

**FIRST NATIONS
POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION:**

**AN EXAMINATION OF POST-SECONDARY STUDENT
SUPPORT AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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INTRODUCTION

The unsettled jurisdictional debate over First Nations post-secondary education continues to result in First Nations education systems that lag far behind that of the non-First Nations population. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) views post-secondary education for First Nations as a matter of social policy rather than a right and argue that the provincial government is responsible for post-secondary education in Ontario. Ontario contends that Indian Affairs is responsible for the education of First Nations people. This long-standing jurisdictional debate results in a constant struggle to ensure the development and delivery of post-secondary systems that address First Nations needs.

The history of higher education for First Nations depicted by INAC, in their Information¹ brief of December 2000 reveals a number of benchmarks depicting the development of First Nations education. In the 1950's federal program support for post-secondary was non-existent, during the 1960's courses taught on reserve "largely ignored First Nations history, culture and values" and few communities had their own secondary schools. By the mid 1960's, only 200 status Indian students were enrolled in post-secondary. In 1968, the federal government introduced the Post-Secondary Student Support Program to provide financial assistance to status Indian students pursuing post-secondary studies. In 1999, more than 27,000 Indian students were enrolled in post-secondary education. The INAC Information brief also revealed that in 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood, (now the Assembly of First Nations) presented a report entitled, Indian Control of Indian Education.² Indian and Northern Affairs adopted policy supporting First Nations control of education by 1973. While this policy recognizes First Nations' right to control their own education, INAC continues to control the parameters in which this occurs. The need for First Nations control of education continues to be evident as First Nations continue to create their own secondary schools and First Nations controlled post-secondary institutions.

Article 15 of the Draft United Nations Declaration (1994)³, supports local control of First Nations education by stating:

"...all indigenous people have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning."

This research report is an examination of Ontario's First Nations post-secondary education system. It documents the historical perspective, what currently exists, the vision, best practices and recommendations for change. Specifically, this report examines three components of the First Nations post-secondary education system: First Nations post-secondary institutions; post-secondary funding and First Nations programming in mainstream colleges and universities.

I. FIRST NATIONS POST SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Ontario First Nations began establishing First Nations owned and controlled post-secondary education and training institutions in 1985. These institutions were created largely as an exercise in Indian control of Indian Education but also to fill the need for culturally relevant and

¹Information: Post-Secondary Education for Status and Inuit, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, December 2000

² National Indian Brotherhood. Indian Control of Indian Education. 1972.

³ Cited in The Concept and Formation of a World Indigenous Qualification Validation Authority, World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium, 2

appropriate education. First Nations institutions provide an avenue for the design, development and delivery of programs to address the human resource needs and capacity development of First Nations people and communities. In doing so, Ontario's First Nations institutions are also developing areas of expertise that assist in addressing local and regional education needs.

The uniqueness of First Nations institutions is demonstrated by three key factors: responsiveness, flexibility and accessibility.

1. Responsiveness

First Nations institutions design, develop and deliver programs that respond to First Nations people to address labour market needs both within and outside of First Nations communities. All programs delivered in First Nations institutions are based on demand. Programs delivered in First Nations institutions can be classed as First Nations specific or culture based, others contain minimal First Nations specific curriculum, while some are in fact, mainstream programs. Specialized culture based programs such as the Master's program in Indigenous Philosophy, developed by Seven Generations Education Institute and the Spirit of the Two Row Wampum, developed by Six Nations Polytechnic become important means to preserve the intellectual property of First Nations people. The common thread of programs offered by First Nations institutions is that they all respond to the needs of First Nations individuals, communities and labour markets.

2. Flexibility

First Nations institutions use flexible delivery models to deliver community-based programs to address First Nations learning styles. Delivering programs within culturally rich and supportive environments is an effective mechanism to address the low recruitment, retention and success rates of First Nations in post-secondary. This flexibility provides a foundation for success that cannot be duplicated by mainstream institutions.

3. Access

The student body at First Nations institutions consists largely of mature students, many of whom are older, are single parents, have families and are beginning post-secondary studies after being away from school for a number of years. Given this situation, First Nations institutions provide access to students who would not necessarily compete for space at mainstream institutions. Due to a lack of adequate financial support, First Nations post-secondary institutions are not able to address the breadth of programs and services required by Ontario's First Nations, which results in a continuous need for programming at mainstream institutions.

Currently, there are nine First Nations owned, operated and controlled post-secondary education and training institutions in Ontario. They are:

- Anishinabek Educational Institute, North Bay, Thunder Bay, Muncey
- First Nations Technical Institute, Tyendinaga
- Iohahi:io Akwesasne Adult Education, Akwesasne
- Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, M'Chigeeng First Nation
- Mamaweswen Training Institute, Blind River
- Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre, Six Nations
- Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute, Thunder Bay
- Seven Generations Education Institute, Fort Frances
- Six Nations Polytechnic, Six Nations

Annual Reports of the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium (coordinating organization for the institutes listed above) reveal that these institutions have delivered more than 150 programs to over 22,000 students in nine years and continue to educate more than 4,000 First Nations learners each year. First Nations post-secondary institutions have experienced a 92% increase in enrolment over a five-year period and continue to experience on average, a 15% increase in enrolment each year. First Nations institutions boast 90 – 98% student success rates.

The range of programs offered in First Nations institutes includes and is not limited to: literacy; adult education and skills development; alternative secondary school programs, certificate, diploma and degree programs, training, culture and language courses and community workshops. Program offerings prepare learners for employment in First Nations and non-First Nations communities. The range of programs delivered in First Nations institutions include renewal energies, several language courses, Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Education, Master's Program in Indigenous Philosophy, Public Administration, second level support services for elementary and secondary systems, horticulture, paramedic training, community services worker training and a First Nations principals course.

The responsiveness of Ontario's First Nations institutions is demonstrated as follows:

- Anishinabek Educational Institution is a multi-campus institute for the delivery of Early Childhood Education and other programs.
- First Nations Technical Institute is the only First Nations institute that delivers Aviation. FNTI attracts First Nations students from across Canada.
- Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute requires that all Board members sign a declaration agreeing to "remember the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers in the fulfillment of their duties..."⁴
- Iohahi:io Akwesasne Adult Education responded to the need for First Nations health care professionals in local community organizations through the creation of a nursing lab and the delivery of a three year nursing program.
- Mamaweswen Training Institute offers a first year university program for the Arts to accommodate the large number of artistic First Nations people.
- Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre delivers training in the skilled trades to address the shortage of need for such workers.
- Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education Institute develops distance education programs such as Aboriginal Statistical Training to respond to the need for program delivery in isolated and remote communities.

⁴ Board Member Code of Ethics, Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute

- Seven Generations Education Institute launched a Master's Program in Indigenous Philosophy to address the need for a program that did not exist elsewhere.
- Six Nations Polytechnic responded to the need for experienced post-secondary instructors by setting up a system of co-instructors in the delivery of their first year university program.

The success rates of First Nations institutions are largely due to their commitment to student support. Student support services offered in First Nations institutions include: academic, career, social and financial counseling; cultural and spiritual teachings; peer support; elder support; student housing; and assistance in accessing community organizations such as childcare, transportation and other social programs. The creation of student centered support environments contribute to the retention and success rates of First Nations institutions.

While First Nations controlled post-secondary institutions continue to demonstrate success, they have existed in Ontario for nearly twenty years without policy and legislative support to ensure stable and adequate core funding. Unlike mainstream colleges and universities, First Nations institutions are not provincially recognized nor supported by government policy and therefore are not eligible to receive per student operating grants, infrastructure and other special grants available to Ontario's publicly supported institutions.

Three government programs provide limited program funding to some First Nations post-secondary institutions. The provincial Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy⁵, permits First Nations institutions access to \$800,000 per year through a proposal driven process. Some First Nations institutions access project funding through the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy (accessed through local delivery agents), a federal program of Human Resources Development and Skills. The third program that supports post-secondary programs for First Nations is the Indian Studies Support Program.

The Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP)⁶ is a program delivered by the federal government to support "Indian education organizations, Indian post-secondary institutions and other post-secondary institutions for the development and delivery of special programs for treaty/status Indian students". This program also provides multi-year funding to one First Nations institution, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now referred to as the First Nations University of Canada), to "maintain a university-level focus on research and development in Indian Education and to deliver special programs". The amount of funding available is a maximum of 12% of the national allocation for the Post-secondary Student Support Program. The administration of ISSP, which was once an annual proposal driven process and distributed upon recommendation from Ontario's First Nations political organizations, changed in 1997 to a decision making process without First Nations input. The change in 1997 has resulted in INAC officials determining annual funding allocations based on previous distribution. This method of distribution provides some institutions with limited stable funding, while preventing capacity development and eliminating any opportunity for new institutes to access the fund.

While ISSP is helpful in supporting program delivery throughout Ontario's post-secondary institutions, it provides operational funding to only one First Nations institution in Canada, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. Based on the Saskatchewan model, First Nations Technical Institute successfully negotiated a sector based multi-year agreement as a source of regularized core funding. However, very recently INAC terminated this agreement (after ten

⁵ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy. 1991.

⁶ Indian Studies Support Program, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

years), after concluding the arrangement was not consistent with their authority for the allocation of the fund. This action has created undue hardship on this very successful institute at a time when the need enrolment in First Nations institutions in Ontario post-secondary institutions continues to rise. It must also be noted that not all First Nations post-secondary institutions have access to ISSP funding and the ones that do, are very dependent upon the fund as a source of regularized funding.

In addition to funding accessed by First Nations institutions, some First Nations communities are successful in accessing project funding to deliver community-based training programs in communities where no First Nations institutions exist. However, none of these government programs provide First Nations institutions with access to adequate and regularized funding (i.e. operational costs, ongoing program delivery, infrastructure development and special grants) like the funding that is available to provincially legislated and supported colleges and universities.

Not only are First Nations institutions unable to access provincial grants available to mainstream colleges and universities, First Nations institutions also do not have the recognized authority to grant provincially recognized certificates, diplomas and degrees, which limits the recognition of credentials obtained in these institutions. The lack of provincial program recognition means that program credentials do not have currency outside of First Nations communities. Credentials received for successful completion of programs taken in First Nations institutions is largely limited to First Nations communities, which also affects the transferability of credentials if students transfer between First Nations post-secondary institutions and mainstream institutions. Without provincial policy and legislative support, First Nations institutions must negotiate partnerships with mainstream institutions to ensure program credentials are portable and transferable for employment and educational advancement. At the same time, negotiating these partnerships are very time consuming and costly.

In the broader scheme of things, there are at least an additional forty, First Nations owned and controlled post-secondary institutions located throughout Canada. Policy supporting First Nations institutes across Canada is limited to support for the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College through its affiliation with the University of Regina and for two First Nation institutes in British Columbia - the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and the Institute of Indigenous Government. The lack of policy and legislative recognition to legitimize the role of these institutions in the delivery of post-secondary education and the lack of adequate regularized government funding motivated Ontario's Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium to coordinate a national meeting of representatives of Canada's Indigenous institutes. The apparent need for a unified, national organization resulted in the creation of the National Association of Indigenous Institutes of Higher Learning in 2000. Ontario's regional coordinating organization, the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium was instrumental in the development of the national association and continues to play a supportive role.

Research entitled, Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates⁷, commissioned by the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada supports the flexibility, unique approaches and local control exerted by First Nations institutions. The report proclaims:

“Best practices for Aboriginal post-secondary enrolment and retention strategies depend upon Aboriginals exerting control over their own education.”

⁷ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates, (Victoria, BC: May 2002), 44

Given this research, combined with the fact that First Nations youth is Canada's fastest growing demographic, Canada's growing need for a well educated and skilled labour force, the success attained by First Nations institutions and the fact that the demand for the number and breadth of programs continues to far exceed available programming, First Nations institutions and communities require increased government support. Adequate and regularized long-term funding obtained through policy and legislative support by the provincial and federal governments is required to support the stability and increased growth and development of First Nations institutions.

VISION

First Nations have the responsibility to plan and prepare for the well-being and human resource development of First Nations people for the next seven generations. The responsibility to guide, assist and prepare younger generations for what is to come requires a review and assessment of historical and cultural practices, planning, foresight, and careful decision-making. To fulfill this responsibility, First Nations require total control, adequate funding and complete flexibility to develop and deliver programs and services using approaches that work well for First Nations people.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples⁸ (RCAP) report identified a number of elements necessary for achieving excellence in education based on research reports written between 1966 and 1992. Recommendations include:

- "Aboriginal control of education
- School courses in Aboriginal studies, including history, language and culture
- Training and hiring of more Aboriginal teachers
- Inclusion of Aboriginal parents, elders and educators in the education of Aboriginal children
- Special support programs for Aboriginal students....
- Funding of support services for students in post-secondary studies
- Aboriginal language instruction ... "and more.

The RCAP report also called for, "increasing the number, capacity and stability of Aboriginal institutions".

The vision for the Ontario First Nations post-secondary system remains consistent with these recommendations. The vision includes First Nations owned and controlled post-secondary institutions, programs and services grounded in the knowledge, history, values, ideals, practices and languages of Ontario's First Nations, programs and services designed and delivered by First Nations people, and institutions with the research capacity to support education and other community needs.

First Nations controlled community-based post-secondary institutions increase access, retention and success in post-secondary and provide learning that results in recognized credentials for sustainable employment, which can significantly increase the economic viability and sustainability of First Nations people and communities. Programs designed by First Nations people require local, regional, national and international recognition to ensure that the credentials earned by students are portable and transferable for employment and educational advancement. Programs grounded in Indigenous knowledge have the potential to instill pride and self-confidence in learners while preserving and maintaining First Nations values, languages, cultural practices and intellectual property rights.

⁸ Royal Commissions, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, (Ottawa, ON: November 1996)

Ontario's First Nations institutions also require adequate funding to develop the research capacity to design curriculum to preserve and protect First Nations histories, cultural practices and languages and to address community needs with respect to the capacity building of Ontario's First Nations people (i.e. governance, health, social and environmental issues).

Qualities and Outcomes of Learners

An education system that addresses the needs of First Nations is expected to achieve results that are identified by and specific to First Nations. For First Nations, these results not only include passing grades, but more importantly instilling confidence and knowledge crucial to the cultural identity of First Nations people - a unique set of qualities and outcomes for learners that cannot be duplicated elsewhere.

First Nations learners will acquire a foundation that results in a state of holistic well-being (balanced physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development) creating individuals who are respectful of the environment, the land, nature, and people in general. They will articulate "strength and confidence", have high self-esteem and be proud of their cultural heritage. First Nations learners will be well grounded in Indigenous knowledge, which includes a thorough understanding of their language, cultural identity, historical background and the contemporary implications of First Nations' experience in Canada (i.e. colonialism and marginalization of First Nations people). First Nations learners will apply Indigenous knowledge to today's contemporary situations and demonstrate confidence, knowledge and the ability to compete in local, regional, national and international labour markets. They will share their knowledge as role models and contributing members of Indigenous communities and society in general. First Nations learners will acquire a love of learning and a commitment to lifelong learning for personal growth and development.

BEST PRACTICES

Ontario

1. Seven Generations Education Institute

Seven Generations Education Institute is a prime example of a First Nations institute that responds to the needs of First Nations through the development of programs while utilizing traditional practices for decision-making. In response to the need for a specialized program, a master's level program in Indigenous Philosophy was developed with community involvement through the use of sharing circles. Chiefs of the ten First Nations communities in the Rainy Lake area provided recognition for the program through passing a resolution of support. This program is the first of its kind and the first program in Ontario to be accredited through a First Nations process.

Seven Generations provides local access to post-secondary which has increased the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal students. The learner friendly environment, small class sizes, community role models, familiar staff, personal attention and focus on student success, all contribute to instilling an "I can do it" attitude in students.

2. Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium was established in 1994 as the regional coordinating organization of its nine member Aboriginal post-secondary institutions. The Consortium is supported by the Chiefs of Ontario to negotiate increased recognition and resources for Ontario's Aboriginal owned and controlled post-secondary institutions. Key accomplishments of the Consortium include: increased regional and national

recognition of the issues affecting the growth and development of Aboriginal institutions; partnerships with local, regional and national organizations; regional planning; joint program and service delivery; research to support the goals of Aboriginal institutes; support networks and shared resources; and participation in regional, national and international education processes.

Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now, the First Nations University of Canada) is Canada's only First Nations institution that receives federal policy support with core funding. Policy and funding support is provided through the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP). An affiliation with the University of Regina, results in provincial program recognition and the provision of shared funding from the province of Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) is provincially recognized by the province of Saskatchewan to issue diplomas and certificates, provide adult education and post-secondary programs and negotiate agreements with agencies to achieve its objects.

British Columbia

British Columbia offers another best practice. The province created the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework to: increase participation and success rates of Aboriginal people in post-secondary; support capacity building; establish a long-term plan for Aboriginal people to acquire knowledge and skills; and to secure the commitment of the federal government for post-secondary for Aboriginal people. The policy acknowledges the public post-secondary system cannot address the specific needs of all Aboriginal learners and in doing so, provides provincial recognition and funding for two Aboriginal institutes. The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology and the Institute of Indigenous Government are provincially recognized as public post-secondary institutions with the power to grant certificates, diplomas and degrees and to receive funding in the same manner and at the same levels as mainstream post-secondary institutions in British Columbia.

United States of America

President Clinton signed a Presidential Order in 1996 in support of Tribal Colleges and Universities in the United States of America. The Presidential Order states that each agency of the federal government must develop and implement a three-year plan "to increase the capacity of tribal colleges to compete effectively for any available grants, contracts, cooperative agreements, and any other Federal resources".⁹ This Presidential Order ensures "direct accountability at the highest levels of the Federal Government", providing assurances that positive measures will occur to address the education and training needs of First Nations.

New Zealand

⁹ House. Executive Order Tribal Colleges and Universities. 2002.

New Zealand passed the Education Amendment Act¹⁰ in 1990, which defines institutions of Higher Learning as:

“A wanaga is characterised by teaching and research that maintains, advances and disseminates knowledge and develops intellectual independence and assists the application of knowledge regarding ahuatanga Maori (Maori tradition) according to tikanga Maori (Maori custom).”

Recognition of Wanaga in the Act means that it “would be treated in the same way at least for funding purposes and on the same basis as polytechnics and universities” in New Zealand. Following the establishment of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the Wanaga was successful at having its degree programs approved.

Key Components of First Nations Post-Secondary Institutions

Policies and practices of First Nations post-secondary institutions must be developed based on Indigenous knowledge and reflect the distinct culture, values, language, practices and history that are unique to First Nations people. This concept provides a successful and unique approach to the delivery of education and training, which has not gained acceptance and funding support by government. While First Nations develop concepts and ideas that are successful in addressing education and training of First Nations people, these processes continue to find themselves “outside the box” or outside the realm of policy makers, making government support difficult to obtain. Key components that distinguish First Nations post-secondary institutes from mainstream institutes include:

- Boards directed and controlled by First Nations communities
- First Nations faculty ensure a holistic approach to education (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual)
- Infusion of First Nations history, culture, traditions and values throughout the curriculum
- Methods of instruction that address First Nations learning styles
- Community involvement/integration of community throughout the educational process; linkages and referrals to various community organizations
- First Nations support staff ensure a focus on student support and the creation of student support networks
- Elder support, spiritual and traditional teachings
- Programs and services that instill recognition and preservation of Indigenous knowledge and history, recognition and respect for the land, environment, people and community; designed and delivered by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people i.e. the Indigenous Health Practitioner Program, Aboriginal Healing and Wellness, Cultural Interpretation
- Program and service delivery in community based, culturally rich environments

Research prepared for the Council of Minister’s of Education in Canada in 2002, Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates¹¹ revealed that programs and initiatives that work well held several common characteristics. Such characteristics include: community delivery; transitional support and support through alternative admissions; academic and personal support; and, support for First Nations control of education at the program, curricular or institutional level.

¹⁰ Turoa Royal. Wananga An Emerging Higher Education Institution in New Zealand. 2002.

¹¹ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates. (Victoria, BC: May 2002), 2

The report concluded that initiatives created to address low completion rates of Aboriginal people in post-secondary include: the creation of Aboriginal institutes; programs geared for Aboriginals; support services that focus on the needs of Aboriginal people; the development and use of Aboriginal curriculum and cultural sensitive materials and pedagogies; etc.

The report highlighted effective practices in promoting Aboriginal post-secondary education, such as: community program delivery; access programs; Aboriginal control of education; student support that addresses Aboriginal needs; and, partnerships between Aboriginal communities and mainstream education institutions. Aboriginal People continue to state and restate the importance of these components in the development and revitalization of First Nations people, communities and nations.

WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS

Ontario's post-secondary system is comprised largely of: 18 universities, 25 colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, agricultural colleges, colleges of health sciences and art, a military college, privately funded degree granting institutions, registered private career colleges and other learning opportunities. In an effort to address First Nations issues in post-secondary education, in 1991, the provincial government established a five-year initiative called the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy. This Strategy was the catalyst that significantly increased the number of initiatives available to First Nations. Prior to the development of the Strategy very few courses or programs existed for Aboriginal students.

A review of the Strategy, the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, An Evaluation Report¹² conducted in 1996 by Devlin and Associates Incorporated, revealed: 27 Aboriginal counselors were funded at 21 institutions; over 4 years (1991-1995) Aboriginal student enrolment grew 43%; Deans of Aboriginal education increased from 2 to 6; language programs were developed; several programs were being delivered via distance delivery and in Aboriginal communities - in 1995, 20 students graduated with Ontario Teacher's certificates in Moose Factory; 20 colleges have an Aboriginal person on the Board of Directors; and more. Today, 30 mainstream institutions provide programs and services for Aboriginal students.

Criteria to access the Strategy forced the creation of partnerships between Aboriginal communities and mainstream institutions resulting in the creation of 30 Aboriginal Education Councils within colleges and universities. While the creation of institutional Councils provide an avenue for First Nations involvement in decisions affecting Aboriginal people, mainstream institutions continue to control the breadth of activity and financial investment. In addition, some mainstream institutions have relinquished their responsibility to provide programs and services for Aboriginal people without Strategy funding.

Although the five-year Strategy has ended, the province continues to invest \$6 million per year to support programs and services for Aboriginal people in post-secondary. Of the \$6 million, \$5.2 million is allocated to mainstream colleges and universities as a regularized fixed share fund, providing a source of stable funding for mainstream institutions to maintain Aboriginal programs. The same opportunities do not exist for Aboriginal institutions. The remaining \$800,000 is made available to Aboriginal institutes through an annual proposal process – providing no source of regularized stable funding.

¹² Devlin and Associates, Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, An Evaluation Report, 1996, 18-25

WHAT DO FIRST NATIONS NEED TO REALIZE THEIR VISION?

Realizing the vision for post-secondary must take into account the continued development of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions as well as improvements to the mainstream post-secondary system. Achieving the vision for First Nations post-secondary education rests largely on the need for long-term resources (human, financial and infrastructure), but also requires support and encouragement to take control of our education systems, and the power to *'just do it'*¹³.

First Nations have the knowledge, authority and expertise to further develop post-secondary institutions but require more control over decisions affecting funding. With regard to provincial funding, the province controls 87% of the \$6 million, all of which is allocated to mainstream institutions leaving Aboriginal institutions access to only 13%.

Within the broader context of education, First Nations rely on, and expect the department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to own up to their fiduciary responsibility with respect to resourcing Aboriginal education to ensure Aboriginal people have the necessary skills to succeed in today's society. Section 91 (24) of the Constitution Act¹⁴ of 1867 gives the federal government authority to make laws respecting Indians and lands reserved for Indians, where as Section 93 states that the provinces have jurisdiction over education. The federal government claims responsibility for education up to the secondary level and the province claims that the federal government has responsibility for First Nations, which leaves issues related to post-secondary to the attention of a long-standing jurisdictional debate.

While Indian Affairs continues to express a desire to work with First Nations in the provision of education, the goals of the federal government and the available funding does not permit the delivery of education that addresses the entire scope of needs required by First Nations. The lack of adequate resources over time has resulted in challenges evident throughout the elementary and secondary levels, including the need for: the construction of and proper maintenance of schools; increased salaries; qualified First Nation instructors; extensive student support services; system development and planning; transportation; curriculum development; curriculum resources; and more. At the post-secondary level, these challenges are further magnified. Therefore, having the courage to 'just to it' is not an easy one.

The development of community-based First Nations post-secondary institutions and the infrastructure to support regional planning and development are required to:

- Identify and communicate labour market needs;
- Review and evaluate current programs and services;
- Expand the number and breadth of programs offered to address the identified education and training needs of First Nations people;
- Recruit and retain qualified instructors;
- Develop an instructors support group(s);
- Identify and establish partnerships with local and other stakeholders (in and outside of First Nations communities);
- Create a network focused on sharing information and institutional support;
- Create local and regional forums to discuss increased coordination and cooperation;

¹³ Participant, Chiefs of Ontario Education Manifesto Consultations, Toronto, 2004

¹⁴ First Nations Education Jurisdiction, National Background Paper, Assembly of First Nations, 2001,

- Expand First Nations research capacity for curriculum development, cultural and community research, partnership and administrative processes, policy development; and,
- Establish forums to celebrate and share best practices.

Federal and provincial policy and legislation (i.e. university charters, Ontario post-secondary Act) is required to legitimize and provide First Nations post-secondary education and training institutes to ensure program recognition and access to adequate multi-year funding. Other options include increasing funding for the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy, re-aligning Strategy distribution to increase support for First Nations institutions or designing a new Strategy specifically for First Nations institutions. Political will is and continues to remain the key factor in increasing support for First Nations post-secondary institutions.

COST TO REALIZE THE VISION FOR POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

Determining the costs required to realize the vision of First Nations post-secondary education and training institutions is extremely difficult to determine. Past experiences of First Nations education administrators provide the knowledge foundation to create the system that is envisioned. However, First Nations education administrators have never known the luxury of having adequate funding and so, have been forced to be creative and ‘make do’ in delivering programs and services. As a result, cost estimates of the full range of services required is not available.

Infrastructure costs and operational support for Ontario’s colleges and universities should be examined to help determine the costs required. This would include an examination of all funding envelopes (i.e. per student funding formulas, special grants, research grants, capital and infrastructure); as well as salaries and benefit packages for instructors, administrators and support staff. A comparability study needs to occur with mainstream institutions. At the same time, First Nations need to identify the real costs of providing services that are specific to addressing the unique needs of First Nations people (i.e. elder support, traditional teachings, linkages between levels of education for student support).

First Nations also require similar resources of mainstream post-secondary institutions and organizations that exist for institutional support and regional coordination (i.e. Council of Ontario universities, Association of Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology, Council of Regents). Nationally, an examination of how mainstream regional organizations input into national processes is key to the continued development of the First Nations post-secondary system. First Nations also require support to participate fully in discussions at the national level (i.e. Association of Community Colleges of Canada, Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations).

ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS OF GOVERNMENTS FOR ACHIEVING THE VISION

First Nation communities and their institutions are the driving force behind achieving the vision for First Nations post-secondary education. First Nations institutions need to be responsive to communities by identifying needs and delivering programs and services to address the needs. They are also responsible for: strategic planning; policy development; standards development; data gathering; research; continuous improvement systems; promotion; fundraising; public relations; communication and partnerships with federal and provincial governments and other key stakeholders; and technical support to First Nations leaders.

First Nations Chiefs and leaders are responsible for engaging in political lobbying on behalf of communities and institutes. The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, the regional coordinating organization operates at arms length from government and advocates, promotes and negotiates for increased recognition and resources for First Nations institutions locally, regionally and nationally.

With regard to the provincial government, a partnership needs to occur with First Nations to ensure political and program support for a First Nations' vision of education. First Nations institutions require provincial and federal government support and respect to increase their legitimacy within Ontario's post-secondary system. Federal and provincial policy and legislative change is required to support the existence and capacity development of Ontario's First Nations post-secondary institutions and to ensure the availability of adequate multi-year funding to address the vision.

First Nations expect the federal government to fulfill their fiduciary responsibility for the provision of education for First Nations from preschool to post-secondary largely as a funding agency. Federal government assistance in the development of policy to support the vision of First Nations education would be an asset.

II. POST SECONDARY FUNDING

VISION

First Nations maintain that the federal government has a fiduciary responsibility to provide education (cradle to grave) based on historical relationships with the Crown and other specific treaty agreements. This claim is justified by the Constitution Act¹⁵ of 1867, which defines the legislative powers of the federal and provincial governments. Section 91 (24) established federal jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for Indians”, which includes education. However, section 93 of the Act specifies that the provinces have authority over education. These articles continue to fuel the jurisdictional debate between the federal and provincial governments. However, First Nations believe that the ultimate responsibility for the education of their people rests with the federal government. First Nations expect funding support for accessible, high-quality post-secondary education for any and all First Nations students who wish to pursue post-secondary studies.

Funding support for post-secondary extends beyond the cost of tuition to include other support mechanisms necessary to ensure student success at the post-secondary level. In addition to tuition, students require funding for books, supplies and equipment costs associated with programs of study, living allowances, childcare, transportation costs and other mandatory student fees. Funding is also required for other services including, counseling and transition programs to assist with the transition from secondary school; prep programs, academic upgrading, assistance with entrance exams/interviews, etc. to ensure students are well prepared for post-secondary studies; prior learning assessment and review services and counseling and other assistance during post-secondary study.

WHAT CURRENTLY EXISTS

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada established a national initiative, the Post-Secondary Student Support Program¹⁶ (PSSSP) in 1989 to support Aboriginal people in post-secondary. The PSSSP not only provides funding support for Aboriginal people to attend post-secondary, but a special program within the PSSSP called the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) also supports research and program delivery for Aboriginal people. In addition, there are numerous scholarships and bursaries available to students from various sources within the department.

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) was established to allow registered First Nations to attend post-secondary programs. Eligible programs of study include: community college diploma and certificate programs, undergraduate programs, degree programs, and university and college entrance programs. The program provided students with the necessary funding to attend post-secondary (i.e. cost for tuition support, travel, living expenses) but unfortunately, the amount of available funding was capped in 1989. This funding has not kept pace with the rising cost of tuition, the cost of living and the increasing numbers of students wishing to attend post-secondary study. Today, many First Nations students are denied the opportunity to pursue post-secondary studies due to the lack of adequate government funding support.

¹⁵ Ibid, 11

¹⁶ Information: Post-Secondary Education for Status and Inuit, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, December 2000, 1-2

Statistics compiled by the Assembly of First Nations confirms the magnitude of the funding crisis. In the report Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Post-Secondary Enrollment Rates¹⁷, it is stated that, “approximately 8,475 Aboriginal applicants were not able to access funding (through the PSE program for post-secondary education in 2000-2001).” The current funding crisis has resulted in some First Nations students having to apply for student loans under the Canada Student Loans Program to gain access to post-secondary or to supplement funds provided through the PSSSP.

The PSE Program Evaluation Report¹⁸, December 2003, offers little encouragement for First Nations with respect to addressing the unique needs of First Nations in post-secondary education. The report, commissioned by INAC concluded that “20% of each year’s applications are deferred”; there is a “lack of mutually agreed upon performance measures”; the allocation of ISSP “does not provide true stability of multi-year core funding because it is unsupported by a clear policy and secure financial arrangements”, the program “does not include any formal mechanism to identify and respond to emerging national priorities”; and more. While the report paints a rather bleak situation of post-secondary education for First Nations, it includes a recommendation that is fundamental to future success. The need to “build and maintain partnership capacity” within INAC and First Nations communities is recommended. It is difficult to address the needs of First Nations in post-secondary education without a solid partnership.

Another critical issue facing First Nations post-secondary students is the potential taxation of student support funding. It has recently become known that the Canada Revenue Agency is of the opinion that education payments made to status Indians constitutes taxable income¹⁹ based on a legal opinion obtained by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. This decision, expected to be in effect January 1, 2006 will have a devastating impact on the numbers of eligible First Nations students able to attend post-secondary. This decision also diminishes the effect of the federal governments fiduciary responsibility for the provision of education for First Nations.

BEST PRACTICES

Success stories with respect to post-secondary funding include: the “one stop shop” approach to post-secondary, the local administration and policy development of student support funding, the use of community networks, institutional partnerships, and sharing best practices.

The “one stop shop” refers to the grouping of several organizations in one building allowing students access to a number of services at one location. At Six Nations Polytechnic for example, students can access: post-secondary student funding and counseling services; education and training programs; literacy services; the Independent Learning Centre (high school credits through independent study); General Education Diploma preparation (assessment and testing); the Achievement Centre (life skills, English and math); Homework Support (computer lab/assistance to high school students); the Indigenous Health Research and Development Program; and more. This approach provides access to student funding and a variety of related services at one location, it also facilitates organizations working together to address student needs.

¹⁷ R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd., Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates, (Victoria, BC: May 2002), 51

¹⁸ Hanson/Macleod, INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS CANADA, PSE Program Evaluation Report, December 9, 2003

¹⁹ Briefing Note to the National Chief, AFN Education, April 29, 2004

Local administration and policy development of post-secondary student support funding allows flexibility in addressing individual needs of students in various communities, can assist in addressing access needs, local labour market needs and has the potential to reduce barriers to student recruitment, retention and success.

The creation of networks and support systems engaging a wide variety of community organizations has contributed to the collective ability of First Nations communities to assist students with individual challenges. A support network and regular communication with other community organizations helps to address issues like enabling bridge funding, referrals to and assistance from community agencies, additional guidance and counseling, and other student supports. As one individual described it, “it is not just one person’s responsibility to educate a child, but a community’s”. Without these networks students may otherwise, ‘fall through the cracks’.

Partnerships between First Nations institutions, the area management board (administering training funds from Human Resources and Skills Development), the area college/university and local employers provides a best case scenario for assessing and utilizing resources required to assist First Nations institutions in meeting the needs of First Nations communities.

Widespread knowledge of current practices could assist local communities and First Nations institutions in addressing needs that are not currently being met. Partnerships, joint ventures, strategic planning, and shared resources locally and regionally have the potential to significantly increase the capacity development of the First Nations post-secondary system. Regular opportunities for information sharing among communities, institutions, and organizations will assist communities in developing the human resource potential to address local and regional labour market needs. Ongoing information sharing, communication and dialogue with provincial, federal and other stakeholders increases the potential to strengthen the position of First Nations in addressing local, regional and national needs.

REALIZING THE VISION

Realizing the vision of First Nations with respect to post-secondary funding will require a review of how current funding is spent as well as an influx of additional resources for identified services. Ensuring additional and adequate resources will require clarification and/or policy and legislative change at the federal and provincial levels to ensure an adequate and ongoing commitment in the provision of quality post-secondary for all First Nations people. Infrastructure or system support would require increased coordination at the community level and increased funding to provide stability to programs required to support student achievement.

First Nation communities need to undergo a detailed examination of current and required programs and services to be able to identify the costs associated with the delivery of post-secondary to First Nations. Examining processes and costs for the provision of like services within mainstream institutions and organizations would also assist in determining the costs required. Governance structures, administration, policies and available funding under the Ontario Student Assistance Program and the Canada Student Loans program would need to be examined to provide a baseline for resources that are required for First Nations. With respect to student support, per student funding must be equivalent to the current and future costs associated with attending post-secondary institutions. In order to address the full range of costs, funding needs to include, tuition and other mandatory student fees, books and supplies, living allowances, transportation, childcare and other services, as determined by the local post-secondary institution and community in which the student attends post-secondary.

ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS OF GOVERNMENTS TO REALIZE THE VISION

First Nations people, communities and leaders must project a strong and unified voice to create the change necessary within mainstream post-secondary institutions to ensure First Nations needs and aspirations are addressed. Articulating a clear vision and the need for change could result in the development of federal and provincial policy and legislative support to ensure the required funding is made available and to develop and implement support mechanisms required to assist First Nations in achieving the vision for First Nations post-secondary. Achieving the desired results will require respectful partnerships between First Nations and the provincial and federal governments.

III. FIRST NATIONS PROGRAMMING IN MAINSTREAM COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Few colleges and universities in the mainstream post-secondary system offered First Nations specific courses until the creation of the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy in 1991. Today, a wide variety of courses and programs are available in thirty mainstream institutions, some of which include: Native Studies PhD program; Native Teacher Education; Aboriginal language and history courses; Native Social Worker Program; Native Legal Assistant Program; Native Nurses Entry Programs; Native Business and Economic Development; Native Early Childhood Education; and Adult Language Immersion.

First Nations specific programs aside, mainstream institutions also make program modifications/adaptations to include cultural content and will also change the names of programs in order to recruit First Nations students. Some institutions offer several First Nations programming options, while other institutions do not. Many colleges and universities created Aboriginal Education Councils or advisory committees (with Aboriginal community representation) and tasked them with the responsibility of providing input or advising the college or university on the design, development and delivery of Aboriginal courses, programs and services. While these councils and committees provide an avenue for increased participation by First Nations representatives, the decision to offer Aboriginal programming and the extent to which colleges and universities deliver Aboriginal programming continues to depend on the “will” of a particular institution.

VISION

The vision of First Nations with respect to programs delivered in mainstream colleges and universities is that Indigenous knowledge provides the foundation for the development of all programs of study. In addition to the overall vision, Ontario First Nations have stated that:

1. Indigenous knowledge should be infused into all programs of study
2. Aboriginal curriculum should be designed, developed, delivered by First Nations people
3. Intellectual property designed by First Nations is owned and controlled by First Nations communities
4. A provincially recognized, First Nations curriculum development and program approval process must be established for all programs developed for Ontario’s education system (for use in all levels, mainstream and First Nations systems)
5. A First Nations mechanism must be established as a result of provincial policy as the recognized authority in Ontario for the development of First Nations curriculum.

This vision could be supported through the creation of a First Nations research and curriculum center. Functions of the centre could include but not be limited to:

- Researching and documenting Indigenous knowledge, histories, cultural practices, languages, etc.
- Function as a clearinghouse of information, curriculum, case studies, supporting materials instructors, writers, elders and other resource persons for the development and delivery of First Nations curriculum.
- Designing and developing First Nations content and First Nations specific courses and programs for use in Ontario's elementary, secondary and post-secondary system.
- Providing program approval for all courses and programs with First Nations content.
- Owning and controlling of the use of First Nations curriculum used in Ontario's education system (First Nations and mainstream).
- Providing recommendations to schools/institutions regarding program delivery.

REALIZING THE VISION

The development of curriculum by First Nations for use in Ontario's education system will require increased human and financial resources from First Nations and the provincial and federal governments. As the provincial government has responsibility for education in Ontario, provincial policy support will be key to realizing this vision.

Other tasks required to realize the vision will include:

- Expanding the research capacity to document the history, language, customs and practices of First Nations people as told by First nations people.
- Developing guidelines, processes and outcomes for the design and development of Aboriginal curriculum.
- Examining provincial curriculum development methods, standards and processes to ensure curriculum developed addresses provincial requirements for courses and programs.
- Developing protocols to obtain Indigenous knowledge of First Nations people and nations for use in curriculum.
- Developing agreements with First Nations and methodology in the development and for the use of Indigenous knowledge in curriculum.
- Developing policies for elder and community involvement through all processes of gathering information, documenting research and developing curriculum.
- Developing policies to ensure the review and approval of curriculum content by First Nations Aboriginal people.
- Establishing a clearinghouse of existing curriculum, research reports and historical documents to support curriculum development.
- Developing case studies and other resources to supplement curriculum.
- Recruiting and securing researchers, writers and writing teams.
- Developing a human resource directory of First Nations instructors and speakers to teach courses and programs at all levels of education.

COST OF REALIZING THE VISION

The development of a First Nations research and curriculum centre is a concept that would require resources to introduce the idea and cultivate support from First Nations and the provincial and federal governments prior to development. Extensive research to examine the design and development of processes and mechanisms would be required to determine the costs to realize the vision. This work should include a comparative analysis of

organizational structures and processes within colleges and universities, research institutions and other like organizations that perform similar work.

ROLES AND OBLIGATIONS OF GOVERNMENTS IN ACHIEVING THE VISION

Political advocacy from First Nations leaders will be essential in achieving policy and financial support required to realize the vision. Provincial policy support is required to ensure processes established meet provincial requirements and to facilitate the acceptance and portability of courses and programs developed for use throughout the mainstream system. Financial support will be required from both the provincial and federal governments.

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