



NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
**FRIENDSHIP  
CENTRES**

*New Federal Framework  
on Aboriginal  
Economic Development*

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National Aboriginal Youth Engagement Session

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March 2, 2009

Ottawa, ON



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## *Executive Summary*

In Budget 2008, the Government of Canada committed to developing a new federal framework for Aboriginal economic development. A new federal framework would provide long-term strategic direction for actions in support of Aboriginal economic development. The Government also committed to work with Aboriginal peoples and other stakeholders in the development of this new framework.

Without a doubt, youth input is critical to the New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development in order to start a basis for sustainability including Canada's largest Aboriginal population – our youth. Economic development opportunities and awareness are crucial for Aboriginal people to fully succeed in Canadian society. As such, the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) was engaged to hold a national Aboriginal youth engagement session.

The national session, held on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009, provided an opportunity to engage Aboriginal youth in discussing their suggestions for a new federal framework for Aboriginal economic development. Through facilitated discussions, Aboriginal youth discussed promising practices in economic development and related programming; highlighted success stories in economic development, and shared programming and business development knowledge. The session ultimately resulted in five youth-identified recommendations:

1. Specific education, training and mentorship opportunities for Aboriginal youth;
2. Increased Government investment in First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultural awareness strategies;
3. Improved support for youth to start, maintain and sustain businesses;
4. Greater commitment to involve youth in the design and ongoing implementation of economic development policy, and;
5. Ensure and facilitate ongoing interaction with youth in the development of the Framework.

The NAFC is hopeful that the outcomes of these discussions will play an integral role in the development of the New Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development to ensure that Aboriginal emerging leaders have the same opportunity as the rest of Canadians to fully participate in, and contribute to, Canadian economy.

In Friendship,

Peter Dinsdale  
Executive Director  
National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)

## *Report on Aboriginal Youth Economic Development Engagement Session*

### *Facilitator's Summary Report*

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Chris Corrigan  
Harvest Moon Consultants, Ltd.

On March 2, 2009 16 First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth from across Canada gathered in Ottawa to consider the federal government's proposed framework for Aboriginal economic development. These youth varied in age from 15 to 30 and were from a variety of sectors and organizations, including national political organizations, economic development organizations, small businesses and schools.

The youth received a presentation from Allan Clarke, Director General, Strategic Policy Branch, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). He outlined the framework that the government is designing to renew their approach to Aboriginal economic development in Canada.

### *Presentation from Allan Clarke*

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Allan Clarke presented an overview of the framework to the youth. Following his presentation several points were raised.

- Interdepartmental communication and ease of access are important issues.
- Consider the recommendations from the Senate report on Sharing Canada's Prosperity: A Hand-up not a Hand-out. It talks about what is needed to level the playing field and not just focus on the Indian Act.
- There is a need to focus on aspects of the Indian Act that restrict participation in the economy.
- Clearly the most important factors in success are developing leadership and community ownership.

## *Diversity exercise*

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The youth moved into an exercise to notice the diversity in the room. The question “*what does economic development mean to you?*” was raised. Participants were asked to approach someone that they did not know and quickly discuss what economic development meant to them, or their organization, and also briefly describe their educational and work experience backgrounds. Key learnings from this process included:

- Cultural backgrounds differ and historical legacies differ from Métis, First Nations and Inuit and within those communities as well; and,
- There is huge diversity in educational and employment backgrounds.
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## *Mind Mapping<sup>1</sup> and Brainstorming*

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Following the diversity exercise, the youth were asked to consider the question of: *What are the emerging issues in Aboriginal economic development as you see them?*

In general, comments focused on the following:

- On mentoring: sharing successes, having a place to go to access expertise and mentorship, supporting self education and self-directed learning.
- Educating teens and youth at the secondary and post-secondary level on economic development and entrepreneurship, to let them know it is possible.
- Would be useful to bring together all of these learning resources and make them clearly accessible to all youth.
- Supporting training in jobs that cannot be outsourced, especially among youth with little formal education. Education is not a ticket to prosperity, rather learning and training is.
- Government needs to move at the speed of business and provide support when it is needed and not delay things while opportunities pass people by.
- INAC has to develop effective and meaningful ways to engage youth in the process of creating policy and explaining the ideas. Communications strategies need to be directed to this huge slice of the demographic. A lot of what was presented to us was impossible to understand.

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1 *Collective mindmapping* is a form of facilitated brainstorming that involves identifying a question, which is posted in the centre of a large writing area. The subsequent responses are recorded on the same writing area, which will result in a visual summary of participant input.

- The framework is very culturally based, but it needs to be sensitive of the differences between First Nations and between First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures. INAC is just learning about Métis communities.
- Access to opportunity has to mean more than just low end wage jobs. Businesses need to continue seeing communities and people as partners and not clients.

Each youth provided thoughts on this question and the results were *mindmapped*. The group worked with these basic ideas and devised four questions to interview each other with for the afternoon, using a tool called the *interview matrix*<sup>2</sup>.

In the afternoon, youth self-organized deeper dialogue on these four identified areas of concern:

1. Education, training and mentorship;
2. The lack of cultural awareness of mainstream society and its effect on economic development for youth;
3. Supporting youth in starting, maintaining and sustaining businesses; and,
4. Involving youth in the design and ongoing implementation of economic development policy.

### *Results of the Interview Matrix*

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The youth used a dialogue process to interview most of their peers on these questions. Small groups then convened around the learning that was in the room and the summaries of these discussions were presented to the whole. A more detailed transcription of the flipcharts from these groups is included in the verbatim notes, Appendix C.

#### **Question #1: Education, training, mentorship: what does it look like?**

- Training should be continuing and consistent across the spectrum of needs. Also it should be progressive to help youth at different stages of business development;
- Processes for accessing education and training should be simplified;
- Recruit genuine mentors who can speak from personal experience. “it’s more genuine if someone is standing there talking to you as an entrepreneur, if they’re speaking from personal experience”;

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2 The *interview matrix* is a facilitation technique that allows each participant to interview other participants on questions that are identified by the participants themselves. This technique ensures that **all** participants are offered the opportunity to provide detailed input and comments.

- Hands on experience: “be able to hear from people who made it and done it in the world – be able to see first-hand is amazing”;
- Access to capital needs to reflect a graduated approach to starting business. Much more emphasis could be put on micro loans, small capital grants and doing more to help youth get started and experiment without incurring a lot of debt in the process;
- “Someone needs to pave the road so that there’s no excuse not to do it”; and,
- Youth friendly tools from Revenue Canada, and basic level resources and training for financial planning and personal and small business management and decision making.

**Question #2: What strategies are necessary to address the lack of cultural awareness and diversity of Aboriginal people in the mainstream in order to create a level playing field for economic development?**

- Government awareness of cultural distinction;
- It is important for government and business partners to be aware of the economic realities of indigenous communities, traditional law, and economic and social realities;
- These are not just about cross-cultural understanding but much more about the realities of working in indigenous communities;
- There is a need for national reconciliation so that we can all take our rightful places in Canadian society. That includes people involved in the fiscal, economic and business sectors, not just government or educators. Reconciliation of questions of rights and title also opens up opportunities for economic development within an indigenous context;
- Aboriginal economic reality still contains a healthy trade a barter system; and,
- Racism has a huge impact on the way in which Aboriginal youth are treated by lenders, partners, and mentors. Overcoming racism will go a long way to actualizing potential.

### Question #3: How can youth best be supported in starting, maintaining and sustaining business and other economic activities?

#### *Starting*

- Simple access to education, training, capital and business development support; and,
- Communication that reaches youth where they are and makes it easy for them to start businesses – easy to use resources, business plan templates, etc.

#### *Maintaining*

- Communication on the changing business environment, easy to access, usable information;
- Connecting funders and partners with updated information and tools that move at the speed of business; and,
- Include tax changes, market shifts, environmental scans, legal information that affects Aboriginal businesses in the information and communications that go to youth in economic development.

#### *Sustaining*

- Moving to the next level once the business is started;
- Capacity resources and financial support for growth and expansion;
- Access to mentors that have done the same; and,
- Leadership and management resources for growing or expanding businesses, or for businesses that are shrinking or changing their focus, in order to keep things sustainable.

#### Question #4: How can youth be involved in design, improvement and on-going implementation of economic development policy?

- Involving families, and supporting the role of families in helping kids overcome the start they get growing up in an Aboriginal community;
- Government needs to be in continual conversation with youth, and not just in consultations like these but out in the communities, to see what it is that youth face and to see where the opportunities and strengths are. This will prevent youth being turned down for support based solely on demographics;
- There must be a way that Aboriginal youth can be in ongoing conversation with banks as well, to let them know about realities and help them shape their products to support young Aboriginal entrepreneurs. Different realities, like the ability to co-sign a loan when you don't have any equity, can be seen in a different light if banks and lending institutions understand the realities of community life;
- Implement a National Youth Economic Development Advisory Council – panel that serves as an advisory capacity – not only economic development – we need youth advisory panels for health, education, housing and everywhere – not just economic development. Understanding that economic development is tied to all of these things and that youth are a growing and important demographic;
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities could also benefit from have youth advising them on procurement opportunities. What if our own governments used resources from land claims settlements and treaties to procure services from Aboriginal youth?;
- Within the partnership initiative, put aside money for youth to collaborate with government of policy development, so you can target initiatives to our specific needs;
- To involve youth, we need infrastructure built on the ground, places where youth can gather, that would incubate businesses, provide learning opportunities and support business development and mentoring; and,
- Involve youth in helping parents raise kids that can be involved in economic development and business.

## *Moving Forward*

Throughout the duration of the one-day session, youth participants were offered the opportunity to share their concerns, challenges and even success stories in regards to their experiences with economic development as an Aboriginal youth. Subsequently, the youth participants identified the following recommendations:

1. Specific education, training and mentorship opportunities for Aboriginal youth;
2. Increased Government investment in First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultural awareness strategies;
3. Improved support for youth to start, maintain and sustain businesses;
4. Greater commitment to involve youth in the design and ongoing implementation of economic development policy, and;
5. Ensure and facilitate ongoing interaction with youth in the development of the Framework.

It is therefore recommended that the Federal Government work to create educational, training and mentorship opportunities for Aboriginal youth, that is developed in a manner that is easily understood and accessible to Canada's Aboriginal Youth. Further, these opportunities should be communicated in a manner that reflects mechanisms in which youth most frequently access information (Internet, schools, Friendship Centres, etc).

There was a distinct sentiment that the Federal Government not only lacked awareness of unique Aboriginal (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) cultures, but also on challenges faced by youth. Consequently, the Federal Government should invest in strategies that not only respect the distinct cultural practices of Aboriginal people, but also the roles that youth play within these societies. Further, the general Canadian public needs to be informed of the true history of Canada's Aboriginal people and Canada's historic relationship with its First Peoples.

Whether through micro-financing, incentives, awards or ongoing assistance – Aboriginal youth require support from the Federal Government to start, maintain and sustain businesses. Oftentimes, roadblocks occur in the process of accessing loans and grants and these government processes need to be streamlined so that Aboriginal youth can move at the speed of business, not the speed of bureaucracy.

Finally, it was heavily stressed that the youth did not want this session to be a “one-time deal”. They suggested such activities as including a youth member on the Aboriginal Economic Development Board, or creating a Youth Advisory Council on Economic Development that would be comprised of youth representatives from Aboriginal organizations, young entrepreneurs and technicians. The youth stressed the importance of ongoing, and meaningful, engagement in the development of the Framework as they will be the ones who will benefit from it for generations to come.

## APPENDIX A: Participant List

<b>Facilitator:</b> Chris Corrigan	<b>NAFC Staff:</b> Peter Dinsdale Executive Director	<b>NAFC Staff:</b> Geraldine King Communications Officer
<b>Youth Participants</b>		
<b>Christopher Sheppard</b> NAFC Youth Executive	<b>Ashlee Cochrane</b> NAFC Aboriginal Youth Council (AYC) President	<b>Jamie Linington</b> NAFC AYC Alberta Representative
<b>Cody Bruno</b> Samson Cree First Nation	<b>Donnie Garrow</b> Youth Intervenor	<b>Guylaine Morin-Cleroux</b> Métis Nation of Ontario
<b>Chelsey Quirk</b> Métis Nation of Ontario	<b>Janine Landry</b> Métis Nation of Ontario Youth Representative	<b>Zach Gilbeau</b> Métis Nation of Ontario Youth Representative
<b>Mike Valentine</b> Congress of Aboriginal Peoples	<b>Kristina Duffy</b> Congress of Aboriginal Peoples Youth Representative	<b>Delilah Crane (Mah)</b> Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO)
<b>Angie Silva</b> Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO)	<b>Brenna Clark (Latimer)</b> National Centre for First Nations Governance (NCFNG)	<b>Anisa White</b> National Centre for First Nations Governance (NCFNG)



## APPENDIX B: *Flip Charts and Notes*

### Flipchart 1: Education

**How can education training and mentorship have the biggest possible impact on youth entering the economy? What does it look like?**

- Continuity
- Education, training, mentorship needs to be consistent (long-term strategies that encompass multi-year agreement);
- Education, training, mentorship needs to be engaging, interesting and direct i.e. guidance, on-going mentorship, etc.;
- Equal access, no emphasis on location or Aboriginal affiliation;
- More standardized and simpler process;
- Experienced mentors ex. Retired entrepreneur;
- Need hands-on experience;
- Access to capital (micro-financing opportunities);
- Have success stories documented and accessible;
- “someone to pave the path, therefore there will be no excuse”;
- Guidance from Elders;
- Youth inspiring youth;
- Youth-driven;
- Early development in life skills, financial budgeting, personal finances; and,
- Updated information on Revenue Canada.

## Flipchart 2: Cultural Awareness

**What strategies are necessary to address the lack of cultural awareness and diversity of Aboriginal people in the mainstream in order to create a level playing field for economic development?**

- Government needs to be more aware of our culture and who we are;
- A suggestion was made that there could be a database that is very accurate regarding our people and our culture
- Enlightening people as to who we are through a multi-faceted approach, through media, targeting all tiers of the education system;
- There needs to be mandatory classes in schools;
- Indigenous legal traditions need to be mandatory;
- National reconciliation strategy.

## Flipchart 3: Resources

**How can youth best be supported in starting, maintaining and sustaining business and other economic activities?**

### *Starting*

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- Easy access to education/training;
- Awareness of opportunities;
- Access to reliable funding;
- Mentorship – on-going support;
- Toolkit targeted to youth – template – proposals/business plan;
- Awareness of economic development initiatives in various communities;
- Improved governance capacity;
- Improved access to capital and investments;
- Sustainable development;
- Leadership training: on-going transfer of knowledge;
- Short/long-term goals/commitments specific to each project.

## *Maintaining*

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- Cultural support system/holistic;
- Awareness of environment;
- Ongoing communication with funder(s);
- Access to updated information/changes;
- Networking/marketing/communication

## *Sustaining*

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- Additional growth support (capacity resources, expand financial support for business expansion);
- Sharing of best practices/success stories with aspiring Aboriginal entrepreneurs.

## **Flipchart 4: Process**

How can youth be involved in design, improvement and on-going implementation of economic development policy.

## *Recommendation*

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“Create the opportunities for the youth and they will come.”

- Parental Involvement
  - ◆ Parents need support to pass on skills to youth;
  - ◆ Teach youth skills when they are young – primary school;
- National Youth Economic Development Advisory Council
  - ◆ And all policy areas, including education, housing, health, etc;
  - ◆ Youth to provide on-going input into policy development and implementation;
  - ◆ Bring organizations together;
  - ◆ Procurement for youth in organizations and governments including federal, provincial, municipal and Aboriginal;

- Mentorship
  - ◆ Recruitment process of professionals and support program (contacts for youth to get guidance, leadership, etc.;
- Partnerships
  - ◆ Between federal and provincial governments (collaboration);
  - ◆ Provide funding (federal government) to local government to provide “know how”;
  - ◆ Proper tools and support of federal and local governments – “infrastructure”;
- Build infrastructure in Aboriginal communities;
- Social economic development;
- Early interventions;
- Have on-going consultations with youth (world revolves, need to keep them updated);
- Awareness





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