

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

**Fifth Annual Champions' Meeting**  
**5e Rencontre annuelle des Champions**

December 11, 2003

Fairmont Chateau Laurier, Quebec Room  
11:45 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

"The Cluster Approach to  
Aboriginal Human Resource Development:  
Increasing and Accelerating Aboriginal Employment in Canada"

"Une approche collective au  
développement des ressources humaines autochtones :  
accroître et accélérer l'emploi des Autochtones au Canada"

## ***The Focus of the 2003 Champions' Dialogue...***

*With the ultimate goal of increasing and accelerating Aboriginal skills, learning and employment, what strategies should the Council develop to effectively transfer the successes of its human resource “clusters” to a wider network of dedicated organizations throughout Canada?*

## ***Framing the Dialogue***

At the 2002 Annual Champions Meeting, Mr. Eric Newell, Chief Executive Officer of Syncrude Canada Ltd., spoke about the collaborative value of "clusters" as a way of increasing Aboriginal skills, learning and employment as well as addressing companies' skills shortages. He spoke about the Council's success with the development of clusters that bring industry together with Aboriginal training organizations, educational facilities, organized labour and government. Newell stated that the cluster is an important collaborative model that is achieving success in the challenging area of Aboriginal human resource development. The challenge is how best to lever up the benefits and lessons of the model. With the ultimate goal of increasing and accelerating Aboriginal skills, learning and employment, what strategies need to be developed by the Council to effectively transfer the successes of its human resource "clusters" to a wider network of dedicated organizations throughout Canada?

Many circles in government and industry continue to feel frustration and even dissatisfaction over the progress being made with the national mission to increase Aboriginal peoples' full participation in the Canadian economy. What can be done to increase and even accelerate changes to the status quo? How can we apply new learning and approaches to the complex issues underlying Aboriginal employment in Canada?

## ***Innovative Clusters ~ Design, Development & Attributes***

In 2002 the Council completed a comprehensive results-based strategic plan and the "cluster approach" was formally incorporated into its work plan. Under this work plan project clusters were advanced in several areas of Aboriginal human resource development. For example, a First Nations/Métis cluster in Vancouver was developed which has been successful in employing urban Aboriginal people in trades and apprenticeship positions. This partnership will soon grow to a larger British Columbia-wide cluster that will coordinate Aboriginal entry to trades positions. A second cluster focuses on collaboration between industry and Aboriginal training centres and the application of new technology and coaching systems to work place literacy. The Council's Inclusion Network is an example of a unique web-based cluster that connects employers with the Aboriginal talent pool. An innovative cluster which brought Inuit, First Nations and Métis front line human resource practitioners together with career development experts has resulted in the new Guiding Circles, the first national Aboriginal career planning tool in Canada. Finally, the two-year old BEAHR initiative (Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources) is a further example of an effective collaboration between the Aboriginal Human Resource Council and the Canadian Council for Human Resources in the Environment Industry that has created an industry-based cluster around a specific labour market.

The defining features of the Council's clusters are that they bring together effective partnerships based on solid relationships, shared public-private investment, new ideas, a results-based orientation, good design characteristics and, in some cases, technological innovations. They encourage horizontality. They provide a collaborative framework within which many interests and players can support common initiatives. In a multi-party environment these players bring knowledge capital, financial capital, social capital and human capital to bear on substantive issues in the Aboriginal human resource realm. Clusters are a way for these interests and their various expressions of capital to be effectively organized and deployed to achieve common goals. Their success generating employment and improving accessibility to skills and learning is "proof of concept". If this cluster approach could be amplified and implemented by a sufficient number of dedicated organizations in Canada it could have a significant effect accelerating and increasing Aboriginal employment.

## Developing Transfer Strategies - Challenges and Opportunities

The Council's chief challenge ahead is to develop strategies that can effectively parlay the results of each cluster to a growing network of national partners. Pilot or demonstration projects are simply interesting episodes unless they inform or instruct and are acted upon. The "multiplier effect" of pilot or demonstration clusters is that lessons learned are migrated into the mainstream to affect a change from the status quo. Of necessity, these "transfer" strategies will be complex because they need to address a variety of objectives.

For the Council, "transfer strategies" may incorporate several different features. One of the features is that of knowledge transfer. What are the most effective ways of distilling lessons learned from the clusters to make this information and know-how more available and accessible to a wider audience? An investment strategy is also required. How can private sector investment be increased and leveraged? How can municipal, provincial and federal sources of public funds be aligned with private funds? A third and more subtle transfer strategy entails the exchange of social capital. What are the ways and means of transferring to a wider audience the trust, the relationships, the goodwill and other "social glue" that are so evident in the clusters? It can be argued an abundance of social capital is a prerequisite for improved and accelerated collaboration between Aboriginal organizations, government, employers and other players.

Another consideration to the development of transfer strategies is the need for alliances and partnerships. Simply put, the Council's value proposition is that it is a designer/ developer. Its area of expertise is that it designs and incubates innovative products and services but it does not have the resources or distribution infrastructure to roll out these innovations on its own to broader networks regionally or nationally. As part of its transfer strategies the Council needs to develop the partnerships and alliances necessary to enable it to "export" the knowledge/know-how, the social capital and other attributes created inside the clusters to this wider network. It also needs to develop partnerships in order to engage more organizations to replicate, adapt or originate new innovations using the cluster approach.

There are at least four types of partnerships, which the Council could pursue. It could enter into a business relationship with a company or companies to commercialize and market products or services that are incubated within clusters. For example, it could develop a commercial distribution network for its Inclusion Network or its "Guiding Circles" career awareness product. It could develop a strategic alliance with a non-governmental organization, a sector council for example. It could create third party delivery arrangements with existing networks such as the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement (AHRDA) holders. A fourth type of arrangement would be to work with municipal, provincial and federal levels of government to explore the development of public-private partnership models. Each of these partnership opportunities poses special considerations for the Aboriginal Human Resource Council. These considerations could include product/service continuity, financial and capacity issues, quality management and others.

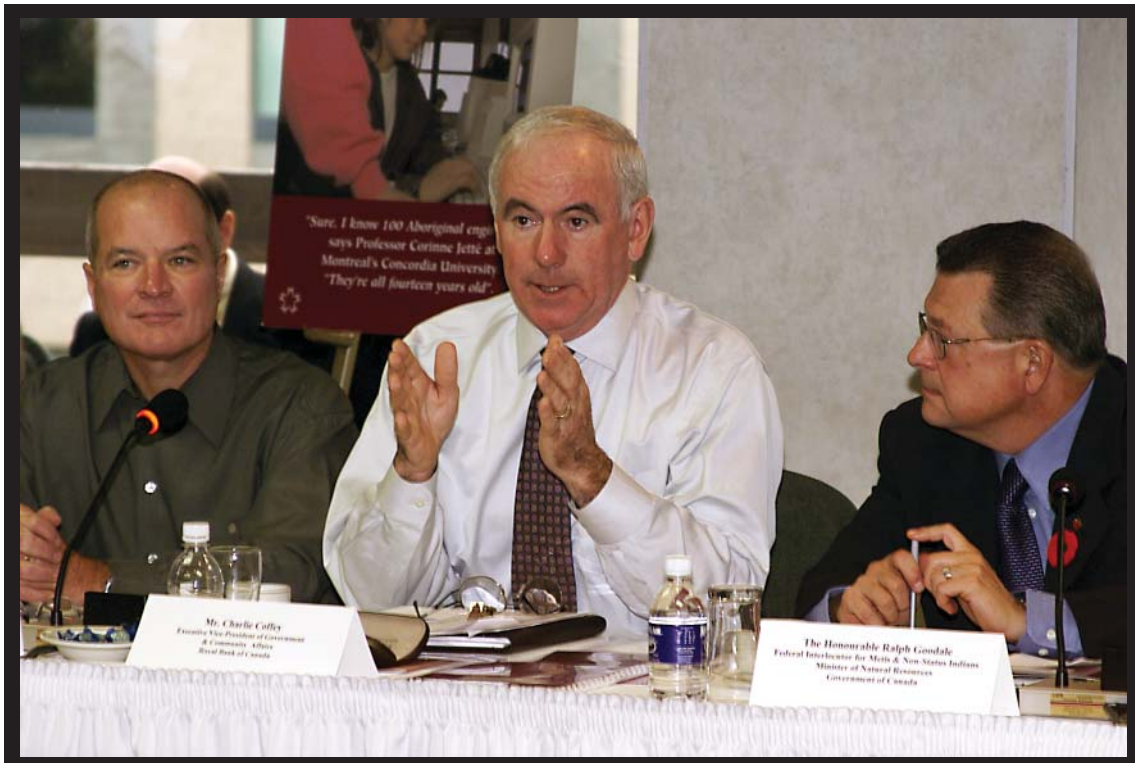
The development of transfer strategies must be a multi-pronged approach encouraging a wider network of dedicated partners to embrace the knowledge, know-how and other characteristics of clusters to replicate, adapt or originate new clusters.

The Council has already begun part of this work developing transfer strategies. This year the Council engaged more sector councils and AHRDA holders in its clusters, broadening the level of engagement. In November 2003 it delivered a new national workshop, bringing AHRDAs and sector councils together so they could discuss how to create new clusters that leverage their respective capital resources. The Council is also partnered with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges on a workshop that will bring community colleges together with AHRDA holders so these networks of colleges and Aboriginal training centres can more effectively collaborate.

## ***Champions will Provide Direction and Advice***

At the December 11, 2003 meeting, a dialogue will be facilitated with Champions to gather new insights, guidance and direction about the kinds of strategies needed to effectively transfer the successes of its human resource "clusters" to ever-widening networks of organizations that include public, private, educational, government and labour interests. The Council needs to mine the experiences of its cluster projects and transfer these experiences to benefit and engage a wider national audience of dedicated organizations that want to increase and accelerate Aboriginal employment in Canada.

The Champions' guidance and direction will not only help the Council parlay its results but they will help clarify the roles and responsibilities of the many players in this busy landscape of national or regional groups, different levels of government, employers and other organizations that are all working toward a common goal, though not always in a fully coordinated way. As the federal political scene changes in the new calendar year, people will be looking to new ideas and ways of achieving more efficient and effective results on Aboriginal employment. What direction can Champions provide to improve the planning and coordination for Aboriginal employment, skills and learning in Canada?



**Keith Macdonald, National Manager, Aboriginal Banking, RBC Royal Bank and Charlie Coffey, Executive Vice-President of Government and Community Affairs, RBC Financial Group and The Honourable Ralph Goodale, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians.**

## **Appendix 1**

### ***AHRDCC: Achieving Results through the Cluster Approach***

- The Council plays a niche role as a "pillar" in the \$1.6 billion Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy (AHRDS) and it is a sector council working with 27 other councils within a national sector partnership framework. As part of these two strategies the Aboriginal Sector Council has an effective "reach" to supply and demand ends of the labour market.
- Through the Council's cluster projects in its 2002-2004 work plan, it is playing a strategic national leadership role in the Skills and Learning Agenda (introducing innovative pan-Aboriginal products and services such as Guiding Circles, e-literacy, Inclusion Network and TeKnoWave.)
- The Council is the first to layer a national sectoral approach over the AHRDS. It has mobilized AHRDA holders on trades project clusters that coordinate Aboriginal investment and labour market activities. (Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project, Vancouver Trades and Apprenticeship cluster, BC-wide Coordinated Trades Strategy).
- The Aboriginal Sector Council is the first to engage sector councils in comprehensive Aboriginal strategies e.g. Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources (BEAHR) project with the Canadian Council for Human Resources in the Environment Industry (CCHREI) and now working with eight other sector councils.
- Creative partnerships are becoming a hallmark of the Aboriginal Sector Council. One such model brings seven diverse AHRDA holders together with the Council and other partners to design new human resource innovations in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.
- The trial period following the launch of the Inclusion Network in February 2003 indicates the early success of this web-based "virtual" cluster. With over 1150 positions posted, 1550 job seekers and more than 65 organizations already participating in the network it is demonstrating its potential as a viable and cost effective strategy to connect employers with Aboriginal skills, learning and employment.
- The number of Aboriginal people who will be provided a job, skills or learning through the lifecycle of the various activities the Council is undertaking, or in which it is partnered, is estimated at 7905 over the next 15 years.
- The employment generated for the 2002-2003 reporting period through the Council's activities was approximately 320 (Aboriginal) person years of employment.
- The Council is demonstrating an impressive 303% return on the public investment. For each dollar invested in the Council's annual infrastructure of \$1.2 million, it has leveraged \$4.03 for a total of \$4.8 million from public and private partners.
- In addition to the above figure for "leverage", it is noteworthy that two sector councils AHRDCC has currently partnered with have attained approximately \$3.5 million for Aboriginal project initiatives.
- The Council has learned a great deal about the social capital considerations underlying partnerships and collaborative models. Engagement strategies require that relationships be developed and nurtured. There is no substitute for the time and resources that may be required in the initial engagement phase. There is a strong correlation between this initial investment, the longer-term longevity or quality of the partnership and the achievement of the incremental value derived from the partnership.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Guiding Questions for the Champions' Dialogue**

*With the ultimate goal of increasing and accelerating Aboriginal skills, learning and employment, what strategies should the Council develop to effectively transfer the successes of its human resource "clusters" to a wider network of dedicated organizations throughout Canada?*

- How can new ways of thinking contribute to a radical shift in Aboriginal employment in Canada?
- What considerations need to be taken into account by the Council as it develops partnerships with organizations that help it transfer innovative products and services developed within its clusters?
- What are the ways and means of transferring to a wider audience the trust, relationships, goodwill and other "social glue" that are so evident in the clusters?
- What direction can Champions provide to improve the planning and coordination for Aboriginal employment, skills and learning in Canada?





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