

News Release



ABORIGINAL HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF CANADA
CONSEIL POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DES RESSOURCES HUMAINES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 10, 2006

PRIVATE SECTOR AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY MEET TO RESOLVE BC'S SKILLED WORKER SHORTAGE

Vancouver, BC – A landmark BC forum, *Workforce Connex*, kicks off today at the Vancouver Marriott Pinnacle Downtown to help resolve barriers and open the potential for the private sector to effectively train, recruit and retain an Aboriginal workforce. Over 140 participants representing private sector, Aboriginal Employment Centres and government will attend the forum. Delegates will review BC workforce supply and demand issues and determine how the talent of Aboriginal people can be utilized in a win-win to fill emerging job opportunities in support of the 2010 Olympics and industry sectors such as construction, oil and gas, forestry, mining and transportation.

Through open dialogue built on mutual respect and understanding, the forum will increase and strengthen private sector/Aboriginal Employment Centre partnerships. The partnerships formed over the next two days will ultimately translate into jobs for Aboriginal people and expanded business opportunities for employers.

“Many regions and employment sectors in British Columbia are experiencing a shortage of skilled workers,” said John Webster, Co-chair of the British Columbia Aboriginal Workforce Strategy. “Employers are searching for innovative solutions to address the issues and capture the many business opportunities now available. Aboriginal people are ready and willing to answer the call to fill the employment gap.”

“We are experiencing an Aboriginal baby boom in Canada,” said Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. “Aboriginal people are the nation’s fastest growing and largely untapped human resource. Better use of their talent will solve many of Canada’s skill shortages”.

Almost one in five Aboriginal men aged 25 to 64 with qualifications beyond high school has a trade or college level credential in building and construction technologies or trades. Another 25 per cent are college and trade level graduates of industrial, mechanical or electronic engineering technologies and trades.

In a survey conducted by the Canada Labour and Business Centre, Canadian business and labour leaders found that hiring Aboriginal workers is not considered an important solution to solving their skill needs; only 13 per cent of business leaders and 21 per cent of labour leaders rated this activity very important. “This finding suggests that on a national scale, a disconnect exists between the potential skills contribution made by the Aboriginal workforce and the view held by some business and labour leaders on this contribution. This is the reason for *Workforce Connex*,” said Lendsay.

From 1996 to 2001, the Canadian working age population grew by five per cent, while over the same period; the Aboriginal labour force grew by 25 per cent. This young upwardly mobile labour force needs workplace opportunities for training, skills development and employment. Awakening firms to this opportunity is another goal for *Workforce Connex*.

Workforce Connex is a national forum series that is currently scheduled to be hosted in British Columbia, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Labrador, Quebec and Alberta. The outcomes of the British Columbia forum will be integrated into a national private sector/Aboriginal partnership strategy. The BC forum is hosted by the British Columbia Aboriginal Workforce Strategy holders in cooperation with the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. The project is funded by the Sector Council Program, Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

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The Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada is a national not-for-profit organization funded by the private and public sectors to create links between Canada’s employers and the Aboriginal community. The Council provides leadership on supply and demand issues that address the development of effective training, recruitment and retention strategies for Aboriginal people.