Inclusive Futures

Indigenous Engagement in Canada's Workforce

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The suffering that Indian residential school survivors were forced to endure represents a shameful period in Canada's history. The physical and sexual abuse survivors were subjected to, coupled with the displacement and cultural and familial destruction that followed long after they were no longer forced to attend the schools, has caused intergenerational trauma throughout most Indigenous communities.

While discussing the future of work in Canada and ways to understand how workplaces can be more inclusive of Indigenous Peoples, the distrust they may feel towards non-Indigenous entities because of the historic and systemic discrimination towards them cannot be overlooked.

This report is driven by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action #7: "to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians."[1] It is not our intent to suggest pathways to Reconciliation; rather it is our hope that this

report, and the recommendations that follow, be considered a constructive component of the ongoing discourse of how all Indigenous Peoples can be recognized, honoured and celebrated as we work toward Reconciliation.

In this report, the term "Indigenous Peoples" is used to reference First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples living in Canada. The terms "Aboriginal peoples" or "Indian" will appear from sources such as the Government of Canada, which is in the process of changing the terminology it uses, with exception to legal documents.[2]

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1 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.
2 Joseph, B., and Joseph, C.F. 2017. Working effectively with Indigenous Peoples (4th ed.). Port Coquitlam, B.C. Indigenous Relations Press.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the fastest growing population in Canada, Indigenous Peoples and their participation in the workforce will have a positive influence on the future of work. Despite efforts to increase the inclusion of Indigenous workers in the Canadian workforce, labour market outcomes and employment rates for Indigenous Peoples lag significantly behind the non-Indigenous. Moreover, the disparity of labour market outcomes for Indigenous is expected to worsen with technological advances in automation, artificial intelligence and robotics.

This report examines four interlinked factors that contribute to Indigenous inclusion in the labour force and which are incorporated into a suggested framework for developing a tool to measure how inclusive an organization's workplace is. They are:

the number of Indigenous Peoples employed by an organization;

the opportunity for Indigenous employees to engage in training and upskilling;

the availability of Indigenous cultural competency programs and spaces for cultural practices; and

the evidence of champions of Indigenous culture within an organization.

The proposed Indigenous inclusion diagnostic tool acts as an objective cultural audit of an organization's workplace and is akin to a rating system that can be used by Indigenous candidates looking to potentially join an organization. Organizational scores from the diagnostic tool are meant to be published quarterly and made publicly accessible to generate social awareness and motivate organizations to be more inclusive as a point of reputational pride. It is recognized that the tool would be best developed and applied by an Indigenous-operated organization to ensure their perspectives and voices are thoroughly represented.

Through analyzing best practices for Indigenous inclusion in workplaces and reviewing tools for assessing inclusive workplaces, this report draws from academic, government and publicly available research that focuses on Indigenous communities and workplace engagement. It also highlights insights gained from interviews with Indigenous-serving employment agencies, Indigenous-led or owned organizations and companies or governmental agencies identified as having best practices for Indigenous inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

According to Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, in the 2016 census, "more than **1.67 million people** in Canada identif[ied] themselves as an Aboriginal person. Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Canada – **growing by 42.5%** between 2006 and 2016; [and represent] the youngest population in Canada [with] about **44% were under the age of 25** in 2016."[3]

> *Canadian employers are seeing a clear business case in making their organizations inclusive of Aboriginal people[s] and other underrepresented groups as diversity maximizes the potential of all employees, lowers employee turnover, broadens customer base and increases work productivity. Diversity brings cohesiveness to the workplace."[4]*

The future of work in Canada will be positively influenced by Indigenous participation in the workforce, for example, by helping fill upcoming labour shortages/gaps. However, the sentiments expressed in the preceding remarks have not translated to the workforce nearly a decade after they were published.[5] According to a survey of more than 500 medium and large businesses, 85 percent of corporate Canada can be described as disengaged — unaware of local Indigenous communities or their potential to address labour and business needs.[6] Employment and Social Development Canada[7] notes that "despite [Indigenous labour market program] progress, there continues to be a number of barriers to employment for Indigenous people and our programs are not significantly impacting the overall economic status of Indigenous Peoples," which begs the question: **What barriers are preventing Canadian organizations from creating inclusive workplaces?**

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3 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. 2017. Indigenous Peoples and communities. Government of Canada.
4 Abdul, R. 2010. Aboriginal inclusion in the workplace. Career Edge.
5 Statistics Canada. 2019. Labour force characteristics by region and detailed Aboriginal group.
6 Blackman, J. 2017. Researching Indigenous partnerships: An Assessment of Corporate-Indigenous Relations. R.A. Malatest & Associates.
7 Employment and Social Development Canada. 2016b. Looking into the future of Indigenous labour market programming: Discussion guide. Government of Canada.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

1.67 MILLION
MILLION PEOPLE IN CANADA IDENTIFIED AS AN INDIGENOUS PERSON

42.5%
POPULATION GROWTH IN CANADA
BETWEEN 2006 & 2016

44.0%
WERE AGED UNDER 25
IN 2016

This report examines factors that contribute to workforce inclusion for Indigenous Peoples and offers recommendations on how organizations can measure the inclusivity of their workplace. In arriving at these recommendations, it is important to review why Indigenous inclusivity is an issue as well as some of the constraints that may prohibit Indigenous Peoples from working at or remaining with non-Indigenous organizations. These organizations need to understand the value associated with an inclusive work environment and monitor factors that may prevent Indigenous Peoples from being contributing members. To understand the need for such monitoring, it is prudent to first understand the current state of the Indigenous labour market in Canada.

CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

Labour market barriers limit Indigenous potential today

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples do not share the same labour market outcomes. In 2019, the unemployment rate for the Indigenous Peoples was 10.1 percent, versus 5.5 percent for others.[8] An examination of unemployment data by region between 2015 and 2019 reveals striking results where Indigenous rates of unemployment are consistently higher — in many cases double — that of non-Indigenous peoples. There are several explanations for the disparity. Two of the most prevalent include the need to close the skills and experience gap between Indigenous candidates and workforce vacancies, and the historic and systemic discrimination toward Indigenous Peoples in the labour force.[9]

Barriers for Indigenous workers will continue, unless action is taken

Technological change is said to be putting what we know as work today at risk — with 42 percent of the labour force at high risk of being affected by technological advances to automation, artificial intelligence and robotics — likely leading to many new jobs but also eliminating many current ones in the next decade or two. Research shows the impact of technological change will likely affect those in occupations with less education and occupations that are routine, administrative or service oriented. These impacts are compounded by the concern automation may negatively impact Indigenous and other racialized workers more than others.[10][11] Studies conducted by organizations such as the Brookings Institution[12] reinforce the uneven impact of economic changes to come, predicting 43 percent of an average male worker's job will be automated by 2040 and 40 percent of an average woman's job. The changing nature of work will have uneven disruptive effects, deeply impacting those already at the margins of society.

> "
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> # 42%
>
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8 Statistics Canada. 2019.

9 Employment and Social Development Canada. 2019b.

10 Lamb, C. 2016. The talented Mr. Robot: The impact of automation on Canada's workforce. Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship.

11 Ng, E.S., and Gagnon, S. 2020. Employment gaps and underemployment for racialized groups and immigrants in Canada: Current findings and future directions.

12 Muro, M., Maxim, R., and Whiton, J. 2019. Automation and artificial intelligence: How machines are affecting people and places. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

The same American-based study highlighted that Hispanic workers are in jobs that are 47 percent automatable; Native Americans at 45 percent; and Black workers at 44 percent, compared to 40 percent for the average white American worker.[13]

The future of work is driven by advances and growth in the technology (or tech) sector. To that end, Canada's tech sector surged to become a major and growing source of employment and prosperity. The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship estimates Canada's tech sector employs 935,000 people — about 5.1 percent of the total employment in the country. Yet in this booming sector, Indigenous tech workers are both underrepresented and underpaid relative to non-Indigenous tech workers, reinforcing concerns that labour market disparities for the Indigenous workers will likely not be resolved by the disruption and transformation to workplaces to come from technological advances. The Brookfield Institute found Indigenous workers had much lower participation rates in tech occupations in 2016 (2.2 percent or 13,000 people) compared to non-Indigenous individuals (5.2 percent or 921,000 people) and are paid less, relative to their non-Indigenous counterparts in tech occupations, ranging from $30,000 lower on average for Inuit tech workers to $3,400 lower for individuals identifying as Métis.[14]

> **I believe that the young leaders from Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities who are having transformative conversations are setting a powerful new path. We have our work cut out for us to build common ground and a shared future."**
>
> Saskatoon Mayor
> Charlie Clark

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13 Ibid.
14 Vu, V., Lamb, C., and Zafar, A. 2019. Who are Canada's tech workers? Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship.

> *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. "*

The skills & experience gap

The Government of Canada recognizes the gap between the skills and experience of Indigenous candidates and vacancies within the workforce. In response, it created the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program, which is designed to help First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban/non-affiliated Indigenous Peoples improve skills and find employment, with the ultimate goal of reducing skills and employment gaps.[15] The ISET Program also responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #7,[16] which calls upon the federal government to develop a joint strategy with Indigenous groups to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples.

New research argues the so-called "skills gap" does not exist and may actually be a result of employers responding to fluctuating employment rates. In other words, "employers responded to high unemployment by making their job descriptions more stringent. When unemployment went down thanks to the demand-side recovery, suddenly employers got more relaxed again."[17] Either way, David Pratt, Second Vice-Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, emphasized that "government and industry should make it a priority to educate, train and build skills [among Indigenous Peoples]. We have to make sure our kids are graduating and going into trades, entrepreneurship, law, nursing and engineering — and support them to ensure their success as future leaders in this country. It will take all three levels [of government] working together to achieve this success."[18]

Given that Indigenous Peoples face various barriers to education,[19] it is crucial that labour market information be used to assist in identifying emerging job opportunities where skills training could then be customized for Indigenous Peoples through both formal education and on-the-job training programs.[20] Further, how skills acquired from work/lived experience (versus formal education) are recognized, assessed and valued by employers must also be taken into consideration.[21] However, these efforts are for naught if non-Indigenous organizations lack the capacity to recruit and retain Indigenous talent. An organization's capacity to ensure a safe, culturally appropriate and welcoming work environment is paramount to facilitating the integration of Indigenous employees and allowing these employees to thrive.

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15 Employment and Social Development Canada. 2019a. About the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program. Government of Canada.
16 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015.
17 Yglesias, M. Jan. 7, 2019. The "skills gap" was a lie. Vox.
18 Pratt. 2019. pers. comm.
19 Employment and Social Development Canada. 2019b. Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programming.
20 (Employment and Social Development Canada. 2019b.
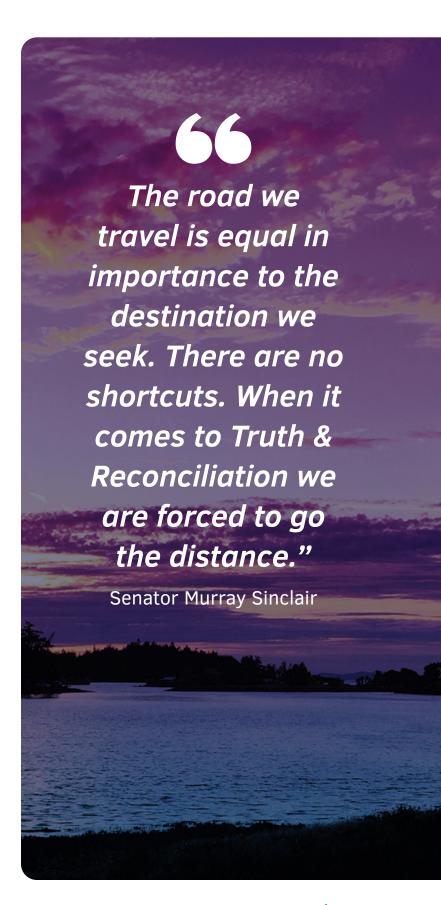21 Southwick. 2019. Pers. comm.

Historic and systemic discrimination towards Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian labour force

Several studies have demonstrated systemic discrimination against Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian workforce.

"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… stereotypes and racism, can affect people's physical and emotional health… Most employers 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."[22]

Further instances of employer discrimination and bias can be found in Ng and Gagnon's report,[23] where they argue racism is a major "obstacle to integration into the [Canadian] workforce."[24]

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22 MacLaine, C., Lalonde, M., and Fiser, A. 2019. Working together: Indigenous recruitment and retention in remote Canada.

23 Ng, E.S., and Gagnon, S. 2020. Employment gaps and underemployment for racialized groups and immigrants in Canada: Current findings and future directions.

24 The report focuses on racialized Canadians in the workforce; however, racism and the notion of "perceived fit with the Canadian workplace" illustrate the reality that there are filtering techniques employers may consciously or subconsciously use when screening Indigenous applicants.

> *The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to Truth & Reconciliation we are forced to go the distance."*
>
> Senator Murray Sinclair

METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

Before examining how inclusive a workplace is, it is integral to understand what is considered inclusive.

Defining inclusivity

Indigenous Works[25] defines inclusion as an organizational state that is embraced as a cultural norm, with enterprise-wide workplace strategies and a culture that invites full participation of Indigenous Peoples into all aspects of business operations.[26] Inclusivity can be found where leadership and employees are welcoming of Indigenous Peoples, their experience and perspectives. Where diversity is valued, the spirit of Reconciliation has been embraced and calls to action have been acted on in meaningful ways.[27] If the definition of inclusivity were to be distilled down to a simple statement for the purpose of this report, it would be: where we find Indigenous Peoples are made to feel welcome, celebrated and understood within the workplace.

Data collection

Finding Indigenous Worldviews within organizations requires both qualitative and quantitative analyses. A multi-method approach to data collection and analysis was conducted to create a comprehensive understanding of the current state of Indigenous recruitment and retention practices. The investigation of such practices is intended to provide insight into what could cause Indigenous employees to join an organization and stay within that organization. It is understood that a confluence of factors may influence an Indigenous person's decision to join or leave. It is assumed the inclusivity of an Indigenous person within an organization is positively correlated with that person's determination in those decision-making processes.

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25 Indigenous Works is a non-profit national organization established based on "a recommendation from the 1996 Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples with a mandate to improve the inclusion and engagement of Indigenous people in the Canadian economy." Indigenous Works has an outstanding reputation among both Indigenous communities and businesses for working with non-Indigenous organizations toward demonstrating greater respect for Indigenous perspectives in the workplace.
26 Local Employment Planning Council. 2018. Guide to developing Indigenous inclusion policies.
27 Ibid.

To analyze the knowledge, perception and understanding of the current state of Indigenous recruitment and retention, interviews with Indigenous-serving employment agencies, Indigenous-led or owned organizations and companies or governmental agencies identified as having best practices for Indigenous inclusion were conducted (see Appendix I). These interviews were later subject to qualitative thematic analysis to find trends among responses. The overall objective of the interviews was to better understand various experiences, opinions and attitudes toward Indigenous recruitment and retention in the workforce, as well as to gain insight into how well some organizations are doing in recruiting and retaining Indigenous talent.

We also completed a literature review of best practices for Indigenous inclusion in workplaces and reviewed tools for assessing inclusive workplaces for Indigenous communities. The review draws from academic, government and publicly available research and reports that focus on Indigenous communities and workplace engagement. From the literature review, several recommended practices and policies to enhance an organization's capacity and readiness to recruit

and retain Indigenous talent were discovered. After developing our research findings, the findings were shared with interviewees.

Limitations

Due to the small sample size of interviewees and uniqueness of each organization's approach to Indigenous recruitment and retention, the collected data would benefit from additional quantitative data gathering such as questionnaires and surveys to increase the response rate and therefore better validate the responses we received from our select interviewees. Furthermore, we did not examine the needs of urban versus non-urban Indigenous Peoples or regional differences, nor did we delve into the unique experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in the workforce and the strategies required for each Nation (see Appendix II). Finally, the report is meant to provide a framework for a diagnostic tool to be developed that identifies key criteria for inclusive workplaces. It is recognized that the creation and dissemination of such a tool would best be led by Indigenous organizations, with the authors of this report acting in consulting roles.

DISCUSSION

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> Osmosis and hope are not a strategy. People think by osmosis and hope we can achieve change. **There has to be active strategies, active engagements**."
>
> Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO, Indigenous Works

Meaningfully engaging Indigenous Peoples must start with a clearly defined strategy. A recent report of more than 500 medium and large companies surveyed in Canada found only one in four had strategies in place to engage Indigenous communities.[28] Further concerning is that those who do have strategies in place have only ad hoc ones that are limited in scope and often developed internally without Indigenous perspectives.[29] Without a funded strategy that is linked to changing internal policies and procedures, organizations will not change. With this key component in place, organizations can then turn to determining which factors can make their workplaces inclusive and thriving spaces for Indigenous Peoples.

The factors that impact the inclusivity of Indigenous Peoples within an organization are interlinked. Empirical and primary research suggests there are four key indicators that provide insight into whether an organization is inclusive:

1	the number of Indigenous Peoples employed by the organization;
2	the opportunity for Indigenous employees to engage in training and upskilling;
3	the availability of Indigenous cultural competency programs and spaces for cultural practices; and
4	the evidence of champions of Indigenous culture within an organization.

Each of these factors will be examined to attain a greater understanding of how organizations can monitor their inclusivity toward Indigenous Peoples.

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28 Blackman, J. 2017. Researching Indigenous partnerships: An Assessment of Corporate-Indigenous Relations. R.A. Malatest & Associates.
29 Ibid.

The number of Indigenous Peoples employed by the organization

When assessing inclusion in an organization, the number of Indigenous Peoples employed is a common metric as it directly represents an Indigenous person's willingness to work in an environment and/or the influence of other workplace factors such as workplace culture and policies, and practices in recruiting and retaining Indigenous talent. Such a factor is particularly prevalent since many Indigenous candidates do not often see themselves represented in knowledge industries.[30] The prominence of labour-intensive employment for Indigenous candidates can deepen the divide between the skills and education needed to participate in knowledge industries and carries other concerns regarding job security and tokenism.

In a labour-intensive market, Indigenous employees appear to be primary targets for restructuring in times of economic downturn, suggesting their inclusion in an organization may be superficial and not grounded. Following the 2008 recession, approximately 30 percent of Indigenous manufacturing jobs in Canada were lost, a stark contrast to the only eight percent of non-Indigenous jobs lost in the same sector during the same period.[31] It can be inferred through the data that Indigenous

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> *Leadership [in companies] must find common values with the First Nations they intend to work with."*
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> CANDO President Keith Matthew

Peoples will consider their relative job security as an Indigenous person before entering an employment relationship. That said, positions that are less labour-intensive often involve another rubric of consideration for Indigenous candidates.

Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action in 2015, many organizations are focusing on how to improve their respective relationships with Indigenous Peoples, which may include a focus on hiring. As a result, employment quotas can factor into an Indigenous person's willingness to attempt to enter an employment relationship. If an organization ascribes hiring goals toward a specific group, the expectation of what that employee brings to the organization may skew away from the substance of what they are hired to produce. Paul Langdon, the Strategic Initiatives Officer for Ulnooweg, a development group that supports Indigenous businesses, is very alive to this fact:

"Sometimes an Indigenous [worker] becomes the 'expert'. They have to start carrying on their backs the whole Aboriginal culture. I had a [worker] and all the others wanted him to explain Mi'kmaq things, and he couldn't get any work done. Be nice and welcoming, but don't expect this one person to have to educate you about everything Indigenous."[32]

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30 Environmental Careers Council. 2010. Aboriginal recruitment guide.
31 Statistics Canada. 2018. Aboriginal peoples.
32 Langdon. 2019. Pers. comm.

> ## "Without an understanding of truth and Reconciliation towards Indigenous Peoples, matters of recruitment and retention in the workforce will be an uphill battle."

Indigenous Works President and CEO Kelly Lendsay agrees that how Indigenous workers are treated in the workplace is crucial for retention. "We can quantitatively count the number of Indigenous people in a company, but we need to look at the qualitative side: what is the experience of the Indigenous people who are in the workplace?"[33]

Rod Francis, Coordinator for Mi'kmaq Student Services for the South Shore School Board in Nova Scotia, also acknowledges that many organizations are heeding the TRC's Calls to Action to employ more Indigenous Peoples. However, he points out that many organizations are citing the Reconciliation component without really knowing the truth about the intergeneration trauma caused by the Indian residential school system. That Reconciliation is not possible without understanding atrocities Indigenous Peoples faced within those institutions and the post-traumatic experiences that still haunt survivors and their loved ones. "Without an understanding of truth and Reconciliation towards Indigenous Peoples, matters of recruitment and retention in the workforce will be an uphill battle."

If Indigenous Peoples see themselves represented within an organization, they may be more inclined to seek employment with that group, so long as the representation is meaningful and substantive. The number of Indigenous employees in an organization can provide insight into how inclusive that organization is when the impetus for hiring them is investigated thoroughly to understand how they see their contributions within the organization.

Lendsay notes that Indigenous Peoples are also thriving as entrepreneurs, creating employment opportunities for themselves and others. "Indigenous youth should look at positioning themselves to join Indigenous businesses. [This is] an opportunity not to be missed. Non-Indigenous employees also have high engagement and job satisfaction with Indigenous businesses."[34] However, Ng and Gagnon[35] report that the entrepreneurial path is challenging and riddled with "institutional barriers, discrimination, as well as knowledge and skill gaps [among new entrepreneurs] — all of which are crucial to developing a business. Despite the existence of various organizations that provide entrepreneurship support, [a] lack [of] awareness of these services" can be an additional barrier. Lendsay asserts: "We need to think, 'Where can Indigenous investment be an economic driver for all Canadians?'"[36] Thus, it would be advisable for government agencies and Indigenous organizations to continue to provide, and increase awareness of, supports and tools for Indigenous entrepreneurs who will create opportunities to increase the representation of Indigenous talent in their organizations, as well as potential job opportunities for non-Indigenous workers.

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33 Lendsay. 2020. Pers. comm.
34 Lendsay. 2020. Pers. comm.
35 Ng, E.S., and Gagnon, S. 2020.
36 Lendsay. 2020. Pers. comm.

Just as the ability to recruit Indigenous talent is an important indicator of an organization's inclusivity so, too, is the ability to retain that talent. One of the most prominent ways to do so is through the investment in an Indigenous worker's training and education.

The opportunity for Indigenous employees to engage in training and upskilling

A recent Employment Equity Data Report by the federal government found "the Aboriginal workforce has less educational attainment than the national average. Nearly a quarter (22.3 percent) have less than high school graduation, which is twice that of [non-Aboriginals] (10.9 percent). Proportionally more Aboriginal workers hold high school diplomas or an apprenticeship. In contrast, nearly one-third of all other workers hold university degrees — versus 14 percent among the Aboriginal workforce."[37] Mi'kmaq Student Services Coordinator Rod Francis provides some insight into why it is difficult for Indigenous populations to attain higher education:

"Indigenous students in general struggle with the curriculum because it is not designed for them. They come from a rich oral culture and they learn from the land, so the school system is failing them, essentially. When it's time to graduate, they are not ready for post-secondary and mostly they don't want to continue their education."[38]

Francis meets many Indigenous students who want to stay in their community and get jobs available to them but because elementary and secondary education often fails to prepare them for what they would want to do (i.e. trades or working off the land), they are left feeling abandoned. A 2016 Aboriginal Peoples Survey supports this notion. Respondents shared that the biggest barriers to attaining further education and training were "courses not matching needs, the cost, personal and family responsibilities and a lack of personal priority."[39] Moreover, the workforce tends not to recognize other skills developed through non-formal education (e.g. skills developed through work/lived experience).[40] Deputy Minister of Indigenous Services Canada Jean-François Tremblay agrees with the sentiment:

"A problematic factor in recruiting Indigenous workers is that we do not hire workers for their potential but only for their past achievements and experience. If we can look beyond the typical credentials and give people chances based on potential, we would have much more success in recruiting Indigenous workers and good workers in general. In addition, the manner in which we base our 'credentials' for certain jobs are completely colonialized and do not necessarily represent what Indigenous Peoples consider assets or skills. People need to be given chances to succeed.

Indigenous students in general struggle with the curriculum because it is not designed for them. They come from a rich oral culture and they learn from the land, so the school system is failing them, essentially."

37 Employment and Social Development Canada. 2016a. Employment equity data report. Government of Canada.
38 Francis. 2019. Pers. comm.
39 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2018a. Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada: Indigenous labour market outcomes in Canada.
40 Southwick. 2019. Pers. comm.

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> *Indigenous ideology must be a part of Reconciliation moving forward. Creating culturally inclusive workspaces is all of our responsibility in order to have true partnerships."*
>
> Chief Cadmus Delorme, Cowessess First Nation.

"[Another barrier, specifically in the federal government, is that] most Indigenous people are not bilingual in English and French, and this limits their access to certain federal jobs and certainly limits their opportunities for advancement. The Canadian federal government has leadership and mentorship programs in place to attempt to address this issue and offer upskilling to these workers. This obstacle continues to be a huge problem in Indigenous Peoples' recruitment and retention within the federal government."[41]

Given that Indigenous Peoples face various barriers to education,[42] it is crucial that labour market information be used to assist in identifying emerging job opportunities in which skills training could then be customized through both formal education and on-the-job training programs.[43] The federal government has an important role in engaging Indigenous organizations, as well as Indigenous educational institutions, to identify emerging job opportunities and associated education and skills training required to capitalize on them. For example, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada's Innovation Superclusters Initiative is "designed to make Canada a leader in the knowledge-based economy"[44] and "is expected to create more than 50,000 jobs over 10 years."[45] The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat and Ulnooweg Development Group are active members of the Ocean Supercluster.[46] In October 2019, the

41 Tremblay. 2020. Pers. comm.
42 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2018a.
43 Ibid.
44 Fitzpatrick, J. 2019. Building capacity: Ulnooweg unlocks the potential of Indigenous communities. The Chronicle Herald.
45 Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. 2020. Canada's new superclusters. Government of Canada.
46 Canada's Ocean Supercluster. Undated. Canada's Ocean Supercluster Membership.

congress released its Strategic Plan for Indigenous Inclusion in Canada's Ocean Supercluster, which highlights education and training initiatives, skills development strategies and "actionable steps to take to ensure increased Indigenous participation in the Supercluster"[47] and the broader ocean industry. However, it is not as apparent whether Indigenous organizations have been actively engaged in the four other superclusters.[48] A cursory review of the five supercluster websites reveals there are annual membership fees. It is important to note that excessive fees to access business networks may be prohibitive for Indigenous small to medium enterprises, non-profit organizations and educational institutions that might otherwise join to network with industry members. Therefore, it would be advisable for the federal government to create new, accessible venues to forge connections between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations, governments at all levels and educational institutions to meaningfully participate in labour market discussions and use labour market information to identify emerging training and upskilling opportunities for Indigenous employees. In doing so, the risk of Indigenous workers being disproportionately affected by automation, artificial intelligence and robotics can be mitigated.

The willingness of an organization to invest financially in the training and education of its Indigenous employees — and supporting the employees by authorizing the time needed for such training — is just one way to demonstrate a commitment to the development of Indigenous employees. By tracking education and training opportunities in place, it can serve as an acknowledgement that the organization is trying to bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous skills and training. Although such an acknowledgement may suggest a commitment to an inclusive workforce, it does not completely ameliorate one of the leading causes for the education gap, which is a lack of culturally appropriate curriculum and spaces to learn. Whereas the former may be outside the confines of an organization, the ability to create culturally inclusive spaces and programs to teach employees about Indigenous Peoples are not.

The availability of Indigenous cultural competency programs and spaces for cultural practices

Given that there are approximately 1.7 million Indigenous Peoples in Canada — comprised of First Nations, Métis and Inuit representing several Nations, cultures, histories and traditions — there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to learning about Indigenous communities. That said, organizations that commit to engaging in Indigenous cultural competency training are more likely to be exposed to Indigenous Peoples' respective worldviews and experiences of colonialism, which allows for greater opportunity to create shared understanding within the workplace. Such a commitment is not void of constraints. Ulnooweg Officer Paul Langdon recognizes that reaching out to different communities to understand the needs of Indigenous employees and their specific cultural practices is a time-consuming and potentially resource-intensive practice.[49] As a result, organizations need to be practical about how they introduce Indigenous cultures, histories and traditions to their employees.

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47 Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat. 2019. Strategic plan for Indigenous inclusion in Canada's Ocean Supercluster.
48 Lendsay. 2020. Pers. comm.
49 Langdon. 2019. Pers. comm.

> ## "Our people have the warrior spirit of working hard."
>
> Chief Cadmus Delorme of
> Cowessess First Nation

The Firelight Group, a small- to mid-sized Indigenous-owned research, policy and capacity-building consultancy employing Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, provides a foundation of understanding of Indigenous cultures internally through a number of strategies. Chief Operating Officer John Kelly explains that, at the outset, all onboarding employees are asked to take a standard cultural competency course/training offered by the First Nations Health Authority. Management then applies the cultural competency training to the company itself, which may take the form of continuous employee briefings and developing a workplace culture where management prepares for potential issues. All employees have access to employee wellness programs, but the Firelight Group's management aims to be supportive and attuned inside its group of employees to spot issues before they become more difficult to work on. The result is a resource-effective model that encourages employees to challenge their understanding of others, commit to learning more and engage in measures to help prevent cultural ignorance.[50]

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50 Kelly. 2019. Pers. comm.

Ongoing internal conversations and training sessions can help workers understand the perspectives and background of fellow colleagues and the communities they work with. Josée Brun, who is a Development Coordinator for Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services in New Brunswick, puts it more bluntly:

"You cannot assume that all Indigenous Peoples want to smudge or prescribe to traditional practices. Everyone is different and in order to create a culturally inclusive workplace, you must have open and honest discussions with the employees to find out what they need and want to be comfortable and happy at work."[51]

The federal government has implemented several programs to increase Indigenous cultural competency among its employees over the last few years. "In addition to regional branch diversity initiatives, the federal government has developed a 15-hour-per-year program where employees can have information sessions and education on Indigenous cultures in order to create diversity and humility,"[52] says Deputy Minister Tremblay.

In addition to Indigenous cultural competency programs, organizations might also consider providing physical spaces for cultural practices (e.g. smudging) where employees work. The failure to provide such spaces can be met with active confrontation[53] or through a passive discomfort that can lead to alienation. Francis suggests inviting Elders to act as facilitators of discussions about how an environment can be more reflective of Indigenous Peoples and perspectives.[54] If Indigenous employees know their co-workers respect who they are and what informs their worldview, they are more likely to understand how they can contribute to and grow within an organization. The physical manifestation of such understanding can be found in the workspaces dedicated to cultural practices and is perhaps just as important as the substance of any cultural competency programming. Oftentimes the person in charge of such decisions can influence how the entire organization addresses such matters.

The evidence of champions of Indigenous culture within an organization

How the leadership of an organization views and interacts with Indigenous Peoples is often critical to the organization's ability to foster an environment premised on inclusivity. If senior leadership is committed to creating authentic engagement with Indigenous candidates and employees, the likelihood of such an approach cascading to all members of the organization appears to increase. Hence, a key principle to guide the creation of an active and engaged Indigenous labour force appears to be stable and strong leadership dedicated to creating a work environment that acknowledges and celebrates Indigenous cultures, histories and traditions.[55]

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51 Brun. 2019. Pers. comm.
52 Tremblay. 2020. Pers. comm.
53 Ngabo, G. Sept. 22, 2017. Toronto's Indigenous consultant resigns, files human rights complaint. Toronto Star.
54 Francis. 2019. Pers. comm.
55 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2018b. Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada: OECD reviews on local job creation.

> ## ❝
>
> *The manner in which we base our 'credentials' for certain jobs are completely colonized and do not necessarily represent what Indigenous peoples consider assets or skills."*
>
> Jean Francois Tremblay
> -Deputy Minister
> of Indigenous
> Services Canada

Lendsay stresses: "Is inclusion a corporate value? Are there corporate policies and strategies for inclusion? If you have a strategy, the next question is, 'Do you have a budget?' There are high-level, broader strategic activities for a company to do (i.e. policy-making to promote inclusion of Indigenous workers) and tactical things to do (i.e. implementing programs to support Indigenous workers)."[56]

Having senior management subscribe to processes, programs and policies that will allow them to be more culturally competent toward Indigenous Peoples is integral to understanding how Indigenous employees can feel valued at an organization.[57] Engagement with Indigenous Peoples by senior leaders is sometimes seen as a "box to check" when the actual aim is to achieve efficiency and effectiveness within the workplace, but meaningful engagement requires a commitment to Indigenous partnerships and mutual prosperity.[58] John Kelly, Firelight Group COO, supports a group of 35 researchers who understand the importance of incorporating ceremony into daily operations:

"We are circumspect about practices: when we have an organizational moment to pause, we will insert elements of ceremony to reflect, in the same way other places would. It could be through art, nature, an actual ceremony, a way of greeting each other, the clothes we wear or elements of connection with the community that we work with. It's intentional among leadership but also very natural. We insert touchstones of an Indigenous flavour that is noticeable but subtle and not over the top. Someone may have a rough day and can get smudged if they want. It's unmistakable that it's part of our base culture, but it is not what we focus on."[59]

56 Lendsay. 2020. Pers. comm.
57 Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. 2019.
    Business reconciliation in Canada guidebook.
58 Ibid.
59 Kelly. 2019. Pers. comm.

The approach adopted by the Firelight Group is also practical since "98 percent of Canadian companies are small- or medium-sized enterprises [and] often have limited capacity to free staff up to train while also delivering their products or services."[60] That said, for large enterprises, it appears more institutional commitments can be made. For instance, food service contractor Sodexo Canada Ltd., which employs 6,089, created an Indigenous steering committee to strengthen its relationships with Indigenous employees and communities.[61]

The understanding demonstrated by the Firelight Group can also be represented through an understanding of cultural responsibilities, such as the need to participate in cultural ceremonies and traditional pursuits, which would require Indigenous employees to abdicate their work responsibilities for fixed periods.[62] Research highlights "an issue that continually re-emerges in the literature is about the jarring disconnect between workplace policies and Indigenous definitions and obligations toward family."[63] As an example, inclusive workplaces would amend policies to support Indigenous workers to take time to grieve those who are important to them, regardless of the legal relationship between the employee and the deceased. This means incorporating in the workplace Indigenous perspectives on care of family and community. To get a sense of what some of these responsibilities may be, Josée Brun of Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services suggests organizational leadership should reach out to Indigenous Peoples to understand the roles their loved ones play in unifying their community. She recognizes young Indigenous Peoples can provide a wonderful eyeopener for employers looking to understand what it means to balance responsibilities within one's community with the responsibilities of working within a non-Indigenous organization.[64]

Structured programs, organizational policies and visible actions by senior leadership in support of Indigenous employees will often set the tone for the whole company.[65] By communicating a commitment to Indigenous relations to all employees, senior leadership can relieve the burden that may be placed on Indigenous employees to advocate having their cultures and values included within the workspace. Leadership actions such as observing Indigenous ceremony, speaking publicly about the importance of Indigenous relationships and setting clear expectations for Indigenous engagement are integral to understanding how inclusive a work environment is.[66] The presence of such initiatives can demonstrate that an organization is committed to creating an inclusive space for Indigenous Peoples.

> **"You cannot assume that all Indigenous Peoples want to smudge or prescribe to traditional practices … You must have open and honest discussions with the employees to find out what they need and want to be comfortable and happy at work."**
>
> Josée Brun, Development Coordinator, Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services in New Brunswick

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60 Weikle, B. June 26, 2019. 'The priorities have shifted': Nearly half of Canadian firms plan to spend on employee training, satisfaction. CBC.
61 Jermyn, D. March 1, 2019. Canada's best diversity employers build respectful, inclusive workplaces. Globe and Mail.
62 Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. 2012. 6 steps to create an inclusive environment for Aboriginal workers.
63 Ibid.
64 Brun. 2019. Pers. comm.
65 Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. 2019
66 Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government and industry play an important role in removing barriers to Indigenous participation in the future of work. Recommendations that government agencies should increase support and access to Indigenous entrepreneurial resources and tools, as well as facilitate the strategic engagement of Indigenous organizations in emerging labour market discussions, were presented in the previous section. Here, we focus on recommendations for industry. To best monitor and chart the progress of non-Indigenous organizations' inclusivity of Indigenous Peoples, an objective metric should be created that is initially premised on the four key factors outlined in this report:

the number of Indigenous Peoples employed by an organization;

the opportunity for Indigenous employees to engage in training and upskilling;

the availability of Indigenous cultural competency programs and spaces for cultural practices; and

the evidence of champions of Indigenous culture within an organization.

By creating a diagnostic tool that will perform a cultural audit of a workplace, the organizational structures, policies and practices of an organization can be examined to help determine their impact on the inclusion of Indigenous employees. Such a tool is meant to provide a raw score that can be made public to signify how inclusive an organization is of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous worldviews.

Although tools such as the Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR) program of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business and Indigenous Works' Inclusion Continuum exist to provide certifications and recommendations in regard to creating inclusive work environments, the Indigenous inclusion tool proposed in this report is distinguished in the following ways:

1 First, the scores produced will be absolute values for each category, which will be aggregated but not weighed against other organizations within the sample. Objectivity is the key component of the tool, so a score signifying deficiencies in the categories of assessment will not be masked by the distribution of the scores over the sample. Such an assessment is intended to avoid score inflation upon distribution. That is, the score of an organization performing poorly in a specific category will not be skewed to illustrate that it is performing better relative to the worst-performing organizations in the same category.

2   Second, unlike the PAR instrument, the Indigenous inclusion tool does not offer a tiered system of certification. The score produced is meant to be an objective determination akin to a risk rating for Indigenous candidates looking to potentially join an organization.

3   Next, whereas Indigenous Works provides a seven-stage system to help organizations advance towards Indigenous inclusivity, the Indigenous inclusion tool is not meant to be prescriptive. Deputy Minister Tremblay stresses that "it all comes down to communication with communities. The more you can involve Elders, the more success you will have in inclusion measures. Inclusive workplaces are not one size fit all."[67] The tool will not provide recommendations about how an organization is to become more inclusive, as that responsibility is best left to capable organizations such as Indigenous Works to assist organizations in such development.

4   As well, organizations can elect to participate in the assessment and use the tool on a quarterly basis, instead of waiting for certification time periods to lapse. Such an option is intended to have organizations move quickly to amend their practices to attain a higher inclusivity score instead of waiting for assessment intervals.

5   Last, the scores are to be published quarterly and made publicly accessible. A key by-product of the Indigenous inclusion tool is to generate social awareness and reputational pride to motivate organizations to change their practices to be more inclusive, similar to "best places to work" ranking tools. Scores produced through the inclusion tool will arm Indigenous candidates with information about the measures potential employers have taken to ensure Indigenous perspectives are represented.

Although we subscribe to the creation and dissemination of an Indigenous inclusion assessment tool, it is recognized that such an instrument is best further developed and applied by an Indigenous-operated organization. In doing so, Indigenous perspectives and voices will be thoroughly represented in the development of the tool and the possibility of inherent bias entering into the framework of the assessment or its application is less likely. The support and engagement of those who generated this report is offered in the form of research and consultation to assist interested Indigenous organizations in developing a prototype instrument to measure Indigenous inclusion objectively.

Whereas the intent of this report is to assist non-Indigenous organizations in understanding the value associated with the need to monitor specific factors that may increase the recruitment and retention of Indigenous Peoples in the workforce, an Indigenous inclusion assessment tool can serve as a guide to measure those factors and share best practices.

67 Tremblay. 2020. Pers. comm.

INCLUSIVE FUTURES:
INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT IN CANADA'S WORKFORCE

THE CALL

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA CALL TO ACTION #7: "to eliminate educational and employment gaps between **Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians**"

As the **FASTEST GROWING POPULATION** in Canada, Indigenous peoples and their participation in the workforce will have a **positive influence** on the future of work.

GOAL OF REPORT

EXAMINE FACTORS that contribute to the **INCLUSION*** of **Indigenous peoples in the Canadian labour force** and provide a framework to develop a tool for organizations to **measure the inclusivity** of their workplace for Indigenous peoples.

*INCLUSION as an organizational state that is embraced as a cultural norm, with enterprise-wide workplace strategies as well as a culture which invites the full participation of Indigenous peoples into all aspects of business operations.

— INDIGENOUS WORKS

📈 CHALLENGES TO INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT

DISPARITIES IN LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES
limit Indigenous potential today

In 2019, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people was 10.1% versus 5.5% for non-Indigenous people

— STATSCAN

THE SKILLS & EXPERIENCE GAP

22% of the Indigenous workforce have less than high school graduation, which is twice that of non-Indigenous workforce

— 2016 EMPLOYMENT EQUITY DATA REPORT, GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

HISTORIC AND SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION
towards Indigenous peoples

53% of Indigenous people have personally experienced discrimination due to race or ethnicity from time to time if not regularly

— RACE RELATIONS IN CANADA 2019 SURVEY, ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE

BARRIERS FOR INDIGENOUS WORKERS WILL CONTINUE, UNLESS ACTION IS TAKEN

Survey of over 500 Canadian medium and large businesses found that only 1 in 4 companies had a strategy in place to engage Indigenous communities

— R.A. MALATEST & ASSOCIATES LTD, 2017

1.67M people in Canada identify themselves as an Indigenous person

42.5%↑ Indigenous population growth between 2006 and 2016

⚙ METHODOLOGY

MULTI-METHOD APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS
on the current state of Indigenous recruitment and retention practices in the Canadian workforce

LITERATURE REVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES
for Indigenous inclusion in workplaces and tools for assessing inclusive workplaces

INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS
identified as having best practices for inclusion in the workplace

WITHOUT FUNDED STRATEGIES
linked to **changing internal policies and procedures**, organizations will not change

INDIGENOUS EMPLOYEES
appear to be **primary targets during restructuring** in times of economic downturn.

WORKPLACE VALUES AND CULTURE MATTER
Indigenous and non-Indigenous value systems may not always align and this can create a difficult environment to work in

ORGANIZATIONS THAT COMMIT TO ENGAGING
in Indigenous cultural competency training are more likely to be exposed to Indigenous peoples' worldviews and experiences of colonialism, which may lead to more inclusive workplaces

44% – Indigenous population is one of the *youngest*. About <u>44%</u> were under the age of <u>25</u> in 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL & TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS:

DEVELOP INTENTIONAL AND MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS
with Indigenous-led organizations to increase Indigenous participation in labour market discussions

INCREASE SUPPORT AND AWARENESS
of resources and tools for Indigenous entrepreneurs

FOR INDUSTRY: DEVELOP AND USE AN *INDIGENOUS INCLUSION TOOL* TO OBJECTIVELY MEASURE HOW ORGANIZATIONS INCORPORATE THE FOLLOWING KEY FACTORS:

1 **NUMBER OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES EMPLOYED BY THE ORGANIZATION**
– Recruiting and retaining Indigenous talent is an important indicator of an organization's inclusivity

3 **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIGENOUS EMPLOYEES TO ENGAGE IN TRAINING AND UPSKILLING**
– Willingness of an organization to invest in the training and education of Indigenous employees

2 **AVAILABILITY OF INDIGENOUS CULTURAL COMPETENCY PROGRAMS AND SPACES FOR CULTURAL PRACTICES**
– Implementation of Indigenous cultural competency training and providing physical spaces for cultural practices (e.g. smudging)

4 **CHAMPIONS OF INDIGENOUS CULTURE WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION**
– Senior leadership support Indigenous employees by creating structured programs and organizational policies, and taking visible actions

CONCLUSION

"INDIGENOUS IDEOLOGY MUST BE A PART OF RECONCILIATION MOVING FORWARD. [CREATING] CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE WORKSPACES IS ALL [OF] OUR RESPONSIBILITY [IN ORDER TO HAVE] TRUE PARTNERSHIPS."
– CHIEF CADMUS DELORME, COWESSESS FIRST NATION.

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APPENDIX I

As part of our study tours and independent research, our task force had the opportunity to meet and interact with a number of community leaders and organizations. From this, the following individuals and groups have been a valuable source of insight and information for writing this report:

Josée Brun, Prevention Program Development Coordinator, Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services, New Brunswick

Cadmus Delorme, Chief, Cowessess First Nation

Rod Francis, Coordinator, Mi'kmaq Student Services for the South Shore School Board, Nova Scotia

Inda Intiar, Coordinator, Woven Cultures, a non-profit promoting social cohesion and inclusion, Moncton, New Brunswick

John Kelly, Chief Operating Officer, Firelight Group, Vancouver, British Columbia

Paul Langdon, Strategic Initiatives Officer, Ulnooweg

Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO, Indigenous Works

Keith Matthews, President, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers

Gene Ouellette, Indigenous Business Consultant, Iron Buffalo Consulting

David Pratt, Second Vice-Chief, Federated Sovereign Indigenous Nations

Bernard Richard, Child Protective Services, Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services, New Brunswick

Tosh Southwick, Associate Vice President Indigenous Engagement and Reconciliation, Yukon University

Jean-François Tremblay, PhD, Deputy Minister, Indigenous Services Canada

APPENDIX II

Over the course of research and gathering information, the authors found other factors that impact the recruitment and retention of Indigenous Peoples within the Canadian labour force that were outside of the scope of this report. The following represent other areas for future research:

- the unique experiences of First Nations, Métis and Inuit in the workforce and the strategies required for each Nation;

- the needs of urban versus non-urban Indigenous Peoples, and the proximity of Indigenous workers to workplaces and job opportunities;

- regional employment opportunities and challenges for Indigenous Peoples residing in various provinces and territories;

- sectoral (government, academia, industry, non-profit, etc.) employment opportunities and/or barriers for Indigenous Peoples;

- language barriers and accommodations for Indigenous workers; and

- the role and impact of policies that mandate (and/or financial incentives for) greater inclusion/representation of Indigenous workers in an organization.

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