

# Collaborative Aboriginal Economic Development: The Unama'ki Economic Development Model

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The establishment of partnerships is often identified as an important means of engaging in Aboriginal economic development.<sup>1</sup> Several studies have highlighted the value brought to Aboriginal communities through partnerships, not only in terms of increased employment and revenue production, but also capacity building, cultural preservation, and resource control (Brown et al., 2012; Boyd & Trospen, 2010; AAEDIRP, 2010; Missens et al., 2007; Hindle et al., 2005; Anderson, 1997; Ferrazi, 1989). In the *Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*, the establishment of partnerships was one of four strategic priorities highlighted by the Government of Canada, which asserts that, “Forging new and effective partnerships ... with provinces and territories and the private sector will ensure long-term sustainable economic development” (2009: 12). Often the economic alliances outlined focus on those between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners; however, increasingly Aboriginal businesses and communities are partnering with each other for economic development.

The Unama'ki<sup>2</sup> Economic Development Model<sup>3</sup> is one such initiative in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada. Established in 2007, it is “a unique economic partnership between the five Unama'ki communities” (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has benefitted from feedback provided by colleagues Keith Brown, Mary Beth Doucette, and Allan MacKenzie, as well as Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office (UEBO) employees Owen Fitzgerald and Alex Paul. Thank you to research assistant Shawna Boyer for conducting some of the interviews referenced in this article during a 2012 summer internship and research assistant Khea Googoo for compiling relevant publications on the Unama'ki Economic Development Model and the Tar Ponds remediation during spring 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Unama'ki, which means “foggy land” or “land of fog,” is the Mi'kmaw term for Cape Breton Island. The five Mi'kmaw communities in Unama'ki are Membertou, Eskasoni, Potlotek, Wagmatcook, and Waycobah.

<sup>3</sup> This model was formerly referred to as the “Collaborative Approach to Economic Development, The Unama'ki Model” in a video documentary of March 2011 (see <<http://www.unamaki.ca/community-updates.asp>>, accessed February 22, 2013).

This paper will describe the Unama'ki Economic Development Model, explain how and why it was established, discuss and assess its success through its first initiative related to the Sydney Tar Ponds remediation, and identify best practices leading to this success.

### **The Unama'ki Economic Development Model**

The Unama'ki Economic Development Model refers to an approach to Aboriginal economic development established among five Unama'ki communities in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The structures supporting this model include the Unama'ki Economic Benefits steering committee and an office established to accomplish the work directed by this steering committee, as well as the various committees and advisory bodies comprised of stakeholders who provide guidance. The initial goal of the partnership between the five Unama'ki communities was "to maximize economic benefits from major construction projects happening on the island [Cape Breton]" (Unama'ki "Steering Committee"; see also Fitzgerald 2009: 13). Shared between the partner communities was a collaborative vision: "if there was a project taking place close to one of the communities, that community would take the lead in it and they ... would make sure that there was a maximum benefit for Aboriginal people across the island" (interview with Alex Paul, July 31, 2012).

The driving force behind the establishment of both was the opportunity provided by the Sydney Tar Ponds and Coke Ovens clean up project. For nearly a century, one of the major industries in Sydney, Nova Scotia was the production of steel and coke. The environmental impact of this industry included "more than a million tonnes of contaminated soil and sediment" deposited in four areas in the vicinity of the former steel mill: "North and South Tar Ponds; Former Coke Ovens property; An old dump uphill from the Coke Ovens; [and] A stream that carried contaminants from the Coke Ovens to the Tar Ponds" (Sydney Tar Ponds Agency "Project"). As the clean up moved from vision to planning to implementation, opportunities were identified for Aboriginal participation in the clean up effort: "The 400 million dollar Sydney Tar Ponds Clean Up project [presented] an opportunity that, if we [could] structure this correctly, a lot of Aboriginals and Aboriginal businesses [could] gain some really valuable experience and could build capacity" (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011).

Through consultation and negotiation with government partners, the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office (UEBO) was able to advocate successfully for Aboriginal set-asides. Critical to the vision was that there would be meaningful participation by Aboriginals in the remediation process. As Owen Fitzgerald, executive director of the UEBO, noted, too often memorandums of understanding and other agreements are brokered to enable Aboriginal participation, but in the end good intentions do not materialize into tangible results (interview, December 9, 2011). The structure and approach of the Unama'ki Economic Development Model is designed to ensure success in these endeavours.

### **The Structure of the Unama'ki Economic Development Model**

The steering committee, which was established in 2007, includes two or three representatives from each of the five of the Unama'ki communities (usually Native Employment Officers, but sometimes Economic Development Officers), as well as representatives from

Ulnooweg Development<sup>4</sup>, Mi'kmaq Employment Training Secretariat (METS)<sup>5</sup>, and the Membertou Entrepreneur Centre. Other Mi'kmaw<sup>6</sup> stakeholders have participated in the steering committee over the years, including the Union of Nova Scotia Indians (UNSI), Unama'ki College (UC) (formerly known as Mi'kmaq College Institute), and the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC). The executive director of the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office also sits on this committee. It is co-chaired by Dan Christmas of Membertou and Tracy Menge of Eskasoni, and meetings held every month or two alternate between each of the five communities. It oversees and provides direction to the work of the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office, provides input to the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership program (ASEP), and reviews initiatives in training, business development, and the establishment of partnerships.

The UEBO was established with funding from Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC)<sup>7</sup> and the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency (STPA) to implement the objectives of the steering committee and provide business support to local Aboriginal peoples. From the beginning, it served to facilitate partnerships and development: "This office acts as a liaison between the communities, the Unama'ki businesses and the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency and other large industrial projects in the area" (Unama'ki, 2008). Though the Tar Ponds project is coming to a close (2013), the office still fulfills this role in initiatives with new business partners. The UEBO has grown to include seven full-time staff members, including an executive director, a director, a training coordinator, two training support/job coaches, a finance officer, and an administrative assistant (Unama'ki "Contact"). Since the UEBO responds to the needs of the communities and other stakeholders, staff positions are added or removed as necessary. For example, during the height of the Tar Ponds remediation, there was a procurement-community business liaison officer (see Fitzgerald, 2009: 17). The primary office is located in Membertou, and satellite offices are located in Eskasoni and Wagmatcook.

There is an executive body comprised of the co-chairs from the steering committee and the executive director and director of the UEBO. This executive brings recommendations to and shares information with the board of directors on behalf of the steering committee and the ASEP committee. It also receives information and advice from the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency Priorities and Planning Committee. The board of directors is made up of the five Unama'ki chiefs. This arrangement was established once the steering committee perceived the need for a formalized governance structure. The board of directors has decision-making power and provides direction to the economic development initiatives, but receives feedback and recommendations from a number of stakeholders.

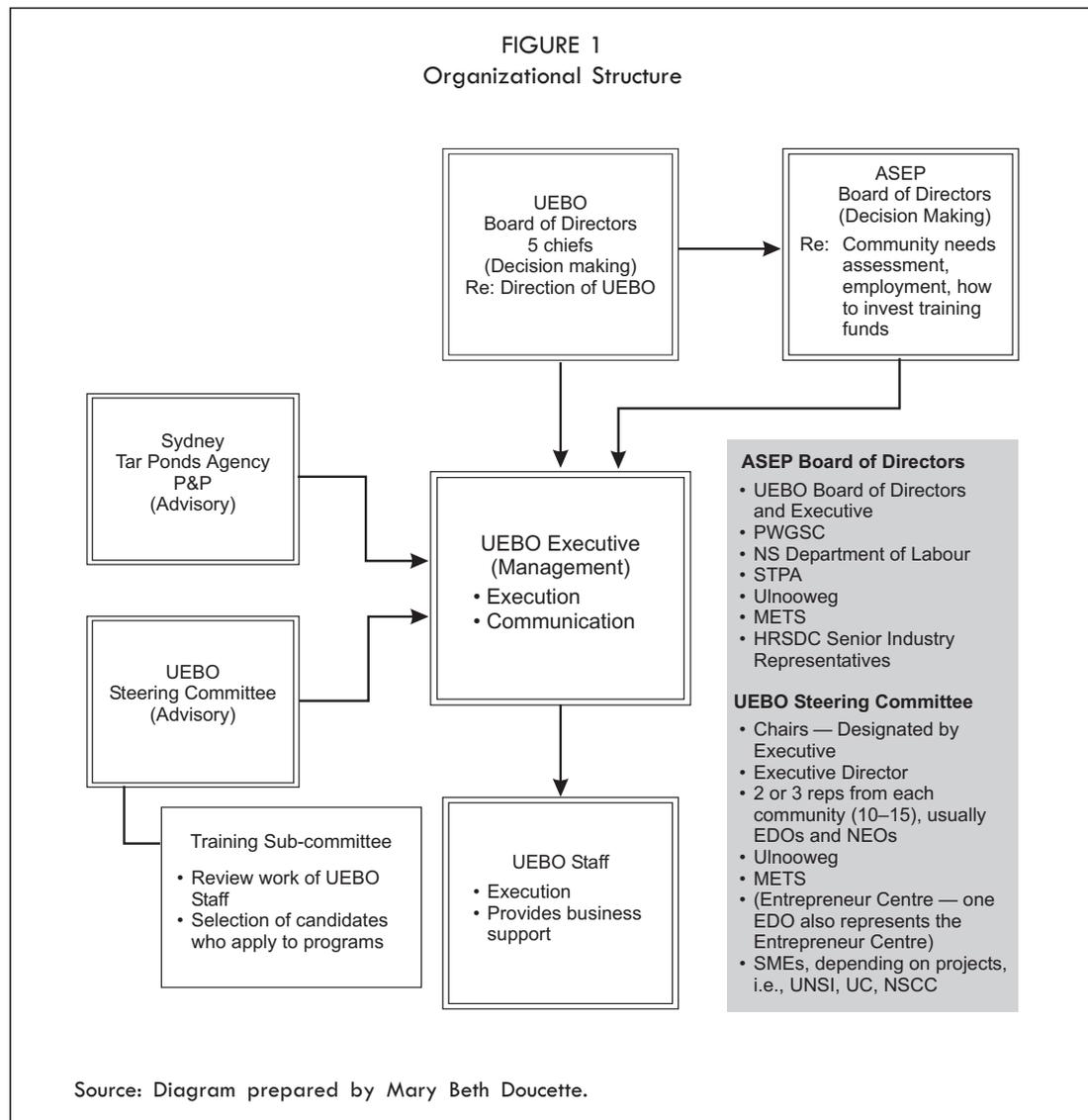
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<sup>4</sup> Ulnooweg Development Group, Inc provides loans to Aboriginal business owners in Atlantic Canada, maintains an Aboriginal business directory, and hosts an awards event to recognize Aboriginal entrepreneurs and businesses (Ulnooweg, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Funded by Human Resource Development Canada (HRDC), the Mi'kmaq Employment Training Secretariat coordinates training for First Nations across Nova Scotia (see Mi'kmaq Employment, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> The Mi'kmaq are indigenous to the area known as Mi'kma'ki, which encompasses Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec, the west coast of Newfoundland, and northern Maine. In the Smith-Francis orthography, adopted by the Grand Council in 1982, Mi'kmaq is the plural noun and the name of the language spoken by this First Nation, while Mi'kmaw is the singular noun and the adjectival form.

<sup>7</sup> ECBC is a Crown corporation that delivers the programs of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), as well as its own development programs, in Cape Breton and the Mulgrave area. See <<http://www.ecbc-secb.gc.ca>>.



A Priorities and Planning Committee representing the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency and the local First Nation communities is comprised of the president of the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency, a senior federal representative of Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC), a senior provincial representative of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal, and the executive body (co-chairs of the steering committee and executive director and director of the UEBO). This committee was tasked with defining what “meaningful Aboriginal participation” in the Sydney Tar Ponds remediation meant and identifying the means through which it would be achieved. They matched assets with opportunities, negotiated set-asides, negotiated the sharing of the first set-aside, established creative ways of implementing training and mentorship components to the set-asides, and defined policy around Aboriginal employment targets. Initially they met every two months, rotating between the Membertou UEBO and government offices, but later met as required.

In 2008, the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office secured more than \$4 million in funding for training from HRSDC, under their Aboriginal Skills and Employment Program (ASEP). A training committee was established to review training needs and challenges in the five Unama'ki communities. Native Employment Officers (NEOs) from each community meet with training staff from the UEBO to recommend training initiatives and review and select applicants for training programs. Their recommendations are then brought to the steering committee. This committee is an important means of ensuring a transparent and fair process for the selection of candidates applying to training programs. The committee is chaired by the director of the UEBO.<sup>8</sup>

With training through the ASEP program, it was necessary to establish separately incorporated board with decision-making power. The ASEP board consists of the five Unama'ki chiefs; representatives of Public Works and Government Services Canada, the provincial Department of Labour, the Sydney Tar Ponds Agency, Ulnooweg Development, and Mi'kmaq Employment Training Secretariat (METS); senior industry representatives; the executive body (with executive director and director of the UEBO *ex officio*); and a representative of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (*ex officio*). This group meets on a quarterly basis to exchange information on industry opportunities and needs, and assets in Unama'ki communities. This group makes decisions as to how to invest training funds based on recommendations from the executive body.<sup>9</sup>

## The Approach of the Unama'ki Economic Development Model

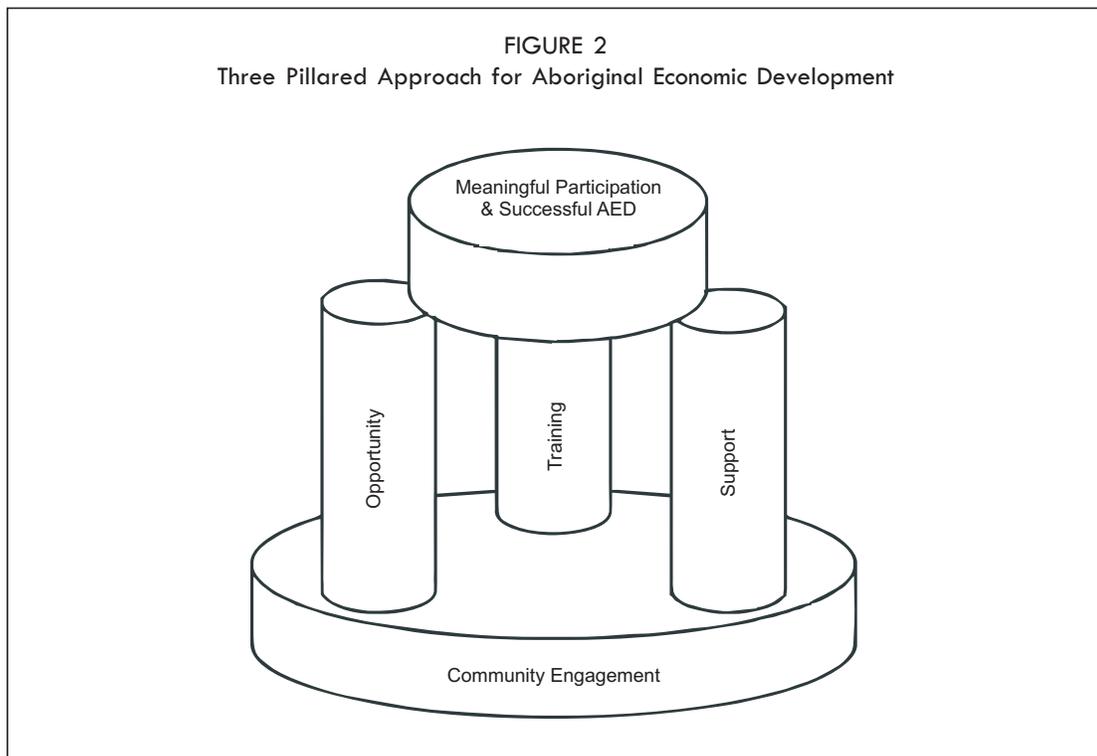
The Unama'ki Economic Development Model employs a three-pillared model for Aboriginal economic development (AED) built upon a foundation of community engagement and support. The key to the success of this approach is the buy-in from communities at a grassroots level. With Aboriginal communities directing initiatives, it is possible to secure serious participation as the project moves forward (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011). Once this foundation is firmly set, through consultation and the establishment of an Aboriginal steering committee, the three key pillars can be set in place.

The three pillars of the Unama'ki approach to Aboriginal economic development are opportunity, training, and support. In discussing the first pillar, the modifier “real” is often added in an effort to emphasize that the viability of any initiative should be tested through the use of good business practices (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011). The foundation of opportunity requires survey and assessment of the surrounding areas to identify possible development initiatives that Aboriginal peoples could lead or participate in with industry partners. For those in Unama'ki, the immediate opportunity in the mid-2000s was the Tar Ponds remediation; however, in other communities it could be natural resource development, ship-building, or wind energy, for example. A strong business plan was emphasized as critical, as well as leadership to see the plan through.

Once a real opportunity is identified and assessed as viable, the second pillar of training comes into play. For the Unama'ki approach this means careful assessment of the number and types of jobs expected in relation to a development initiative, as well as key training

<sup>8</sup> This position has recently been renamed Provincial Director of Training.

<sup>9</sup> The descriptions in this section are based on information provided by Owen Fitzgerald (April 19, 2013).



required for each. They then work with partners to create training programs that will respond to these needs and recruit community members to these programs. Development partners are expected to demonstrate their commitment by being engaged throughout this process. For example, the partner business is directly involved in the recruitment and selection of training candidates (twice as many people are trained as the business anticipates hiring) and then the business selects from candidates who successfully complete training to fill vacancies. In the early years of the Unama'ki Economic Development Model, the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Program (ASEP) was an important training funder for the Tar Ponds remediation (discussed below).

Representatives of the UEBO are careful to note that it is not enough for there to be development initiatives or job opportunities and training. The third pillar of the approach — support — is essential to ensure success and the UEBO provides support to both businesses and individuals. On the latter, Owen Fitzgerald noted, “There are challenges when many people haven’t been in the workforce, or been out of it a long time: cultural differences, isolation, and the dependency that has been created in rural communities” (interview, December 9, 2011). He explained this with the imagery of a tent, noting that with only one or two posts, the tent will collapse, but with a third post it becomes more stable (*ibid*). Support, not unlike the training programs offered by the UEBO, must be tailored to businesses and community members, sometimes on a case-by-case basis. The support provided can range from job preparedness skills for individuals to highly specialized workshops for businesses. For example, some of the Aboriginal companies interested in bidding on contracts for the Tar Ponds remediation did not have experience going through a government tender process

before, which requires the use of the MERX electronic bidding system (see INAC, 2010: 3). The UEBO “[brought] in experts, engineers, estimators, and the such, to conduct ... workshops” to ensure Aboriginal businesses could be competitive in the tender process (Fitzgerald, 2009: 14).

### **The Case of the Sydney Tar Ponds Clean Up Project**

As aforementioned, the initial “real opportunity” available for Aboriginal communities in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia was the remediation of the Sydney Tar Ponds site. The overall cost of the remediation was to be \$400 million. There was desire among Unama’ki Aboriginal communities to participate in this clean up in a meaningful way that would provide employment opportunities and capacity development. This dialogue, of course, was put in motion many years before the Unama’ki Economic Benefits Office and steering committee were officially formed in 2007. In the years prior to this, Dan Christmas, Chief Terry Paul, and Bernd Christmas of Membertou, along with many others, had been engaged in conversations with the provincial and federal governments around the possibility of Aboriginal participation in the clean up project, and the five Unama’ki chiefs agreed that this should be pursued. At the urging of Dan Christmas in January 2007, the five communities came together to identify the path forward through a unified approach (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011).

Initially, there was some scepticism that Aboriginal participation in the remediation would be successful and so it was determined that the first step in the path forward should be a pilot project valued at \$5 million. An Aboriginal set-aside was established for the cooling pond component of the overall clean up. The cooling pond was an area of the Tar Ponds filled with contaminants from the coke ovens plant that would be subjected to a stabilization and solidification process. Given its small scale, it was appropriately sized as a test case. Unique, however, was the way in which the bidding and selection process occurred. The tender was open to majority-owned (at least 51%) Aboriginal businesses. The tender, however, was not awarded to a single business, but to the top three. As Owen Fitzgerald described, “three companies share the work, with the top company getting a larger percentage” thereby providing more individuals and companies with capacity development and wealth (interview, December 9, 2011). The agreement also stipulated that 70% of the workforce was to be Aboriginal.<sup>10</sup> The six month contract awarded to three construction companies — Norman Morris Joint Venture (Eskasoni), MB2 Excavating and Construction (Membertou), and the Membertou-HAZCO Remediation Group (Membertou) — provided employment for twenty-two Aboriginal workers (85% Aboriginal participation) and was completed in April 2008 (Fitzgerald, 2009: 14).

Following the success of this pilot, the UEBO was able to negotiate for additional Aboriginal set-asides. The Unama’ki Procurement Strategy signed between the UEBO and provincial and federal governments established an additional \$14 million in set-asides, ensuring meaningful participation in the remediation process. These set-asides encompassed “removal, conditioning and transport of Coke Ovens Brook sediment, stockpiling capping material, water treatment operations, operating a material processing facility, building and maintaining access roads, and environmental controls” (MacVicar, 2008: 1).

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<sup>10</sup> In Fitzgerald (2009: 14), it is stated that the workforce was to be 75% Aboriginal; however, while reviewing a draft of this document on March 21, 2013, Fitzgerald clarified that the target was 70%.

In addition to generating wealth, providing employment opportunities, and increasing the capacity of Aboriginal businesses and workers, there were less tangible — though equally significant — benefits from the establishment of and participation in Aboriginal set-asides. One of the participants in the original set-aside noted that the awarding of these initial contracts “was important to communities because we were able to first of all participate in the clean up in our own area, something that needed to be cleaned up for years. We had concerns about the Tar Ponds and about what effects it had on our own local environment” (interview, July 26, 2012). Further, as Chief Terry Paul observed, “One major outcome of the first Nova Scotia Aboriginal Set-Aside, is that these companies don’t just have hope, they now have confidence and a growing determination to succeed” (quoted in Fitzgerald, 2009: 15). This confidence and determination was bolstered when the Aboriginal-owned company MB2 Construction in partnership with Beaver Marine (Halifax, NS), won a \$37.6 million contract in an open bidding process (*ibid.*). Aboriginal companies in total participated in \$71 million in projects (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011).

## Training

By 2008, it became clear that there was a need to begin planning for opportunities after the Tar Ponds remediation, which was expected to conclude by 2013–2014. The UEBO leveraged its success in the Tar Ponds Clean Up to secure \$4 million in funding from the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership (ASEP) program. The ASEP training initiative aimed “to create and retain up to 150 full-time jobs for local Aboriginal people in the construction industry and [committed] to construction industry related training and training upgrading for 500 local Aboriginals” (Fitzgerald, 2009: 16). In particular, the ASEP training program focussed on several key areas: life skills (workforce preparation); essential skills (specialized upgrading); construction-specific courses; occupational health and safety training; trades training (welding, electrical, etc.); on-the-job training; and Aboriginal business development (emphasis on entrepreneurship) (“Government of Canada Provides”, 2008).<sup>11</sup> An ASEP advisory board with industry representatives was established to help guide the development of training initiatives.

Prior to implementing specific training programs, the UEBO assessed opportunities in relation to other industries and companies, such as Emera (utility services), the Newpage Paper Mill (paper production in factory), port development (shipping and crane operation), the development of the lower Churchill Falls, and ship building. In each case, the UEBO engaged in data collection, identifying the departments involved in each operation or business, the number and type of positions required in each department, the skill level and training required for each position, the projected need for new employees in the next 5–10 years, rates of turn-over, and so on. This data helped the UEBO understand what opportunities might exist in the near-term, the types of training required, and how many individuals to train in each type of job to provide choices to employers without flooding the job pool (interview with Owen Fitzgerald, December 9, 2011). This research proved to be critical. Initially the UEBO anticipated training workers for the construction industry, but quickly

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<sup>11</sup> The original press release stated that the program would also focus on high school equivalency and university training; however, communities are responsible for both (Owen Fitzgerald, personal communication, March 21, 2013).

learned that there was a need to prioritize other types of training, such as environmental monitoring and civil technicians (interview with Alex Paul, July 31, 2012).

The customized training in these programs, provided by accredited institutions, goes beyond the confines of mainstream education initiatives to include significant student support throughout the training period, as well as on-the-job assistance as necessary. For example, job coaches supervise student participation in training programs and provide guidance and counselling as required. Should a student be missing from training for any reason, they follow up and assist the student in returning to their program. The environment that is fostered focuses on team work and students in programs also support each other (interview with key informant, July 31, 2012).<sup>12</sup> The training also emphasizes practical skills related to all stages of the job search process, including resume-writing, creation and maintenance of work portfolios, interview skills, and appropriate attire for interviews (interview with key informant, August 3, 2012).

The ASEP training program concluded in 2012 and a new training program, the Nova Scotia Aboriginal Employment Partnership, was approved in January 2013 with funding from provincial and federal sources. It will continue the work of creating a skilled Aboriginal workforce (interview with key informant, July 31, 2012; UEBO, 2013).

Diavik Diamond Mines runs a training program in the North West Territories that bears many similarities to this model (see Diavik, 2002). Its success has been attributed to the partnership approach between contractors, community organizations, governments, and educational institutions; the combination of classroom and practical training; the orientation toward team-building; the availability of training in home communities; and the “linking [of] training program objectives with workforce skill requirements” (Missens et al., 2007: 67). As the Unama’ki model emphasizes these same principles, they may suggest best practices for the establishment of other training initiatives in the future.

## **Success of the Unama’ki Economic Development Model**

The success of the Unama’ki Economic Development Model can be attributed to its business approach to development, while emphasizing holistic and collaborative methods. In regards to the business approach, Alex Paul, director at the UEBO, highlighted transparency and accountability as critical business approaches leading to the success of the model. The UEBO reports to the steering committee, funders, chiefs and councils, and the Unama’ki communities more broadly, in terms of job creation and retention, as well as the overall number of community members trained. This reporting is critically important for demonstrating that the partnership is of value to all Unama’ki communities even though its administrative centre is in Membertou (interview with Alex Paul, July 31, 2012).

Alex also emphasized the importance of leadership to the success of this model. He said that “leadership is key,” for it is the vision of the steering committee that directs the work (interview with Alex Paul, July 31, 2012). Rose Julian, an economic development officer in the mainland Mi’kmaw community of Paq’tnek, also highlighted strong leadership as central to the success of the UEBO (interview, March 11, 2013). It is worth noting that in a

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<sup>12</sup> All interview participants remain anonymous to protect confidentiality, except where they have explicitly agreed to attributed quotations.

recent study of the Membertou business model, visionary leadership was identified as one of seven principles leading to the success of that community's economic development initiatives. That study also highlighted accountability and transparency as key factors (Brown et al., 2012: 33, 37–38).

There are also particular orientations that bolster success, such as the problem-solving or solution-based approach of the UEBO. As Alex Paul explained, "When we come and work with our industry partners, we want to hear what opportunities exist and then we'll come to them with solutions, instead of saying 'You have a problem. Why don't you fix it?' We actually create the solution for them" (interview, July 31, 2012). The UEBO assists its partners in locating and hiring a highly trained workforce, while also adding under-represented groups to their labour force (Alex Paul, personal communication, March 25, 2013).

For those who have benefitted from the efforts of the Unama'ki Economic Development Model, other factors that contribute to the model's success are highlighted. A participant in the original set-aside noted each community in Unama'ki has different strengths that can work in a complementary fashion and the same is true for the skill sets of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal partners. He also felt that the partnership between Unama'ki communities was successful because it showcases Aboriginal success and provides opportunities to learn from others to address weaknesses in the communities (interview with key informant, July 26, 2012). The Unama'ki Economic Development Model, then, recognizes the value of collaboration, as well as the resulting knowledge transfer and enhancement of community capacity.

Others have attributed the success of the model to the fact that there are real employment opportunities available at the end of the training period. A member of the steering committee observed, "They train you and there is employment at the end of the program. ... You can train, train, train, but if there is no meaningful job at the end, then it's just another training program" (interview with key informant, August 3, 2012). To go beyond training toward meaningful participation in economic development initiatives, jobs must exist at the end of training programs. Related to this, Rose Julian has observed that the success of the Unama'ki Economic Development Model is largely related to the comprehensive planning that occurs to support these opportunities and economic trends (interview, March 11, 2013).

Finally, the ability to identify and provide a clear pathway to meaningful participation in local and regional economies for Aboriginals was highlighted as significant for the success of this model. As an employee of the UEBO noted, particularly regarding the pillars of training and support, the UEBO "bridged a gap for other community members to help them ... succeed in their future" (interview with key informant, August 9, 2012). A critical part of achieving this success is the support provided which extends beyond pure training. As observed by another employee of the UEBO, "They [those in training programs] are never left to swim alone. They always have the support officers there to receive the information they require to be successful, including addictions counselling or whatever they might need that isn't provided at the office" (interview with key informant, July 29, 2012).

As Dan Christmas summarized, "Success of the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office is due to its strong business approach to economic development, strong engagement of the communities through the steering committee, strong communication, effective partnering efforts with government and industry, a strong training program that is tied to industry needs and support for the people in training and support for the people that are starting new jobs" (as quoted in Unama'ki, 2009). It is clear that this approach instills confidence in govern-

ment funding partners. Over the next two years, the UEBO will coordinate training for seven hundred Aboriginal workers for anticipated employment in the shipbuilding industry with \$6 million from the federal government (Lambie, 2013; UEBO, 2013).

Another indicator of the success of this model is the desire of other Mi'kmaw communities in mainland Nova Scotia to partner with the UEBO. When the community of Paq'tnkek decided to pursue an interchange on highway 104 at Afton to open up another area of their reserve for commercial and residential development, Rose Julian approached the UEBO to collaborate and share best practices: "To me, it made no sense to reinvent that wheel if there was already a wheel that was successful in Mi'kmaw country" (interview, March 11, 2013).<sup>13</sup> In particular, the principle of establishing nation-to-nation relationships and the UEBO model for capacity building are best practices that might be replicated in other contexts and regions.

While continued collaborations with provincial and federal governments, as well as the interest of other communities in working with the UEBO and employing its practices are important indicators of success, the UEBO has also received a number of awards. The UEBO was honoured with an Atlantic Canada Aboriginal Entrepreneur Award in 2010, the Stewardship Award sponsored by the Sunshine Rotary Club from Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce in 2011, and a Community Partnership Award from the Strait Campus of Nova Scotia Community College in 2012 (see UEBO, 2010, 2011, 2012).

## Conclusions

The Unama'ki Economic Development Model has been successfully employed to secure meaningful participation in economic development opportunities for Aboriginal peoples in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, as demonstrated through the Tar Ponds remediation project and the establishment of significant Aboriginal set-asides. While the partnership between five Unama'ki communities was formed to act on immediate and near-term opportunities on the island, the focus of this development model on education and support ensures that those who are trained through UEBO programs will enjoy employment opportunities in the long-term. The success of the model thus far affirms that Aboriginal partners can provide solutions to non-Aboriginal partners as they respond to the challenges of an aging workforce and equity employment targets.

The greatest success, however, is the establishment of a mechanism through which Aboriginal communities can collectively work with other business and government partners to secure benefits from the development of local natural resources and environmental remediation. This meaningful participation in economic development initiatives provides employment, individual and community wealth, skill and capacity development, and experience that will lead to improved living and work conditions for Aboriginal people. It also fosters confidence that will ensure that workers are well-positioned for future opportunities.

It remains to be seen whether this model for collaborative economic development could be successfully deployed in other areas of Canada; whether it would work in an intertribal setting where there is greater diversity in culture, history, and experience; or whether (and the degree to which) its success is geographically based. Nevertheless, this three-pillared

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on the establishment of the Afton interchange and the Highway 104 Commercial Development Project, see Paq'tnkek First Nation (2011).

model set on a foundation of community engagement, may prove valuable for other economic initiatives, such as the development of Lower Churchill Falls hydroelectric energy project.

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