

# *New Brunswick Aboriginal Business Women's Mentoring Circle*

---

**Leslie Reid**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES OF NBAPC AND NCPEI



---

Based on the final report on the New Brunswick Aboriginal Business Women's Mentoring Circle program held in January 18–March 26 (released in March 31, 2016). The program was funded by the Native Women's Association of Canada.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SERVICES OF NBAPC AND NCPEI**

Economic Development Services (EDS) of New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council (NBAPC) and Native Council of Prince Edward Island (NCPEI) was a not-for-profit organization incorporated in 1997, formally known as the *NBAPC Equity Fund Inc.* It is a wholly owned subsidiary of the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council and is in partnership with the Native Council Prince Edward Island.

### **1. Mission**

To inspire, encourage and promote economic development with off reserve Aboriginal people and their businesses in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

### **2. Goals**

- Encourage off reserve Aboriginal people to work for their own betterment and for the wellbeing of their children;
- Build a foundation of continuous economic growth, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and opportunity for future generations;
- Establish a framework for economic progress in the context of a modern and complex society while respecting the traditions and culture rooted in the past.

### **3. Values**

- **Integrity**  
Employment Development Services acts with integrity when contributing to the economic self-sufficiency and self-reliance of Off Reserve Aboriginal People.
- **Mutual Respect and Equity**  
Employment Development Services values and respects all members of its community and strives to create, strengthen and enrich Off Reserve Aboriginal People for the wellbeing of our children.
- **Community Interest**  
Employment Development Services embodies the highest standards of service and stewardship of resources and works within the wider community to enhance societal good.

## **ABORIGINAL BUSINESS WOMEN'S MENTORING CIRCLE**

Economic Development Services (EDS) of NBAPC and NCPEI was contracted by the Native Women's Association of Canada to serve as a mentor for Metis, status and non-status

women interested in starting their own business. EDS received interest from Aboriginal women across the province who wanted to participate in the circle.

**Problem:**

How to allow any Aboriginal women interested in starting and/or developing their own business to participate from across the province during a New Brunswick winter?

**Solution:**

A virtual Aboriginal Women's Mentoring Circle that would:

- Allow open participation of Aboriginal business women across New Brunswick;
- Reduced unsafe travel in the winter; and
- Develop sustainable local women's mentoring groups.

**Requirements:**

- Access to a 'video communication' system;
- Reasonably priced facilities;
- Accessible to all participants;
- Set up in 2 weeks, give or take.

**Answer: New Brunswick Community Colleges**

Enter the New Brunswick Community Colleges team of Erin Sweet, Business Development Manager, Dale Morehouse, Regional Operations Manager and Jamie Coughlan, Systems Analyst. Staff who are passionate about providing opportunities and coming up with 'Out of the Box' solutions. They saw the potential of a virtual mentoring circle and worked quickly and efficiently to complete all-the-behind-the-scenes activities.

On January 18, 2016, the first virtual New Brunswick, Aboriginal Business Women's Mentoring Circle link was opened from the Fredericton Community College to the Moncton Community College and the Eel River Bar First Nation Health Centre. Eleven women from across New Brunswick participated in the 10-week circle.



## Mentoring Circle: Goals & Outline

The 10-week program was designed with the following goals:

1. Facilitate a virtual mentoring circle for Aboriginal women wanting to start or expand a business.
2. Promote business basics.
3. Identify and reduce barriers to success.
4. Experience lots of viewpoints and guidance.
5. Share problems and develop solutions.
6. Laugh, help and support in a trusting environment.

The outline of the 10-week program is reproduced in Appendix A.

## Scheduled Guest Speakers

The following speakers were invited to speak to the participants in the program:

- Kim Landry — Canadian Business Development Canada on Aboriginal Women Funding and Services
- Bryan Harn — JEDI New Brunswick on Funding and Services
- Michael Melvin — Lawyer McGinnis Cooper on Patents and Trademarks
- Jim Arsenault — Director on Occupational Health and Safety in Home Based Businesses

## Participation

Below are some participation statistics of the program:

- Ten women started on January 18, 2016:
  - One joined the circle three weeks later
  - Nine completed the scheduled sessions
    - One completed but did not attend the physical meeting as unable to get time off work
- Two left the circle before completion:
  - One left due to a family illness
  - One left as her business was more developed than the circle topics offered
- Average participation was 85%
  - One session was cancelled due to a storm

## The Physical Meeting

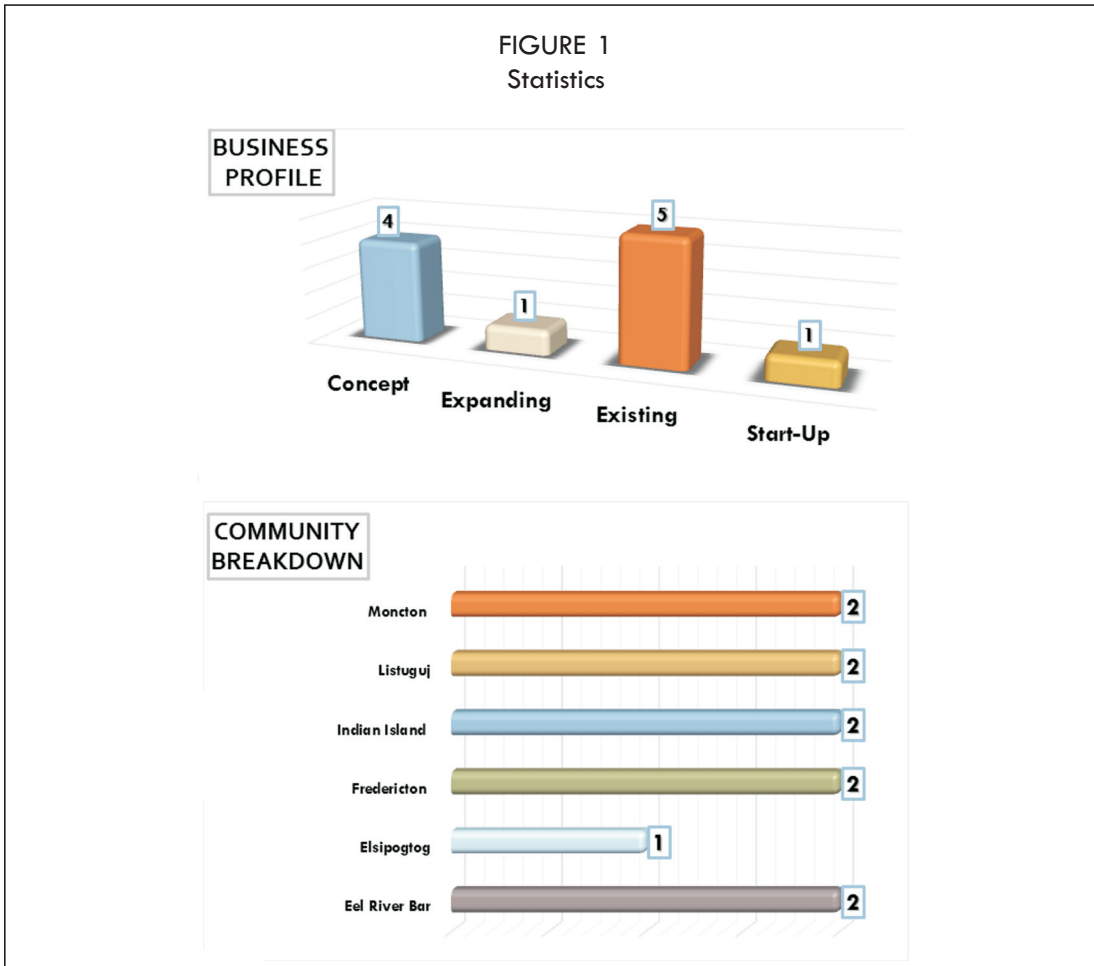
Part of the NWAC Mentoring Contract was the obligation of the Mentor to “Identify 1 (potentially 2) mentees to be considered as a participant in a three-day Aboriginal Women’s Business Entrepreneurs Network (AWBEN) Boot Camp and a one day AWBEN conference at the end of February 2016.” As the New Brunswick Virtual Mentoring Circle progressed, it became clear that selecting which entrepreneurs should go to a three-day conference was extremely difficult and would not meet the requirements of the group.

The Mentor provided NWAC with an alternative option: to identify the money earmarked for the New Brunswick participants and use it to co-ordinate a physical meeting for the eleven participants of the Virtual Mentoring circle. Jane Luhtasaari, our NWAC contact, championed the New Brunswick proposal and approval was given to modify the contract terms.

On March 30 and 31, 2016, eight Aboriginal entrepreneurs came in person to the last session of the Aboriginal Business Women’s Mentoring Circle. Everyone delivered their business plan and funding request to the group, receiving excellent positive feedback and ideas from all. It was a warm, safe environment for the women to practice their presentation; and for some, it was the first time they had spoken about their business out loud and in public.

### Statistics and Participant Evaluation

Figure 1 shows the business profiles proposed in the program as well as a breakdown of communities where the proposed businesses locate. A survey on the program was conducted at the end of the program and the results are summarized in Appendix B.



## NEXT STEPS

Clarissa Harris LeBreton, Oasis Coordinator, introduced all the participants to the NBCC *Oasis Program*. Oasis provides multi-generational mentorship based on the specific and unique needs of individual mentees through resources and guidance necessary to explore their entrepreneurial goals. The mentoring circle women are now eligible to apply for a mentor to talk over and assist in solving a specific business issue. All are looking forward to further discussions with Clarissa. The virtual Aboriginal Business Women's Mentoring Circle was so successful that Employment Development Services, in concert with New Brunswick Community College system, are in discussions to initiate three virtual business circles beginning in the Fall of 2016.

- **Youth** Aged 16 to 24 wanting to start a business now or in the future
- **Women** Meeting the continuing interest of Aboriginal business women
- **Arts** Preserving traditional techniques and process so they remain within Aboriginal Communities

## CONCLUSION

Economic Development Services of NBAPC and NCPEI was honoured to facilitate the New Brunswick Aboriginal Business Women's Mentoring Circle. Working with these enthusiastic, dedicated women was inspiring and reflected the growth and diversity of business development within our Aboriginal community.

We know that Aboriginal businesses create employment, economic prosperity and social wellbeing and that Aboriginal business circles provide the information, guidance and support Aboriginal entrepreneurs need to be successful in developing and/or growing their business ideas.

EDS sees this mentoring circle as the first of many.

### **Bruce Harquail, President**

Economic Development Services of NBAPC and NCPEI

APPENDIX A  
Mentoring Circle Outline

**Week 1**

- Introduction, Meet and Greet
- Expectations, Outcomes, Outline

**Week 2**

- Your personal business evaluation
- Why start a business?
  - How much do you have to risk?
- Business SWAT Analysis

**Week 3**

- Business Basics — Your Product is?
- Supply Chain: Suppliers, Time, Cost

**Week 4**

- Business Basics — Customers
- Who are your customers?
- Complete a Customer Map

**Week 5**

- Business Basics — Business Plan
- Why Bother?
- Business Plan — Component Overview

**Week 6**

- Business Basics- Business Plan
- Financial Plan: Grants, Loans, Sweat Equity

**Week 7**

- Business Basics — Marketing 101 and 2 and 3
- Legal matters and risk management

**Week 8**

- Business Basics — Growing Your Business
- Ways to Grow Your Business
- Responding to Growth

**Week 9**

- Review Business Plan and Marketing Plan components
- Identify any outstanding items
- Review any questions or concerns

**Week 10**

- This Is My Business — Participant Led
- 15 minute Presentation
- 10 minutes for Questions

## APPENDIX B Participant Evaluation

### QUESTIONS

(Using a 5-point rating scale to indicate the extent to which participants agreed or disagreed with each statement. 1 being totally disagree and 5 being totally agree)

	<b>Question Response Average</b>
1. Mentoring Circle goals and objectives were stated clearly and met.	4.75
2. The Circle as presented matched with the Mentoring description.	4.75
3. The Circle was well organized.	4.6
4. The information presented were relevant and useful.	5
5. The presenter(s) provided adequate time for questions and answered them satisfactorily.	5
6. This Circle increased my knowledge and skills in Business development.	5
7. The speakers were relevant to the subject.	4.4
8. The presenter(s) allowed me to work with and learn from others.	4.9
9. The presenter(s) suggested ways to follow up on the topic.	4.9
10. The video conferencing was an effective way to have a Circle.	4.6
11. Overall rating.	5

### COMMENTS

#### What Did You Like The Best?

#### What Did You Like The Least?

Convenience of getting to the video location

2 Hour classes

Hands on topics

Working alone, wished we had laptops in class to work

The feedback on business plan

There are some problems with video conference

Sharing with the group, getting together at the end

Late participants having to re-cover topics

The physical meeting

When people are late - we had to re-cap

We were able to access in our community

The instructor

What would you change?

Any Other Comments

Would like a 'How to Keep Books' session added

Very Well Done

More Presenters

Leslie was amazing, extremely helpful, welcoming. Great speaker, knowledgeable

More time to work on business plan together in class

Great, Very Informative. Loved Leslie as an instructor

Nothing, everything was great