



Workforce Connex

Summary Report

Ontario

Labrador

Alberta

British Columbia

Nova Scotia

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www.workforceconnex.com



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Introduction/Background

The information provided in this report will summarize highlights and commitments made as a result of six Workforce Connex forums held between April and October 2006. Individual reports for each forum are posted at www.workforceconnex.com.

Workforce Connex is a national forum series designed to increase Aboriginal participation in targeted trades employment and apprenticeship programs.

The concept behind the series came to life in 2005 when Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) undertook a series of roundtables with stakeholders across the country. The principal purpose of the tour was to bring together stakeholders from Aboriginal employment centres (Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders – AHRDAs), the private sector (employers), learning institutions and government to discuss collaborative partnerships in Aboriginal labour force development.

The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC) felt it was important to continue this dialogue and secured financial resources from HRSDC as part of the council's National Trades and Apprenticeship project. Additional money was received from the Alberta Government to fund the Alberta forum.

This project is an innovative and results-driven initiative designed to create, strengthen and leverage partnerships with stakeholders in an effort to collaborate on methods to recruit and retain Aboriginal participation in trades and apprenticeship.

Members of AHRDCC have been actively supporting the AHRDA community to help increase Aboriginal participation in trades employment and apprenticeship programs.

Workforce Connex is the first of many trades and apprenticeship initiatives to link national and regional employers with Aboriginal employment and training recruitment organizations.

The forums have been coordinated by AHRDCC, in conjunction with regional steering committees. Typical representation on the regional committees involves AHRDAs, HRSDC, Service Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, provincial/territorial governments, learning institutions, private sector organizations and sector councils.

Following is a brief summary of the methodologies, commitments, common themes, issues, challenges, participants and participant evaluations that emerged.

Summary of Data

Forum Participants by Category

Date	Location	Employers	Aboriginal Community	Organized Labour	Government	Training Institutions	Total
April 20, 2006	Thunder Bay	11	23	1	3	3	41
April 27, 2006	London	14	32	1	6	4	57
May 10-11, 2006	Vancouver	39	51	1	48	12	151
June 19, 2006	Happy Valley-Goose Bay	19	20		17	8	64
June 28-29, 2006	Membertou	32	33	2	12	14	93
October 18-19, 2006	Red Deer	83	81	3	40	11	214
Totals		198	240	8	126	52	624

The planning of each forum began with the establishment of a regional steering committee, which provided advice and direction on the architecture of each event. The following is a breakdown of the sectors involved.

Regional Steering Committee Representation

Location	Employers	Aboriginal Community	Federal Government	Province/Territory	Training Institutions
Thunder Bay		5	3		
London		5	3		
Vancouver	4	11	9	3	
Happy Valley-Goose Bay	3	4	5	5	2
Membertou	2	3	3	3	1
Red Deer	6	10	4		
Totals	15	38	27	11	3

Forum Synopsis

Each of the forums had their own methodology. The following provides a brief summary of each event:

Ontario

Part 1: Walk in my Shoes/Moccasins: In an effort to better understand each other's challenges, the conversation reversed roles whereby the AHRDAs were asked to walk in the shoes of business and the private sector were asked to walk in the moccasins of AHRDAs.

Part 2: Supply Side: Discussion here helped employers understand the foundation, role and employment challenges of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement holders (AHRDAs) and their clients in the Thunder Bay/London regions.

Part 3: Demand Side: Discussion helped the AHRDA community get to know various employment trends and challenges that business and industry in the Thunder Bay/London areas face.

Part 4: Connections: After both the supply and demand side of the labour market experience was revealed, the conversation focussed on what works, what doesn't work, and how to improve engagement between the supply side providers and the demand side employers in the future.

Part 5: Go Forward Commitments:

Participants built a list of commitments to ensure the value of the day would be captured in ongoing dialogue that would help sustain long-term partnerships.

British Columbia

Part 1: Presentations: A number of presentations were made to provide participants with context for discussion.

Part 2: Sectoral Perspective:

This session allowed participants to discuss the various issues in relation to Aboriginal employment within a single sector.

The four sectors chosen for this discussion were:

- Service.
- Resources.
- Public (and health).
- Construction.

Part 3: Geographical Perspective:

This session allowed participants to discuss issues being experienced within a specific geographical area from a cross-sectoral perspective. The geographic regions discussed were the Central/South Interior, Vancouver Island/Central Coast, Lower Mainland/Sunshine Coast and Northern British Columbia.

Part 4: Go Forward Commitments:

For each of the four geographical regions, participants built a list of commitments to ensure the value of the two-day forum would extend into actions and long-term regional partnerships.

Labrador

Part 1: Presentations: Current Labrador labour market presentations were delivered to provide participants with context for discussions.

Part 2: Panel: A panel of private sector company representatives delivered information and answered questions on the demand side of labour.

Part 3: Demand Side: Discussion helped the AHRDA community better understand the various employment trends and challenges for business and industry in Labrador.

Part 4: Supply Side: Discussion helped employers understand the foundation, role and employment challenges of the AHRDA community and their clients in Labrador.

Part 5: Go Forward Commitments: Participants built a list of commitments to ensure the value of the forum would extend into actions and long-term partnerships.

Nova Scotia

Part 1: Walk in my Shoes/Moccasins: In an effort to better understand each other's challenges, the conversation reversed roles whereby AHRDAs were asked to walk in the shoes of business, and the private sector participants were asked to walk in the moccasins of AHRDAs.

Part 2: Presentation: A session on the importance of partnership was delivered to provide participants with context for their discussions.

Part 3: Supply Side: The discussion helped employers understand the foundation, role and employment challenges of AHRDAs and their clients in Nova Scotia.

Part 4: Keynote: A representative from the National Steering Committee for Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources (BEAHR) project spoke about lessons learned from experiences over the years that could help in human resource development.

Part 5: Demand Side: The discussion helped the AHRDA community get to know various employment trends and challenges that business and industry face in Nova Scotia.

Part 6: Go Forward Commitments: Participants built a list of commitments to ensure the value of the forum would extend into actions and long-term partnerships.

Alberta

The discussion occurred in eight stages:

Part 1: Market Highlights: A presentation on the Alberta labour market was made to provide participants with context for their discussions.

Part 2: Walk in my Shoes/Moccasins: In an effort to better understand each other's challenges, the conversation reversed roles whereby AHRDAs were asked to walk in the shoes of business, and the private sector participants were asked to walk in the moccasins of AHRDAs.

Part 3: Best Practices: Two representatives from private sector companies spoke of their success to recruit and retain an Aboriginal workforce.

Part 4: Networking/Information Fair: Participants were given an opportunity to network and meet individuals from organizations dedicated to connecting demand and supply. The Information Fair hosted several booths (AHRDAs/employers) setup to provide participants with information about the programs, services and needs of each organization.

Part 5: Best Practices Panel: Three presentations were made on successful projects that have been cited as promising practices to increase the number of Aboriginal people participating in the workforce.

Part 6: Demand/Supply Issues

Roundtable: Discussion helped employers (demand side) better understand the foundation, role and employment challenges of the AHRDA community in Alberta. As well, discussions helped the AHRDA community (supply side) get to know various employment trends and challenges that business and industry face in Alberta.

Part 7: Keynote: Three Aboriginal people delivered a life story about how they overcame challenges to build a successful career.

Part 8: Strategies and Commitments: Participants built a list of commitments to ensure the value of the forum would extend into actions and long-term partnerships.

Key Common Themes/Issues/Challenges – Demand and Supply Sides

Each forum provided participants with the opportunity to exchange information and have conversations about the demand and supply side of the labour market for Aboriginal people.

SIDE	COMMON THEMES/ISSUES/CHALLENGES
Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employers lack information and knowledge about:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– how AHRDAs work, whom to contact for job postings. In some cases employers were not aware that AHRDAs existed– how to approach Aboriginal communities or whom to contact– the Aboriginal labour market and how to retain Aboriginal employees.• There is a lack of communication, planning, partnership and networking between employers and AHRDAs. Employers would like AHRDAs to share best practices.• To expose Aboriginal youth to apprenticeship and encourage trades employment, recruitment should be conducted in Aboriginal communities and high schools.• A cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness training program for both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal is needed to help deal with cultural differences and curb stereotypes and racism.• Language and Aboriginal Peoples attitude toward unions cited as a barrier to employment.• Finding the right people and keeping them – retention!• Cultural differences (needs to mesh with work environment).• Need to change attitude/focus on education.• Employers feel they have made people aware of opportunities – Aboriginal people often lack experience for posted opportunities.• Connections need to happen with education (high school, college, etc.)<ul style="list-style-type: none">– mentoring, encouragement– training – trades– job shadowing– work experience

Supply

- AHRDAs lack information and knowledge about:
 - jobs available, location of jobs, whom to contact for job postings
 - the job skills or qualifications required to help with recruitment issues.
- Lack of communication, planning, partnership and networking between employers and AHRDAs. AHRDAs find that employers do not know that they exist, or they are not familiar with their processes. Time is a factor in building partnerships with employers.
- Employers lack commitment and engagement to work with AHRDAs.
- There is no consideration of Aboriginal culture in the recruitment process, the policies and procedures of employers, nor the workplace environment.
- There is a need for cross-cultural sensitivity and awareness training program for both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal and to deal with cultural differences and curb stereotypes and racism.
- Aboriginal workers often do not have the proper qualifications (i.e., education, experience, skills training, pre-employment training or work ethic).
- There is a lack of resource people (i.e., guidance counsellors, mentors, role models), and positive advice for the Aboriginal people.
- Due to a lack of funding or fear of the unknown, transportation and relocation issues are barriers to Aboriginal employment.
- Racism at the worksite is alive.
- Need training in communities (i.e., Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)).
- Companies tend to come to AHRDAs with trades, entry level – very few management jobs.
- Need employers to be honest about needs/possibilities (i.e., the need to relocate low wages).
- Employers need to learn/know more about the AHRDA community: targeted wage subsidies, realize it may not be easy – target certain industries/sectors.

COMMON GO-FORWARD COMMITMENTS

- Exchange business cards right now.
- AHRDAs to share best practices with employers.
- Employers to share information with board members.
- Business participants act as ambassadors and share information with their co-workers.
- Follow-ups should be done between employers, Aboriginal organizations and employees.
- AHRDAs will inform their local chamber of commerce of their existence, and engage or become a member.
- Employers will contact Aboriginal organizations.
- Employers will travel to Aboriginal communities to promote their company and to conduct job opportunity workshops/career information sessions in order to share emerging opportunities.
- AHRDAs will visit employers for a site tour, or to market potential employees.
- A central database/website must be developed to connect the demand and supply side of the labour market. (Note: AHRDCC's national Aboriginal job board can help meet this need - www.inclusionnetwork.ca.)
- Networking and social events will be organized to create regular contact between the demand and supply.
- AHRDAs will work with the unions.
- Youth should be involved, informed and recruited at the high school level.
- The regional organizing committees will convene to drive future action started by the forums.
- Greater utilization of AHRDCC as an information-sharing medium.

COMMON GO-FORWARD COMMITMENTS

- AHRDAs will better prepare clients for the workforce.
- Ensure all recruiters know names/locations/resources of AHRDAs – incorporate this as part of individual performance plans.
- Get to know local businesses and AHRDAs.
- Organize company job fairs and look to AHRDAs and Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP) prior to looking outside borders.
- Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources (BEAHR) will create a one-page document outlining their wage subsidy program for distribution.
- Employers to post job listings on AHRDCC's national Aboriginal job board – Inclusion Network (www.inclusionnetwork.ca).
- Lobby with provincial government to motivate companies to access and utilize workplace readiness tools prior to accessing foreign temporary workers.
- Appoint an Aboriginal champion in the company.
- Connect with organizations and small employers about apprenticeships: boilermakers, carpenters, iron workers, welders, pipe fitters, plumbers (men and women 18+ – English, Math and Science).
- Put pressure on school systems to improve cultural awareness at the early childhood education stage.
- Employers make contact with AHRDAs.

Evaluation Highlights

At the close of each of forum, a brief evaluation was circulated to participants. The following provides highlights of the feedback received:

EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS						
	Ontario		British Columbia	Labrador	Nova Scotia	Alberta
	Thunder Bay	London	Vancouver	Happy Valley - Goose Bay	Membertou	Red Deer
Participant response rate	51 %	52 %	33 %	52 %	57 %	37%
Did the forum meet your expectations?	76 %	79 %	82 %	100 %	98 %	89%
One thing that I liked about the forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief evaluation was circulated to participants at the close of each forum. • Great opportunity to network – a very good way to mingle with businesses, unions, government, educational institutes and AHRDAs. • The methodology was well organized, great facilitation, small work groups is effective. • Wonderful way to have interaction with the participants and inclusive – “we are all equal”. • Having everyone on the same page is very constructive. • Increased contacts with employers. • Information received will improve opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples. • AHRDAs got to see the employers’ side of things. • Discussion – opening up regarding concerns and giving our solutions – real connections. • Conducive environment provided to all players to interact, network and communicate. • Pace was well-done, excellent facilitator, lots of information and commitments. • Understanding the diversity of perspectives (employers). • Being involved in the conference and seeing new faces and who are the proper people to seek help from. 					

<p>One thing that I liked about the forum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well done!! Meaningful positive dialogue and excellent networking event! A good variety and balance of lectures, information sharing and participatory interactive group activities (small/large). • Being able to express “our voice” to industry. • Open dialogue from industry. • Let’s do this annually – check progress – update activity, success and feedback. • These forums are value-packed enough and address such relevant issues that they should be available in every major city more than once a year!
<p>One thing I would change about the forum</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have more employers participate not only businesses but government as well such as the Public Service Commission. • More written material on the AHRDAs. • More gatherings such as these. • Add more time to the forum – maybe stretch it to a second day, if not at least one-half of a day. • More advertisement, marketing and promotion of the forums. • It would have been nice to have a perspective of a young Aboriginal youth in the process of education/training and job seeking. • Bring job hunters to the conference. • AHRDA personnel should be clearly identified so employers can go the them.
<p>General comment from the private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of the employers stated that as the result of participation in the forum, they intended to develop plans to increase their organization’s recruitment and retention of Aboriginal people. As well, employers mentioned that they now have a better understanding of the constraints and implications that Aboriginal people face in their efforts to work with companies and secure employment.
<p>General comment from the AHRDAs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AHRDAs reported that these forums have helped them to better understand the issues and constraints that businesses face in their efforts to recruit and retain Aboriginal people.

Future Plans – Dates and Locations of Next Forums

1. May 30-31, 2007 – Val d’Or, Quebec.
2. May 8-9, 2007 – Saint John, New Brunswick
3. Fall 2007 - Manitoba – tentative – to be announced.
4. Fall 2007 – Saskatchewan – tentative – to be announced.

Next Steps

Each forum had specific tasks to be undertaken by both the supply side and the demand side. Upon completion of each forum, the As Said reports outlined various commitments made by participants and organizations. Follow-up meetings will be held with the regional steering committees to decide next steps.

Some examples of next steps include:

- Thunder Bay
 - Representatives of the unions will sponsor a meeting between the representatives of AHRDAs and unions to exchange information on unions and AHRDA processes.
 - Operating Engineers Training Institute (OETI) of Ontario will host information sessions for the demand and the supply side of the labour market.
- London
 - Shell Canada representative agreed to have a discussion with their headquarters personnel about making revisions to recruitment criteria for Aboriginal people.
- Vancouver
 - Conduct ‘free lunch’ events and bring in employers.
 - Create something similar to the 1-800-AHRDA in Ontario.
- Happy Valley-Goose Bay
 - Iron Ore Company will travel to communities and conduct job opportunity workshops.
 - Silver Spruce Resources will meet with Nunatsiavut Government about possible employment-mineral exploration.
- Nova Scotia
 - Nova Scotia Community College is developing co-op programs with Canadian Tire and Nova Scotia New Car Dealer’s Association and will continue to work with Aboriginal people both on and off reserve.
 - Aboriginal Peoples Training and Employment Commission and Mi’kmaq Employment and Training Secretariat will meet with Dexter Construction.
- Alberta
 - Shell will liaise directly with the 13 AHRDAs in Alberta to implement job posting connections.
 - Safeway will attend a job fair hosted by an AHRDA.
 - The Alberta Workforce Steering Committee (through Bill Campbell, Canada Safeway), will put pressure on school systems to improve cultural awareness at the early childhood education stage.
 - The City of Grande Prairie will create a booklet of career profiles to send to elementary/high schools and AHRDAs.

The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC) is a not-for-profit public-private organization with a mandate to increase Aboriginal participation in Canadian labour markets.

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