

BUILDING SELF-SUFFICIENCY... TOGETHER

Establishing a Saskatchewan First Nations
Economic Development Network



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Saskatchewan First Nations make up an important and growing segment of the Saskatchewan economy, but historically have failed to benefit from the broader provincial prosperity. In order to build the capacity of Saskatchewan First Nations to grow and direct their own economic future, a forum for those involved in First Nations economic development was held in Saskatoon/Treaty Six territory on March 13-14, 2012. The event was a success, with the sold-out event attracting over 100 participants and featuring a number of prominent speakers in the field.

The forum was intended to provide relevant information and networking opportunities for the participants of the event. However it was also organized to gauge support for and gather feedback on the establishment of a Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network, through the use of breakout sessions and a written survey. The results are instructive, with three overarching priorities appearing in order to improve economic development for Saskatchewan First Nations:

- First Nations business must operate at arm's length from First Nations politics.
- Each First Nation should take a "snapshot" of their level and stage of development and develop appropriate strategic plans, land use plans, and comprehensive community-based plans to help achieve their goals and objectives.
- Training and educational opportunities should be developed and offered to suit the specific needs of Saskatchewan First Nations professionals in the economic development fields.

Overall, support for the development of a formal network is high. Based on participant feedback, it is recommended that a Saskatchewan First Nation Economic Development Network (SFNEDN) be established, beginning with the development of terms of reference, a governance structure, and business plan.

The primary roles and responsibilities for the network should be:

- To provide information on best practices, Saskatchewan-specific economic information, and funding opportunities.
- To organize more networking events.
- To provide professional development opportunities and strategic planning assistance.

All of this can and should be done in conjunction with existing networks and associations, such as the Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA), the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO), and the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB).

The establishment of a Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network is not a first step in building self-sufficiency for First Nations communities in this province. It is a culmination of years of activities, education, awareness, disappointments and successes. The very establishment of the Network – a volunteer, member-driven, civil society organization - is a statement on how far First Nations people in Saskatchewan have come in determining their own path towards economic well-being, and is an achievement worth celebrating in and of itself.



Communities represented at the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum.

INTRODUCTION

The following report is the outcome of the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum held in Saskatoon/Treaty Six territory on March 13 and 14, 2012. Organized by representatives of the Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC), Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority (SREDA), Saskatchewan Research Council (SRC), Enterprise Saskatchewan, University of Saskatchewan, Whitecap Dakota First Nation, BRIDG, Saskatoon Tribal Council and Yorkton Tribal Council, the forum was intended to bring together practitioners involved in aboriginal economic development to network, learn, and provide feedback on the potential establishment of a network of Saskatchewan First Nations economic developers. The forum was sold-out, with attendance of over 100 people, and generated sponsorship from AANDC, FNMR, Enterprise Saskatchewan, University of Saskatchewan and BRIDG.

Feedback from the participants, gathered informally as well as through breakout sessions and a survey administered by the working group, was almost wholly positive, and there appears to be strong support for the development of a Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network.

Those involved in First Nations economic development understand that there is no silver bullet or magic solution that will address all of the challenges faced by First Nations communities. But a network of those involved most intimately in aboriginal community, economic, and business development cannot but help facilitate partnerships, disseminate best practices, pool resources, develop leadership, and generally help fulfill the shared objective of building healthy and prosperous aboriginal communities in Saskatchewan.



Saskatoon Mayor Don Atchison addresses the forum participants at the opening reception.

OVERVIEW OF KEY CONCEPTS AND TERMS

To begin, it is worth defining a few of the common terms used in discussions on economic development.

Economic Development is defined as an increase in economic activity in a community or other social unit (Cornell and Jorgensen, 2007). Economic development is not the same as economic growth. Economic growth is an increase in wealth and income. Although economic growth is often the outcome of economic development, development may lead to other kinds of outcomes, or be driven by purposes other than wealth and income, for example to create jobs or enhance autonomy. Three objectives appear to be of particular importance to the economic development efforts of aboriginal communities:

- To provide their citizens with economic opportunities so they can support themselves and live satisfying lives in their home communities.
- To provide aboriginal communities with the means to pursue their own social and cultural objectives, from health care, housing and elder and youth services to the revitalization of language and culture, on their own.
- To support aboriginal governance, empowering nations to implement their own governance designs and carry out central governance functions such as law making and enforcement, management of lands, education and so forth, and reduce dependence on outside funds (Cornell and Jorgensen, 2007, 2-3).

Business Development is a narrower concept than economic development. It refers more specifically to the efforts and supports that may be provided to start or grow a particular business and make it viable, ie. profitable. Business development services might include: business planning, mentorship, financial assistance, board training, provision of information and resource materials, business-related training, and marketing support.

Aboriginal Entrepreneurship is the creation, management and development of new ventures by Aboriginal people for the benefit of Aboriginal people. The organizations thus created can pertain to either the private, public or non-profit sectors. The desired and achieved benefits of venturing can range from the narrow view of economic profit for a single individual to the broad view of multiple economic, social and economic advantages for entire communities. Outcomes and entitlements derived from Aboriginal entrepreneurship may extend to enterprise partners and stakeholders who may be non-aboriginal. Economic Development Corporations are prominent examples of aboriginal entrepreneurship ventures.



Musician Jason Chamakese and Lac La Ronge Indian Band Chief Tammy Cook-Searson.

Experts have identified typical community objectives related to economic development. These objectives include:

1. Increased employment.
2. Increased education, work experience, technology transfer and training, as prerequisites for increased employment.
3. Increased business development, including business start-ups and expansions and additional contracts for community businesses.
4. Increased community government revenues.
5. Improved community infrastructure and other services for the benefit of community members.
6. Increased community member incomes from business and employment.
7. Protecting traditional occupations and the incomes and lifestyles of those that pursue these occupations.
8. The development of positive role models for youth.
9. Protecting the capacity of the environment to sustain economic activity, such as trapping, hunting, and utilization of land for economic purposes.
10. Promoting the health and safety of community members.
11. Maintaining the social cohesion of the community, including limiting income disparities within the community and avoiding issues that may lead to significant conflict within the community.
12. Ensuring the fair benefit from economic activities based on community resources (e.g. the allocation of community-controlled land and resources, the awarding of business contracts or training or education opportunities.)
13. Fair and respectful relations with government and industry.
14. Avoiding the deflating impact of failures.
15. Ensuring economic development is sustainable.

Source: Institute on Governance, *Building Sustainable Communities: Good Practices and Tools for Economic Development* by John Graham and Michael Bassett

Aboriginal Economic Development Officer is, according to CANDO, a person who works in the field of economic development at the community level or for an organization that works for Aboriginal communities.

The title of the occupation is usually Economic Development Officer (EDO), but does change from community to community or organization to organization, along with the actual role or task of the EDO. Often there seems to be as many titles and designations for the occupation as there are job descriptions. There are also variations on the title of EDO.

In many places you will find CEDO (Community Economic Development Officer), BDO (Business Development Officer), CDO (Community Development Officer) and others.

Basically, an Economic Developer is hired to improve the economic situation of the community, to find ways to create jobs, to assist with the establishment of businesses and to help create the environment in which the local economy and the community will flourish. As the title suggests, an EDO is the person responsible for economic development.

OVERVIEW OF

SASKATCHEWAN'S ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Over the past decade, Saskatchewan's economy has been booming. The contributions of First Nations people to this growth are significant. First Nations participate in the local economy in three principle ways – as consumers, earning wages and consuming goods and services; as business owners that make capital investments, employ workers, and purchase and sell goods and services; and collectively, through First Nation governments and other entities that work on their behalf (*BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2005*). The potential to contribute much more exists as First Nations and the provincial and federal governments work to improve educational outcomes and expand on economic opportunities for First Nations people.

It is increasingly recognized that full Aboriginal participation in the provincial economy is the most important challenge, and opportunity, faced by the Saskatchewan government. With estimates that the Saskatchewan population will be as much as 50% aboriginal by 2050 (*Howe, 2006*), efforts must be made now to close income gaps and increase First Nations employment rates. However there is cause for optimism: First Nations are earning more income and generating more spin-off effects for the Saskatchewan economy than ever before.

“...the First Nations segment of the population exhibit many economic strengths that, if effectively promoted and capitalized upon, will ensure the continued prosperity of the province.”

STRENGTHS

Despite an emphasis in media and policy reports on the challenges faced by Aboriginal people, the First Nations segment of the population exhibit many economic strengths that, if effectively promoted and capitalized upon, will ensure the continued prosperity of the province.

The abundant First Nations labour pool has helped to satisfy what would otherwise have been labour shortages, particularly in the resource sectors, which has additionally increased average income levels of First Nations individuals (*TD Economics, 2011*). Over half of Cameco's mining workforce, for example, comes

First Nations Contributions to the Province:

- \$66.5 million in personal income taxes in 2005
- \$15.05 million from SIGA casino profits in 2010
- \$104 million from SIGA profits total in 11 years
- \$767,967.46 in reported Urban Reserve fee-for-service payments in 2011
- An estimated \$1.85 billion in combined First Nations income in 2011

from northern Saskatchewan communities, with the goal over the next five to seven years to fill 67% of their mine workforce from northern labourers. As high commodity prices increase labour wages and boost demand for First Nations labour, First Nations purchasing power and overall market size will increase.

The increase in First Nation employment, as well as successful entrepreneurial ventures, increases overall personal income, which ultimately affects the amount First Nation individuals pay in income tax. This total promises to increase as Saskatchewan's economy strengthens and as First Nations expand their economic participation.

Finally, First Nations generate particularly significant economic spin-offs for local Saskatchewan economies, due to their strong tendency to spend their money locally and through their contributions to the provincial tourism industry. Tourism is labour and income intensive, translating into local jobs and direct revenues. Aboriginal tourism is growing in Saskatchewan, and is becoming a bigger and bigger part of this \$1.5 billion industry (*Sask Tourism, 2009*). In addition to hunting, fishing, visits to historic and cultural sites, and gaming, aboriginal events and

conferences are having an increasingly positive impact on local Saskatchewan economies. For example, FSIN and the Province of Saskatchewan were recently chosen as the host of the North American Indigenous Games in 2014, to be held in Regina. The economic revenue from these games alone for the province is estimated to be \$26-\$35 million (FSIN, 2011).

“ *Economic development produces the resources and opportunities for Aboriginal people to improve their standard of living and socio-economic well-being through business and employment. It is a way for First Nations and people to achieve self-determination.* ”

ABORIGINAL INCOME

A recent report by TD Economics recognizes the growth in the Aboriginal market in Canada (TD Economics, 2011). The report indicates that, in general, the Aboriginal population has benefited greatly from the strong performance by the resource sectors. Because these sectors have done exceedingly well in the Western provinces, the Aboriginal population in that region has had greater opportunities for employment. TD speculates that as long as commodity prices remain favourable, the Aboriginal population will see further income gains due to their likelihood to fill labour shortages at a time when higher-than-average wages are being paid. Furthermore, this access to greater wages for skilled Aboriginal workers provides the economy with a rapidly growing consumer market. As the number of employed Aboriginal people increases, their purchasing power will also grow.

The continued success of Saskatchewan's resource sectors and resulting labour shortages will additionally provide Aboriginal skilled labourers with more access to increased wages. However it must be remembered that First Nations are severely underrepresented in some sectors, including potash. Efforts to address this problem will further contribute to the economic success of First Nation people, the labour needs of the mining industry, and the provincial economy as a whole.

The TD report estimated that the Canadian Aboriginal market – combined income from households, business and governmental sectors - doubled from \$12 billion in 2001 to \$24 billion in 2011. They further anticipate growth to \$32 billion by 2016 (TD Economics, 2011). Extrapolated to the Saskatchewan economy, this translates into a \$2.88 billion Aboriginal market size in 2011, growing to \$3.84 billion by 2016 (or a \$1.85 billion First Nations market size in 2011, growing to \$2.47 billion in 2016).

Overall, the First Nation population contributes significantly to the Saskatchewan economy. First Nations represent a growing and dynamic segment of the labour market, and are increasingly investing in and developing their own businesses. Young Aboriginal people are twice as likely as other Canadian youth to become entrepreneurs. And First Nations entrepreneurship in Saskatchewan and the other western provinces is increasing at a rate of 7% per year.

The overall contribution of First Nations to the province of Saskatchewan's economy is estimated at \$1.85 billion already, and is steadily increasing. The enhanced prosperity of First Nations communities will be a huge factor in the economic and social well-being of the province in the decades to come.



Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum participants network during the coffee break.

SUMMARY OF FORUM

The theme of the inaugural Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum, held March 13-14, 2012 in Saskatoon/Treaty Six territory, was “Building Self-Sufficiency... Together”. The event featured leaders in the fields of economic and business development. Speakers showcased the tools and knowledge they have developed in supporting economic and business growth, short of developing specific businesses. This included training, marketing, promotion, research, and investment attraction. Saskatchewan is fortunate to have many successful First Nations and business development experts to speak about the assistance available for First Nations efforts to develop successful businesses, and the panelists were well received by participants.

The keynote speaker, Wayne Postoak provided the story of his organization’s success, Tribal Design and Construction (TDC) from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. TDC’s story was an inspiring example of how aboriginal corporations can be competitive and prosperous in the national and international marketplace.

WORLD CAFÉ BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Forum attendees were asked to participate in World Café-style breakout sessions to provide feedback on challenges and opportunities facing aboriginal economic development and on the mandate for a Saskatchewan First Nation Economic Development Network. Their responses are reflected under the question headers below.

What are the key challenges you face in promoting economic development?

The major challenges revolved around the theme of lack of preparedness to meet opportunities when they arise. The participants raised insufficient capacities and access to the best practices as two of the key barriers. Limited resources, and equity in particular, was cited as another major obstacle in pursuing economic development opportunities. Some individuals raised the lack of technical expertise as well as pertinent training and educational opportunities as another challenge.

Planning was a theme that emerged from the discussions as well. One participant remarked that there was no long-term planning within her organization, or the ability to do so, and that stable funding commitments would be necessary in order to train, attain, and retain qualified professionals. Also under the banner of long-term planning, the lack of continuity between successive First Nations governments was also cited as a major challenge.

Finally, governance issues were presented as a final obstacle. It was suggested that Chief and Council institute guidelines so that businesses operate without interference from the Band Council.

What are some possible solutions to key challenges faced in promoting economic development?

There was no shortage of solutions or responses to this question. First among them was the idea that the training opportunities must fit the current needs. It was mentioned that distance training could be a feasible option, but these would need to be relevant, accessible, and utilized. Mentorship programming was also proposed.

Community engagement and communication was another theme of this discussion. It was suggested that economic development is currently something that only a handful of disconnected individuals are responsible for and there is an absence of a cohesive network to support much needed discussion. As one participant put it: “we need a community network so that way we can communicate objectives, and define objectives.” The Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum was given as an example of one such engagement initiative.

It was also suggested that new contribution models, developed in collaboration *with* First Nations and *for* First Nations, were one possible solution. And lastly, succession planning that would include adequate training and mentoring, and would allow for the seamless transition from the “old guard” to the new—was identified as something that would be useful.

STRUCTURE AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Source: Structure and Accountability Structure from BRIDG Program (2012)

Where do you need more resources?

What kind of resources?

The resources identified were:

- Access to networking
- Availability of a trained workforce *OR* workforce training
- Initiatives to motivate young people to access pertinent training opportunities
- Advocate for more corporate social responsibility and therefore partnering programs and opportunities for First Nations
- Call for transparent procurement policies from industry when dealing with First Nations

What is currently working well?

Where are you having success?

Despite concerns around lack of preparedness – which was also raised in the responses to other discussion questions – some participants pointed to examples of where preparation had met opportunity to some success. Similarly, the partnerships that were able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of all players and work towards a common goal also enjoyed success.

Those participants that were able to identify and follow the lead of other successful models in First Nations communities in Saskatchewan, and across Canada, also cited that as a promising avenue. One individual said: “even small successes create models to build on.”

Good governance structures, strong and supportive leadership, setting out realistic and attainable goals, and increased transparency were other successful measures mentioned.

Notably, one participant said that he’s “seeing a willingness right now by the current government to build relationships with First Nations people”.

What would you like to see out of this forum? What support/resources would you like from a network of Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Developers?

The formation of a network or other connecting tool was a strong theme in answer to this question. Some participants thought a strong and united group that could represent Saskatchewan First Nations and provide services to its members would be useful. These services could include: approaching businesses to make the case that Saskatchewan First Nations were a solid investment; provide background and direction on developing opportunities; and advisory or support functions such as providing access to models, best practices, training, mentors, contact lists, trends, etc.

Others were in favour of a larger network that would come together frequently and share ideas and best practices.

Those in favour of the latter approach advocated for regular and frequent contact so the members could get to know each other enough to feel comfortable trading information and ideas.

Should the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum continue in one capacity or another, it was suggested that a strategic plan be established to define goals, vision, and mission. It was mentioned that more specific background information would be useful to set up the Forum, and might encourage the participation of those First Nations that were not represented at the inaugural forum.

Where do you see opportunities for First Nations economic and business development?

The following avenues for opportunity were referenced:

- Businesses looking to grow in Saskatchewan; opportunity for joint ventures
- Climbing higher up the economic ladder and accessing larger scale opportunities
- In next decade or two's large number of retirees—so long as proper succession plans are in place, it means more jobs and new opportunities under a new generation
- In making better use of the First Nations lands and resources
- Proper training of our youth will mean they're ready to enter the job market and take advantage of emerging opportunities and markets
- Important to look outside our province and even beyond Canada's borders
- In every sector and industry—essentially all around us



Robert Merasty presents artwork as thanks to Wayne Postoak for his presentation. Postoak donated his \$1500 speaker's fee to the Saskatchewan First Nations Veteran's Association.

Survey Questions

The inaugural Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Forum drew in representation from all levels within the field of economic and business development within the province and other regions. The substantial survey completed by participants at the end of the forum provided an overview of the current business and economic development state of Saskatchewan's First Nations, as well as what they aspire to accomplish as part of their membership within the network.

The survey consisted of five main areas of information that we felt could help provide crucial data to assist the development of this new organization. Participants were asked about:

- Respondent demography including job title, gender, age, and if they resided and were employed on or off reserve
- Information about the First Nation that the respondent represented, including the number employees and percentage who are Aboriginal, population, business ventures, income from various industry sectors, and potential business developments being considered for future
- Community planning level, such as if the First Nation the respondent represented had implemented or developed strategic plans, land use plans, and/or comprehensive community plans
- Perspectives on whether a Saskatchewan First Nation Economic Development Network should be pursued, and if so, the kinds of activities it should undertake
- Training background and future educational and training plans for the respondent

The survey data elicited will be very useful in identifying the shortfalls in the system, and highlighting capacity needs to successfully pursue further economic and business development.



Milt Tootoosis (R) awards grand prize of the Forum participant draw -- an iPad.

The “typical” First Nations Economic Developer:

- Male
- Between 30-49
- Comes from a reserve of between 1000-3000 inhabitants
- Is employed on reserve
- Is interested in professional development training, especially strategic planning and impact benefit agreements
- Is supportive of a Network

Highlights of the Results

In total, the survey elicited 33 responses. The results should not be considered scientifically valid, but they provide a useful snapshot of the opinions and perspectives of people involved intimately in First Nations economic development in Saskatchewan.

Forty percent of the survey participants described their positions as “Economic Development” or “Business Development” practitioners. Fifteen percent of the participants were elected members of Chief and Council, with the remainder encompassing First Nations as well as non-First Nations individuals in sectors including financial, corporations, and educational institutions. Over 50% of respondents came from reserves with a membership of between 1000-3000 people.

The gender split was evident, and the numbers showed that males comprised 60% of participants, with 64% of all (male and female participants) falling in the 30-49 year age category. The survey showed 55% of the respondents were employed on reserve, and of those respondents, 37% also resided on the reserve, which meant they were able to work in their communities.

As First Nations population numbers steadily increase, the need to pursue successful business and economic endeavors is becoming even more crucial to enable and support communities and individuals to become empowered to participate in the current boom in Saskatchewan. Over 75% of the First Nations or communities own or operate various business ventures. The most common source of income for First Nations, at 58%, is derived from Agriculture, which may be from leasing of lands to the membership or more likely to non-First Nations individuals, families or corporations. The second highest ranking income category (45%) came from the retail industry which could include gas stations, confectionaries, stores and hospitality. Tourism, mining, and transportation were also major contributors to First Nations development.

Barriers to economic development:

- Lack of capital
- Political interference
- Lack of continuity in leadership
- Lack of long term planning
- Focus on social issues rather than economic ones

Three areas that are foundations to building successful development are a 1) strategic planning, 2) community comprehensive plan, and 3) land use planning. These three tools are integral to mapping the direction to go forward for First Nations. Having a snapshot of the history of the First Nation, its current situation and the direction the membership wants to go is key to moving forward. In each of the three areas, the results showed less than 50% of First Nations had undertaken comprehensive planning. In reference to Saskatchewan First Nations economic development in the last five year period, the absence of planning strategies (and lack of ongoing monitoring,) may be the reason for the “slow growth” and “stable growth (no growth or decline), which was defined by more than 50% of respondents.

The most frequent obstacles stated in regards to economic development were lack of funding and access to investors. Another barrier that also ranked high as an issue was in the area of politics, ranging from too much political interference, to the impact of the lack of continuity in any economic development process, in regards to turnover with elections and short terms in government. “Most communities still have (to contend with) political persuasion over economic development,” and a solution stated by another respondent was to “remove politics from economic development,” which

means dealing with “resistance to change” in trying to replace the “old ways” of doing business. The lack of clarity and “transparency” and not involving or communicating with community leaders and membership, are other obstacles that must be addressed.

Some First Nations disclosed how they always seemed to be in “election mode” in view of the short two or three year terms, and the energy being focused on short-term election platform promises, without long-term planning and goal setting and attainment. Another concern brought forth in response, was that it seemed that “social and health issues take priority over business and economic development, which is very frustrating.” In some of the discussions it was felt that if the focus changed to creating opportunities for long term meaningful employment, that social and health issues would decrease dramatically.

Role for the Network:

- Provide information on best practices, Saskatchewan-specific information, and funding opportunities.
- Organize more networking events.
- Provide professional development opportunities and strategic planning assistance.

“Detailed research and background checks and balances” were identified as essential measures to enter into joint ventures and partnerships. As well, it was noted that the “right managers with strong financial and management skills,” can investigate and “choose businesses that are sustainable and make a profit.” One suggestion was that the establishment of a corporate business structure in the form of a “limited partnership,” where the “director of [the] corporation runs [the] business without political interference.”

Over 50% of First Nations provided assistance in various forms for the purpose of developing a small business. Methods of support included provision of “letters of support” and assistance with developing business plans; completing loan and grant applications; and “mentoring” in an advisory capacity. A few First Nations have developed “small business grant program(s),” or “member equity programs” that provide monies for startup that can be utilized to leverage additional funds needed to get the businesses going. One respondent stated that from their perspective, in their First Nation such a program was meant to assist the membership, but ultimately “fostered and promoted self-interests, benefitting a few.” In cases such as this, a network can provide an opportunity to discuss and share information with other First Nations in regards to start up assistance programs. Each individual First Nation can then choose criteria to create new and improved programs, suited to the specific needs of its membership.

The question relating to what the vision or mandate of the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network should encompass drew a number of responses, and can be summed by, “working together as a team to grow our [First Nations] economy [in Saskatchewan].” Many responses utilized the term “support”, whether through collaboration for larger projects, mentorship, or mutually beneficial exchanges. A network can and should provide a link of opportunity to showcase successes as well as establish a forum for successful First Nations to share insight on projects or companies that did not succeed. Collaboration and open communication are key in having input through discussions, decisions making and addressing all aspects of successes and failures, and provides an opportunity for ongoing assessment and evaluation for current and future endeavours.

The overwhelming response in regards to moving forward with further developing the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network was very positive, and the general consensus was that it must proceed as it could be a catalyst for progression for the member First Nations. One person expressed that the new network should, “promote and foster the development of partnerships and ownership of business opportunities, based on the spirit and intent of Treaty.”



SFNEDF Working Committee members. From left-right: Melvina Aubichon, Jim Seanson, Brenda Dreaver, Kelly Fiddler, Milt Tootoosis, Robert Merasty, Vern Bachiu, Dale Domres and Heather Exner-Pirot. Missing: Darrell Balkwill, Wendall Head, Bernie Ness.

The kind of “information” identified as the most useful for the network to provide to the membership included “reviewing best practices,” and organizing more “conferences and workshops.” The next most popular responses for information dissemination were “Saskatchewan specific information on Aboriginal economic development,” and information on “funding opportunities.”

In reference to “services” the network could provide, the number one response was, “professional development training opportunities,” followed by a “communication network,” and “strategic planning assistance.”

Of the respondents surveyed, 40% had a university degree and an additional 9% had attained a Masters or PhD. Many had acquired various professional accreditations in the field of economic development or business. In regards to accessing educational opportunities in the next five years, 27% want to obtain a Master in Business Administration, with another 9% who anticipate pursuing further education at the Masters or PhD. levels. Others identified attaining more professional accreditation and training in the fields of Economic Development.

In reference to professional development training (short courses) the participants were responsive to the options put forth in the survey. They were given a number of possible choices and

were instructed to indicate all the optional training that they showed an interest in pursuing. The most popular areas for further training identified were “impact benefit agreements”, “financial management” and “strategic planning”, followed closely by “law/regulations/legislation”, “business development” and training in “economic development”. The majority of the participants were most comfortable with 8 hours (with 1-day or 2-day afternoons) as a time allotment and commitment for professional development short courses or sessions.

Overall, the survey pointed to three priority areas for improving First Nations economic development:

- First Nations business must operate at arm’s length from First Nations politics.
- Each First Nation should take a “snapshot” of their level and stage of development and develop - and implement - as a response appropriate strategic plans, land use plans, and comprehensive community-based planning.
- Training and educational opportunities should be developed and offered to suit the specific needs of Saskatchewan First Nations professionals in the economic development fields.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS AND ACTIVITIES FOR THE NETWORK

- ***Develop a terms of reference for the SFNEDN***

Develop a mandate and vision for the Network and ensure an appropriate and transparent governance structure is put into place to implement the decisions of the membership.

- ***Approach potential members and organize a founding meeting***

Communicate the formation of the Network to a target audience (aboriginal EDOs, relevant Band council members, aboriginal businesspersons, organizations involved in promoting or supporting aboriginal economic development) and organize a founding meeting.

- ***Seek funding to support website development and administration for the SFNEDN***

In addition to seeking external funding, the network should consider using in-kind services from member organizations, and/or hiring an aboriginal student or intern to assist with network administration. A website could be useful as the primary platform for communications, information, and networking.

- ***Focus SFNEDN activities on communications, professional development training and networking.***

According to the results of the survey, these are the areas identified by Forum participants as most useful or desired. They are also achievable within the current structure of the SFNEDN organizational structure.

- ***Build on, rather than compete with, existing networks and forums such as SEDA, CANDO, CCAB and others.***

Many excellent tools, information, strategies, and professional development opportunities related to economic development exist in Saskatchewan and Canada already. Although the Network has an important role to play in communicating opportunities and information specifically for a Saskatchewan First Nations audience, much more can be done by building on

and contributing to the efforts of other organizations instead of focusing on reinventing the wheel.

- ***Specific initiatives that have been suggested for the SFNEDN include:***

- Offer workshops on strategic planning
- Offer SIIT Economic Development Officer training sessions
- Develop a registry of aboriginal business mentors to provide support to aboriginal entrepreneurs
- Promote the BRIDG program
- Develop “snapshots” of each Saskatchewan First Nation to provide baseline data against which to measure future progress and enable comparison of individual Bands’ levels of development.
- Provide separate professional development and networking activities for First Nations and EDOs at different levels and stages of development to ensure instruction is targeted at the appropriate level. At the same time, ensure there are opportunities for collaboration and mentorship between First Nations with high levels of success and those that are beginning their development and business planning.
- Look into possibilities for co-operatives in the aboriginal community, especially for on-reserve and female-led enterprises
- Provide a workshop that looks not only at economic development successes, but also failures, and evaluates the lessons learned from those stories
- Develop a website with EDO tool kits, events calendar, contacts list, etc.
- Develop a quarterly newsletter

CONCLUSIONS

The feedback provided both by the forum survey and the participants themselves are integral in informing the establishment and next steps of the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network. While funding should be sought to support new activities in the areas of communications, professional development and networking events, much can be done using existing resources if members are receptive and engaged, and so finding funding should not preclude the beginning of network activities.

Although much remains to be done in order to achieve the Network's shared objective of healthy, prosperous, First Nations communities in Saskatchewan, the opportunities are great. Saskatchewan is booming and First Nations have never

been in a better position to benefit from and contribute to the provincial economy. Aboriginal and non-aboriginal stakeholders are more and more willing to partner together, and are succeeding in such partnerships.

The establishment of a Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network is not a first step in building self-sufficiency for First Nations communities in this province. It is a culmination of years of activities, education, awareness, disappointments and successes. The very establishment of the Network – a volunteer, member-driven, civil society organization - is a statement on how far First Nations people in Saskatchewan have come in determining their own path towards economic well-being, and is an achievement worth celebrating in and of itself.



Members of the panel on First Nations business development. From left to right: Bob Kayseas, Lee Ahenakew and Steve McLellan, with organizer Milt Tootoosis.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A:

OVERVIEW OF MANDATE AND SERVICES PROVIDED BY OTHER ABORIGINAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

A variety of organizations and associations have been set up in Saskatchewan and Canada to promote economic and business development for aboriginal and non-aboriginal communities and regions. Much can be achieved by understanding their particular objectives and services and building on, rather than competing with, the opportunities they provide.

Economic Developers Association of Canada

<http://www.edac.ca>

EDAC's mission is to enhance the professional competence of Economic Development officers and ensure placement of qualified people in the field of Economic Development; to advance Economic Development as a distinct, recognized, and self-governing profession; and to contribute to Canada's economic well-being.

EDAC has helpfully developed a database of the most common indicators used to measure economic development. These include:

- New businesses opened
- Population growth
- Full-time jobs created
- Workforce
- Inquiries received by the economic developer
- New business investment attracted
- Building permits issued
- Business closures
- Unemployment rate

Saskatchewan Economic Development Association

<http://www.seda.sk.ca>

SEDA was established in 1983 as an association of those engaged in community economic development in Saskatchewan. Its current mandate is to build the capacity of communities to grow and direct the economic future of Saskatchewan.

SEDA provides the following 4 key services:

- Pathfinding, by exploring opportunities to better serve the province and increase business, community and economic capacity by providing a clear roadmap for our joint stakeholders.
- Resource Provision, by providing access to research and best practices as well as online and classroom based learning.
- Program Management, by partnering with the Government of Canada, the Province of Saskatchewan and other stakeholders to coordinate, support and deliver programs to support increased economic capacity.
- Network Weaving, by transferring good practice, disseminating innovation (often innovation in process) and building on the lessons learned from others, including through the delivery of three to four conferences and forums each year.

Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers

<http://www.edo.ca/home>

CANDO (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers), established in 1990, is a federally registered, non-profit society that is Aboriginal controlled, community based, and membership driven. CANDO is directed by a national regionally represented volunteer board of elected EDOs representing each region of Canada.

CANDO's vision is to be the leading authority on Aboriginal community economic development. Its mission is to build capacity which strengthens Aboriginal economies by providing programs and services to economic development officers.

CANDO offers a number of services and programs to its members, including an annual conference and AGM; newsletters; professional certification; publication of the Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development; and a number of online resources. Its objectives are to:

- Build capacity for both the individual engaged in economic development and the community
- Serve and provide services to EDOs and CANDO members
- Be actively supporting community economic development through facilitating, promoting, lobbying and assisting EDOs in their efforts to build strong, vibrant, self-sustaining Aboriginal economies.
- Provide affordable tools for professional development
- Partner for community economic development purposes.
- Conduct research aimed at supporting community economic development venues
- Provide and facilitate educational and training opportunities with a view to capacity building to strengthen Aboriginal economies.

Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB)

<http://www.ccab.com>

CCAB, which was established in 1984, is a national nonprofit organization entirely supported through corporate funding, program and event sponsorships, and membership dues. CCAB helps facilitate sustainable relations between the

Canadian business sector and First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people; conducts relevant research that captures trends, best practices, and areas of opportunity for Aboriginal people and business; and works with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses to encourage economic sustainability, training and skill development, and recognition of Aboriginal business success.

CCAB's programs and services support the Aboriginal business entrepreneur through education (financial support for high school and post-secondary students); business development (mentorship with seasoned professionals); and leadership (recognition of lifetime achievers).

Aboriginal Human Resource Council (AHRC)

<http://www.aboriginalhr.ca/en/home>

The Aboriginal Human Resource Council was formed in 1998 as a national not-for-profit organization. Its mandate is to advance the labour market participation of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and Indigenous Peoples around the world.

To do this, AHRC has created and marketed a wide range of products, services and networks that help Indigenous people advance careers and organizations create inclusive workplaces. Its programs include: the Mastering Aboriginal Inclusion program, which aims to position organizations as employers-of-choice for Aboriginal talent and create prosperity for Aboriginal workers; an online and instructor-led workshop on Aboriginal Procurement Training aimed at helping procurement managers and supply chain specialists better use and develop effective tools and strategies to find and hire Aboriginal businesses; an Aboriginal Guide to creating a fulfilling career path which combines traditional teachings with contemporary career development exercises to help aboriginal youth realize their true career potential; and a national Aboriginal job site that electronically connects employers, educators and job seekers.

Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Network (AAEDN)

The AAEDN was established around 2001. Its terms of reference can be found at

<http://www.apcfn.ca/en/economicdevelopment/termsofreference.asp>

The AAEDN promotes Aboriginal Economic Development through the implementation of initiatives that enhance the capacity and effectiveness of its membership. The Network has allowed economic development officers to have a forum to share knowledge, best practices, do some training together and do some regional-based projects and initiatives. Its four main priorities include: expanding lands and resources; strengthening and expanding aboriginal businesses; developing an educated and skilled workforce; and creating baseline data.

The AAEDN terms of reference describe it as a technical network that supports First Nation, Innu and Inuit economic development officers involved in economic development and the implementation of the AAEBS including but not limited to the following:

- To gather, analyze and disseminate business and development information.
- To share practical knowledge and expertise that promotes economic development best practices.
- To promote and be representative of the interests of First Nation, Innu and Inuit economic development.

- To provide strategic input, advise and make recommendations to the AAEBS Executive Committee regarding the AAEBS.
- To be leaders in promoting the AAEBS.
- To proactively engage and consult with respective business, industry, agencies, service providers, NGO's and governments regarding Aboriginal economic development issues at local, regional and national levels.
- To prioritize, plan and deliver training that enhances the capacity of First Nation, Innu and Inuit economic developers.
- To identify, assess and seek opportunity to facilitate larger economic development projects.
- To explore an economy of scale and be a communication vehicle for Atlantic First Nations, Innu and Inuit communities.

Other Similar Forums

Alberta appears to have an Alberta First Nations Economic Developers Network Association (AFNED), but it has no web presence so it is difficult to ascertain if it is active or not.

British Columbia hosted a BC First Nations Community Economic Development Practitioner's Forum in March 2011, but there does not appear to be a formalized organization or web presence.

APPENDIX B: FORUM AGENDA

SASKATCHEWAN FIRST NATIONS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM: “Building Self-Sufficiency... Together” March 13 & 14, 2012 · Saskatoon Inn, City of Saskatoon, SK - Treaty Six Territory

March 13, 2012

5pm–7pm Welcome Reception – Saskatchewan C, Saskatoon Inn

March 14, 2012

7:30am Registration & Breakfast – Saskatchewan B, Saskatoon Inn

Building Self-Sufficiency Together

9:00am Opening Prayer, Elder Don Pooyak

9:10am Welcome, Senator Harry Cook

9:20am Value of a First Nations Economic Development Network
Treaty Commissioner Honourable Bill McKnight

What’s Being Done to Promote First Nations Economic Development

9:30am Panel on Aboriginal Economic Development
Verona Thibault, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Economic Development Association
Ray Wanuch, Executive Director, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers
Vern Bachiu, Manager, Business Ready Investment Development Gateway Program

10:30am Networking Break

10:45am Aboriginal Economic Success Videos

11:00am Panel on Aboriginal Business Development
Lee Ahenakew, Vice-President, Member Relations, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business
Bob Kayseas, Assistant Professor, University of Regina
Steve McLellan, Chief Executive Officer, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce

Stories of Success

12:00pm Lunch

12:30pm Keynote Address
Keynote Speaker – Wayne Postoak, Chairman, Tribal Design and Construction/Mississippi Band of Choctaw

1:15pm Opportunities for First Nations Economic Development in Saskatchewan
Keith Martell, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, First Nations Bank of Canada

What’s Needed to Move Forward Together

1:45pm World Café – Breakout Sessions to Provide Input into the mandate of a Saskatchewan First Nations
Economic Development Network (*Groups assigned at registration*)

3:00pm Group reports from World Café

3:30pm Individual Surveys

4:00pm Closing Remarks and Next Steps

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANTS

PRIVATE SECTOR/NON-INDIGENOUS

- *Affinity Credit Union*
- *BHP Billiton Canada Inc.*
- *Business Development Bank of Canada*
- *Cameco Corporation*
- *Churchill River Enterprise Region*
- *Freedom 4 U*
- *KS Potash Canada*
- *MNP*
- *Morris Interactive*
- *Mosaic*
- *PwC*
- *SaskPower*
- *SaskTel*
- *W. Brett Wilson Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence*

INDIGENOUS

- *Aboriginal Business Service Network*
- *AC Developments LP*
- *Clarence Campeau Development Fund*
- *FHQ Developments*
- *First Nation Power Authority of Saskatchewan*
- *First Nations Bank of Canada*
- *Flying Dust First Nation*
- *Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations*
- *George Gordon First Nation*
- *Indigenous Leadership Development Institute Inc.*
- *Inowending Exploration and Development Company*
- *Jasper Enterprises Inc.*
- *Kabkewistahaw First Nation*
- *Kanosis Business Development Corp.*
- *Kawacatoose TLE Trust*
- *Kinsitin Saulteaux Business Development Corp.*
- *Kitsaki Management LP*
- *MLCN Investment Management Corp.*
- *MLTC Resource Development LP*
- *Nakoda Developments Corporation*
- *Prince Albert Grand Council*
- *Peace Hills Trust Company*
- *Peter Ballantyne Developments LP*
- *Points Athabasca Contracting*
- *Poundmaker Cree Nation*
- *Red Earth Cree Nation*
- *Saskatchewan First Nation Women's Commission*
- *Saskatoon Tribal Council*
- *Saulteaux Band*
- *SIEF*
- *SIIT*
- *SMEDCO*
- *Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation*
- *Wahpeton Dakota Developments LP*
- *Wanuskewin Heritage Park Authority*
- *Whitecap Dakota Development Corp.*
- *Yellow Quill First Nation*

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SASKATCHEWAN FIRST NATIONS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM WORKING COMMITTEE

