

# Urban Aboriginal Economic Development National Network

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## Background Brief: Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business

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Condensed from source documents by Julia Schwamborn, MA  
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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>

### *Mission*

To foster sustainable business relations between First Nation, Inuit and Métis people and Canadian business.

### *Vision*

To be the recognized source for commercial opportunities between First Nation, Inuit and Métis people and Canadian business.

### *Core Values*

- Respect for First Nation, Inuit, Métis culture and values.
- A high standard of business ethics.
- Open honest and transparent relationships with all stakeholders (CCAB 2008)

In 1984, Murray Koffler (Shopper's Drug Mart and Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts) raised awareness for Aboriginal business solutions. As a result, the CCAB was founded by a small group of entrepreneurs and community leaders with the goal of achieving full Aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy.

The CCAB is a national, non-partisan, not-for-profit organization, which does not receive any government funding but is entirely financed through corporate funding, program and event sponsorships, and membership dues. Membership is open to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses. Membership fees range from \$350 annually for Aboriginal Business Members, to \$10,000 annually for Partner Members Plus. Membership categories include Aboriginal Business Member, Aboriginal Business Member Plus, Business Member, Business Member Plus, Partner Member, and Partner Member Plus (CCAB Membership Application Form). Membership is designed to optimize Aboriginal business sustainability, training and capacity building in Aboriginal communities, and the acknowledgement of Aboriginal business success. CCAB currently lists 112 members representing a variety of business sectors. These sectors include:

- Employment/Training
- Finance/Banking
- Information Technology
- Natural Resources
- Media/Communications
- Consulting
- Legal
- Sales
- Hospitality

- Other

“CCAB offers knowledge, resources, and programs to both mainstream and Aboriginal owned member companies to increase employment, foster positive business relations and create economic opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and communities across Canada” (CCAB website).

The CCAB is governed by a national 15 member voluntary Board of Directors representing CCAB patrons, Aboriginal business members of CCAB, and other senior industry leaders who meet four times per year. Board Co-Chair Ron Jamieson, a Six Nations Mohawk, has been extensively involved in Aboriginal banking and finances as well as economic development initiatives; he was, among other positions, a member of the Economic Task Force advising National Chief Matthew Coon Come of the Assembly of First Nations. Board Co-Chair Paul Summers from Clemmer SteelCraft Technologies Inc. in Waterloo, ON is a founding member of the CCAB and brings comprehensive personal business experience to the Board.

Four times a year, the Board of Directors is counseled by an Aboriginal Advisory Committee consisting of four Aboriginal small business owners and a senior representative from an Aboriginal Economic Development Corporation. The intention of seeking counsel is to stay informed about issues and trends in the Aboriginal business community and learn about possible improvements to CCAB membership.

Furthermore, the CCAB features staff positions including a President and CEO, a Director of Finance and Operations, a Senior Manager of Programs, a Manager of Marketing and Special Events, a Foundation for the Advancement of Aboriginal Youth Coordinator, a Finance Coordinator, an Executive Assistant, a Research Analyst, and a Mentorship Coordinator. (CCAB website. About Us. Governance)

CCAB provides four core services to its members and to the Aboriginal business community in general. The services are geared towards supporting education, business development, and leadership and they are sponsored by a variety of corporations and financial institutions.

The *Foundation for the Advancement of Aboriginal Youth* (FAAY) is a program which provides high school and post-secondary bursaries and scholarships supported by program sponsors for Canadian full-time students of Aboriginal heritage. Applicants have to show the need for financial support, commitment to their education, ability and commitment to give back to their communities, and leadership and role model suitability.

In addition, there is an *Aboriginal Business Mentorship Program*, which is still in the process of being established and developed. The program will be organized in twenty mentorship groups Canada-wide. Mentors and protégés are invited to apply to become part of the program and participate, for example in one-on-one communication with each other. Apart from the direct learning experience from successful senior business owners, there will be opportunities to enter into a wider networking system, find communication platforms, or develop business relations. Mentors qualify if they are individuals with Aboriginal ancestry who have been self-employed for at least two consecutive years.

Another feature of CCAB is the *Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame* (ABHF), which was established in 2004 and, for the first time, formally acknowledged two great Aboriginal business leaders in 2005. Its purpose is to pay tribute to outstanding Aboriginal business leaders, such as 2009 laureates Jim Boucher and Judith Sayer, and Nellie Cournoyea and Ron Jamieson, who were honoured in 2008. CCAB accepts nominations from the public and publishes video biographies of the laureates with the intention to provide examples and role models for the Aboriginal communities and individuals. The ABHF is a pool of information on best practices and success stories, and CCAB is hoping to give future generations an incentive to become successful entrepreneurs and leaders.

The *Progressive Aboriginal Relationships Program* (PAR) is a framework to measure a business's success in developing progressive Aboriginal relations. Business performance is measured in four areas:

- Employment: Recruitment, retention, and advancement
- Business Development: Contracts and relationships with suppliers, associates, and partners
- Capacity Building: Access to training, education, and professional development
- Community Relations: Communication, consultation, and participation (CCAB website. PAR Benefits and Criteria)

The process of obtaining a PAR certificate requires a Statement of Commitment from the CEO, a self-assessment, and an application and an onsite visit for verification. A PAR jury makes the final decision and awards one of three levels of recognition. A business which can show PAR certification is a business of choice for Aboriginal communities.

Apart from the core programs, CCAB also provides resources and information for Aboriginal communities, businesses, and leaders. Its resource library includes PAR reports, Aboriginal community profiles, CCAB research, and useful links. A lot of the material is supplied with the goal of preparing and supporting communities and individuals for successful business development or advocacy of their communities' needs and rights.

Apart from the various programs and services offered by CCAB, they also host a number of events. Extensive fundraising occasions such as annual gala dinners, golf tournaments, and forums and panel discussions form CCAB's main source of revenue and a chance for information sharing and networking. "Webinars", luncheons, and conferences and tradeshow provide further opportunities for members to learn, communicate, and expand their knowledge and influence.

CCAB aims for maximum media coverage and public awareness. A current public service announcement on CTV, Canwest, and APTN is meant to "make the term 'Aboriginal business' a household term" (CCAB website. Media). Numerous media releases informing about CCAB programs, services, and initiatives further contribute to its media presence.

Remote First Nations, urban Aboriginal entrepreneurs, Inuit and Métis communities and corporate leaders are what make the CCAB what it is. This organization is but the conduit to the people and capital that leverage Aboriginal business in Canada. Every step of the

way, the CCAB proves that Aboriginal people are valuable contributors to the national economy as business partners, employers, employees, customers, and suppliers. (CCAB website. About. Ron Jamieson and Garry Knox, CCAB Co-Chairs, 2008)

### *CCAB and Urban Aboriginal Economic Development (UAED)*

CCAB provides a valuable example of how an Aboriginal organization, urban or rural, can be funded sustainably through corporate sponsorship and membership fees and be entirely independent from government funding and programs. It also demonstrates a form of organizational governance with a voluntary Board and an Advisory Committee and a number of staff positions.

As a tool for Aboriginal business people, and especially groups and individuals concerned with UAED, CCAB membership is interesting as it opens up opportunities for networking, building business relationships, and access to education and training. As a source for communities and businesses, the PAR initiative provides valuable information about individual businesses and about the integration of Aboriginal business development in the mainstream economy.

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