

Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network



June 8th, 2011
Second Learning Circle on
Developing the Urban
Aboriginal Economy in
Toronto

Prepared by the Urban Aboriginal Economic Development Network

June 8th, 2011

About the Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network:

The *Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network* is an open and inclusive multi-stakeholder network of researchers and practitioners working in urban Aboriginal and Métis communities. This includes organizations, universities, federal/provincial/municipal and Aboriginal governments, private industry, community groups, and NGO's. The network's focus is on mobilizing economic development knowledge and strengthening organizational capacity.

This paper can be found on the network website: <http://abdc.bc.ca/uaed>

The Toronto Learning Circle is being organized in partnership with the following organizations:

About Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training:

The mission of *Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training* is manifold: to counsel Toronto urban Native people on careers and paths and opportunities, to work with employers to secure employment opportunities, to deliver federal and provincial training programs, working with both groups and individuals to achieve these endeavors. Jim Windigo, a respected Ojibway Elder gave the organization its name. Miziwe Biik is like a body of water where a ripple effect has been created; it is the ability to reach out and make positive change in the lives of the urban Native people across the Greater Toronto Area. Website: <http://www.miziwebiik.com/>

About the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres:

The *Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres* (OFIFC) is a provincial Aboriginal organization representing the collective interests of twenty-nine member Friendship Centres located in towns and cities throughout the province. The OFIFC administers a number of programs which are delivered by local Friendship Centres in areas such as health, justice, family support, and employment and training. Friendship Centres also design and deliver local initiatives in areas such as education, economic development, children's and youth initiatives, and cultural awareness. The Vision of the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Movement is "to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to and participation in Canadian Society and which respects Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness." Website: <http://www.ofifc.org/>

Dr. Rochelle R. Côté:

Dr. Rochelle R. Côté is a *Social Science and Humanities Research Council* (SSHRC) Postdoctoral Research Fellow with the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy at the University of Arizona. Formerly of the University of Toronto, her doctoral dissertation entitled "Making Their Way in the Mainstream: Indigenous Entrepreneurs, Social Capital and Performance in Toronto's Marketplace" focused on the link between social networks and the success of Indigenous business owners. She has written and presented on many aspects of social support, social networks and social capital, reciprocity, and social tolerance for ethnic minorities. In a professional capacity, she has provided consulting expertise on matters related to the development of social networks and social capital for *The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation* (SRDC) as well as the *Policy Research Initiative* (PRI), *Aboriginal Policing Directorate* and most recently the *Office of the Federal Interlocutor on Métis and Non-Status Indians*.

Her research interests include understanding the link between social tolerance and social networks, and the use of social networks and cultural knowledge in negotiating business opportunities. She is currently examining the role of different forms of social and cultural capital in the business success of Indigenous entrepreneurs in Phoenix, Arizona.

An up-to-date CV can be found at:

<http://utoronto.academia.edu/RochelleCote/CurriculumVitae>

Contents

Introduction..... 5
Invitation..... 6
Participants..... 7
Learning Circle Notes 8
 Mentorship 9
 Mentoring..... 10
 Pan-Am Games 10
 Incubators 13
 Conversation..... 13

#

Introduction

The second Toronto Learning Circle was organized by the UAED Network, in cooperation with Dr. Rochelle Côté, Principal Investigator for the Aboriginal Entrepreneurship in and around Toronto Project, Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.

Purpose

The overall goal of the Community Learning Circles, which this Circle is be a part of, is to develop a Canada-wide advocacy network that supports the economic development of Aboriginal people in urban areas. The notes below are for the second Learning Circle, held on June 8th, 2011, at the offices of Miziwe Biik.

Invitation

Prior to the event, an invitation was sent to people who had a potential interest in economic development in the Toronto Aboriginal community. This included participants in the first Learning Circle in March, but also others who might have an interest in this issue.

Dear Learning Circle Participants:

Please find attached notes that came out of the first Toronto Learning Circle, held in March, 2011. In our earlier invitation, we had mentioned that we would be seeking feedback and direction about the focus of the upcoming Toronto Learning Circle, which is to be held on June 8th, at 1:30, at Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training.

As you will see from the notes, the March Learning Circle identified three possible topics for the next meeting.

- 1. Participants agreed that Aboriginal entrepreneurs in Toronto are not well connected with each other, and that it would be helpful to have a Toronto-wide network of Aboriginal entrepreneurs. This would help both by enabling mutual support networks, but also assist people to identify market opportunities and maximize those by cooperation and partnerships.*
- 2. There was a suggestion that the group could foster a project that linked young or early stage Aboriginal entrepreneurs with more experienced ones, either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. This could be a mentorship process, or job shadowing, or some form of co-learning.*
- 3. Finally, there was some suggestion that Toronto community might consider a longer term project, which would be to develop a business incubator for new or expanding Aboriginal businesses.*

We invite your feedback on these potential topics. When we convene the June Circle, the group will have the chance to discuss these and confirm the focus of the June meeting.

We look forward to seeing you in June.

Participants

The following people attended the learning circle:

- Roman Bittman
- Ralph Brown
- Rochelle Côté (participated in first circle)
- Ronald Green (participated in first circle)
- Candice Holmstrom (participated in first circle)
- Charles Horn
- Constance Jamieson
- Mille Knapp
- Michael Low
- Patrice Mackenzie
- Chris Meawasige
- Jennifer Rafferty
- Andrew Szonyi (participated in first circle)
- Jena Weber (participated in first circle)

Learning Circle Notes

The meeting was held in the Miziwe Biik meeting room on June 8th, 2011. Dr. Rochelle Côté and Jena Weber co-hosted the Circle and helped to organize the meeting.

The meeting itself started with an opening prayer. Somebody put a sacred item in the center of the circle (a hat with a Che Guevara patch). We had a round of introductions to get to know each other. Charles discussed with the group background information about learning circles and then posted the following guidelines on the wall for all of the participants to see:

- **Learn about one another – become familiar**
- **Listen carefully – make notes to focus on listening**
- **Take your turn – important everyone is heard**
- **Help keep discussion on topic**
- **Address remarks to the group not the facilitator**
- **Let facilitator know if it isn't working for you**
- **Take part – everyone has unique experience and knowledge**
- **Engage in friendly disagreement - challenge ideas**
- **Respect all opinions**
- **Humor helps**

The three items on the table were:

1. Network
2. Mentorship
3. Incubators

The participants were invited to add to the agenda.

Once the Circle was convened, the following issues and points were raised by participants.

Mentorship

One of the participants talked about the need for mentorship programs for youth interested in entrepreneurship. Other participants made additional points on this topic:

- Current mentorship opportunities are not very structured, don't have an academic component to them
- Mentors
 - Don't know what they know, so may not realize they have value to add
 - Need inventory of knowledge.
- Roman – suggest a more formal system of mentoring
- CCAB – good at addressing needs of established businesses. Need for role models.
- Ronald – has been asked to mentor but is very busy: many potential mentors have this problem
- Something that junior entrepreneurs can access? Fund for somebody to be mentored (ASEB?) There are costs to the mentor and the person being mentored
- Miziwe Biik offers different levels of mentorship
- Jazz up an initiative for youth, make it eye catching and interesting.
 - Give youth the sense that they can be their own boss.
- Need to help youth awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities
- Need culturally relevant stories
 - Historically, pre-contact, First Nations were entrepreneurs.
 - The Indian Act took Native people out of the economy.
- Ministry offers academic program for middle school aged children regarding entrepreneurship
 - High school – business plan wizard (Patrice Mackenzie)
- Lack of knowledge of support systems
 - If you don't know, you're blind
- Government will give \$3000 to students to create a summer job

Mentoring

What do people have to give?

What do people have to get?

Andrew – suggest that we take the rifle approach rather than the shotgun approach. Focus on something that is doable

After some more discussion on this issue, participants turned to the second agenda item, which was the issue of the opportunities for the community presented by the Pan AM Games, which Toronto is hosting.

Pan-Am Games

- Are we trying to get jobs?
- Are we trying to train people?
- Focus on something tangible
 - Partnership opportunities
 - Focus this circle
- Pan Am Games 2015 has the city approached First Nations?
 - Government of Ontario
 - Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs
 - 2015 Organizers
- Create a fund for Aboriginal youth
- Huge potential for Aboriginal involvement
- Trades – Aboriginal people want to enter trades in Toronto at two times the rate of other people.
- Want to coordinate to get Aboriginal people construction jobs
- Aboriginal companies need to be organized
- Toronto Aboriginal Business Association
 - People need to see it as an avenue for economic development.

As part of the discussion of how to take advantage of the Pan Am Games, participants talked about the value of a coordinated approach, and the need for more structure within the Aboriginal business community in Toronto. The following points were raised:

- What about an Aboriginal chamber of commerce?
- The Aboriginal Businesses in Arizona seem to be way more connected than here.
- A chamber of commerce has more structure than a business association
- Demand pull or supply push – we create the supply
- More formal structure to guide pan am games on opportunities
- Initiate a community forum
- Look to the Vancouver Olympics
 - 4 host nations
 - Six nations plus urban aboriginal population
- There's a winning formula but we want to focus on the economics and not the politics.
- Do the four host nations in way that Ontario can accept.
- If you don't organize, you miss out on opportunities
- Creation of a body that can act as an earphone
- Need a champion who can marshal the rest
 - Organize a task force
- It's hard to foster a sense of inclusiveness
- We need an information session or public forum
 - Champion can emerge
- We need more business people
- If TABA was to be reformed does Miziwe Biik have the capability to sustain it?
- Supply push
 - Don't rely on the argument that the Pan Am Games must use Aboriginal suppliers, instead, show them
- What's in it for me? The value of participating in some more formal approach to the Games, or to doing business in Toronto, needs to be clear to Aboriginal business people. Some of them are in survival mode and can't afford to be involved where there is no material benefit

- Incubator space would be good, this has been talked about before but might have some potential for the urban Aboriginal community
- Can we use the Pan-Am games to advance this idea? Ie Headquarter for Aboriginal presence
- City won't operate an incubator based on a specific group.
 - Who picks it up?
- Ryerson – Centre for Indigenous Studies – have an endowment
 - Indigenous Governance Chair
- Mantra “Aboriginal money under Aboriginal control”
- Create a business plan for Aboriginal ent.
 - Private money – no strings attached
- Participants discussed the role of Miziwe Biik in forming a secretariat structure for the Games: in response, Ken provided more information about their role, clarifying that they are just setting the table, but don't want to control the process.

Incubators

The discussion turned to the topic of business incubators, and their applicability or viability for the Toronto Aboriginal community.

- Business courses
- Coaching and mentoring
- Lower rent
- Aboriginal incubator needs to be self-supporting
- Maybe develop a co-op afterwards
- Network with other businesses
- Not not-viable, just not automatic

Conversation

Where do we go from here?

Secretariat – Kenn. Chiefs meeting next week, will have a sense of direction

Crystallization of thoughts

Legacy of games

- Incubator
- Youth trust fund
- Jobs created
- Mechanism for engagement about secretariat
- Revitalizing the TABA
 - Mechanism to do a lot of communicating
- Great short term goal – get the word out
- Framing it strategically – hear about games opportunities
- Market it as a great networking opportunity.
- Email update to Charles

- Another meeting – Fall

At the end of the meeting, it was clear that there was some interest in exploring the issues raised in the Circle in more depth. There was some support for continued discussion about the incubator model, although participants also knew that this would not be a short term project. Participants also thought that there might be value in a more focused event that dealt just with the opportunities associated with the Pan-Am Games.

Charles, Jena, Ken, and Rochelle committed to get the record of the meeting out to participants, and to explore the feasibility of another Circle.