



Aboriginal Workforce Initiative

Research to Action – Improving Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes in the Calgary Region

October 2009 Update

Background

The Project

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce's Aboriginal Workforce Initiative (AWI) is a three-phase research and action plan designed to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes in the Calgary region. The AWI is conducted in conjunction with the Chamber's Aboriginal Opportunities Committee.

Phase One resulted in a research report titled *Completing the Circle: Realities, Challenges and Strategies to Improve Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes in the Calgary Region*, which identified gaps and offered program and policy recommendations.

Phase Two involved hosting a one and a half day Aboriginal Workforce Symposium on March 25th and 26th 2009, which brought together over 100 key stakeholders representing businesses, the Aboriginal community, service providers, decision-makers and other stakeholders to showcase the research findings, share best practices, facilitate discussion, raise awareness of key issues and mobilize action for change.

Phase Three, currently underway, involves working with the Aboriginal community of stakeholders, government, service providers and the business community to develop and deliver programs to implement the research project's findings identified in Phase One and build upon the relationships and momentum developed in Phase Two.

Phase Three - Next Steps

Completing the Circle, the Chamber's Phase One research report, identified four overarching priority actions to improve Aboriginal labour market outcomes:

1. Align business, government and Aboriginal priorities;
2. Establish a single access point for Aboriginal employment services;
3. Provide workplace preparation and support; and
4. Encourage skill development and business capacity building.

Based on these priority actions, the Chamber is undertaking the following approaches as Phase Three of the Aboriginal Workforce Initiative.



Priority Action One: Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities

Businesses seeking to work with Aboriginal communities need to align their objectives with those of Aboriginal communities. This means approaching issues in a manner that considers the perspectives, interests and culture of the community, and then assessing how the business opportunity can align with these values.

To achieve Priority Action One, the Chamber will build upon its positive relations established through previous phases and work with Chamber members, Treaty 7 communities, Aboriginal service providers and organizations, and the province to Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities.

Tasks for Priority Action One: Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities (September 2009 - March 2010)
Engage and work with Treaty 7 community leaders, government and/or Aboriginal organizations to identify community vision(s) and potential economic and labour opportunities available in Treaty 7 communities.
Canvass Chamber membership (via surveys, interviews and/or other outreach methods) to assess the level of business interest in the identified Treaty 7 Aboriginal economic and labour opportunities. Identify “anchor” organizations willing to champion this initiative.
Develop a formal / informal arrangement to better connect Chamber members to Treaty 7 business and labour opportunities, in collaboration with relevant stakeholder groups including Aboriginal communities, service providers, Chamber members and provincial government initiatives such as the <i>First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative</i> .
Arrange and host informational sessions, open houses, and speaker luncheons to connect the business community with Aboriginal opportunities in the Treaty 7 / Calgary region.

Priority Action Two: Single Access Point for Aboriginal Employment Services

Multiple Aboriginal career and employment service providers operate within the Calgary region yet these organizations do not fully coordinate in linking and referring clients to services. What is needed is an integrated access point to connect Aboriginal people to the services, training, programming and employment opportunities they need to succeed in the workplace.

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

To achieve Priority Action Two, the Chamber will work with the Treaty 7 Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal-oriented service providers and organizations within the Calgary region, and the business community to better coordinate and link prospective employees to employers.



Tasks for Priority Action Two: Single Access Point/ Better Coordinated Aboriginal Employment Services (September 2009 - February 2010)

Develop working relationships/ agreements between the Chamber and Aboriginal individuals, organizations and service providers (e.g. Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, Community Futures Treaty 7, Aboriginal Futures Career and Training Centre) to better connect prospective employees to employers in the Calgary region.

Priority Action Three: Workplace Preparation and Support

Cross-cultural awareness training was identified in the research as critical to Aboriginal employment success. For Aboriginal employees, this involves pre-employment preparation training. From an employer perspective, Aboriginal awareness training is the most effective approach.

To achieve Priority Action Three, the Chamber will coordinate with Aboriginal pre-employment training service providers to ensure prospective Aboriginal employees are equipped with the knowledge of workplace etiquette and expectations necessary to succeed in the workplace.

The Chamber will also arrange accessible, competency-based Aboriginal awareness training for businesses interested in hiring Aboriginal employees and/or working with Treaty 7 Aboriginal communities to tap into business opportunities on-reserve. This training will serve as recognition of these organizations as 'Aboriginal Employers of Choice' for pools of talent.

Tasks for Priority Action Three: Workplace Preparation and Support (November 2009 - May 2010)

Develop working relationships and agreements (formal or informal) with Aboriginal pre-employment training service providers, and establish a procedure / arrangement to ensure prospective Aboriginal employees access this training and are prepared for, and supported in, the workplace.

Identify and secure an Aboriginal awareness training provider that can provide accessible, competency-based Aboriginal Awareness Training to Chamber members.

Provide accessible, competency-based Aboriginal awareness training to Chamber members interested in hiring Aboriginal employees and/or working with Treaty 7 Aboriginal communities to tap into business opportunities on-reserve.

Priority Action Four: Skills Development and Business Capacity Building

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



community leaders interested in enhancing opportunities to develop business-friendly governance and regulatory practices such as competitive rents and streamlined approval processes.

The level of bureaucracy and regulation in government departments can also discourage otherwise successful and much needed projects from accessing funding. Businesses seeking economic development opportunities on-reserve need to work together with Aboriginal communities and government to create mutually beneficial economic development partnerships.

Chamber efforts undertaken on Priority Actions One, Two, and Three will, in turn, spur activity on Priority Action Four. In particular, business community efforts to tap into economic opportunities in Aboriginal communities will encourage business-friendly governance and regulatory practices on-reserve, ultimately creating greater economic development on-reserve.

**Tasks for Priority Action Four: Skills Development and Business Capacity Building
(December 2009 to April 2010)**

Where possible, the Chamber will work with its members, Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal service providers such as Community Futures Treaty 7 to encourage and develop business and entrepreneurial friendly practices on-reserve.

Engage With Us

Learn more and stay current <http://www.calgarychamber.com/PGA/labour/aboriginal.html>

Does your business want to develop new business opportunities with Aboriginal partners and/or improve Aboriginal participation in your workforce?

Contact Ben Brunnen, Manager of Policy & Research at 403-750-0442 or bbrunnen@calgarychamber.com to get involved with the Aboriginal Workforce Initiative.