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Welcoming and Inclusive Communities

Ponoka Regional Workshop: Full Report
October 9, 2013



BACKGROUND

The Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) initiative is a partnership between the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA) and the Alberta Human Rights Commission to create communities with positive reputations, where diversity adds to the social and economic vibrancy of the community and the quality of life enjoyed by all residents. The WIC initiative supports municipalities that have joined the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CMARD).

Through its work on WIC, the AUMA noted that municipalities are particularly challenged by issues related to immigration. As a result, the AUMA partnered with Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education to deliver the Come Together Alberta (CTA) initiative. The CTA initiative works under the umbrella of WIC with a specific focus on providing resources to support strategies for the attraction, retention and integration of newcomers.

Municipal governments function at the most practical level and are most involved in the lives of their residents. They are an ideal place to develop policies, programs and strategies and take meaningful action towards eliminating racism and discrimination.

Through its WIC and CTA initiatives, the AUMA has been working with a number of communities around the province to plan four regional workshops built on topics identified by host municipalities.

On October 9, 2013, the third of these free workshops entitled ***Engaging Our Aboriginal Workforce*** was held in the Town of Ponoka. Participants discussed best practices of inclusion, cultural awareness, Aboriginal community history and were provided with an opportunity to network with municipalities, businesses, employment centres and other organizations.

The workshop took place in the afternoon from 1-5pm in order to encourage more employers to take part, and was well attended with approximately 70 participants representing various community sectors (see the Evaluation section of this report for details).

AUMA would like to thank Alberta Works, the Maskwacis Employment Centre, the Ponoka Chamber of Commerce and the Ponoka Employment Centre for their assistance in organizing the event.



PRESENTERS

Bruce Cutknife presented on the history of the Maskwacis people. Bruce took participants back to the very beginning, tracing Maskwacis roots through to the discovery of the first Paleo-Indian points, suggesting that our ancestors were the right people for their time by making use of, and adapting to, their environment. As time progressed, weapons and tools became smaller and more efficient. In addition, the discovery of crops such as corn allowed people to leave behind the nomadic lifestyle and develop villages. Despite the Papal Sublimus Dei, which forbade the enslavement of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, the Spanish enslaved the Indians because they did not see them as “people.” Even today, the use of tribal images is prominent in sports (e.g. Washington Redskins) and is considered by some to be racist.

Kristen Cumming discussed Alberta’s current labour market and how it relates to the Aboriginal population. Kristen suggested that communities cannot build structure ahead of an economic boom, but must think about long-term sustainability and predictable expectations. Alberta’s labour market is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 2.4%, while its labour supply grows at an annual rate of 1.9%. This means that by 2021, Alberta predicts a cumulative shortage of +/- 114,000 workers. The Aboriginal population is generally younger than the non-Aboriginal population and comprises approximately 9% of Albertans (data from 2011). Ideally, employment would be both meaningful and sustainable. This generation, however, is living at a time when jobs are not the typical permanent, full-time format but rather where contingent work is on the rise and jobs are less stable. It is important that communities find ways to match supply and demand in such a way that employment opportunities are provided and communities are strengthened economically and socially. This includes providing employability supports, creating proposals for training and building industry partnerships.

Margaret Sparling is the Aboriginal Partnerships Manager at Alberta Works. Alberta Works assists Albertans to participate in the workforce, helps employers and industry find the workers they need, and aims to build an educated and trained workforce. Alberta Works centres provide job boards, career development services, Aboriginal partnership coordinators, contracted services coordinators, and workforce information. In addition, Alberta Works provides resources for employers, such as Business and Industry Liaisons, who help employers navigate Alberta Works services and tackle labour shortage and staff retention challenges; workforce adjustment services to help employers and employees through times of expansion and downsizing; workforce partnerships to help employers address skills shortages by partnering to train Albertans with in-demand skills; and an employer toolkit, which contains a comprehensive listing of the information and services available to employers. Alberta Works also holds regular job fairs across the province and provides targeted marketing opportunities for employers to profile their business and job opportunities. Labour market information, such as jobs and salaries, industry sectors, cities and communities, and future trends and conditions helps Albertans make good decisions when changing jobs or relocating. Furthermore, the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS) (<http://alis.alberta.ca>) is an excellent online source for career, educational and employment information.

John Carpenter, Apprenticeship Consultant with Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education, concluded the presentations by providing a brief overview of the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative. The initiative is designed to increase Aboriginal participation in the workforce and successful completion of Alberta apprenticeship programs. It links employers with potential Aboriginal apprentices and provides support to help build successful working and learning relationships. The initiative used to be active in Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton and Fort McMurray but is now only active in the latter two regions with



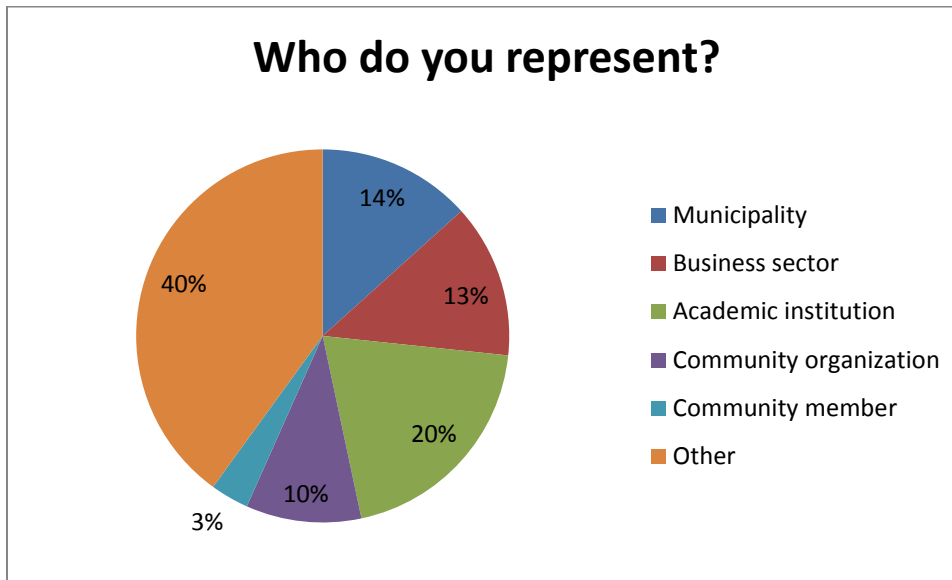
a focus on the oil and gas sector. The initiative was started in 2001 and had a 5-year mandate to register and employ 255 Aboriginal apprentices throughout the province. By the time this 5-year mandate ended in 2007, the initiative had over 300 apprentices, well above its original mandate. Current local and economic circumstances are driving continued interest in many parts of Alberta, including Hobbema. The success of the initiative has been attributed to a number of factors, including an informed employment counseling process; an out-reach based approach; and addressing other factors, such as career decision-making, skills enhancement, job search and employment maintenance. In addition, good assessment has resulted in higher retention and completion rates; support has been offered to the right people going to the right employers; passion for the trade has been key; ongoing coaching and support is offered until Journeyman status through monthly follow-ups with the apprentice and employer; and academics are reinforced and annual milestones recognized. The initiative has experienced some challenges because there is no single solution that works for everyone. The individual and culture have to be understood and there are often variations between urban and rural Aboriginal people (e.g. in rural areas mobility is a factor). Today, the initiative has 400 Journeymen and 1,200 apprentices.

**NOTE: Following the above presentations, participants were given the opportunity to pose any remaining questions to Kristen, Margaret and John. Remarks by presenters are their own personal thoughts and are not necessarily shared by the AUMA.*

EVALUATION

After the session, participants were asked to complete an evaluation survey to gather feedback and basic participant information. Out of 70 participants, 30 responded to the survey (response rate of 43%). The following summarizes the results of the survey.

Participants came from various sectors. The workshop had representation from 4 different municipalities.



What did you appreciate most about this session?



How will this session contribute to your own Welcoming and Inclusive Communities (WIC) and/or Come Together Alberta (CTA) work?

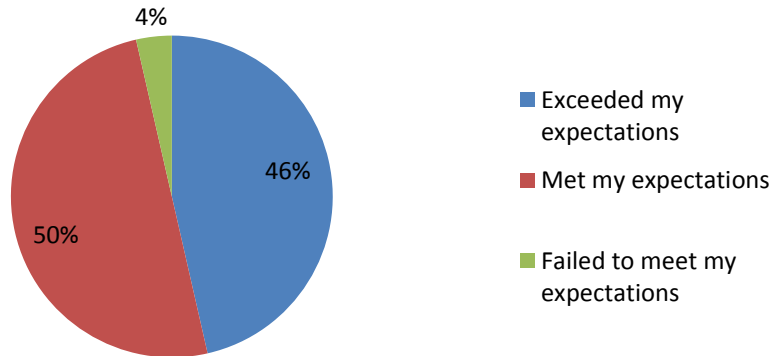


Any suggestions for how we could improve future sessions?

- Talk about structural racism in the workplace and how it works.
- Have time for sessions earlier in the day.
- Having more numbers for potential employees.
- There are many factors to include, but keep compassion in all that you do. First Nation peoples have been heavily oppressed and are used to put downs. Remember that there are many people who you interact with when you make a difference to one individual.
- Just do more of them!
- I would like to see more employers, success stories and mentorship programs.
- I did not hear anything about the social issues that we encounter when we meet certain Aboriginal individuals to interact/attract them to join our workforce. How can we solve the drug/alcohol issues? How can we solve issues so that certain individuals come to work as reliable and punctual workers? Of course this is not applicable to all Aboriginals but it needs to be addressed in order to get a strong and good reputation for the Aboriginal people.
- More coffee and tea.
- I would come to another session with both Bruce and Kristen speaking. They could continue where they left off.
- Make this a whole day session with breaks to allow for networking between the different groups in attendance as the one 15 minute break did not allow for this, which is a lost opportunity.
- It was all good ladies and gentlemen!
- An employer and employee success story.
- It could have been longer. Bruce had a lot to say and it felt like he could have spoken longer. Could start at 10am-4pm or 9am-3pm. Lost a lot of people at about 3pm.
- As always, time is always short for these amazing sessions.
- More education.

- There is a need to have more involvement locally. Ponoka will need labour. Involvement opportunity.
- More stuff like these.
- More jokes and laughter and munchies.

Overall, how well did this session meet your expectations?



Comments:

- Educational.
- It was very informative and good speakers.
- Workshops are needed to introduce us for labour demand and which job is suited for you.
- Thank you for a positive, proactive insight of the plan to employ Aboriginal workers.
- Speakers were excellent.
- At this moment, Alberta seems to prefer the Philippines as they have a good reputation of hardworking people with a good and reliable work attitude. How can we change the reputation of Aboriginal people? I would like to go a bit more in depth about this subject.
- I found some value in this workshop. More opportunity to network and group discussions for the future.
- Excellent effort for a first of its kind workshop. Keep up the great work.
- Great attendance and representation of local service providers. Well-spoken presenters/speakers.
- Those who participated, it appeared, wanted to be in attendance.
- Well-organized and great people.
- I thought the event was well-organized and run. Great information and good turnout. Networking and wonderful snacks helped too.
- I was not expecting the caliber of presenters and was very impressed with all of them.
- It was great to see the turnout today. Good information and great beginning to connect the various groups. Breaking down barriers, disputing myths, showcasing resources and supports.
- Well done! A great mix of cultural and economic information. Bruce Cutknife is an amazing storyteller and Kristen makes a “dull” topic dynamic and exciting.
- I was amazed.



Anything else you would like to share with us?

- Great opportunity to network and connect with the Alberta Works group.
- Would like to run this workshop in my community.
- It felt like an AA round-up. Keep it real! Education.
- I would like to thank you for inviting us. It was nice to be here although I was kind of paranoid at first.
- It would be good to see more of these sessions in more rural communities across central Alberta. Thanks for putting this on!
- Great venue.
- Include contact information for the presenters for follow-up questions.
- Thank you for your hard work in putting on a successful event. Way to go!
- Well-organized. Thanks!
- Share the love and compassion to expel the fear that builds around our positive efforts.
- Thanks for the information and workshop!
- Keep up the good work.
- Great speakers.
- Thank you to everyone who put this together.
- I would have appreciated hearing from a representative (Aboriginal) to learn more about what is needed from employers or what obstacles are experienced.
- I was working in southern Alberta Department of National Defense (DND). Ponoka demography is different and Hobbema.
- Invite us more to these kinds of things.



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