent of the total number who signed up.<sup>23</sup>

Once participants complete the Work Readiness Training Program, they are invited to attend a Site Readiness Training program. This program allows potential employees to visit the mine site and stay overnight for the duration of the program. Through this program, participants visit many different departments in the mine, and they are trained for a variety of entry-level positions to help them discover what interests them. Those who complete the program come out with the necessary basic skills to work in the mine.<sup>24</sup> After completing the program, interested participants

21 Mine Training Society, "Career Support."

22 Participant interview, February 22, 2017.

23 Agnico Eagle, *2016 and 2017 Pre-Employment Training Programs*, 2.

24 Participant interview, February 21, 2018.

are considered as candidates and are typically hired within a month. Agnico Eagle also provides its candidate list to contractors so they can hire from the pool as well. In 2016, 99 people successfully completed the Side Readiness Training program; 79 per cent of those who were *accepted* to the program completed it, and 95 per cent of those who *participated* in the program successfully completed it. As was the case with the Work Readiness Training Program, 2017 saw an increase in uptake and completions—173 applicants successfully completed the program, which had an 89 per cent completion rate.<sup>25</sup>

## Agnico Eagle's Career Path Program

Once employees are hired at Agnico Eagle, they can access the Career Path Program. The Career Path Program is a visual way for employees to understand the path from an entry-level job to a skilled job, and is available in numerous departments in the Meadowbank mine. The program shows employees the steps to reach a position at the top of their field, including the number of work hours needed to obtain that position, as well as the necessary skills or test scores that will need to be achieved. According to Agnico Eagle, "The program provides those who have limited formal skills or education with the opportunity to advance in their career by identifying the incremental steps they must take and then, through a combination of work experience, training, and skills development, enables them to achieve their goals."<sup>26</sup> One of the reasons the program has been successful is the mentorship aspect of the program, which is led by Inuk trainers.

The Career Path Program was launched in 2012.<sup>27</sup> In September 2017, Agnico Eagle recognized its first Inuit employee to reach the highest position in his field through the Career Path Program.<sup>28</sup> After six years of work, training, and study, Gabriel Ulayok is now a Production Equipment Operator qualified to operate the RH120 shovel—"one of the largest and most sophisticated pieces of equipment in the global mining industry."<sup>29</sup>

25 Agnico Eagle, *2016 and 2017 Pre-Employment Training Programs*, 3.

26 Agnico Eagle, "Breakthrough."

27 Mayrand, "Innovation in Learning Practices in the Heart of the Arctic," 10–11.

28 Agnico Eagle, "Breakthrough."

29 Ibid.

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Agnico Eagle is currently working to put support services in place in communities to address underlying barriers.

The Career Path Program is now being administered in a total of seven departments at Agnico Eagle, and it anticipates similarly positive results.

Agnico Eagle has created its programs based on the needs of its Indigenous employees. They are continuously looking to improve their offerings, and are currently working to put support services (psychological, child care, hired tradespeople such as plumbers, etc.) in place in communities to address underlying barriers and assist families while employees are away on-site.<sup>30</sup>

## Provincial Government: British Columbia's Aboriginal Youth Internship Program

As part of its commitment to develop more positive relationships with Indigenous people and communities, the Government of British Columbia created its Aboriginal Youth Internship Program (AYIP). The program was created through a partnership between the BC Public Service Agency, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Indigenous leaders, and Indigenous youth organizations. The program provides year-long, paid internships for up to 25 Indigenous British Columbians aged 19 to 29. Program participants spend nine months with a provincial government department, followed by three months with an Indigenous organization.

### Program Goals and Opportunities

The goal of the program is to provide interns with a hands-on understanding of various aspects of provincial government and public service processes. Through the program, interns develop their leadership abilities, professional skills, and working relationships. The program promotes the British Columbia provincial government and Indigenous organizations as potential employers; helps participants acquire leadership experience; facilitates youth contributions to improve relationships between the provincial government and Indigenous people;

30 Mayrand, "Innovation in Learning Practices in the Heart of the Arctic."

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The AYIP program is an example of how organizations can adapt inclusion and diversity policies to create a culturally aware and supportive work environment.

and seeks to reduce socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous British Columbians.<sup>31</sup> The government also hopes to encourage Indigenous youth to choose a career with the public service or its Indigenous organization partners.

AYIP is open to Indigenous (First Nations (non) status, Métis, or Inuit) applicants who are under 29 years of age and have a GED or high school diploma.<sup>32</sup> The interns are part of a cohort who directly report to a supervisor who provides them with direction, training placements, and work assignments. AYIP also has mentors and program staff who work to provide support and career guidance for the interns.<sup>33</sup> The program offers diverse opportunities, including “youth engagement, community liaison, event and conference coordination, facilitation, program development and delivery, [and] communications.”<sup>34</sup> The work assignments provided to interns are intended to be engaging, and in some cases provide them with the opportunity to develop policies and programs, conduct research, participate in negotiations, and/or manage projects.

## Success and Testimonials

The AYIP program has been successful and is now in its 12th year. AYIP was awarded the Premier’s Award for Partnership in 2010–11 and the Deputy Ministers Award of Excellence in Innovation in 2009. One major program benefit is the cohort system, which aims to create a bond between the interns who start and complete the program together. AYIP staff encourage the interns to work together, and share information and resources to help each other overcome any challenges they may face during the program. The program is also designed to be culturally safe, and incorporates elements such as story-telling, confidential sharing circles, and compassionate communication.<sup>35</sup> As one former participant, Asta Murray, a Cree Métis woman who now works for the Ministry of Health, observed, “AYIP starts to bridge the gap towards reconciliation.

31 Government of British Columbia, *Aboriginal Youth Internship Program*.

32 Ibid., 2.

33 BC Public Service Agency, *Moving Forward*, 9.

34 Ibid., 2.

35 Ibid., 21.



It taught me how to walk in both worlds as a young Indigenous leader within government and community. The program encouraged, supported, challenged and inspired me to be the change I hope to see in B.C.”<sup>36</sup> Another former participant, Danielle Atkinson, a Cree Métis from the Ministry of Health, also affirmed the program’s value, saying, “AYIP has provided me with a once in a lifetime opportunity to connect with other amazing Indigenous youth leaders while developing my career skills within my placement. The program helped me grow personally and professionally in more ways than I can count, and I will always be grateful for the experience.”<sup>37</sup> The program serves as an example of how organizations can adapt inclusion and diversity policies to create a culturally aware and supportive work environment.

## Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium

Nunavut’s fishery sector, consisting of SMEs, has experienced substantial growth over the last decade. To support this growth, the non-profit Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium (NFMTC) was established in 2005. It helps Nunavummiut who are interested in pursuing careers in the fishing industry, and provides training for Inuit beneficiaries. NFMTC’s training programs, such as its Marine Training Program, aim to reduce employment barriers for under-represented groups, such as women and Indigenous peoples in the North. Training is provided for all aspects of ship operations, ensuring that students are prepared for various roles, including “Small Vessel Operator, Marine Diesel Mechanic, Fisheries Observer, Bookkeeper, Bridge Watch, Cook, Quality Control Officer, and Deckhand (introductory Pre-Sea Course).”<sup>38</sup> Those who complete training may also be able to use their skills to develop inshore fishing operations in their communities. This is

36 Ibid., 2.

37 Ibid., 1.

38 Government of Nunavut, “Fisheries and Sealing Programs.”

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NFMTC has grown immensely since it was first established as a fisheries training institution.

an example of a program that finds candidates, provides them with the necessary technical and job-related skills, and connects them with jobs.

## Program Funding

Various governments and private sector organizations have funded training for the fishing industry through NFMTC. In 2012, NFMTC signed an agreement with the Canadian government, which focused on “getting the right people in the right courses, continuing the delivery of introductory courses, increasing the number of higher-level courses, and the development of the mentorship program.”<sup>39</sup> Baffin Fisheries, a producer of wild, cold water seafood, and a leader in research and development in the Nunavut fishing industry, was at the forefront of the creation of NFMTC. Baffin Fisheries has provided over \$1.6 million in funding to NFMTC to support its training programs.

In 2016, the Government of Nunavut released a five-year fisheries strategy to support the industry's growth. One of the major goals of the strategy was to increase opportunities for Inuit to participate in the fishing industry. In addition, in February 2018, Transport Canada announced that as part of the \$1.5 billion Oceans Protection Plan, \$12.6 million over three years will be provided to NFMTC for the Marine Training Program. Training will take place at a marine training facility in Hay River, Northwest Territories, through a partnership with the Government of Northwest Territories. The existing training programs in Nunavut and Nunavik will also be expanded, and new specialized marine training equipment will be purchased using the Oceans Protection Plan funds.<sup>40</sup>

## Impact of NFMTC and the Marine Training Program

As of 2016, it was reported that over 1,700 people had attended training with NFMTC since it was established in 2005.<sup>41</sup> According to a Nunatsiaq News interview in September 2014 with Elizabeth Cayen, former executive director of NFMTC, “If you go back four years, you might have

39 Baffin Fisheries, “Training and Development.”

40 Transport Canada, “Government of Canada Invests in Marine Training.”

41 Government of Nunavut, *Nunavut Fisheries Strategy 2016–2020*, 35.

seen one or two, maybe three Inuit on a crew list of 27.... Now it's not unusual to see anywhere between 10 to 15, in a crew of 27.... Part of it is obviously the training. But people are really starting to understand what the fishing industry is all about, and the benefits that it can give them."<sup>42</sup> NFMTTC has grown immensely since it was first established as a fisheries training institution. Over time, it has expanded to provide training for "the entire marine industry including cruise ships, research, sealift and the Canadian Coast Guard."<sup>43</sup> In the 2013–14 training year, 288 participants registered for NFMTTC training in 25 courses. The success rate is high, with approximately 92 per cent of students completing their courses.<sup>44</sup> This program works with the local community to engage it and provide community members with useful skills and training that enable them to work and live in their communities, in an industry that interests them and works well with their skill sets and cultural beliefs.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we examined six cases of exemplary employers that have developed initiatives to address the persistent challenges and issues raised in our discussions of survey findings, expert interviews, and review of the research literature. The cases illustrate best practices and lessons learned from successful recruitment and retention initiatives by a diverse cross-section of natural resources sector companies, provincial/territorial governments, Indigenous development corporations, and a consortium of SMEs. In following the lead of these public and private sector organizations, employers can learn to adapt best practices for engaging Indigenous youth, defining career paths that are meaningful to residents of remote Indigenous communities, developing work structures that complement local Indigenous cultural contexts and realities, reducing barriers that restrict the eligibility of Indigenous candidates, and supporting the pre-employment training needs of potential Indigenous recruits.

<sup>42</sup> Varga, "Nunavut-Based Marine Training Helps Grow Inuit Fishing Crews."

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Government of Nunavut, *Nunavut Fisheries Strategy 2016–2020*, 35.

## CHAPTER 7

# Recommendations for Employers

### Chapter Summary

- Employers can partner with Indigenous communities to improve recruitment, enhance education and skills development outcomes, and identify suitable candidates for job opportunities.
- Workplaces can benefit from mandated inclusion and cultural awareness training. This training should address racism and cultural conflicts, and work to accommodate community obligations and traditional practices.
- Employers can engage with Indigenous youth by building awareness around job opportunities, ensuring that the interests and aspirations of youth are understood, and implementing programs that foster leadership and skills development.

**Indigenous people in Canada's Northern and remote regions face multiple challenges to finding stable, meaningful employment. At the same time, employers in these regions struggle to recruit and retain local employees. A major barrier for employees that is amplified in Northern and remote Canada is educational attainment. A lack of education or relevant training significantly affects the way in which the residents of Indigenous communities participate in the wage economy and take advantage of employment opportunities in their region. Skills attainment is also affected by a lack of educational attainment, since many skills necessary for success in the workplace build on essential skills learned in school.**

Inadequate life skills have been identified as a job-readiness challenge for Northern and remote Indigenous job applicants. Examples of life skills for job readiness include punctuality, dealing with shift work, teamwork, oral communication, and time management. These skills are not always easy to learn on the job, especially in cross-cultural workplace situations, and often require targeted pre-employment training and mentorship. Through the development of relevant life skills, and through culturally competent pre-employment training, applicants can learn to be effective members of the workforce and adapt to challenging and changing work environments and situations.

Beyond this, employers in Northern and remote Canada also face unique challenges regarding Indigenous recruitment and retention. For instance, many Northern communities face a host of underlying barriers that exacerbate the main challenges to recruitment and retention. Inadequate housing, the absence of various forms of community infrastructure, and a lack of safe drinking water represent some of these underlying barriers. Another example of a unique challenge is the politics of smallness.

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The movement to advance reconciliation has created an opportunity for employers to improve their relationships with Indigenous people.

Because of the small, close-knit nature of many Northern and remote communities, personal networks can at times play a significant role in local hiring practices.<sup>1</sup> Smallness is also an employer-side challenge, because it can limit the size of the pool of potential employees, and may make it challenging for employers to accurately assess skill sets and qualifications or respond to the needs of a community or region.

## Success Factors and Recommendations

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for Indigenous employee recruitment and retention. Each organization must understand that processes and policies need to be adjusted over time to determine which strategies are the most effective. Organizations successfully recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees often partner with other organizations, such as skills development and training organizations. They also focus on providing roles that address the interests of Indigenous people and provide positive workplaces that value Indigenous culture.

Now is an ideal time to adjust workplace policies and practices to be both inclusive and supportive of Indigenous people, their cultural heritage, and the unique talents and skills that they bring to the workplace. The movement to advance reconciliation in Canada has created an opportunity for public and private sector employers to improve their relationships with Indigenous people, by recognizing their rights and needs, and by helping non-Indigenous Canadians appreciate the contributions of Canada's First Peoples.

Based on the findings of this report, which incorporated an environmental scan, an online survey, expert interviews, and consultations with an expert advisory committee, we have developed 12 recommendations for public and private sector organizations looking to improve their recruitment and retention efforts for Indigenous candidates and employees.

<sup>1</sup> Coates and Poelzer, *An Unfinished Nation*, 23.

## Recruitment Recommendations

1. **Build trust and genuine understanding with Indigenous communities and leaders.** It is essential to build and maintain strong, mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities. For example, before approaching a community to provide job opportunities, the employer should explain its needs to community leaders and learn about the community's needs and available skill sets. This can help to ensure that both parties understand their counterpart's situation, interests, and concerns. Then, employers can determine the types of jobs that should be offered to fit the community's interests, and the community can find out if it has interested workers available to match the employer's needs.
2. **Partner with Indigenous communities on recruitment campaigns and to design job opportunities.** Employers can increase their visibility and improve their outreach efforts in Indigenous communities by partnering with Indigenous communities, groups, and agencies to identify potential candidates and to make candidates aware of job opportunities. Since many Indigenous workers in remote communities may be unable to access the Internet to discover jobs themselves, or may be unaware of how to assess their skills or even apply for jobs, employers can build partnerships with Indigenous communities to make employment more accessible for their residents. Employers and Indigenous communities can also benefit from collaborating to design job opportunities. For example, the Newmont Mining Corporation hired Indigenous people in environmental services roles, which acknowledged their skill set and their cultural values, and put these to good use in the pursuit of company objectives.
3. **Adjust the hiring process to meet Indigenous realities.** Employers should ensure that hiring requirements are equitable, culturally appropriate, and reasonable. Some non-essential requirements may be preventing Indigenous people from applying for jobs, even though they may be well suited for a job's technical demands. Employers should also provide feedback to applicants who do not progress in the hiring process, particularly for those who fail criminal background checks, or drug and medical tests. This information can help applicants/employees be more successful when they re-apply for employment.

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Northern and remote employers can benefit from partnerships with regional educational institutions.

4. **Offer pre-employment training.** Life skills were identified as a barrier to employment for Indigenous people in Northern and remote regions. To remedy this, companies can offer pre-employment training or partner with organizations and communities to provide this training to potential employees. Training can be foundational (how to deal with difficult situations, how to obtain a driver's licence, how to open a bank account), or can be focused on technical skills acquisition. By investing in this training, employers can ensure that Indigenous people are prepared to succeed in their roles, building confidence on the part of the employee and employer. For this training to be successful, employers should ensure that it is delivered through culturally competent methods that respect Indigenous cultures and life experiences.
5. **Identify and, where possible, address underlying barriers.** Canada's remote Indigenous communities frequently face a host of barriers that are not as common in Southern towns and cities. Barriers can include things like access to potable water, telecommunications, and basic community infrastructure. These barriers need to be taken seriously by prospective employers and, where possible, addressed. As an example, core housing need is a significant issue for Indigenous people living across Canada's Northern and remote regions. Housing in Northern and remote Canada is not only costly, it is often scarce and in a state of disrepair. For this reason, companies operating in these regions should consider housing supports for Indigenous workers and provide housing options whenever relevant and feasible.
6. **Partner with educational institutions.** Northern and remote employers can benefit from partnerships with regional educational institutions. Organizations can offer co-op or internship positions for summer students, or full-time positions for students upon completion of their studies. Staff at post-secondary institutions can often assist in identifying Indigenous student candidates and can connect them with employers that are the right fit for their skill set.
7. **Offer youth development programs.** Companies can benefit from engaging with Indigenous youth. By making youth aware of job opportunities while ensuring their interests and aspirations are understood, in addition to offering practical experience and youth leadership programming, organizations can motivate them by providing insight into job opportunities that are available to them.



Youth can also benefit from exposure to different workplace and educational environments.

## Retention Recommendations

8. **Implement effective and meaningful inclusion practices.** Creating a work environment and implementing workplace practices that ensure Indigenous employees feel valued, understood, accepted, and included can go a long way to enticing people to stay in an organization. Moreover, employers can make the workplace a more welcoming environment for Indigenous employees by ensuring that they see themselves in their work. For example, employers can use Indigenous-specific training materials and ensure that instructors have experience working with Indigenous employees. The importance of, and various options for, inclusion policies and practices are highlighted through the programs of a number of organizations, such as AMIK and Indigenous Works. Employers can take inclusion a step further by ensuring that all levels of leadership, from mid-level managers through to senior leadership and the board of directors, include Indigenous employees. Doing so will help Indigenous employees feel more comfortable by valuing them as people as well as employees.
9. **Mandate cultural awareness training.** Negative stereotypes and racism continue to persist and can present a significant challenge for Indigenous people at the workplace. For this reason, some Indigenous applicants may try to hide their cultural heritage and personal characteristics on their resumé or during a job interview process. Virtually all workplaces can benefit from mandated cultural awareness training. Training should be linked to inclusion practices and policies, in addition to helping non-Indigenous employees appreciate the discrimination and related challenges faced by Indigenous people over the course of Canadian history. It should also help to provide all employees with relevant cross-cultural conflict resolution training. Employees' cultural awareness can also be enhanced through direct experiences with Indigenous culture, beyond formal training sessions.

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Flexible work arrangements may be preferable for Indigenous employees, who may find it difficult to be away from home for extended periods of time.

10. **Accommodate traditional practices and community/family**

**obligations.** Many employers have found success by offering flexible work arrangements (e.g., late/early start/finish; four-day weeks; 10 days on/five days off). Such arrangements may be preferable for Indigenous employees, who may find it difficult to be away from home for extended periods of time. It may also be of value to develop adaptable work arrangements, so that employees can leave on short notice should an important family or community obligation arise. In some cases, Indigenous employees may prefer to work seasonally, if it enables them to participate in traditional activities, such as hunting, fishing, and harvesting, that support their community's local mixed economy. Employers should make themselves aware of when these activities take place annually and put a plan in place to enable Indigenous employees to participate. It is recommended that employers survey their Indigenous workers to understand the work arrangement that they would prefer and make changes wherever possible to accommodate their preferences and traditional activities. Such flexibility also helps to build community trust and employee loyalty.

11. **Clarify career paths and provide professional development**

**opportunities.** Employees often leave organizations that do not clarify how they can progress in their careers. Organizations can increase retention rates by offering career guidance to help employees plan their careers and understand pathways to advancement. This can also build trust and loyalty in Indigenous employees. In some cases, Indigenous employees may not have the technical skills necessary for advancing to higher positions in their careers. However, with on-the-job training and support for professional development via a range of options and measures, employers can facilitate the career progression of employees and their ability to take on highly technical roles. It is recommended that employers invest in professional development and job-related skills training for Indigenous employees. In some cases, companies can access government funding for training programs.

12. **Offer mentorship, coaching, and/or cohort programs.** Mentorship programs have been proven to be successful tools to integrate Indigenous people into the workplace. Mentors can assist by offering career management advice and can also help people to navigate the workplace and build life skills. Cohort programs are also effective, since they provide Indigenous people with a support system of peers when they begin their new roles. These programs can all be enhanced through the inclusion of Elders, culturally sensitive support programs, and/or support for cultural and traditional activities.

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## APPENDIX A

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## APPENDIX B

# Participating Organizations

We would like to thank the following organizations for participating in various parts of our research project, including completing our survey, participating in an interview, circulating our survey to their members, and participating in our advisory committee. It should be noted that the list below does not include individuals and organizations who asked not to be listed. We want to thank those individuals and organizations as well, whose input, knowledge, and responses were pivotal to producing this report.

## Advisory Committee

- Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
- Efficiency Nova Scotia
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Mushkegowuk and Wabun tribal councils
- Natural Resources Canada
- Niagara Peninsula Indigenous Area Management Board
- Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation (SIFN)
- Société du Plan Nord
- TD Bank

## Interviewees

- Agnico Eagle Mines Limited
- Canadian Council for Indigenous Business
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
- Det'on Cho Corporation
- Dominion Diamond Corp. (Ekati mine)
- Forest Products Association of Canada
- Hall Beach Hamlet Office
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Makivik Corporation
- Mushkegowuk and Wabun tribal councils
- Nunavut Department of Economic Development and Transportation
- NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines
- SNC-Lavalin Inc.
- Suncor Energy Inc.
- Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce

## Survey Respondents

- Akaitcho BDC
- Alberta Pacific Forest Industries
- Applus RTD Canada
- Arctic Canada Construction Ltd.
- Atikokan General Hospital
- Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat
- Ayoni Keh Land Corporation
- Baffinland Iron Mines
- Boys & Girls Club of Yukon
- British Columbia Institute of Technology
- British Columbia Institute of Technology Faculty and Staff Association
- Cameco Corporation
- CAP Enterprises Ltd
- Carvo Group
- Chetwynd Chamber of Commerce
- CIBC

- City of Thompson
- CMHA Sault Ste. Marie
- Cochrane District Social Services Administration Board
- Colliers Project Leaders
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs
- Daishowa-Marubeni Int. Ltd., Peace River Pulp Division
- Deh Cho Friendship Centre
- Dehcho First Nations
- Department of Justice
- Dominion Diamond Mines
- Dragados
- EACOM Timber Corporation
- Equitable Bank
- Essar Steel Algoma Inc.
- Federal ACL Inc.
- Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec
- Fortune Minerals Limited
- Government of Nunavut
- Government of Nunavut, Department of Health
- Government of Northwest Territories
- Government of Yukon
- Hall Beach Hamlet Office
- Holloway Lodging
- Human Capital Strategies
- Kativik Ilisarniliriniq
- Kativik Regional Government
- Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories
- Makivik Corporation
- Manitoba Hydro
- Marriott International
- Media Mentor
- Ministry of Justice (Saskatchewan)
- Municipal District of Smoky River No.130
- Municipal District of Spirit River
- North American Palladium
- North Stream Rehabilitation Centre
- Northern Health Authority

- Northlands College
- Northwestel
- Nunatsiavut Government
- Nunavut Business Credit Corporation
- NWT Seniors' Society
- Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute
- Prince Rupert Port Authority
- Public Service Commission, Yukon Government
- Qulliq Energy Corporation
- Rainy River District Women's Shelter of Hope
- RCMP—B Division (NL)
- Recreation and Parks Association of Nunavut
- Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce
- Sego Resources Inc.
- Skookum Jim Friendship Centre
- St. Joseph's Health Centre
- Tbaytel
- The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board
- Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board
- Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre
- TMAC Resources Inc.
- Toronto Artscape
- TRICORP
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
- Visionary Seeds Inc.
- Yukon Bureau of Statistics
- Yukon Chamber of Commerce
- Yukon Energy Corporation

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