

Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network



Background Brief: Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative

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About the Urban Aboriginal Economic Development 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 Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative's (CUAI) mission is "[to] provide a home for ongoing discussion, coordination, and informed action in support of Calgary urban Aboriginal issues and initiatives" (CUAI website).

The CUIAI originated from a community research initiative, which was established in 1999 under the title "Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle". The idea was to gather members of Calgary's urban Aboriginal population to compile information about barriers and make recommendations for future initiatives. In 2000, the original research initiative became the CUIAI.

The CUIAI has a CUIAI Committee, which is not a Board of Director nor does it lead the work of CUIAI, rather it assists in coordinating activities and provides support and direction for the CUIAI project team. If ever need, the Committee is responsible for hiring the Director. The CUIAI Committee exists to support and enhance the work of the domain groups and to act as an arena for any cross-domain initiatives. The CUIAI Committee meets on a quarterly basis. Decisions are based on a consensus-building model or, if required, one vote per member as listed below. Members of the CUIAI include (CUAI website):

- 1 - 2 representatives from the Government of Canada;
- 1 - 2 representatives from the Government of Alberta;
- 1 (One) representative from the City of Calgary;
- 1 (One) representative from the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (CAUAC);
- 1 (One) representative from Treaty Seven Economic Development Corporation;
- 1 (One) representative from the Métis Nation of Alberta;
- 1 (One) representative from each domain group (see below);
- 1 (One) Elder;
- 1 (One) Aboriginal youth representative;
- 2 (Two) members-at-large from the Aboriginal community; and,
- 1(One) member from the Chamber of Commerce, Aboriginal Opportunities Committee (AOC)

The foundation of CUIAI's structure are eight community-based domain groups, which are facilitated in order to respond to emergent needs in the Aboriginal community and move ahead recommendations from "Removing Barriers: A Listening Circle"

The eight CUIAI 'domain groups' include a broad range of stakeholders, who have an interest in urban Aboriginal development and effect sustainable enhancements for the urban Aboriginal population of Calgary. The eight domain groups are:

- Services
- Justice
- Human Rights
- Housing
- Health
- Employment
- Education
- Funders

Most of the Domains meet on a monthly basis, and try to host events on a Quarterly basis for their Domain membership and the community. Each Domain has either Co-Chair positions or one Chair and one Co-Chair, with one of those positions being selected to represent the Domain group at the CUIAI committee level (CUIAI website). Domain quarterly meetings and memberships are free and open to the public. All domain members and chairs volunteer their time. It is the goal of each domain to be a networking platform for urban Aboriginal community members and other stakeholders to identify urban Aboriginal issues in need of attention and collect recommendations for improvements. Each domain has outlined goals and priorities (subject to change, as most Domains review these annually):

The *Services* domain aims to support culturally sensitive service delivery including all aspects of family and community well-being in a single-window service delivery approach.

Justice focuses on culturally appropriate law enforcement and crime prevention methods with the goal of reducing the relative number of Aboriginal people in the Justice system.

The *Human Rights* group educates and informs Aboriginal individuals about their rights and available resources, while collecting feedback and suggestions from the Aboriginal population and partnering with related service providers and stakeholders.

Homelessness, addiction, the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the preparation and execution of housing projects, and Aboriginal representation on housing committees are aspects addressed by the *Housing* domain group.

Health works on enhancing communication, networking, and service delivery, as well as increasing the awareness of Aboriginal health issues. The domain provides a platform for discussion and information sharing.

The *Employment* domain group's goal is to create a non-discriminatory work environment and increase Aboriginal participation in Calgary's urban work force. They also gather and share information concerning employment practices and retention. The domain holds learning events to introduce Aboriginal people in Calgary to service providers and organizations such as the Calgary Workers Resource Centre and the Alberta Human Rights Commission. They have, furthermore, hosted the "Methods to Hire and Retain Aboriginal People" forum, where Canada Safeway, the City of Calgary's Born to Be program, and the Calgary Chamber of Commerce were represented. To expand their hiring and employment retention resources and expertise, the group invites employers to take part in an online survey in their section of the CUIAI website.

The *Employment* domain group regularly revises its priorities to adapt to changing needs in the community. The priorities function as guidelines in the collaborative Granting Process as described in the paragraph about the *Funders* domain below. The current focus of *Employment* is on:

- programs and services for Aboriginal people with disabilities,
- networking, partnerships, and cooperation throughout the community,
- employment programs for Aboriginal people in the community,
- understanding and educating about hiring and employment retention issues.

Education aims to create and promote a sense of belonging for Aboriginal individuals in Calgary's education system. This domain identifies possibilities for system improvements and addresses youth, Aboriginal educational staff, adult education, and mentorship programs.

The function of the *Funders* domain group is to leverage funding from governments, corporations, and philanthropic organizations through partnerships for projects that are deemed of high community importance. The Domain group also plays a part in the CUIAI Collaborative Granting Process (CGP). This process was initiated in 2003, as a result of a partnership that was established in 2002, between CUIAI and the Federal Government's Urban Aboriginal Strategy. "The objective of the CUIAI Collaborative Granting Process (CGP) is to prioritize investment in community-driven projects that build on existing strengths or address high-priority needs and service gaps in the urban Aboriginal community" (CUIAI website).

The intent of the CGP is to receive exposure to a broad base of funding opportunities and to provide a single-window facility for project proposals which aim at positive changes to the socio-economic circumstances of Calgary's urban Aboriginal population. "It provides participating funders with community-reviewed proposals prioritized against the CUIAI Community Plan" (CUIAI website).

The CUIAI CGP is offered once a year (with cycle timelines varying) and is completed with a focus on improvements over time based on feedback from stakeholders for each funding cycle. Each cycle starts with each of the Domain groups (except funding) reviewing the priorities of the prior cycle and ascertaining if the priorities relating to their sector are still of high need. If so, they stay in the "CUIAI Plan document", which outlines the priorities for that cycle, if not, the Domain group discusses and develops one or more priorities for that coming cycle. CUIAI staff sends out a Request for Proposal for the cycle. Once all proposals are submitted, the Domain groups provide community recommendations on projects, which CUIAI staff collect for feedback to funders. All of the Domain Chairs (except the funders domain) meet together to review all the multi-domain proposals. Once this process is completed, all of the applications go to the Funders Domain table for their consideration against their funding mandates. The *Funders* domain also assists successful applicants in finalizing their applications according to the specific funder's requirements.

"CUIAI is not a service delivery agency, a government department, a funding body, or a not-for-profit. CUIAI is a true collaborative, and its potential is a function of the degree to which it engages community members, stakeholders and government around common goals" (CUIAI website).

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