

# Hiring and Retaining Indigenous Apprentices: Challenges, Solutions and Opportunities

## Dialogue Summary Report

### Introduction

In partnership with the British Columbia (BC) Industry Training Authority (ITA), North Island College, North Island Employment Foundations Society and the Nanwakolas Council, the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum hosted a regional roundtable on April 12, 2017 in Campbell River, BC.

The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum provided employer insights from its *Hiring and Retaining Aboriginal Apprentices: An Action Plan for Employers*. The Nanwakolas Council outlined its *First Nations Training and Employment Strategy* and Marine Harvest Canada and Western Forest Products shared their experiences engaging First Nation communities and training Indigenous employees.

During small group discussions, participants discussed employer expectations when hiring, recruiting strategies and current barriers and challenges. They offered recommendations based on their experiences. Thirty stakeholders including First Nations, ITA advisors, employers, unions, educators and local employment organizations contributed their perspectives. Examples of participant organizations include North Island College, North Island Employment Foundations Society, the North Vancouver Island Aboriginal Training Society, Nanwakolas Council, Nuu-chah-nulth Employment and Training Program, BC Hydro, FortisBC, Galitzine Construction, River City Plumbing and Heating Ltd., Apple Electric Ltd., Oceanside Industrial Skills Ltd., Construction Maintenance and Allied Workers Union, CLAC, ICBA, IBEW 230, School District 72 and the Progressive Contractor's Association of Canada.

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## Employer Expectations

Participants discussed employer expectations when hiring apprentices. The group agreed employers are seeking candidates who are reliable, physically fit, willing to move and ready-to-work with all the appropriate gear and tools. Candidates should have basic essential, safety and life skills and meet any pre-requisite requirements. BC Hydro, for example, requires Grade 12 English, math and physics. Employers expect that candidates will arrange for childcare and transportation to work. A driver's licence is often a requirement. Work experience and/or completing a pre-employment or pre-apprenticeship program were considered valuable.

Initiative, critical thinking, effective communication skills, being a team player, an eagerness to learn, a willingness to ask questions, dedication, a positive attitude and work ethic were important employee attributes.

## Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment strategies when attracting Indigenous candidates were discussed. Participants agreed youth outreach and building talent from within is as important as external recruiting strategies. BC Hydro talked about the BC Hydro Youth Hire Model as one example of youth outreach. This program is for youth aged 15 to 27. Youth job shadow and then receive a summer placement. They explore their options and learn about pre-requisites and potential career paths within the company in a supportive environment. If youth are interested in creating an action plan, they can do so. Students are tracked on an ongoing basis and there is in-person follow-up. This model has helped engage Indigenous youth and attract future employees to the company.

When recruiting externally, employers attract Indigenous candidates by offering a safe and inclusive workplace, good wages and benefits, quality training and career advancement opportunities. Employers market the geographic location, especially to candidates who want to live in rural or remote communities. They demonstrate how they respect Indigenous culture and care about the environment and sustainability. When individual and corporate values align, top talent is naturally attracted to the organization.

Employers recruit potential apprentices by going to trades classes and universities, advertising on websites, social media, billboards and local radio stations and networking with band offices, Indigenous student unions, school coordinators and Aboriginal Skills Employment and Training Strategy agreement holders. Employers noted you must go where the potential employees are and seek them out. Candidates may not apply online so offer alternatives. One employer brought a mobile training unit to a community and interested individuals applied for positions in the trailer. Participants noted the importance of local community partnerships and tailoring

recruiting strategies. One company branded its communication materials in co-operation with the First Nation.

## Barriers and Challenges

### Skills Gaps

Participants discussed the barriers Indigenous candidates experience:

- Lack of awareness about how to apply for work and connect with employers
- No internet access to apply for jobs online
- Inconsistent work attendance
- Not having a driver's licence and no access to affordable transportation
- Essential skills gaps
- Missing pre-requisites
- Uncertainty about what the work will be like, employer expectations and whether the work environment is inclusive and safe
- Lack of internal motivation and aspiration
- Limited career planning and few opportunities to “try-a-trade,” pursue internships or job shadowing
- No individual action plan with achievable steps
- Cost of textbooks and code books
- Difficulties obtaining required work hours in remote communities
- Few certified Indigenous journeypersons to mentor Indigenous apprentices

### Employer-related Barriers

Participants agreed there are employer-related barriers as well:

- Lack of cultural awareness
- Limited support from senior company leaders for Indigenous initiatives
- Minimal community engagement in advance of major projects
- Not understanding where skills gaps exist when a major project is starting
- Unrealistic project quotas or targets that do not align with demand, interest in the work or employee capacity
- Limited employment opportunities for community members
- Positions offered do not provide a meaningful training experience
- Strategies are not tailored to the needs of small and medium-sized businesses

## Recommendations

Participant recommendations address career awareness, skills development, connecting to employment and building employer cultural competencies.

### Enhance Career Awareness Planning and Trades Exploration Activities for Indigenous Peoples

#### Promote Career Planning and Outreach

- Do more outreach in Grade 9 and clearly explain the educational requirements and career pathways. Students require goals to aspire to and an action plan. They need to also develop personal life goals and self-knowledge.
- Provide videos of journey persons working in their trade. Role models need to share their stories.
- Profile pre-apprentices and apprentices and encourage students by saying “this is what you can achieve”
- Provide historical images of Indigenous peoples working and say “Indigenous peoples helped build BC”
- Map out where Indigenous apprentices are working across the province and feature the variety of employers and opportunities
- Get companies and First Nations groups to work with the schools while students are in a supported environment and help connect youth to employers
- Ensure youth understand the nature of the work and the lifestyle. Not everyone will like the hours in certain trades and the mobility requirements.

#### Offer Trades Exploration Activities

- Offer “try-a-trade” activities, trades discovery programs, job shadowing and “ride along with a crew for a day” opportunities. An employer observed students performed better during the interview after they participated in the ride along and received exposure to the trade. Youth, especially those who are shy, should be encouraged to talk about these career exploration activities and what they felt, saw and experienced. Participants noted the best teachers for the trades discovery programs have direct on-the-job experience.
- Bring the career awareness activities and programs to the community through mobile training units
- Encourage the exploration of various trades

#### Prepare Individuals for Success

- Emphasize the importance of foundational skills and offer pre-employment programs
- Help those in career or life transitions by integrating culture, education, compassion and community into counselling and programming

- Provide scholarships or pay for education and training. Let students know about upcoming funding opportunities so they complete their applications on time.
- Track employment outcomes after high school

### Create Awareness about Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades Careers

- Explain the apprenticeship route and entry requirements at information sessions
- Highlight the various available programs. Trades promoted should align with local employment opportunities.
- Explain the differences between rural versus urban work environments and the different nature of the work
- Create awareness about training opportunities outside Campbell River
- Educate apprentices about the Employment Insurance (EI) process, union membership and employer sponsorship
- Train community members so they can help apprentices complete any paperwork
- Create awareness about the resources on ITA website

### Connect Indigenous Peoples to Employment and Support Quality Training

#### Identify Opportunities and Facilitate the Job Application Process

- Identify employers hiring apprentices by sector and region
- Provide timely information about upcoming training opportunities to parents, educators and community members
- Host job fairs
- Create awareness about how to apply for jobs. Do not expect all candidates will apply online.
- Provide onboarding opportunities at the workplace
- Discuss regional labour market needs and establish committees to discuss potential employment opportunities. When required look outside the region for support.
- Establish an Advisory Committee to maximize employment opportunities among the Comox, Campbell River and Powell River projects. Support communication and networking. Issues of concern could be shared with ITA advisors.
- When one project is ending, help apprentices transition to another project. Recognize transferable skill sets.

#### Support Community-Based Training

- When feasible, support training within the community. Use local facilities and mobile training units to provide training and ensure the units can travel over gravel roads. Engage a local community member who is a tradesperson to teach or provide onsite supports.

- Help Indigenous tradespeople earn their certification so they can mentor
- Engage elders to provide life skills training and integrate Indigenous culture into the training
- Teach apprentices how to manage their finances and personal responsibilities while training
- Consider the community's education structure
- Provide a school bus to transport apprentices to work

### Engage Indigenous Learners and Develop Skills

- Use culturally relevant assessment tools that focus on an individual's strengths
- Address essential skills deficits early and accommodate learners
- Support in-house training and offer supports and mentors
- Offer trades-related math upgrading
- Provide bridging programs
- Offer online courses with the appropriate level of supports
- Partner with local labour or education and training associations
- Build and recognize core competencies when training
- Help apprentices develop effective communication skills
- Engage apprentices by using social media. Encourage discussion by using Twitter and Snapchat rather than email.
- Pay for tools and other costs such as textbooks
- Establish employer networks so apprentices can rotate among employers and learn the full scope of the trade
- Include small businesses in the conversations about training and encourage employers of all sizes to work together to support training opportunities

### Build Employer Cultural Competencies

#### Engage First Nation Communities

- Build relationships with Indigenous communities and ensure employers are connecting with the appropriate individual within the community. Stay connected to local First Nations on an ongoing basis.
- Engage the First Nation early in the process prior to a major project starting, understand the skills gaps and training needs and do not set unrealistic training or employment targets in contracts
- Organize dialogues between First Nations and employers. The ITA could facilitate these sessions. Build trust and have an open dialogue about expectations on both sides. Clearly



outline what the work will be like. Emphasize the team will rely on the individual to do their part. Ensure there is accountability.

- Engage elders and other community influencers as they understand the best practices and approaches for engagement within their own communities
- Build tripartite partnership models with First Nations, employers and educators/trainers and invite First Nations to meetings
- ITA advisors understand the best practices and are well positioned to provide support and advice to companies seeking to engage First Nations. Create a special strategy or guide for small and medium-sized businesses without large HR departments. Associations may offer additional supports to small businesses.

### Respect Indigenous Culture

- Implement an internal diversity strategy including cultural awareness, appreciation and connection
- Have senior leaders provide consistent messages to employees about the importance of Indigenous initiatives
- Emphasize cultural awareness among existing staff and honour and respect Indigenous culture at company events
- Celebrate Indigenous employees by featuring apprentice stories in the company newsletter or calendar
- Recognize the importance of extended family and community. When an elder or community member passes away, recognize employees require time off.

### Demonstrate commitment

- Make employees feel comfortable so any issues or challenges can be discussed. Act sensitively and listen.
- Communicate with employees. Let them know some travel may be required for certain projects, but there will be opportunities to work closer to their communities.
- Track employment outcomes after training is complete and identify areas for improvement
- Be flexible and creative in addressing challenges
- Adapt processes. Have informal interviews and invite families and friends to make potential candidates feel more comfortable. Let individuals try a couple of shifts to see if they like the occupation. Adjust assessments and focus less on tests.
- Offer math and literacy upgrading
- Help employees transition to new positions within the company. Support internal candidates. Promote career progression.
- Overcome isolation by establishing an Indigenous employee network at the company

## Conclusion

At the dialogue, participants learned about best practices and discussed hiring and training Indigenous apprentices. To build awareness and understanding, participants supported career exploration activities for Indigenous peoples and employer cultural competency. Potential apprentices, parents and educators must become more aware of pre-requisites, employer-preferred hiring attributes, essential skills and regional employment opportunities. Participants reflected upon how employers could best approach First Nations communities and engage employees. Participants agreed attracting and retaining Indigenous employees requires a genuine commitment to training, meaningful employment and career advancement. Participants supported ongoing networking opportunities among local employers, unions, colleges, high schools and First Nations in Campbell River. Nurturing these relationships supports employment and success by ensuring employers and Indigenous learners are connected to the appropriate programs, resources and networking opportunities.