

Canadian
Construction
Association



Association
canadienne de
la construction

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

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The CCA wishes to extend sincere gratitude to Indigenous Works for researching and writing this Guide. In particular, the tremendous dedication and expertise of Kelly J. Lendsay, and Craig J. Hall, were instrumental to the production of this Guide.



Indigenous Works (formerly the Aboriginal Human Resource Council) is an Indigenous ISO-accredited organization which offers specialized products and services to help mainstream and Indigenous businesses and organizations build successful engagements, relationships and partnerships. Its assessment-based approach helps minimize the risks associated with venturing unprepared into relationships or partnerships. Under its former name, Indigenous Works has also developed products and services which help companies build inclusive workplaces and effective culturally relevant strategies which increase Indigenous employment.
www.indigenousworks.ca contact.us@indigenousworks.ca



INTRODUCTION


The Canadian Construction Association (CCA) commissioned this guide to help the construction industry engage more effectively with Indigenous companies and communities in Canada. The guide was researched and written by Indigenous Works (formerly the Aboriginal Human Resource Council), an ISO-certified organization that helps companies increase indigenous workplace performance and build successful engagements and relationships with Indigenous people, businesses and communities.

This guide provides general information, guidance and insights into Indigenous engagement strategies. Its contents are entirely the responsibility of its authors and should not be construed as legal advice. The views and opinions of industry owners and opinion leaders were gathered as part of the research methodology, and any opinions expressed in this guide do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the CCA.

This Guide is available for the exclusive use of CCA Members and Partner Associations. Non-members may reprint or quote from all or parts of this document, provided that all materials are properly and fully credited to CCA and Indigenous Works.

Indigenous Works (formerly the Aboriginal Human Resource Council) was formed in 1998 as a national not-for-profit organization and today is an ISO-accredited company providing workplace strategies, tools and services to help mainstream businesses engage and build successful relationships and partnerships with Indigenous people, businesses and communities.

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Throughout the guide, we have incorporated the voices of a number of people in Talking Stick Tips. Talking sticks are traditionally used in Indigenous culture as a means of orderly, just and impartial listening. They give everyone a voice.

Foreword



Former Prime Minister Paul Martin

The future of Indigenous Canada is one of our most pressing economic challenges – and it is without a doubt our greatest social dilemma. But it is solvable. However, it will take new and deeper engagements and partnerships between employers and Indigenous communities, businesses and people.

In 2015, the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its report with 94 recommendations. The TRC engaged Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.

The report released in 2015 made recommendations to specific audiences including the business community. I commend the Canadian Construction Association for its leadership, for its action and for your commitment to renewing the relationship with indigenous people.

The TRC recommendation #92 asks the corporate sector and its leadership to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The commission calls for meaningful consultation, long term sustainable opportunities from economic development projects as well as education and training for managers on the history of Indigenous people, intercultural competency, human rights and anti-racism.

Prime Minister Trudeau stated that “No relationship is more important to me and Canada than the relationship with Indigenous people”.

This new Indigenous Guide for Construction Owners is a bold initiative. It is needed. You are helping to create new futures for Indigenous peoples, more business opportunities and more effective engagement and partnerships which will result in a stronger better Canada.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Martin'.

The Right Honourable Paul Martin, Former Prime Minister



Project Management Committee Co-Chairs

The Canadian Construction Association (CCA) began its efforts in late 2014 to commission the development of an Indigenous guide to help the construction industry engage more effectively with Indigenous companies and communities in Canada. This guide provides general information, suggestions, and insights into Indigenous engagement processes and strategies. It is not a 'one size fits all' document but rather a guide, which is the product of a broad pan Canadian effort and reflection.

Chris Lorenc,
B.A., LL.B.,
Co-Chair,
CCA Project
Management
Committee
Winnipeg, MB

The CCA Indigenous Engagement Guide was researched and developed prior to the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) final report which was released on December 15th 2015. Although the guide pre-dates the TRC report, the authors and the project management committee were cognizant of the important work of the TRC and one of its core messages to improve knowledge and education on indigenous issues in Canada.

We want to acknowledge the tremendous contribution of the volunteers who participated in the Project Management Committee, the National Advisory Committee and the industry focus group participants from across Canada. Your candid contributions, feedback and insights are very much appreciated. The final result is a guide that will help the construction industry start new journeys to improve and increase successful indigenous partnerships and engagements.



On behalf of the Canadian Construction Association, we wish to acknowledge the contributions of those who served on the various committees and focus groups that contributed to this document. The collective insights of the committee members, industry participants and staff were invaluable. In particular, we thank the consultants and authors, Kelly Lendsay and Craig Hall for their leadership, expertise and guidance.

Victoria LaBillois,
MBA,
Co-Chair,
CCA Project
Management
Committee
Listuguj, QC

We are builders. Together, we build stronger people, communities, businesses and a better Canada.

Overview

Building Relationships Between Indigenous People and the Construction Industry

Many companies in the construction industry have been successfully building relationships with Indigenous people for years. Small, medium and large, these companies have hired Indigenous people, purchased goods and services from Indigenous businesses, and provided investments and assistance to Indigenous communities. Looking at our industry and at Canada's growing Indigenous population, we see increasing opportunities to grow long-term relationships between Indigenous people and the construction industry.

Construction business owners and managers say that to be successful in their Indigenous engagements, they have had to develop specific knowledge and skills. The most successful companies have developed a familiarity with Indigenous history, an understanding of communications, and a grounded knowledge of the culture and social and political structures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities. Developing an understanding of Indigenous leadership and community aspirations is also key to successful relationships with Indigenous people as employees, with Indigenous businesses as partners and allies, and with Indigenous communities as neighbours and friends.

This guide was created to help construction business owners and managers learn from peers who have succeeded in building relationships with Indigenous communities. It includes insights and ideas as a starting point for those looking to begin engagement with Indigenous people and communities.

If you or your company are considering deeper relationships with Indigenous businesses, ask yourself these key questions:

- Do you and your company have the knowledge and skills to work successfully with Indigenous people, businesses and communities?
- Is your workplace ready to hire and support Indigenous employees?
- Do you know who to approach in Indigenous communities?
- Do you know how to approach Indigenous leadership?
- What are the trends in Indigenous business or employment that matter to you as a construction owner and businessperson?

This guide will help you answer these questions and understand why developing these relationships is important for your business.

"The companies we have been most successful with have taken the time to get to know us and we have taken the time to get to know them. Good relationships whether it be for business, employment or social-development reasons all hinge on discovering the similarities and differences we all share. How we work together is a reflection of the interest we have in one another including knowledge of where we have come from, our history as well as our future goals and aspirations."

Dan Christmas, Senior Advisor, Membertou First Nation

How The Guide is Organized

This guide has two main sections. The first, entitled *Knowing and Understanding* is devoted to what construction owners and managers need to know about engaging and building relationships with Indigenous peoples, businesses and communities. The second, *Indigenous Engagements and Relationship Building*, focuses on how to build those relations.

What Engagement Means

Engagement may be generally understood as a preliminary step to developing a full Indigenous relationship. In this guide, when we talk about engagement, we refer to several types:

- with Indigenous people—for recruitment or employment
- with Indigenous business—for partnerships, procurement or allies
- with Indigenous communities—for investments, partnerships or other reasons

“Our goal with this guide is to equip construction owners and businesses with the grounding they need to develop successful Indigenous working relationships.”

Victoria LaBillois, Co-chair CCA Project Management Committee

Your company’s ability to develop better engagement strategies requires that you develop a deeper understanding of Indigenous people, their history, culture and way of life. It is this knowledge and understanding which guides your Indigenous strategies and practices.

Your success in developing and attaining successful Indigenous relationships can also be ranked in terms of the level and depth of relationships you build. It is important to move beyond merely transactional approaches to develop deeper relationships grounded in trust, empathy and understanding.

The most successful engagements and relationships of any kind including those with Indigenous communities, are not built overnight. You must take incremental steps to grow your knowledge and approaches.

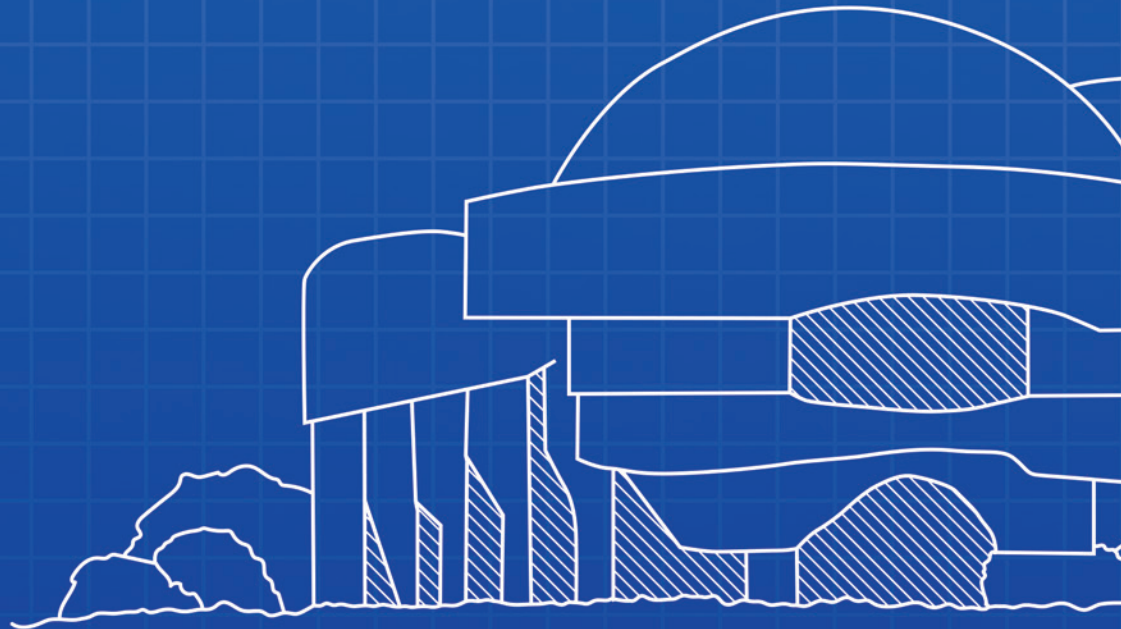
Some leaders in the construction industry are already building their knowledge, competencies and skills. It makes sense to build on these early successes that some of the best in our industry have already achieved.

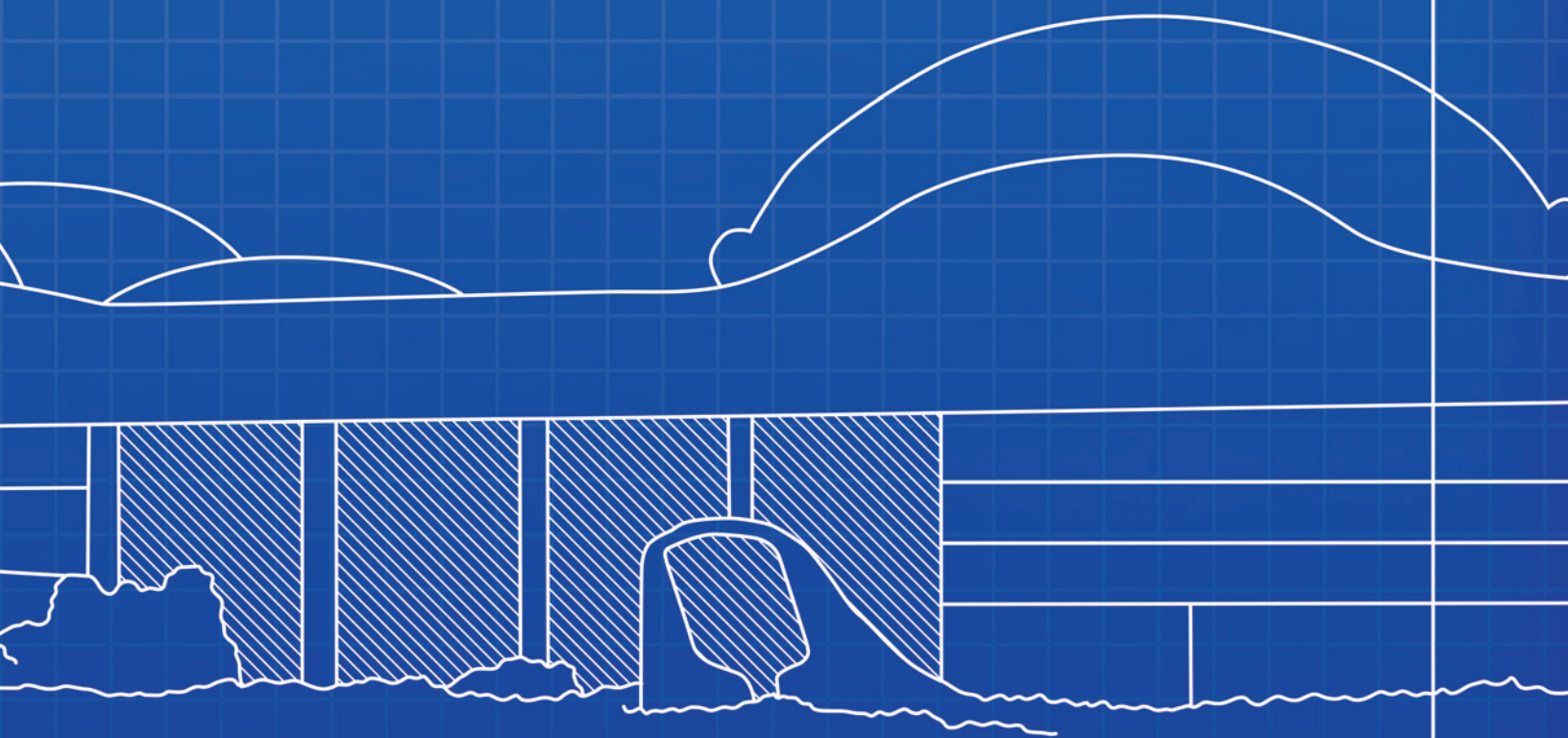
“I firmly believe that we must and can grow meaningful relationships between Canada’s Indigenous peoples and the construction industry across Canada. Our collective future can only improve if we commit to working together.”

Chris Lorenc, Co-Chair CCA Project Management Committee

SECTION 1

Knowing and Understanding





Douglas Cardinal
Canadian Museum of History

Introduction: Indigenous Engagement Environmental Scan

As a construction company trying to build engagements with Indigenous peoples, businesses and communities, you have most likely conducted an environmental scan to collect information that will help you better understand the range of factors and issues that will inform your strategic decisions.

The scan should help you better understand the Indigenous landscape, build your confidence and help you and your company become engagement-ready. It will help you better understand the engagement process.

Understanding the scan and its eight components can help you build your company's business case for Indigenous engagement and help you assess the opportunities available to you. A lack of knowledge and understanding of these components could invite risk and uncertainty. The scan is a tool to help ensure that your engagement strategy is not compromised.

Your efforts to build Indigenous relationships will be grounded in sound business and economic targets, many of which can be identified through the scan. In order to achieve your targets, you must ensure that your employees and managers have the right knowledge, strategies and practices at their disposal.

Inclusion leadership starts at the top. You and your leadership set the tone and position your company's brand for success. And when partnership, workplace and leadership performance converge, you will achieve social and economic outcomes that will benefit your company as well as your Indigenous employees and partners.

"The business case for skills and talent is clear: Indigenous people are a workforce solution."

Dave Kinley, Chair, Alberta Construction Association

Indigenous Engagement Environmental Scan



We will now describe the eight elements of the indigenous engagement environmental scan.

Demographics

Many people born during Canada's post war baby boom are either retired or about to retire. Statistics Canada notes that by the start of the next decade, people old enough to leave the labour market will outnumber those old enough to join it.

By contrast, the Indigenous population is in a baby boom. Half are aged 25 years or younger, and the population's median age is 27 (compared to 40 for the entire Canadian population). Canada's total Indigenous population in Canada is almost 1.5 million people, of which 43,460 are Inuit, 851,560 First Nations and 451,795 Métis. The Indigenous labour force totals approximately 942,000 people, and almost one half of Indigenous people held postsecondary qualifications in 2011.¹

Socio-economics

"Closing the gap" is a common term you will encounter in the Indigenous space. It refers to the difference between the education, employment and income statistics for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Employment – Currently, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people is 9.6 percent versus 6.7 percent for non-Indigenous people. This statistic can mislead, however. It does not account for on-reserve First Nations populations, among which unemployment can range from 20 to 50 percent.

Income – The median Indigenous annual income is \$18,950. It is \$27,097 for non-Indigenous people. On-reserve annual incomes are \$14,000. Annual income among Indigenous people varies from region to region and is influenced by income from employment and income from government assistance.

Education – According to the last Statistics Canada National Household Survey 2011, more than 48 percent of Indigenous people aged 25 to 64 held post-secondary qualifications in 2011, compared to nearly 65 percent of non-Indigenous people in the same age group. While there have been some increases in high-school completion rates, trades and technology certifications and university degrees, large gaps remain.

Although important, these statistics are national averages. They should not be relied upon for planning purposes. Instead, you should seek data from the communities in which you plan to do business.

There are some positive trends and improvements in specific markets and communities across Canada. But geographically you will find very large differences in socioeconomic conditions. Indigenous people are in disadvantaged circumstances and they know it. As a matter of conditioning, they may assume that the playing field is not level. Perceptions about perceived power imbalances may impede the progress of business discussions. That is why it is important to establish trust as part of the engagement process.

"The engagement workload takes time, effort and patience but it's the right thing to do. Our partnerships with Indigenous groups are stronger as a result."

Colleen Munro, President,
Hugh Munro Construction

¹ Statistics Canada 2014

Economic Trends

A variety of economic indicators help to illustrate the scope, size and influence of the Indigenous market on the economy.

- Natural Resources Canada estimates that development companies will invest \$431 billion in Canada's North over the next 10 years. Most of this spend is for projects near or on Indigenous lands.
- The 2011 TD Economics Report estimated the size of the Indigenous market (the sum of Indigenous business and household income plus discretionary government spending) was \$24 billion in 2004 and projected to grow to \$32 billion by 2016. The business sector expanded the most.
- All Canadians benefit as Indigenous education, employment and business opportunities increase. These gains also generate real economic opportunities for non-Indigenous people as employment can empower Indigenous people and boost Canada's productivity. It is estimated that if Indigenous people attained the same education and employment levels as their fellow Canadians, Canada's GDP would increase \$261 billion by 2031.²

Community Development and Well-being

For Indigenous people, the concept of 'well-being' embodies many values and principles. It is closely aligned with the development of mind, body, spirit and emotions. Here are a few quick references to give you a better sense of Indigenous community development and well being:

- The Community Well-Being (CWB) index is a useful method of assessing socio-economic well-being and gaps at the community level and is made up of the following four components: Income per capita, Education, Housing and Labour Force activity. In 2011, CWB scores were available for 594 First Nations, 50 Inuit and 3,784 non-Aboriginal communities. The CWB gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities are substantial. In 2011, the average CWB score for Inuit communities was 16 points lower than the average score for non-Aboriginal communities. This gap is a few points narrower than it was in 1981. In 2011, the average CWB score for First Nations communities was 20 points lower than the average score for non-Aboriginal communities. This gap is the same size as it was in 1981.
- According to Health Canada data, Ontario is home to the majority of community-wide boil water advisories with one half of First Nation communities on water advisory alerts. Ten First Nation communities in northern Ontario have been without safe drinking water for more than a decade.
- The United Nations Special Rapporteur's 2014 report, "*The Situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada*," examined the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and summarized "notable episodes and patterns of devastating human rights violations." The report states "the most jarring manifestation of these human rights problems is the distressing socio-economic conditions of Indigenous Peoples in a highly developed country."³

What does this mean for the construction industry? You will likely encounter strong advocates for community well-being among Indigenous and non-Indigenous politicians, business leaders and community leaders. These people want to close the gaps and help create socially and economically healthy communities. Your engagement efforts help to close the gaps and create prosperity.

2 Matthew Calver, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Closing the Aboriginal Education Gap in Canada: The Impact on Employment, GDP, & Labour Productivity, (2015)

3 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples, James Anaya Addendum – *The Situation of Indigenous peoples in Canada** – May 2014

Legal

Construction business owners need to use the environmental scan to understand legal matters at the forefront of Indigenous relations. It is important to know about Indigenous treaties, land claims, Supreme Court rulings and the duty to consult. Doing so will help you to further position your company for successful engagement strategies and outcomes.

Treaties and Land Claims⁴

As construction owners and managers you need to be aware of the footprint made by land claims and legal rulings. Failure to be aware of and understanding them may cause delays in development projects and they underpin the engagements that you seek to make with Indigenous people.

Some Key Legal Rulings

In 1982, Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982 affirmed three distinct Aboriginal groups in Canada, the First Nations, Metis and Inuit. There have been hundreds of legal issues and rulings prior to and since the Constitutional inclusion of Canada's indigenous peoples. Some of the key Supreme Court decisions are highlighted below.

Calder (1973)

In 1973, the 'Calder Supreme Court' decision stated that 'Treaty and Aboriginal rights exist'.

Sparrow (1990)

In 1990 the Sparrow decision addressed the fiduciary duty the Crown holds towards Aboriginal peoples and specifically it relates to the issues of 'infringement of Aboriginal rights', 'expropriation and fair compensation', 'consultation and conversation measures'.

⁴ Note to reader: anyone who wants to read a fulsome account of the history of treaties in Canada should begin by consulting the entry on Aboriginal Treaties in the Canadian Encyclopedia. The entry can be found at www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-treaties.

"We need to understand the social, economic and legal landscape for managing and developing our Indigenous partnerships."

Steve Adsett, Director of Human Resources, Bird Construction

"You need to understand the legal dimensions and how these decisions are shaping the social and economic actions in Canada – these developments have a downstream impact on construction companies".

Shaun Howdle, GM, Industrial Western Canada, Concept Ltd, SK

Delgamuukw (1997)

In 1997, the Delgamuukw [pronounced 'del ga mook'] case described Indigenous title, confirmed the legal validity of Indigenous oral history in establishing the title rights *to consult and accommodate* [in the context of the infringement of Indigenous rights]. Understanding the nature and the extent of the Duty to Consult is important to industry, governments and Indigenous communities who wish to advance economic interests in Indigenous territories or where there are Indigenous interests.

Tsilhqot'in (2014)

More recently in 2014, in Tsilhqot'in ('Sil-kwo-tin') the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the British Columbia's Supreme Court decision which recognized for the first time in history the existence of Indigenous title in a specified area of British Columbia historically occupied by the Tsilhqot'in people. While this decision is specific to the British Columbia and the Tsilhqot'in people, the implications of having Indigenous title recognized over a specified area are being considered across Canada.

Daniels 2016

Métis and non-status Indians are now under federal jurisdiction and may assert Aboriginal rights. The implications of this decision clarify rights and jurisdiction for a wide-swath of Métis and non-status individuals across Canada, ending what the Supreme Court called a "jurisdictional tug-of-war" and a "jurisdictional wasteland."

Prior to this, both federal and provincial governments had denied legislative authority over such persons, with some exceptions. Such individuals had to rely on the goodwill of each government to obtain any recognition of their status or rights, and any consultation over impacts to their traditional practices. Now, such persons benefiting from "Indian" status may have access to federal programs, services and initiatives and may negotiate for recognition of their rights.

The Environmental Scan and Duty to Consult

An important component of the environmental scan is the duty to consult. When the government considers actions that may affect Aboriginal lands or treaty rights, it has a legal duty to consult those affected communities. Although this duty typically arises in the context of resource-based projects and construction works, it is not limited to them.

Although the duty to consult is a government responsibility, it is occasionally delegated to those companies that want to secure the social license needed to work on or near Indigenous lands. The [Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult](#) explains how consultations should be carried out and describe the roles of the parties in the process.⁵ Some provinces and territories also provide guidelines on Duty to Consult.

Construction companies that wish to develop major projects on or near Indigenous lands potentially impacted by a project should be aware of past legal rulings and the duty to consult. You want to understand how the current legal climate can impact your options, opportunities and business partnerships.

When you are bidding on projects you will want to engage with Indigenous people, businesses and communities to discuss Indigenous participation in the projects through employment, direct and indirect business developments and revenue sharing.

⁵ The guidelines are maintained by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and can be found by searching for "Updated Guidelines for Federal Officials to Fulfill the Duty to Consult" on www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca.

Public Policy Development

This dimension of the environmental scan focuses on the knowledge and learning that business people are encouraged to develop in the area of federal and provincial public policy as it relates to Indigenous people, businesses and community development.

Two federal public policy initiatives that have done much to build awareness about Indigenous peoples' socio-economic realities: the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. Both have helped shape the business environment in which Indigenous people and businesses operate today and deepened Canadians' collective understanding of Indigenous realities.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

Launched in 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples called for major changes to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and governments.

Why is RCAP relevant today? The RCAP report, which was released in 1996, was a blueprint for social, political and economic change. It set out a plan for closing the socio-economic gaps facing Aboriginal people, and helping them achieve the same standards of living, education and employment as their fellow Canadians.

Although some progress has been made in closing the gaps, there are still half of status First Nations children in Canada living in poverty (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives 2013). Twenty years later, the RCAP report remains an important milestone in benchmarking Indigenous development and progress on social, economic and other fronts.

Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada

The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) engaged Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation. The TRC report, which was released in 2015, contained 94 recommendations with specific "calls to action" to target groups.

Recommendation 92 is focused on business. It contains a number of calls to action to business leaders to make meaningful consultation with Aboriginal people, offer long term sustainable opportunities from economic development projects, and train managers on the history of Indigenous people and intercultural competency.

"Commitment to respect, communication, and some flexibility is key to successful engagement with First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. By developing an understanding of Indigenous cultures and lifestyles, a healthy and fruitful relationship is made possible."

Carole Morsky, Vice-President, The Morsky Group

"It's important to remember we share more similarities than differences – respect is the most important engagement principle."

Joe Wabegijig, Deployment Analyst, Project Delivery Group, Hatch Ltd.

Construction owners can align their engagement efforts with these recommendations to demonstrate their commitment to and support for reconciliation. Offer information and training to employees to help them better understand Indigenous peoples and their history.

You can learn more about the TRC and read the full recommendations at www.trc.ca.

The RCAP and TRC Legacies

RCAP and TRC are important public policy initiatives that will invariably be referenced in your engagements and discussions with Indigenous communities. But they are only two examples of special initiatives that have helped non-Indigenous Canadians better understand and build stronger relationships with Indigenous peoples across the nation.

The Role of the Public Sector

On a day-to-day basis, the public sector plays a major role in Indigenous development issues. The federal budget for Canada's Indigenous peoples is about \$11 billion a year. That doesn't count provincial expenditures or other government benefits available to all Canadians.

Government funds are allocated to Indigenous education, housing, training, employment, business development and social and political development. Some funds are paid directly to the Indigenous organizations that administer programs while some are delivered through programs that must be applied for.

It is not easy for business owners and managers to navigate the complicated funding landscape however many opportunities for leverage and partnership-building exist.

Starting online is the most efficient approach. Research the various funding programs available in your province and through the federal government to see if there may be something pertinent to your efforts to engage with or build partnerships with Indigenous peoples.

You may also be able to meet with government officials who can explain how their programs match your initiatives. Knowledge of government affairs can be an important component of your Indigenous engagement strategy.

Human Capital

In 2006 the national employment rate among Indigenous Canadians was 54 percent, compared with 63 percent among non-Indigenous Canadians and increased to a 57% employment rate by 2011. While trends are improving, unfortunately the education and employment outcomes vary regionally among Indigenous people. In some Indigenous communities, unemployment rates approach 50 percent.

Today, more than 80 Aboriginal Skills Employment and Training Strategy (ASETS) agreement holders across the country are mandated to link Aboriginal training needs with labour-market demands.

Through service-delivery points, ASETS holders prepare people for jobs and offer work supports by occasionally offsetting costs for transportation, relocation, special equipment and other needs. ASETS holders also sometimes develop training to employment programs or support short-term training costs for clients. Start with the ASETS program as part of your outreach to connect with Indigenous trainees and employees. Search for ASETS at Employment and Social Development Canada website (www.esdc.gc.ca).

Colleges and universities also play an important role in helping Indigenous people acquire the skills and training they need to enter the workplace. Some have developed Indigenous-specific programs to produce skilled talent that meet or exceed industry expectations. Across the country, college and institute-led trades and apprenticeship initiatives are producing hundreds of Indigenous tradespersons. Almost every provincial trades and apprenticeship division has an aboriginal strategy.

Many campuses house Aboriginal liaison offices that act as bridges between communities, students, institutions and employers. It is worth visiting these offices to gain an understanding of the resources that can help you develop the Indigenous human resources you need. You should also consider approaching umbrella organizations such as Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICAN), which can help you reach many Indigenous oriented post-secondary institutions.

Inclusion & Diversity

The final dimension in your environmental scan has to do with Indigenous inclusion and diversity among various Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Values

At times, different value systems come into play between a company and any community. Each needs to be understood and respected.

Indigenous values may conflict with business ventures where achievement and success is measured solely in terms of economic objectives. Many indigenous communities have incorporated their teaching and value systems into their business and partnership practices. For example, elders will open and close meetings and provide their insights and guidance. Communities and people have a long time horizon. It is not uncommon for people to think about the impact of decisions on 'their children's children'. Because of this 'generational' thinking, some communities have created 25 year community and economic development plans.

The social fabric of indigenous communities is very strong. When there is a death in the community it is not uncommon for the schools, band office and businesses to close and many employees will take up to a week off to support family and community members.

"Understanding and respecting people and their histories will create positive attitudes and perceptions."

Joe Thompson, Indigenous Employment Partnership Specialist, Manitoba Hydro

"Our industry needs to be open to the many opportunities presented by Indigenous people, communities and businesses. We need to establish meaningful engagement practices with Indigenous people."

Joe Wrobel, President, JPW Road & Bridge Inc.

Indigenous people rely on and integrate Elders in social, community and economic enterprises. Construction owners, managers and employees will encounter community Elders as part of most engagement processes. They bring valued guidance and advice to individuals and communities, and can help streamline the relationship-building process.

Community engagement is highly valued. Generating community input is a time consuming process but will help generate long term success. Engaging elders, the priority on the environment and the strong focus on employment, education, culture and healthy communities are key components of an indigenous value base.

Perceptions of Indigenous People

How much do people's perceptions affect their attitudes and actions? We create first impressions within ten seconds of meeting someone. Groupthink can further erode independent views and impressions. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are equally prone to misperceptions and negative attitudes that can mask individuals' positive attributes and the beneficial outcomes to be achieved.

According to an Urban Indigenous Peoples Study prepared by the Environics Institute in 2010, almost all of the 2,614 Indigenous youth interviewed believe they are consistently viewed in negative ways by non-Indigenous people.⁶ Almost three in four perceived assumptions about addiction problems, while many felt negative stereotypes about laziness, lack of intelligence and poverty.

Misperceptions and perceived assumptions can be carried into the workplace with damaging consequences. Implementing an indigenous knowledge culture is vital to a company's success in its Indigenous engagement efforts.

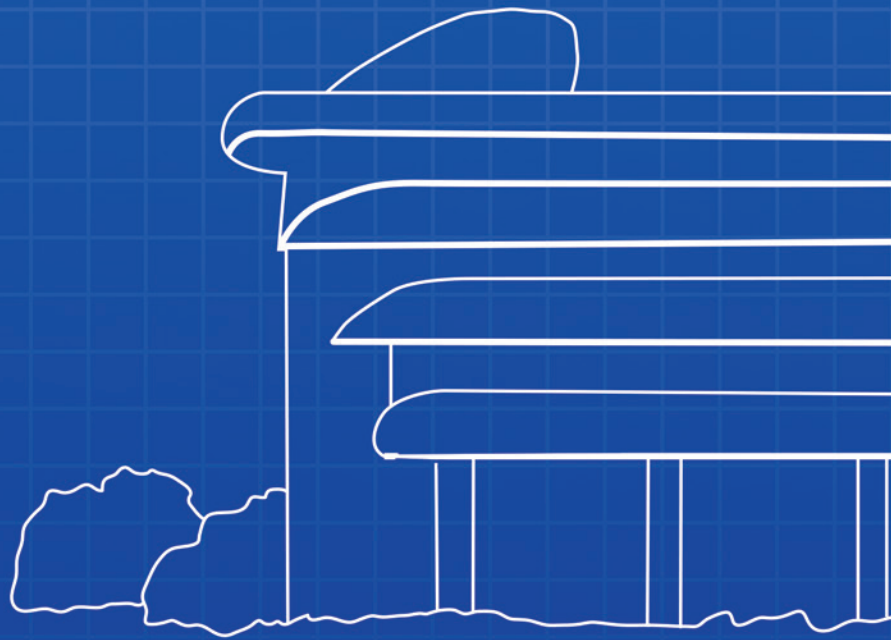
Regional and Community Diversity

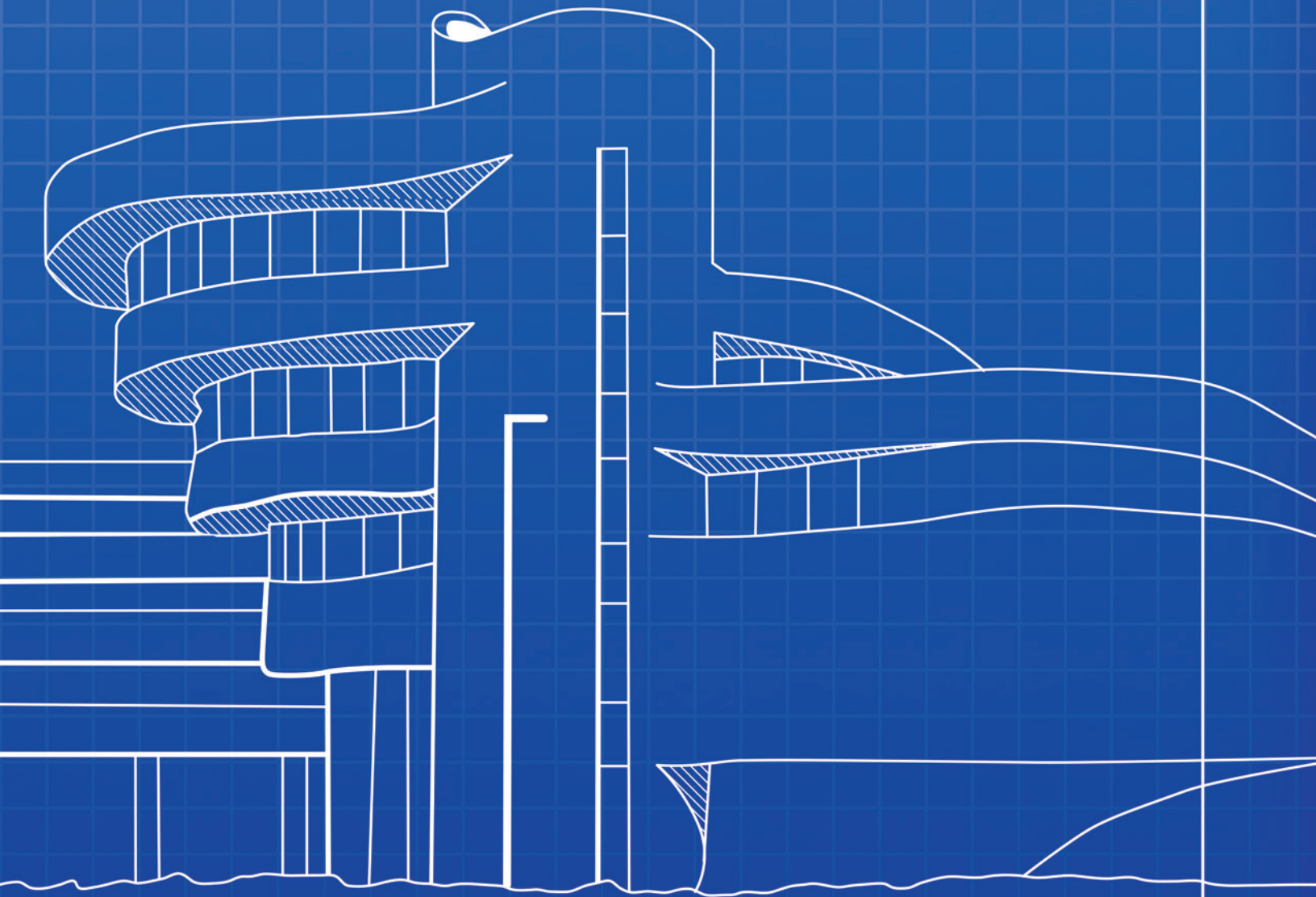
Indigenous people and communities are different, distinct and diverse. Yet, in some circles there is a perception that they are homogenous. With over 300 languages and a multitude of cultures, Indigenous communities approach issues like education, labour standards, taxation and economic development differently, just as treatments of these issues vary across Canada's provinces and territories. It is important to be mindful of such differences.

⁶ Main report by The Environics Institute for its Urban Indigenous Peoples Study, (2010). The document can be found at www.uaps.ca.

SECTION 2

Indigenous Engagement and Relationship Building





Douglas Cardinal
First Nations University of Canada

The Stages of Indigenous Engagement and Relationship Building

In this section, we look at the specific strategies and practices you need to achieve success in relationship building. We break it down into six main steps.

We see the terms of engagement and relationship building as sequential. Relationship building is a later phase, although, of course, there are elements of relationship building present during the engagement phase. With relationships, we assume there are increasingly formal arrangements which signify the partnership. From early to mature stages of the relationship there is a deepening of the commitment.

Engagement	Relationship Building
1a – Starting out <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educate yourself.• Examine business fit and build your business case.• Assess community readiness.• Build your understanding of government’s role in Indigenous development matters.	1b – Establishing early relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Values and commitment articulated.• Have a strategy.• Get your workplace ready.• Be the good neighbour.
2a – Developing your company’s capacity to engage <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek experts and information.• Create letters of intent.	2b – Building your commitment <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Upping the relationship and building trust• Policy formation.• You are ready to Partner or Joint Venture.
3a – Ready to do business <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You’re ready to work together.• Disseminate your cultural knowledge throughout the company.• Growing your strategies and practices blueprint.	3b – Achieving a reciprocal relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustaining the relationship.• Having the same relationship with each other.• Safety measures and safeguards.• Being a good partner – It takes two wings to fly.

1a: Engagement – Starting Out

The important thing to note when starting out is the level of commitment and the time you need to build any relationship. We still hear stories about companies visiting Indigenous communities for the first time, making a business pitch and expecting an answer in the immediate future. It simply doesn't work that way.

“I’ll hear companies say it took them 14 months to arrive at a business decision about a major investment and yet they are looking for an answer from Indigenous communities in 24 hours. People don’t make decisions at that speed. Communities need time to assemble and consult with one another.”

Bruce Lund, Provincial Manager, British Columbia Construction Association

As a business owner or manager, you can't go into communities with a preconceived notion of how your project is going to benefit Indigenous people. It's the wrong approach. Of course, you need to present possibilities and financial and economic reasons why working together is warranted. But you shouldn't over-promise what is achievable together. This is especially true because you may be in a position where you have to bid on the project for which you may need your Indigenous partner. Ultimately, you need to let communities decide what's really in it for them and whether you and your company are a good match for them. It takes time to make that decision. We can't overstate that point.

Educate Yourself

In this early stage of engagement, you need to devote some time and attention to educating yourself about Indigenous people. You need to understand the people and communities you want your company to engage. Educate yourself first. Bring others in your company along later. A knowledge strategy is a purposeful internal education and training program that will increase the efficacy of your indigenous inclusion efforts. It is one of the most important items you can address early in the planning stages. You will need various strategies and you will need to grow your company's organizational competencies to build the Indigenous strategies and practices that will help you in your future relationships.

Keep in mind two questions as you acquire information and knowledge about Indigenous people:

- What do you want to achieve with the Indigenous people, businesses or communities you want to engage?
- What does your business need to do in order to get ready for these engagements and relationships?

Examine Business Fit and Build Your Business Case

Business fit is different from a business case. The business case looks at why you want to engage and build relationships with Indigenous communities. Your analysis of the business fit requires you to consider four things:

- 1. Capacity** – Do you have the knowledge and strategies to work with Indigenous people? Do you have or can you develop cultural competencies? Does the community have good management capacities? Is it easy to do business with them, or are the main players you are trying to contact constantly changing? What is the financial standing of the community? Are they under third-party management?
- 2. Politics** – Does the community appear to be historically stable? When are the next elections? You can spend a lot of time getting to know a Chief and Council to build your political capital, but be prepared for leadership changes and shifts. Political terms can range from two to four years.
- 3. Communications** – Many businesses connect with each other through LinkedIn and Facebook. These social media are a good way to build your awareness and understanding.
- 4. Business experience** – Is there much business established in the community? If they don't have a well established economic infrastructure, business experience may be lacking and capital in short supply. Is there a local development corporation that can help to grow small businesses or be a key proponent in a potential joint venture?

Your business case for working with Indigenous people needs to be clear—not just to management, but also to employees. Everyone must understand the reasons why your company is seeking to approach Indigenous people.

In establishing your business case, there are a few things to take into account. Ultimately your ability to work with Indigenous people will depend on your ability to demonstrate that your work with Indigenous people and communities could result in any of the following for your business and theirs:

- **Gain** new revenues
- **Access** talent
- **Ensure** the stability of your business
- **Build** your business reputation
- **Identify** and gain new sources of leverage (e.g. government funding)
- **Build** joint ventures
- **Contribute** to more positive social capital and relationship building

Assess Community Readiness

If a construction project were to start tomorrow and the community was willing to participate in some way, could the community rise to the challenge and be able to provide, say, the labour needed to participate in the project? It's a good question to consider in terms of analyzing capacity.

To assess community readiness, you have to look at the infrastructure in place. Are there community databases that document the number of people available for hire? Does the database include reference to the skills available? Do people have drivers licenses? Are there buses in town? What would it take for the community to mobilize?

Your company needs to do a thorough analysis of the Indigenous communities with whom it wants to work. Think through all of the capacities that communities need in order to fully participate in a project. This analysis will also help you deepen your relationship with the community. For example, it may facilitate an employment partnership or an opportunity agreement with the community. If the capacity analysis isn't realistic, then the partnership agreement may be out of synch, potentially leaving the community and the company frustrated in the future. Think things through.

Build Your Understanding of Government's Role in Indigenous Development Matters

As we mentioned earlier, one of the areas you need to research and build your understanding of has to do with the roles of government in Indigenous development.

Some useful questions to ask

Government role	Services	Yes
Information, Statistics	Does government have information available about the Indigenous communities I may want to work with on my upcoming project?	✓
Funding	Is there government funding that I could leverage to help offset my costs to hire or work with Indigenous people?	✓
Regulatory and permitting	Are there regulations that I need to know about for this project or permits I need to have in hand before I start?	✓
Programming Intelligence	What programs and services does government fund? What is working well, what is not in program and service delivery?	✓
Relationship	What kind of relationship does government have with the community?	✓

Did you know that there are about 37,000 Indigenous businesses across the country? The majority (63%) of Indigenous small businesses are very small, with no employees. There are 275 Indigenous development corporations across the country according to TD Bank. Seventy-two percent of Indigenous economic development corporations have been around for 10 years or longer. The average length of operation is 18 years.

TD Bank and Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Study (2012)

"It is very important to put into place the training programs needed by the community so that local Indigenous people can participate in the projects which are taking place nearby."

Chief Kenneth Karonhiatie McComber, Councilor, Mohawk Council of Kahnawá:ke

2a: Engagement – Developing Your Company's Capacity to Engage

In this second engagement stage, the focus is on growing your organizational capacity to do the necessary outreach that will result in successful engagements. You have done your homework. Now you need to pass your knowledge onto other staff members and help them prepare to engage their colleagues. It's all about teamwork and building a company-wide engagement plan. Even if you are a small company with only a few employees, you still need to coordinate roles and get everyone prepared and ready.

Seek Experts and Information

When you want to deepen your engagement with Indigenous people, it may be worth bringing on board a local Indigenous contractor who can introduce you to the people, and their customs and culture. This will help you in the longer term.

Create Letters of Intent

When you get to the point where you are starting to think about forming a longer-term relationship with an Indigenous community, you will likely want to consider developing a letter of intent that will help to formalize your desire to work towards this new relationship. Before you get to this stage, ensure you have already followed several critical steps:

- You have met with a local Indigenous Elder to seek his/her advice on an approach to the community. For example, in some First Nation and Métis circles it is appropriate to offer ceremonial tobacco to show respect and to make a formal request. There are Elders and community members who can provide suggestions and guidance on the appropriate cultural protocols.
- You have met with Chief and Council or appropriate Indigenous leaders and formally introduced your company and your intentions to explore ways of working together.
- You have met with the main managers of the community, the people responsible for economic development and the local Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training offices to explain your company's intents.
- You have researched the community, its history and its social, political and economic structures.
- You have attended some community events. You have met some of the people in the community and listened to them talk about their community and what makes it home for them.
- You have developed an appreciation for the community's economic, political and cultural aspirations. You have developed some understanding of the problems facing the community and how it hopes to boost its residents' quality of life.
- You and your Indigenous partners have discussed how you will monitor and track your communication, meetings and record of decisions. You have adopted a common format and set of protocols that are agreeable to all parties. You have a record of these partnership developments and agreements so that your company is protected in the event of changes within your company or in local or community government.

Once you have done these things, then you can advance a statement of intent to the community leaders that explains what you hope to achieve. Make the letter brief and highlight some key principles about the discussions you want to have with the community in order to explore ways to work together.

3a: Engagement – Ready to Do Business

Now that the engagement process is well underway, you are looking seriously at some of the business and other opportunities with the Indigenous communities with which you have chosen to work.

You're Ready to Work Together

Some companies have developed cooperation protocols and letters of intent that are directional in nature. That is, their main intent is to demonstrate goodwill between the company and the community. This style of agreement avoids specific statements of economic and employment benefits, and characteristic metrics for employment, procurement or other targets. Such hard targets tend to act too much as the pivot for the relationship between the company and the community. In some cases, they tend to limit rather than enable the relationship. Instead, cooperation protocols can create deeper relations with communities. They guide both parties' expectations about how the relationship should behave so that there are mutual benefits. These types of documents can help to build trust, familiarity and confidence in the partnership building process.

Disseminate Your Cultural Knowledge Throughout the Company

A knowledge strategy involves needs assessments and appropriate pedagogy. Companies want to know what kind of cross-cultural training they need to provide to their employees. If you are trying to employ Indigenous people, a lot of good work can be undone by an offhand comment by one of your team members who hasn't been properly introduced to Indigenous ways and culture. You want to ensure that you have cultivated the right workplace where Indigenous people feel welcome and part of the team.

Many businesses offer cross-cultural training. Staff responsible for supervising Indigenous employees may require more customized training. We have all heard of larger companies that bring in entire teams of supervisors and workers from other parts of Canada. Each is paired up with local Indigenous staff. These supervisors may not know how to work with Indigenous people and consequently problems may soon develop. Company leaders who are personally dedicated to Indigenous engagement and relationship building are suddenly perplexed when they start to hear complaints from the communities about their company's middle managers. This is sometimes referred to as the "frozen middle": people in the company who are obstructing Indigenous relations because they haven't received the proper supervisory training.

Stories abound but the point is that you need to get your training right. If you have a handle on who needs what kind of training, then make the investment. If you are not sure, then do a proper needs assessment to determine the kinds of training that are needed. Your objective is to create an inclusive workplace and equip staff with the knowledge and cultural competencies they need to work with Indigenous people, businesses and communities.

Growing Your Strategies and Practices Blueprint

An enterprise-wide approach to Indigenous engagement and relationship is important. The Inclusion Continuum diagrams a seven-stage road map for workplace inclusion. As companies move along the continuum they acquire knowledge about Indigenous people and they develop the cultural competencies needed to work effectively with Indigenous people, businesses and strategies. Take a moment and think about where you and your work division is on the Inclusion Continuum.

The Inclusion Continuum



Stage 1 – Indifference: Workplace inclusion and diversity are not on the radar.

Stage 2 – Intimidation: Inclusion is viewed as ‘forced compliance’ or what is the minimum that can be done to avoid an Employment Equity audit or human rights complaints. It is a minimalist approach to inclusion.

Stage 3 – Image: Organizations view inclusion through an image lens that romanticizes their inclusion efforts.

Stage 4 – Initiation: A person, leadership team or division initiates the business case for inclusion. It usually starts within leadership or in a division inside the company that starts to ask questions such as: Why aren’t there more aboriginal people working at the company? Why are we not doing business with aboriginal enterprises? How can we build partnerships and better relationships?

Stage 5 – Incubation: Your inclusion efforts starts to grow and incubate across workplace divisions including human resources, procurement, corporate social responsibility, marketing and communications. New pilot programs may be developed and skills are enhanced for supervisors to prepare for managing a diverse workforce. At this stage it will need senior leadership support to grow to stage 6 – Integration.

Stage 6 – Integration: Inclusion is now a catalyst for growth, adopting new world views and creating innovative workplace cultures that hire, retain, and advance Indigenous talent. Your CSR efforts are aligned with developing human capital, business and community potential.

Stage 7 – Inclusion: You are practicing and nurturing indigenous inclusion practices, strategies and behaviours as a corporate ‘norm’ to achieve a long term vision and growth of the company. You are deepening your relationship and partnerships with indigenous people, communities and companies.

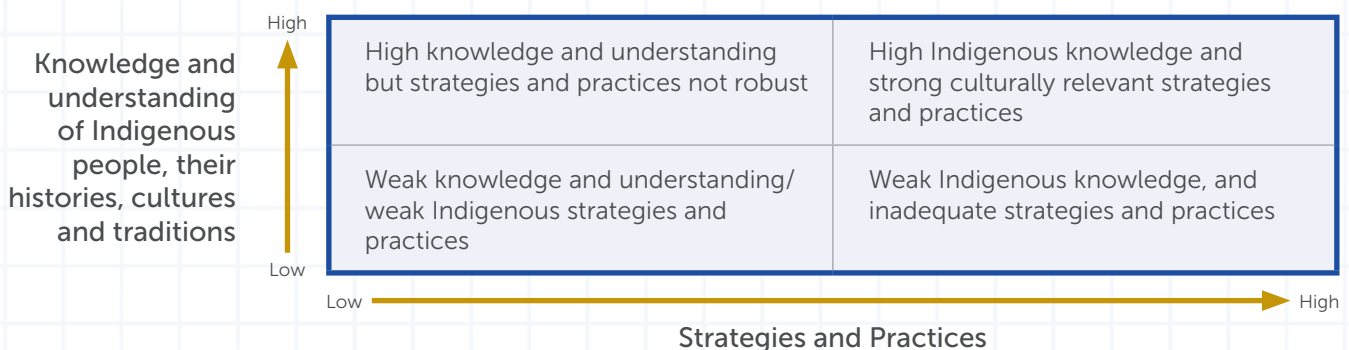
You need to build your organizational knowledge and leverage those assets with the development and implementation of your strategies and practices. It’s important to have the right strategies and practices in place so that your company builds effective relationships and partnerships. Whatever size of company you are, it’s important that you build your strategies and practices right across your company.

Take a moment and think about where you and your work division is on the Inclusion Continuum.

Knowledge and Know-how – Improving Your Company’s Cultural Competencies

The Inclusion Continuum illustrates how improvements in your knowledge and understanding of Indigenous people will inform and guide your company’s comprehensive suite of Indigenous strategies and practices so that they become more culturally relevant.

Your company’s ability to develop strong cultural competencies improves your chances of achieving successful engagements and relationships with Indigenous people, businesses and communities.



Where would you like to be and what might it take to get there?

1b: Relationship Building – Establishing Early Relationships

You are making all the right connections with Indigenous communities and you are gradually establishing a more formal relationship.

Values and Commitments Articulated

It can never be said enough: you need to establish trust with Indigenous people before you can develop a mutually beneficial relationship. But how does your company operationalize trust? What can it do to show Indigenous people that you want to establish this trust as the basis for your relationship? Here are some suggestions.

- Many companies that are deep into Indigenous relations have dedicated an area of their website to the values that they hold important to their organizations and to the Indigenous people, businesses and communities with whom they want to establish successful relationships.
- Be diligent and follow up on matters that arise during meetings. Build trust by following through and doing the things you said you would do.

Have a Strategy

No matter why you wish to engage with an Indigenous community—for business reasons, community investments or access to human resources—you need to have a strategy in place to ensure the engagement is effective.

“When engaging with Indigenous communities, its really important that you use a values-based approach.”

James Williams, Aboriginal Liaison Kiewit Infrastructure

Your Indigenous Recruitment Strategy

Here is a typical recruitment cycle with five components. It varies with company size and whether the business is unionized, but these steps are fairly common across the industry—and they are applied to Indigenous people as well as non-Indigenous people. Those companies that are successful in their Indigenous recruitment have thought beyond this cookie-cutter approach and identified the ways that each step in the process is nuanced for their Indigenous audiences, candidates or new hires.

In workforce planning, consider the rule of three. One third of the Indigenous community may be ready and willing to work tomorrow. One third will need upgrading of some sort. The final third may need extensive training—perhaps due to lack of experience, inadequate life skills and low education and training. Whatever the ratio for the community you are working with, plan accordingly. Your role is to not only recruit, but to also develop the talent pool. You cannot simply advertise and hope that Indigenous candidates will show up.



Get Your Workplace Ready

Those companies that are successful with their Indigenous engagements and relationships have made sure that their vision is shared by all employees. There needs to be strong support and endorsement of the company's efforts to build employment and business opportunities for Indigenous people. Everyone needs to share some level of engagement with the company's engagement strategy. There cannot be any misalignment between the company's values in these matters and the values of individual employees. Company owners must set the tone from the top.

Be the Good Neighbour

In any company there is a range of understanding of, and familiarity with, Indigenous traditions, culture and aspirations. Some employees may have personal relationships with friends or colleagues who are Indigenous. As a result, they may have a grounding or familiarity with Indigenous people and their social, economic, historical and political circumstances. Others may be less familiar with the company's work and the community's circumstances.

No matter their familiarity, employees support the company's efforts to be a "good neighbour" with the Indigenous people and their community. Companies that bring this ethos of the "good neighbour" to their work in Indigenous relations are likely to succeed.

"20% to 40% of Indigenous workers don't work out, but that is the same figure as non-Indigenous workers."

Bill Swaine, Senior Project Manager, Emil Anderson Construction

"Through their corporate social responsibility programs, companies can make vital investments in Indigenous communities, addressing a variety of issues and encouraging wellness."

Edith Garneau, Senior Director, Social Responsibility, SNC Lavalin

2b: Relationship Building – Building Your Commitment

Upping the Relationship and Building Trust

A company's job in the area of Indigenous inclusion is never done. As the relationship progresses, you will want to challenge yourself and your partner to continue to grow together and to help one another succeed.

Companies that have achieved a high state of inclusion have set for themselves an exemplary standard. They have become champions.

As a group, Indigenous people are the most disadvantaged in Canada. It is becoming increasingly important for mainstream companies to show how they support Indigenous people to achieve their social, economic and community goals. Companies need to be able to demonstrate how they contribute to this fulfillment. You want your partner to succeed. So part of your commitment is to do what you can to make this so.

“There are numerous developmental activities that can encourage Indigenous companies’ participation in large mainstream companies’ supply chains.”

Phillip Ducharme, Manager, Supplier and Business Development, Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council

Policy Formation

As you engage Indigenous communities and build relationships, it is important that your company establish a policy that affirms your commitment to Indigenous engagement. Such a document can stand on its own or reside within a variety of policies (e.g., your diversity policy or healthy workplace policy).

At the very least, some kind of documentation is important for your company to communicate its values, goals and commitments toward engaging and building relationships with Indigenous people, businesses and communities. Communicate the policy internally to staff and to external audiences such as Indigenous communities, your suppliers, your partners and the public. All of these different interests need to understand what your company stands for in its Indigenous engagement and relationship work.

You Are Ready to Partner or Joint Venture

We may expect to see more business opportunities to develop with Indigenous communities or their development corporations in the future. For companies that gain the competencies to work with Indigenous companies and their development corporations, there are potentially many opportunities ahead. But it’s important to get the partnership conditions right from the onset. There are no shortcuts to building such foundational relationships.

Canada’s resource, utility and energy companies will experience tremendous pressure in the coming years to demonstrate the ways in which they are working with Indigenous communities. This pressure will cascade down to the companies that are part of the resource sector supply chain, such as contractors. Those companies that can show how they work effectively with Indigenous communities will realize an important competitive advantage that will help them win contracts with bigger companies.

3b: Relationship Building – Achieving a Reciprocal Relationship

At this stage, your company will have successfully developed some positive Indigenous relationships. Your job now is to sustain those relationships. How do you do that? What makes it possible? What makes it difficult?

Sustaining the Relationship

It is very much a balancing act. Companies need to show their support while managing community expectations about forthcoming opportunities. Companies do a disservice when they unduly raise expectations. Doing so can undermine the relationship. It takes between two and five years to build Indigenous community capacity. Make sure you preach—and practice—patience. Timing is important. Working with and within community capabilities is a key to success.

Having the Same Relationship with Each Other

It is all about balance in the relationship. Here are five principles that will guide you in your successful relationship;

1. **Someone has to lead.** It is important to remember why a company decides to joint venture or partner in the first place. Each party brings to the table certain strengths. Let each lead in situations that capitalize on their innate respective strengths. That is just a good business tactic.
2. **Scale and size may be the biggest issue in a partnership.** This issue can surface when multinational companies partner with Indigenous communities. Communities may feel dwarfed because they don't have the resources of large companies. And large companies may be unaware that their size and scale can create power imbalances in the relationship.

During the relationship-building phase, agree on the respective assets that are attractive to both parties. Presumably, something has motivated the desire to partner. Talking through the value parties see in each other's assets can help mitigate or prevent feelings of power imbalances.

3. **Cultural differences may not be as much of a divide as you might think.** It's important that partners understand how their respective cultures differ from one another. Problems arise when parties don't do their due diligence and recognize how they are different and where there are similarities. It could be argued that cultural differences can actually sensitize partners' ability to navigate the new relationship and make them more mindful of the strengths that each bring to the table. This in turn can contribute to longer-term partnerships.

Differences are best understood through cultural education. Learning about the histories of Indigenous people and their communities will enable a better understanding of past, present and future aspirations.

Mainstream companies need to develop specialized knowledge and strategies if they hope to effectively engage and build relationships with Indigenous people, businesses and communities. Creating an early foundation of trust and respect makes a big difference to the long term success of their Indigenous partnerships.

4. **Failure and success are often a matter of perspective.** Don't be quick to label something a complete failure if it doesn't achieve the forecasted results. Business is about resilience. Rarely do things go completely as anticipated, especially in new situations. Of course, in business you are guided by the bottom line. But rarely would one look at a partnership as a complete failure even if it did not achieve what it set out to do. Successful businesses take long-term views. Even if short-term goals go unmet, any lessons learned can be applied to future scenarios.

"Patience and practice can lead to powerful partnership solutions."

Beaver Paul, Aboriginal Contracting Liaison, Energy East Pipeline, Tobique, NB

"Sit down and talk with Indigenous firms and identify the capacity gaps that exist."

Jeff Westeinde, Executive Chairman, Windmill Developments

5. Respect your partner. If a situation is unworkable in the long term, then the partnership must end. Good partners leave in style and keep open the possibility of return. Business revolves around serendipity. One day you may be at odds with someone and the next you may both see grounds for re-establishing relations.

Safety Measures and Safeguards

Some final comments are offered here about sustaining your Indigenous relationships. There are stories that continue to circulate in the construction industry about failed attempts to develop successful Indigenous engagements and relationship building. These do not have happy endings. If you do not want to be the one speaking firsthand about such experiences, you must safeguard your Indigenous engagements and relationships.

Earlier, we mentioned a few things that should be done. Document your meetings with Indigenous communities. It is a way to keep things on course and accountable. Manage expectations: under sell and over deliver.

What other advice do construction managers and owners have on this topic? Here are five suggestions from those who have witnessed or lived through some tight spots in attempting to forge Indigenous engagements and relationships:

1. There's the example of the manager who came across a tender and had 10 days to submit a bid. The bid depended on Indigenous participation. The manager showed up cold to the community and hoped to strike a deal. I told him he wasted his time. He would have been better to skip the bid and work on a longer-term relationship with the community. If it is rushed, it is probably doomed to fail.
2. I have heard of a construction manager who had a contract to put up a building near an Indigenous community. An Elder from the community spoke with him and tried to tell him about the local area and the flood patterns. But trying to convince companies to listen to Indigenous people is hard sometimes. And getting them to treat traditional knowledge as valid information is often a stretch. It comes back to cultural competencies. When Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are in a conversation there is a tendency for the latter to fill in the silence. I tell them wait three times longer than they would normally, then say something. It comes down to respect. If respect is there then the relationship works better in the long term. (The Elder was right by the way. The building flooded in the spring and had to be rebuilt later that year).
3. Understand the business governance. In First Nations, community matters are run by the Chief and Councillors. Likewise, there are political leaders in Métis and Inuit communities. There are also numerous Aboriginal economic development corporations that play important business roles. The interface between Indigenous politicians and economic development can be compared to political leaders who interact with Crown corporations. Sound governance practices need to be in place to ensure the economic partnerships are viable, sustainable and effective.
4. Construction owners or managers need to consider the risk and opportunities in communities that have not developed effective economic development authorities, systems and practices. At the outset it can be helpful to deal with some of the accounting firms that have some expertise in these matters. If you do not know which accounting companies to go to check and see which of these accounting firms are actively supporting Indigenous organizations, communities and causes and which firms are working with Indigenous clients. There are also consultants and lawyers who specialize in this area. It can be worth the money to have accounting and legal firms help you in any deals to ensure that the governance arrangements are solid from the onset. They can guide you.

5. If there is not a development corporation in place in the community, it may be important or even critical to establish one for purposes of a development project. Separate the fiscal liabilities of the community and those of the project. If governance issues later become cloudy, then you may need an intervenor. Political leaders can be elected every two to four years depending upon the community and you want to reduce the possibility of backsliding on governance matters. Be attuned to the elections in Indigenous communities and what a change in leadership can potentially mean for your business relationship.

Being a Good Partner – It Takes Two Wings to Fly

We would not want to imply from the above that failed engagements are due mainly to shortcomings on the part of construction owners and managers – both sides can be to blame when engagements go south.

One cause for significant concern is silence. Silence can be a powerful communication signal. It might be that the person or community disagrees with your company's approach or ideas. When you encounter unexpected silence, it may be helpful to have an outside party explore the issues and bring clarity to the situation.

Communities that do not have the initial capacity to respond to business propositions need help. If the project is big enough, then the company may help the community hire a person who has some expertise in business and development. Be proactive. If you can, help the community to build the capacity it needs to respond to your engagement. Or help it leverage the resources it needs to build this business capacity.

Moving Forward

As business owners, managers and leaders you have an important role to play in equipping your company and your employees with the information and strategies they need to be successful in Indigenous partnerships. Indigenous people, businesses and communities are seeking to develop communities and economies through strong partnerships and engagements.

There are challenges ahead. There are significant socio-economic gaps to close. By developing and renewing our relationships we can build the partnerships that will generate economic and social prosperity. Better education, employment and economic outcomes are shared goals that benefit all Canadians.

Committees

National Indigenous Engagement Project Steering Committee

Project Management Committee Members	
Chris Lorenc, President Manitoba Heavy Construction Association Co-Chair, Project Management Committee	Victoria LaBillois, President Wejipeg Excavation Co-Chair, Project Management Committee
Joe Wrobel, President & GM JPW Road & Bridge Inc.	Dan Christmas, Senior Advisor Membertou First Nation
Dave Kinley, Chair President, Concept Electric Ltd.	Michael Atkinson, President Canadian Construction Association
Aneel Rangi General Counsel & Corporate Secretary Canadian Construction Association	
Kelly J Lendsay President, Consultant & Author Indigenous Works	Craig J Hall Chief Fulfillment Officer, Consultant & Author Indigenous Works

Indigenous Engagement Guide

Indigenous Engagement Guide National Advisory Group

Phillip Ducharme
Manager, Supplier and Business Development
Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier
Council, ON

Beaver Paul
Supply Chain Management Aboriginal
Contracting Liaison, Energy East Pipeline, NB

Edith Garneau
Senior Director, Social Responsibility
SNC Lavalin, QC

Colleen Munro, President
Hugh Munro Construction, MB

Chief Kenneth Karonhiatie McComber
Mohawk Council of Kahnawá:ke, QC

Joe Thompson
Aboriginal Employment Partnership Specialist
Manitoba Hydro, MB

Bruce Lund
Lead, Special Projects
BC Construction Association, BC

Joseph Wabegijig
Deployment Analyst, Project Delivery Group
Hatch, ON

Carole Morsky
Vice President,
The Morsky Group, SK

Focus Group Interviews

Ron Castel
Indigenous Liaison
Manitoba Construction Sector Council, MB

Marc Richard,
General Manager
Borea Construction, QC

Mark Dreschel
Senior Vice-President
Bird Construction, SK

Jamie Saulnier
President
Running Deer Resources, AB

Phillip Ducharme
Manager, Supplier and Business Development
Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier
Council, ON

Bill Swaine
Senior Project Manager
Emil Anderson Construction, BC

Edith Garneau
Senior Director, Social Responsibility
SNC Lavalin, QC

Joe Thompson,
Aboriginal Employment Partnership Specialist
Manitoba Hydro, MB

Shaun Howdle
GM, Industrial Western Canada
Concept Group Inc, SK

Joseph Wabegijig
Deployment Analyst, Project Delivery Group,
Hatch Ltd., ON

Nick Johnson
VP Human Resources
Bird Construction, SK

Jeff Westeinde
Executive Chairman
Windmill Developments, ON

Chief Kenneth Karonhiatie McComber
Mohawk Council of Kahnawá:ke, QC

Jonathan Westeinde
Managing Partner
Windmill Developments, ON

Bruce Lund
Lead, Special Projects
BC Construction Association, BC

Paul Wearmouth
Hydro Area Specialist
Kiewit Infrastructure Co., BC

Carole Morsky
Vice-President
The Morsky Group, SK

James Williams
Aboriginal Liaison
Kiewit Infrastructure Co., BC

Terri Lynn Morrison, Project Director
Mesgi'g Ugju's'n Wind Farm, QC

Joe Wrobel
President and GM
JPW Road & Bridge Inc., BC

Colleen Munro, President
Hugh Munro Construction, MB

Trevor Wynd
Hall Constructors, ON

**Canadian
Construction
Association**



**Association
canadienne de
la construction**

Canadian Construction Association

1900 - 275 Slater Street
Ottawa, ON K1P 5H9

Tel: 613-236-9455
Fax: 613-236-9526
cca@cca-acc.com
www.cca-acc.com



Indigenous Works

Indigenous Works

#2 - 2510 Jasper Avenue
Saskatoon, SK S7J 2K2

Tel: 306-956-5360
Fax: 306-956-5361
contact.us@indigenousworks.ca
www.indigenousworks.ca