



**NEWS RELEASE
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**Calgary Chamber of Commerce releases major research report connecting
local business with the largest untapped labour force in Alberta**

***Chamber seeks to partner with the Aboriginal communities to improve labour
market outcomes***

(Calgary, AB) – At an Aboriginal Workforce Symposium held today at the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber released a major research report that recognizes the Aboriginal population as the largest untapped labour force in Alberta and proposes actions to work with the community to improve labour market outcomes. Increasing Aboriginal employment rates to similar levels of the non-Aboriginal population may provide 14,000 additional workers for the provincial economy.

“The current economic slowdown will have a substantive short-term impact on labour needs; however, over the long-term demographic changes and economic expansion will continue to drive demand for workers in Alberta,” says Heather Douglas, President & CEO of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. “Aboriginal people, representing a young and growing segment of the population, are a major source of talent to engage.”

In the report *Completing the Circle: Realities, Challenges and Strategies to Improve Aboriginal Labour Market Outcomes in the Calgary Region*, the Chamber lays out a business case for partnership including:

- ***Build a Stable, Local, Skilled and Reliable Workforce*** – For business, the combination of underemployment, a younger than average population, and individuals rooted in the local community make the Aboriginal population an ideal pool of talent for long-term engagement.
- ***Achieve Diversity in the Workforce*** – There are genuine business advantages gained from employing Aboriginal people in the workplace including accessing the growing Aboriginal market, and improving market knowledge of the local consumer base.
- ***Develop a Capacity and Reputation for Corporate Social Responsibility*** – Aboriginal engagement and employment programs gain public and regulator support for projects, alleviating avoidable project delays and cost escalations.
- ***Reduce Support Service Costs to the Aboriginal Community*** – Improving Aboriginal employment outcomes will increase employment income tax revenues and reduce excess government spending on remedial health and social support programs – ultimately reducing the tax burden on all Canadians and businesses in Canada.



Through a literature review, in-depth focus groups and personal interviews engaging a total of 26 key stakeholders including the business and Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal service providers and educational institutions, four priority actions themes were identified:

Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities - Businesses seeking to work with Aboriginal communities need to align their objectives with those of Aboriginal communities. They must first consider the perspectives, interests and culture of the Aboriginal community, and then assess how the business opportunity can align with these values. In an urban context, the focus needs to be on the individual.

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. A single access point is needed to connect Aboriginal people to the services, training, programming and employment opportunities they need to succeed in the workplace.

Workplace Preparation and Support - Cross cultural awareness training is critical to Aboriginal employment success, both for Aboriginal employees and existing workers and managers.

Skills Development and Business Capacity Building - Engaging Aboriginal youth often requires using new media, which means overcoming current tendencies to favour traditional forms of communication. A focus on applied skills, electronic learning and provincial involvement in Aboriginal K-12 education can lead to significant Aboriginal labour force gains.

“Calgary’s business community believes that through partnership and collaboration with the Aboriginal community, we can enhance economic opportunities and quality of life for all,” says Douglas. “Our organization looks forward to doing our part to enhance labour market outcomes for Aboriginal people, and increase the pool of talent for our members.”

The full report is available on the Calgary Chamber of Commerce’s website: calgarychamber.com

Project Support

The Calgary Chamber of Commerce sincerely thanks the Government of Alberta Ministries of Employment and Immigration and Aboriginal Relations for providing funding for this research report. The Chamber would also like to thank the Talent Pool Development Society of Calgary for serving as the fiscal agent for the Chamber. The Talent Pool provides Chamber members and other business with information about employing Aboriginal people as an underutilized labour pool.

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BACKGROUNDER

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Align Business, Government and Aboriginal Priorities

1. It is recommended that the business community support the Government of Alberta's First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Workforce Planning Initiative and seek opportunities to engage Aboriginal communities and the province in partnering to achieve economic and labour market success.
2. It is recommended that Alberta Employment and Immigration and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada coordinate their efforts in working with Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal economic and labour market outcomes through the collaborative *FNMI Workforce Action Plan* initiative and the *New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*.

Single Access Point for Aboriginal Employment Services

3. It is recommended that the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative, Aboriginal employment agencies and other Aboriginal service providers work together to continue to build on their success in coordinating their efforts and resources to strengthen their network linkages and better connect clients to services.
4. It is recommended that business community associations, such as the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, work together with the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative and other service providers to better connect Aboriginal employment programs and services to business needs.
5. It is recommended that all Aboriginal employment postings (including those posted by employers and employment service providers) be consolidated onto a single website (such as the Aboriginal Canada Portal) to create an Aboriginal equivalent of "monster.ca" – a national single access resource for all Aboriginal job seekers and employers seeking to connect with one another.

Workplace Preparation and Support

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



Skills Development and Business Capacity Building

8. It is recommended that government study the Sunchild e-learning program and develop best practices that can then be used to implement e-learning strategies within band school systems.
9. It is recommended that government ensure applied high school upgrading and literacy programs are available as key components of any new Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement program.
10. It is recommended that the Province and Aboriginal communities continue work in collaboration to achieve meaningful gains in Aboriginal K-12 outcomes.
11. It is recommended that Aboriginal entrepreneurs on-reserve work with community leaders interested in enhancing opportunities to develop business-friendly governance and regulatory practices such as competitive rents and streamlined approval processes.
12. It is recommended that businesses seeking economic development opportunities on-reserve, work together with Aboriginal communities and government to adopt an ethos of innovation and flexibility in creating mutually beneficial economic development partnerships.