

# WORKFORCE FORWARD

INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT  
AND INCLUSION

CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION



Janet Lane and Sarah Pittman  
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We would also like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their hard work and dedication in putting together the *Workforce Forward* conference and reviewing this report.

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### IN ASSOCIATION WITH

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*CPHR Alberta*

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Indigenous Workforce

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Partner, Labour &

Employment | Aboriginal

*MLT Aikins*

**Raylene Whitford**

Director

*Canative Energy*

This report documents what we heard at *Workforce Forward* – an Indigenous-led conference dedicated to advancing Indigenous employment and inclusion.

*Workforce Forward* was held in Calgary on October 16, 2019.

This report was prepared by Janet Lane and Sarah Pittman of the Canada West Foundation.



**Rod Miller**

The Indigenous sector is Canada's fastest-growing labour pool, and understanding how to engage with this group has direct implications for your business. Indigenous inclusion is key to creating and maintaining healthy, productive workplaces, and HR professionals are vital to the success and delivery of an organization's Indigenous inclusion strategy. As the leader of Alberta's professional HR Association, I was proud and excited when I was asked to Chair the Workforce Forward conference. The conference provided training and insights to Alberta's HR professionals and amplifies the message of Indigenous reconciliation and inclusion in a safe space of learning and growth. As a community, it's our responsibility to ensure that we are well-educated and can make valuable decisions to strengthen our organizations and workforce. Make no mistake, an inclusive workforce is not only the right thing to do, it's essential.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report includes Calls to Action for the business community, including ensuring that Indigenous peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities. We know there is a gap between the acknowledgment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and implementation, as only 11% of organizations include reconciliation as part of their diversity and inclusion strategy. I am confident that knowledge and training can change that. This CPHR Alberta-accredited program aligns

with our mission to protect the public by focusing on continuing education, the CPHR competency framework, and ethical standards of practice to prepare the HR and business community for success and economic reconciliation. I hope this report provides you with insights into how you can develop an Indigenous inclusion strategy now, improve your existing one, or bring new knowledge to your organization.

We offer this report for any professional interested in the path to reconciliation by exploring Indigenous workforce strategies within their organization. The information included is shared through the experiences of Indigenous inclusion experts and the feedback from HR professionals involved in the conference sessions. Although there are many valuable takeaways, the true value of Workforce Forward is about building relationships and engaging openly with Indigenous culture.

Thank you to Connect Partnership Group for organizing the conference and this report, our partners and supporters for getting involved, and the speakers and Leadership Council for sharing their knowledge with attendees and readers.

Sincerely,

**Rod Miller**

Chairman, *Workforce Forward*  
President & CEO, CPHR Alberta



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# INTRODUCTION

Workforce Forward: Indigenous Employment and Inclusion follows the successful Forward Summit Conference in Calgary in early 2019. That event provided three days of information and networking about the importance of, and ways to begin, economic reconciliation for Indigenous people. Read our report from this conference at <https://cwf.ca/research/publications/report-forward-together-key-learnings-from-forward-summit-on-empowering-indigenous-economies/>.

Workforce Forward, held October 16, 2019, was organized by the Connect Group in association with Chartered Professionals in Human Resources (CPHR) Alberta. Attendance at the conference earned professional development credits for CPHR members.

This report is an attempt to bring the comments made by the panelists and presenters in each session into a cohesive whole. The report is not a transcription of exactly what was said, but rather a pulling together of what the authors heard and took away from the sessions. We have not attributed comments or quotes. The report is organized by individual session, and a list of key takeaways is offered as a conclusion.

Most of the 26 panelists and presenters at Workforce Forward were Indigenous people, who brought their

lived experience and insights gained from their work in Indigenous communities and in other settings to the conference participants. The 250 participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, came from across Canada, with a few from the U.S.

A pre-conference session – the Kairos Blanket Exercise – was held on the afternoon of October 15.

## **Kairos Blanket Exercise: Reconciliation through Education and Understanding**

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise program is a unique, participatory history lesson – developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and educators – that fosters truth, understanding, respect and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. ([kairosblanketexercise.org](http://kairosblanketexercise.org))

Even for people who have already learned some of the history of Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, this exercise offers an opportunity to bring the lived experience of Indigenous peoples to life and to feel, for a moment and in a small way, the impact of this history.

As one participant put it, "I thought of my kids .... I can't unlearn this."

*Workforce Forward*

# SESSIONS

*Panels and roundtables*



## PANEL SESSION 01

### Indigenous Peoples in Canada and the Future of Work

#### Participants

Charmaine McCraw, Deborah Green, Max Skudra, Heather Lastiwka, Raylene Whitford, and Christine Channer Auguste (*Moderator*)

#### Digitalization will change jobs – can it be used to do work differently with Indigenous people – or will it be a barrier?

Technological connectivity creates many opportunities for people to live and work where they want. However, these opportunities should not be taken for granted as not everyone is connected to the internet. Digitalization of jobs will provide opportunity for employment in Indigenous communities, but only if access to broadband wireless, and the necessary hardware, is improved.

While many rural and remote Indigenous communities have access to internet, it is not sufficient to conduct business. For example, of 60 communities one panelist visited in the last couple of years, close to 80 per cent do not have high enough internet speed to download files or stream videos. And even cell phone coverage is problematic – for example there is no cell phone reception 90 minutes outside Thunder Bay, Ont. This means, among other things, that some of the best hands-on training that is done using simple tools like You Tube videos or more sophisticated tools like virtual reality technologies do not work in communities which could benefit from it.

Corporations partnering with Indigenous businesses to bring infrastructure and technology to communities will enable success. The tools to make it happen exist – higher poles for transmission lines, drones and balloons with Wi-Fi hot spots for example.

Technology is changing the way all of us communicate – we talk less face-to face and more through technology. This can be of benefit to people who live in rural and remote communities – but only if the necessary access is available.



“If we don’t make a focused effort to build infrastructure and ensure companies develop partnerships with other companies in rural and remote areas – the ones that aren’t next door – we will see opportunities skew towards cities, and reduced opportunities for people in remote areas.”

**The future of work is often referred to as 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution – how are Indigenous people poised to be part of this?**

There is a lot of talk about the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, but some of the new jobs that will be created during this period are difficult to comprehend; it is also hard to know what kind of jobs these will be, and to see ourselves working in them. Some Indigenous communities may not know what the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution is or what it means for them.

Robotics, 3D printing, AI and other technologies bring opportunities for a diversified economic future. It is important to communicate what these jobs are and what the work entails. For that communication to be effective, the systemic and connectivity barriers communities face must first be removed.

The work of the future offers opportunity for Indigenous peoples:

“The future of work is the rise of the human. We focus a lot on the tech aspect, but the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution is about our human qualities – empathy, integrity, creativity, ethics etc., the pieces that make us uniquely human – while leveraging the technology. ...

*“The rest of us can learn from Indigenous practices. They are going to make us successful in the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution. It’s going to be a fantastic leadership opportunity, which the rest of us will have to create space for.”*

*“Our economic future depends on diversification and entrepreneurship.”*

*“The 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution is the ‘human era.’ My interconnectedness with everything living is central to me, so the humanist piece of it [the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution] really resonates with me.”*

*“Where I see the most relevant space is applying technology to issues that Indigenous people face, and who better to do this than Indigenous people? ... There are a lot of hurdles facing Indigenous people. The applications of these technologies provide a way to address these hurdles.”*

**What type of skills training works?**

Most training in Alberta has been for employment in the oil and gas sector in technical jobs. There are many other opportunities within oil and gas, such as human resources, finance, travel, and others. However, the oil and gas sector is changing, and different sectors are growing. People who already have skills and experience will be able to transfer to other industries. Now is a good time to offer training in other sectors including hospitality, finance, human resources, service and especially information technology. When content can be found at the click of a button, training curricula can become stale quickly. The training needs to be fresh and reflect new realities.

There are good companies willing to partner with Indigenous communities and employment organizations to offer training which will get youth directly into employment. Having good relationships with the community is key for companies to build partnerships. For example, Elders have a lot of knowledge and wisdom, and they know what the community needs. Invest time with them, pay them for their time, sit with them and find out what they think their community needs. As one panelist said, “If you’re looking for actual human development, the Elders will put you in the right direction.”

Another example of the importance of community comes from the need to heal the traumas of the past. Employment training programs cannot be successful without ensuring participants are in a place of balance, which includes healing.

One panelist recruited 50 people into training. Program success and job readiness linked directly to strong partnerships and collaboration for the trainees through their community. Of the 50, 48 finished the program and 47 were hired into jobs. They were set up for success, not failure.

“Suncor is on a new journey, the 4.0 journey, which is all about people. It’s not all about the degree you have, or what your grade average was, but the lived experience and skills and cultural value you can bring to the organization.”

It is also important to tie the training directly to jobs so that youth know that there will be work in their community at the end of the program, or that their certification is transferable to jobs elsewhere. However, not all youth in a community will have the interest in, aptitude for, or readiness for working in jobs that are being created in their community. Testing for aptitude before placement will reduce the likelihood of failure.

*“I’m really excited about seeing Indigenous youth in the technology space. Alberta is such a petro-centric society. I’m worried that we’ve been training youth to join the oil and gas sector, but there are a lot of different opportunities out there. If Indigenous youth don’t want to work in oil and gas, they don’t have to.”*

“Indigenous youth in urban centres are gaining skills through training and experience and then going back to their community and bringing skills with them.”

## What is the best way to attract Indigenous talent?

For recruiters who want to recruit for jobs in rural and remote areas, going directly to community is the way to start. This can be difficult – but that is the way to get the conversations going. Once trust is established with the community, working with community members to validate candidates’ skills is a great way to reference check.

“What it would take for me to join a company? Relationships! If I knew and admired Indigenous people already working inside a company, that would attract me.”

Other ideas:

- Think about starting earlier – begin building relationships before you “need” something
- Develop long-term relationships
- Offer internships, mentorships, and more connections
- Develop youth programs in schools to bring youth in from an early age
- Have Indigenous people who work in your company be role models

Recruiting talent into larger urban companies takes a full court press. People in HR need to network with other departments to bring different parts of the company together to work on recruiting. The strategy and plan should come from the top. Leadership needs to be clear, vocal, and public about attracting Indigenous talent. The goal is to help people see themselves working for your company.

And like all younger people, Indigenous youth may not stay long in their jobs. They are looking to develop many skills and then, in some cases, take those skills back into their community to become entrepreneurs and potentially to provide procurement opportunities.



## **What can we expect from the ways work will be changing and how will that affect Indigenous people?**

One panelist said that we have been talking about the future of work for about 15 years and it is already here. It is shaped by the work, the workplace, the workforce and leadership.

The market will be for freelance contracting many smaller pieces of work, not necessarily whole jobs or working for one company. Contractors will be able to bid on work that lines up with their values. There is an opportunity to grow in work an individual is interested in, instead of being boxed into a job. This will be good for Indigenous people, who are innately entrepreneurs.

ATB has organized a job board where contract work is posted. People who are interested and have the skills and attributes to do the work can bid on it. These pieces of work become development opportunities – a way to gain skills.

The future of work will allow for entrepreneurship. Not having credentials is becoming less of a problem. People can be hired into jobs based on their values and skills. The trend is for opportunities to come from an individual's networks; more connections will mean more opportunities.

### ***What occupations and professions do Indigenous people tend to pursue in corporations?***

Indigenous businesses are overrepresented in construction and underrepresented in the science and technology fields. But there is increasing need for technology in construction and forestry where Indigenous people have traditionally worked. And there is generally a growing shortage of people in IT, cybersecurity for example, where Indigenous people may be able to find work.

“Don’t be afraid to be first – to drive a lot of change. My ancestors stand behind me – and they did a lot – they came first, struggled and survived. I need to pave way for future generations.”

## ***Recruiting barriers***

Companies need to look at how they are connecting with people in communities and how they communicate the opportunities. If corporate leaders come and go, and there is no consistency in who is doing the communicating, there is not a lot of trust built.

Large organizations are barriers themselves, as are siloed departments. Corporations need a large overall Indigenous hiring strategy and smaller plans that work through all departments. Just posting a job and hoping that an Indigenous person will make it through the screening of the resumes will not work. There needs to be an intention to offer what Indigenous people are looking for.

“Indigenous youth tend to take jobs that are close to home – because home means everything to them.”

Organizations are often afraid of making mistakes, so they do nothing. They should hire leaders who have learned and who understand how things need to be different when working with Indigenous talent. For instance, interviews need to shift to include storytelling.

The elephant in the room is racism. Systemic racism is everywhere, and it is exhausting. It is up to all of us to correct people when they say racist things.

### How do we encourage applicants to bring lived experience to recruiting and work?

It is vital to have dedicated roles and resources within the hiring process that focus on Indigenous recruitment. Throw out the one-size-fits-all recruitment model, and be flexible to adapt hiring processes for Indigenous Peoples.

Even if they have never had a job, Indigenous people have skills that they bring to the table. Letting candidates know before an interview to bring stories of their experience to the discussion and to talk about how they work will help the interviewer determine their skills and be empowering to the individual. An Indigenous candidate's cultural background and stories may matter as much as technical skills on the job. Even if a candidate does not have all the technical skills, they may be the right person for the job if given some training.

Making the interview space comfortable, not too sterile, and relaxing the dress code for the interview will help put Indigenous candidates at ease.

“Make your company a safe place to be hired into. Think about your reputation, what are you doing, your stakeholder relations. People don't want to make themselves vulnerable and work with you if it's not a safe place.”

### Should employers have a different strategy with rural communities?

Different engagement strategies are needed in all three settings – urban, rural and remote. The only way to know what is needed is to be in the community, to talk to the people, and to learn what is going on and what it will take to succeed. Working with Indigenous businesses can be lucrative for everyone if the local community, employers and individuals work together.

In rural and remote – fly-in – communities, the biggest problem is getting to the city for training. The answer is to take the training to them.

Each community will have its own training plans. Training providers must be thoughtful about what is needed in each community.

## PANEL SESSION 02

### Creating Pathways to Employment

#### Participants

Alex Cook, Kirsten Ryder, Winona Lafreniere, Ken Kachmar, Krystal Abotossaway, Robert St. Denis, and Richard Lemaire (Moderator)

#### Creating Pathways to Employment for Indigenous Peoples

The members of the panel all have experience with creating a wide variety of pathways for Indigenous people in their organization. Pathways can be as broad as the development and execution of a strategic guide with the specific purpose of hiring more Indigenous people. The creation of internships and co-ops for Indigenous people is a great step into the door of a company. Offering training programs within reserve communities is another way to create pathways; for example, a camp cook program for a northern job site.

One panelist talked about a “speed dating” technique in which young Indigenous professionals/students met with a wide variety of potential employers looking to hire Indigenous people in the region.

Develop full cycle, long-term training to employment programs where partnerships are key, and include companies, the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET), educational institutes, and federal and provincial governments.



## Barriers for Indigenous Peoples Seeking Employment

The panel listed several barriers that Indigenous people often face when seeking employment, and they mainly fall into two broad categories: systemic problems or lack of specific required technical training.

The system of finding and hiring employees is itself a barrier, as it is a western, colonial system. If there is an Indigenous person within the system – for example, an Indigenous person who works in Human Resources – that can be a way to get over the barrier, but if not, it can be very challenging. Part of the challenge of “the system” and colonial history in Canada is the poverty experienced by many Indigenous people; it is also a barrier in seeking employment. Another barrier for those who live on reserves is leaving the reserve to work and live in an urban centre that has a much different lifestyle and value system than the Indigenous person may be used to; this can be very isolating. Additionally, there is an overall bias that Indigenous people can face from non-Indigenous people in the process of seeking employment.

Indigenous people may be lacking formal, western education – one example given was that fewer than 1 per cent of people in Nunavut have a post-secondary education. This can be a barrier when a certain level of education or credential is required for a job.

Another barrier is a lack of drivers’ licences or the means of transportation to a job site; this is compounded for those who live in remote communities, where transportation options are limited.

## Creating Lasting Partnerships

The panelists had several ideas on how to create lasting partnerships, focusing on who industry partners should be and how to best ensure the longevity of a true partnership.

For companies looking to partner with an Indigenous organization, partnering with any entity on a reserve is likely a good bet. One panelist has found that a good indication of whether an industry partner is the right organization is if they have a land

acknowledgement in the letter sent to a community looking to establish a formal partnership.

In maintaining lasting partnerships, panelists gave advice for how non-Indigenous organizations should conduct themselves. Finding out what the protocol is for a specific Indigenous community is key. Approaching the relationship from the heart and being your genuine self are both critical in building the relationship. When you want to ask your Indigenous partner organization for something, follow the 3:1 ratio: give three things before asking for one thing.

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## ROUNDTABLE SESSION 01

### Strategic Workforce Planning and Career Development

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In this session, two panelists discussed their work with Indigenous students at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)

Indigenous students already experience a lot of barriers before they arrive in cities from their communities and begin programs that they may not think they deserve to be in. The panelist lets her students know that they belong on campus and that she believes in them.

But that is not always easy, because many Indigenous students isolate themselves and do not come for help if they are unhappy or not doing well. Indigenous students can feel that they do not belong, that people are looking at them and judging them – not realizing that this is an experience common to everyone.

While getting into SAIT can be tough and it is hard for anyone to adjust, it is much harder for Indigenous students. Post-secondary institutions need to offer many types of student resources – and advertise them – so that students know that there are supports to help them cope. SAIT has resources to pay the application fees for Indigenous students and has many different funding options so that students can succeed. On campus, Chinook Lodge resource centre also provides support in comfortable, friendly space.

“There is a common assumption that all Indigenous people have their education paid for, but that is not true.”

It is also stressful for Indigenous students when they get close to finishing their program and have to start thinking about getting a job, so SAIT offers help with preparation for jobs and holds mock interviews.

SAIT works with Indigenous people in the prison system to let them know that it is possible to get an education and find a job. No one at SAIT asks you if you have a criminal record. The panelist advises applicants to disclose a criminal record during a job interview and tell their story. In many cases, a record does not preclude getting a job.

When starting to work with Indigenous youth, the panelist advises people to break down barriers by asking questions. She says, “If we don’t ask questions we’re going to assume – which is the wrong thing to do. And when we get explanations, that encourages us to ask more questions.”

“Remember, not all Indigenous people are the expert on all things Indigenous.”

Another SAIT presenter who works in Indigenous communities to identify learning needs, starts by saying she is “sorry for her ignorance.” She has found that this willingness to be a learner herself opens a lot of doors. While some doors take time to open, relationships are the key to building trust and getting to hear from the Chief and Council and the ISET manager in the community. (The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training [ISET] Program is designed to help Indigenous people improve their skills and find employment. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-skills-employment-training.html>)

Youth in Indigenous communities often only know about the kinds of jobs they have seen. The panelist goes into junior high and high schools in communities with “career crates” – materials that provide information about what is involved in different kinds of work. These career crates open student’s eyes to careers that may be available, besides paramedic, social worker, and police officer.

The conversations she has in communities are about how the people do not want to be left behind again. They believe the digital revolution can enable youth to stay in community, if internet connectivity is available.

SAIT helps communities build their workforce by looking at roles that will fit into the community and its culture. People often assume that all Indigenous people have to start at the bottom and work their way up. But that is not true. Some already have education and skills and are ready for higher level jobs and leadership opportunities.

Many communities have only had access to lacklustre education which does not give enough of a background for youth to transition to post-secondary. SAIT works with employers who are interested in engaging with the community and want to have a long-term employment strategy with the nation. They assess the interest from employers and the community to see what education and upgrading needs to be done. SAIT has found that traditional long days in a classroom are not what people want, so they try to create more engaging training, starting later, and with hands-on experience for part of the day. This hands-on experience makes it easier for students to decide earlier if the program is not for them.

SAIT tries to ensure that students can relate to the learning and incorporate the community into it. One successful program is about environment and reclamation, which is a natural fit in the Indigenous world.

ISET funding is available, but corporations need to put money into little things that will help students be successful. One example is to sponsor a bus so people can get to class.



SAIT works to bridge the gap between training and employment. SAIT knows that a practicum needs to be a part of every training program so that learners can experience the workplace in a positive way. Practicums help students to build confidence in everything they do. The goal is for students to go straight into the workforce after SAIT.

### **Racism is still an issue**

Later in the session the discussion turned to the subject of racism. Stereotypes and racism are everywhere, but all can be advocates and help change the minds of others. “If not you, then who?”

One panelist was the daughter of a very young single mother whose child was adopted during The Sixties Scoop. She was told not to put her baby’s race on the birth certificate because no one would want her if she did. And, racism still exists.

No one wants to work for a company that is only hiring them to meet some internal diversity metric. While metrics are important, it is better to hire Indigenous employees because it is the right thing to do – having a workforce with diverse knowledge and skills sets adds value to the organization.

### **Other perspectives on career development for Indigenous peoples**

A panelist talked about the need for all of us to support each other – including Indigenous youth – to be successful. A conference early in her career helped her to understand that she could walk confidently in two worlds. She could be an Indigenous person and a professional engineer.

Her work is with Indigenous students in engineering and other STEM programs. She offers support for students, and talks about the need to create safe, ethical spaces for non-Indigenous and Indigenous people to learn and be together. It is hard, emotional yet rewarding work to support learners who are overcoming huge barriers.

Another presenter was at his first conference, presenting for the first time. He had started his career as an apprentice in the North but realized after a while that the work was not for him. After working abroad for a few months, he began to work with a company which persuaded him and supported him to go to university.

“Hearing ‘You belong here’ changes everything.”

He works as manager of Inuit employment programs in his company and feels a deep community connection. Community is the basis of his work. He says, “Connection to community makes us stronger – we are social creatures.”

His strategic workforce plan for the company includes an Inuit leadership development program. This pays for the education of Inuit leadership candidates at post-secondary institutions in the South and offers education support for all employees. Going away to school means having a sense of aloneness that comes from the absence of community. To ease the separation, learning programs of all kinds need to include community support.

He advises HR professionals to know what talent they are going to need, make connections with schools, and Indigenous communities and to figure out how long it will take to develop that talent.

One last word of advice, “Be transparent – let people know what their options are and what is going to happen; don’t build hopes on what might be possible.”

## ROUNDTABLE SESSION 02

## Indigenous Inclusion and Engagement Strategies

### What are some of the basic skills that are needed when engaging with communities?

First, remember that this is not a business transaction – companies are engaging with *people*. Relationships first, always.

The most basic skill is knowing about the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada – knowing the whole story of this land. Having a basic understanding allows companies to work in a better way with Indigenous people. Then, be patient. Be flexible. It takes time.

When companies understand the intergenerational impact of trauma that is still being experienced by Indigenous people, they can work with a compassionate lens and loving kindness to do the work of inclusion. An Indigenous world view exists, but it can differ by community.

*“Remember that we have two ears and only one mouth.”*

All have been indoctrinated in school systems in different ways. Non-Indigenous people learned how to compete with each other – which is not the Indigenous way.

“How can I have a Ph.D. in history and not know this history? We have lost by not knowing and understanding each other.”

### Hiring Indigenous talent

Building a hospital or some other project may be the only job that is going to come through the community for years, so the impact of the work must have far more reach than the project itself. For example, when contractors come in to do work, they often hire apprentices. But the apprenticeships may not last long enough for apprentices to finish their program of study because companies move out when the work is done. There is a need to look at how apprentices may carry their learning forward after the project is over and how to help make that happen.

When hiring people in communities, the onboarding and orientation process is critical for retention. Employers should put themselves in the shoes of the community member who has no experience working with a non-Indigenous culture. If people do not feel like they belong in the company, they will leave their jobs.

### How does the engagement process change according to territory, tribe, province/state or country?

In Canada, First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) peoples all have unique engagement processes. Just as any business person would do their homework before going to do business in other countries around the world, there is a need to learn about the First Nations with whom organizations want to engage.

With Indigenous communities, it is important to learn as much as possible in each situation and know what the community's goals and hopes are. In the past, the goal has most often been that people are hired into jobs. Now there is more interest in equity and inclusion in the project, not just jobs.

### What are some of the common needs, requirements and expectations?

This work of economic reconciliation is just beginning for some companies. It takes time to learn; experience helps.

One common need is corporate policies and procedures that outline how a company will work with Indigenous communities. Leadership comes from the top. One company learned to insist that every interaction with the community is logged. This makes sure that every promise is followed up, even if the person who creates the expectation moves on.

Be careful to manage expectations – it is not easy. It is important not to promise at an early stage what may not be deliverable when the time comes. For instance, a certain number of jobs will be promised in the contracting phase, but it may not be possible to hire as many people as needed from the community. Disappointment can lead to labour disruptions or worse. Companies should be realistic when developing community benefit agreements. This is where getting to know the community first can really help.

One suggestion is to offer mentorship to people in community who have no experience working in large companies. If, for example, a community does not have a human resources department, a large company could offer to set one up and pay for the community college education of people to run it. Then, their personnel could mentor people when they take up the jobs.

As another panelist put it, stereotypes impact the way human resources professionals work – it is important to build shared understanding to become allies. Non-Indigenous people must teach themselves about racism – and white privilege.

*“When we learn that we are sharing the river of life, that we are all related, and we are called into this work together, then we can walk together. We need to think generations ahead, there is only one Mother Earth.”*

“It’s getting easier. Now kids come home from school with this knowledge [Indigenous history] – and kids are teaching their parents.”

### What kind of investment does it require?

It does not have to cost a lot; it is possible for companies to build relationships on their own time and over time. Understanding how important Indigenous Relations are to the company and developing a strategic plan around that is a starting point. Build a plan starting with a grassroots approach or hire a firm to build one.

Call 92 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls for “business to ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.”

If fully implemented the estimate is that there is a potential \$600 billion benefit from Call 92. The investment will be worth it.

“Nothing about us, without us.  
For Indigenous, by Indigenous.”

This is the best long-term strategy. If industry partners want to do ethical work, they need to listen to the community.

### How do you hire Indigenous talent in urban centres?

Recruiting and retaining talent in urban centres can take a long time but keep with it to build a strong corporate brand and get it out there. It takes dedicated resources for companies to do a good job of hiring and retaining Indigenous talent. Companies can learn from others who have been successful.



One suggestion is to put on a job fair type of event to talk about what is happening in a company. One panelist has had good results from information sessions. Another suggestion is for a company to invest in its people and then let them be the best representative to go and attract others to come and work for them.

**Should we have a standalone, dedicated person to hire Indigenous people? Or is the risk that they will be ignored?**

Specialist Indigenous recruiters today are like the health and safety officers of the past. Employers are at that stage now with Indigenous inclusion staff positions, and over time they will become recognized as an integral part of the staff. However, it is important to note that having a focus person for community is crucial for relationships, so starting with a dedicated person is vital.

Depending on size, it may be necessary to start with a standalone staff person – preferably an Indigenous person – who is the recruitment specialist to start. Over time, it may be possible to move to the role being more embedded across the organization. Either way, investment within an organization will ensure that someone is always ready and available to do this work.

**EQUALITY VERSUS EQUITY**

Some people are tall enough to see over the fence in order to see a baseball game, others are too short. In equality, everyone gets the same sized stepping stool. In equity, the stools go to the people who are too short.

**ROUNDTABLE SESSION 03**

**Making Welcome**

**The art of hiring Indigenous talent**

This roundtable session opened with audience members and roundtable participants sharing success stories they have had hiring Indigenous talent. The theme running through the stories was someone in the company connecting with a stellar Indigenous candidate (stellar as in skills, personality/fit with company, work ethic, etc.) who had faced significant barriers in getting a job. In each story, the Indigenous person created a relationship with someone in the company who was instrumental in the Indigenous person being hired.

Success included how Indigenous hires were “made welcome.”

- Mentorship can be crucial in getting a job; additionally, mentor-mentee relationships can also become deep and meaningful. These relationships are often symbiotic, with both parties learning and growing throughout.
- Internships and job shadowing opportunities can be crucial introductions to different fields and opportunities for youth developing or starting out in their career path.
- Related to internships and job shadowing is the importance of creating connections with young Indigenous people more broadly. This can include going into high schools and building relationships there, going into communities, etc.
- Hiring professionals often need to get creative when trying to hire Indigenous talent. For example, one audience member told a story of hiring two Indigenous individuals that came highly recommended – but because they lived in a community with no Wi-Fi, no transportation outside the community, etc. the “normal” hiring paperwork process would not work. They ended up sending someone into the community with hard copies of everything, and the individuals were hired.

Key with this is having a company and colleagues who are engaged to seek out and hire Indigenous talent – some of these creative methods can take significant time and resources.

The discussion also highlighted some of the problems that people have had hiring Indigenous talent, with others offering potential solutions. Sometimes a lack of budget and staff made it difficult to scout out Indigenous talent. A potential solution to this is using low- or no-cost methods, such as posting to Indigenous Facebook groups, Boolean searching Indigenous hires, and putting ads on community radio stations.

Another challenge discussed is that it can be difficult to hire Indigenous people in certain regions (central British Columbia was referenced), because Indigenous talent is competitive there and most candidates have been hired, or the company could not afford to hire them. For the challenge of not being able to afford to hire some people, it was suggested that alternative compensation could be offered – for example, cultural leave or more time off.

To wrap up the session, the group created calls to action – what is needed from government or industry to move forward:

- Indigenous engagement needs to be throughout a company, not just HR.
- Transportation can be a big issue, especially for remote communities. Ways to help people get drivers licences and providing or getting people to reliable transportation are needed solutions.
- HR professionals can create internship opportunities specifically for Indigenous people, which can be a huge help in getting a foot in the door.
- More communities need Wi-Fi infrastructure.
- Government support and community strategies for education are needed.
- Government quotas for number of Indigenous hires are archaic and need to be updated, to reflect changes, for example, in retention and Indigenous people in leadership roles.

## ROUNDTABLE SESSION 04

### Culture and Retention in the Workplace

#### Making a more culturally diverse workplace

One participant described the *Indigenous CIRCLE to Cultural Confidence* building approach developed by her organization, Sakatay Global. It is mainly designed for non-Indigenous companies that want to participate in reconciliation. The CIRCLE acronym stands for Creating Space, Indigenous History and Context, Relationship Building and Protocol, Culture, Community and Ceremony, Land, Language and Life-long learning, and Education Leads to Reconciliation.

Policies aimed at making the workplace more culturally diverse can be a key tool, as well as staff training, and implementation of both the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action as a framework for reconciliation.

#### How organizations can make people feel welcome

One of the ways to make employees feel welcome is for the company to start thinking about how welcoming their space really is – for example, are Indigenous languages or land acknowledgements present? From there, move on to general awareness of Indigenous issues, and assess if there is ongoing learning, collaboration and reciprocity going on. After that, assess ability for employees to tap into their spiritual side – for example, is it possible for employees to smudge?

Another way organizations can make people feel welcome is to allow people to bring their cultural practices in to the organization, and emphasize the importance of encouraging *everyone* to bring in their cultural practices, not just Indigenous people (this was reiterated by a member of the audience). An example was someone bringing her talking stick

into office meetings. Generally acknowledging the realities in communities would include Orange Shirt Day and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Tokenism<sup>1</sup> can be a significant barrier to people feeling welcome in the workplace. Hiring only one Indigenous person does not suddenly mean that the organization is now a welcome place for Indigenous people.

### Aligning HR policies with Indigenous Issues

A community lens is particularly key to developing Indigenous policies. Aligning HR policies with Indigenous issues requires cultural confidence in their ability to make appropriate changes. One company's exemplary approach included: CEO mentoring and coaching; 50 staff participating in a six-week course on the subject; and auditing of all its programming.

It is important to remember that, while policy may be important, it can only go so far, especially if company attitudes and behaviours do not align with policy.

### General diversity and inclusion practices

Audience members listed several ways they used to develop general diversity and inclusion practices. These include:

- approaching Indigenous communities with good intentions
- working with Elders
- working with the Indigenous school community because schools are the hub of community. One person had been told by Elders that “when they show they care about their children, they show that they care about us”
- not only hiring Indigenous people, but also Indigenous allies
- Indigenous inclusion driven by the company leadership
- the cultural importance of an Indigenous person's responsibility to their family and community (including for example, going to the funeral of someone who is not immediate family).

Audience members also noted several challenges where they are struggling to make their workplaces more inclusive for Indigenous people. These barriers included: a lack of Indigenous strategy, issues of racism and harassment by some employees and having the staffing capacity to even look at Indigenous policies.

<sup>1</sup> “the practice or policy of making no more than a token effort or gesture, as in offering opportunities to minorities equal to those of the majority.” Tokenism definition, *dictionary.com*, accessed October 21, 2019.



# *Summary of Learnings from* **WORKFORCE FORWARD**

Relationships and a community lens are critical to success hiring Indigenous talent. Do not forget schools, youth and Elders, they are invaluable.

*"We can have all the strategy we want, but if we don't care, and aren't invested, we're not going to get anywhere."*

*"Diversity is who you are. Inclusion is what you do."*

*"One thing that I've noticed with a lot of companies is that we bring in a non-Indigenous mentality. Make genuine connection. Talk about what your values are. Make personal connections, step outside of comfort zones."*

## **1. Work in the future:**

- a. Opportunities from the use of technology may not be available to Indigenous communities without improvements to high speed internet connectivity and the required hardware.
- b. During the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, the human relational skills in which Indigenous peoples excel will become more important, leading to increased employment opportunities.

## **2. Preparing an Indigenous workforce**

- a. Some Indigenous youth build skills in jobs in the cities and then take them back to their communities, often as entrepreneurs.
- b. Post-secondary institutions need to offer multiple, culturally appropriate supports to Indigenous students during the application process, through their programs and as they prepare for the workforce.
- c. More training to employment programs/partnerships.

## **3. Recruiting and hiring**

- a. Racism, and structural barriers to gainful employment, are significant problems for Indigenous people.
- b. Meaningful investments in cultural confidence training is critical to start shifting corporate culture and addressing systemic issues.
- c. Corporations should be intentional about hiring Indigenous workers – starting with CEO commitment, company-wide Indigenous engagement, strategic hiring plans, and recruiters who are dedicated and empowered to hire Indigenous talent.
- d. Specialist Indigenous recruiters today are in the same place health and safety officers were in the past. Soon, they too will become embedded and valued across the organization, although having a dedicated focus is vital to begin with.
- e. Indigenous people have a lot to offer to organizations – but in order to bring these people in, making the hiring process and the company welcoming is crucial.

## **4. Retention**

- a. Companies need to make their workplaces safe and welcoming. Indigenous workers do not want to feel vulnerable or unwanted.
- b. Adapt HR policies to the needs of the community, urban policies may not work in a rural or remote community.
- c. Have Indigenous mentorship programs and Indigenous employee networks.

## **5. Joint responsibility**

*"As much as I can hold the door open for Indigenous talent, they have to walk through it."*



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If you have questions about the report or participation at Forward Summit, contact:  
Connect Partnership Group, Organizers of Forward Summit

[hello@forwardsummit.ca](mailto:hello@forwardsummit.ca) | **403.648.0876**

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