

CH'NOOK INDIGENOUS BUSINESS EDUCATION INITIATIVE

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Rick Colbourne

SAUNDER SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the need for business education that is relevant to Aboriginal youth and senior leaders. It describes Ch'nook, an organization that provides support for post-secondary Aboriginal business education across three generations of participants. First, senior Aboriginal leaders and entrepreneurs who need business training (Aboriginal Management Certificate Program); second, post-secondary students enrolled in British Columbia (and soon Canada) by providing them with scholarships, bursaries, mentoring and internship opportunities (Indigenous Business Education Network/Ch'nook Scholars); and, third, it promotes business as a viable career option for Aboriginal high school students (Ch'nook Cousins). Ch'nook's efforts led to the signing of the British Columbia Indigenous Business Education Accord with the province's twenty-five colleges and universities and it has a cooperative agreement with four British Columbia universities. Ch'nook supports Aboriginal students in part by supplementing their studies with a strong Aboriginal perspective and context, which is often missing from their home institution's business programs. Working with community, business, and academic partners, Ch'nook promotes business as a viable career choice for Aboriginal participants and supports them in graduating from management and business education studies.

THE NEED FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald, Associate Dean for Indigenous Education at the University of British Columbia and former Ch'nook Advisory Board member reminds us that our elders taught us to consider the future of our children and grandchildren as a guide for our day-to-day activities. Grand Chief Ed John, Hereditary Chief, Tl'azt'en Nation and Ch'nook Advisory Board Chair underlines this sentiment pointing out that it is very clear to the First Nations Leadership Council that focusing on economic development by itself does not pave the road to self-reliance.

He stresses that when economic development is combined with strong business education we have the equation that equals Aboriginal success.

Aboriginal community leaders stress that economic self-sufficiency means successful Aboriginal businesses run by Aboriginal managers; however, the facts are that Aboriginal communities in Canada are typically marginalized, have very low employment participation rates, have limited economic infrastructure and that the recent downturn in global economies further marginalized these communities (Kunkel & Schorcht et al., 2011). In 2010, while the average unemployment rate for British Columbia's youth was 13.4 per cent, Aboriginal youth faced higher

incidences of unemployment at 21.4 per cent. While the unemployment rate gap widened between 2008 and 2010 (BC Stats, 2011), recent statistics indicate that an improvement from 8 per cent to 5 per cent in 2011. The Aboriginal youth unemployment rate in British Columbia was 18.8 per cent compared to 13.8 per cent of non-Aboriginal youth in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012).

The participation rate is defined as the labour force (those employed and those seeking employment) divided by the population. In 2008, the Aboriginal participation rate was 4.6 percentage points below the non-Aboriginal participation rate; however, in 2010 this difference has increased to over 10 percentage points (BC Stats, 2011). Generally, the higher the participation rate, the greater potential earnings for the population.

While it is widely recognized that education plays an important role in labour force success, in 2010, over 20 per cent of the prime working-age (25–54) Aboriginal population in the province did not have a high school credential compared with 7.6 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. There are still considerable differences in educational attainment between Aboriginal youth and non-Aboriginal youth. In 2010, over 50 per cent of non-Aboriginal youth (15 to 24) were attending school, while only 43.0 per cent of Aboriginal youth were attending classes. Consequently, 51 per cent of Aboriginal youth have not attained a high school diploma, compared with 33 per cent of non-Aboriginal youth.

The gap between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal population with a post-secondary credential continued to increase between 2007 and 2010 from 1.0 percentage point in 2007 to 14.0 per cent in 2010 (BC Stats, 2011). This trend is exacerbated by shortfalls in federal funding levels for post-secondary Aboriginal students that have been capped since 1996 at an increase of 2 per cent per year (First Nations Education Council, 2009).

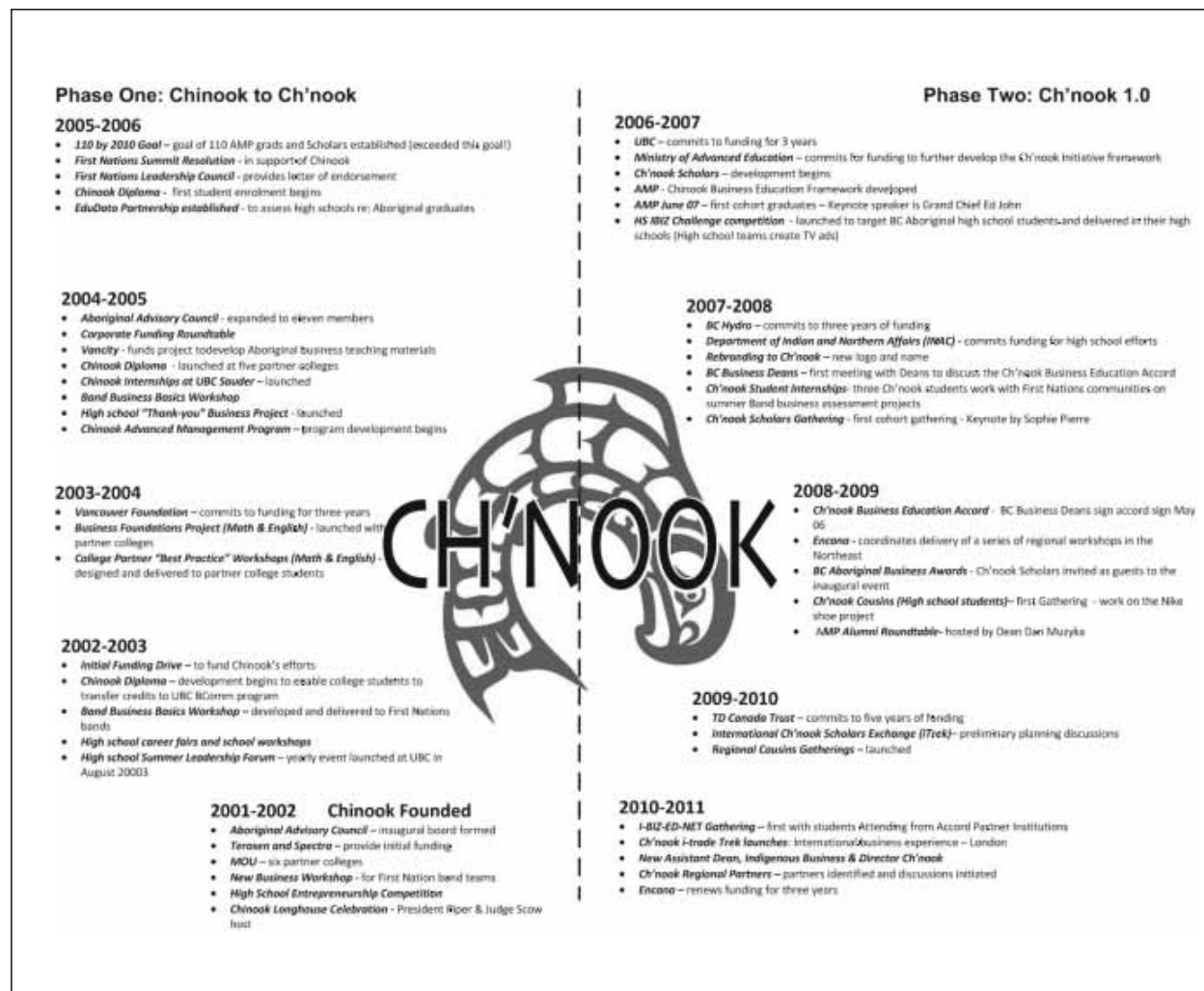
These statistics and trends lead to one very clear implication — that we must provide educational opportunities that build the skills needed to participate in all aspects of tomorrow's world. Ch'nook is focused on one very critical part of this skill building: in developing Aboriginal business, leadership and management skills needed

to achieve entrepreneurial success and economic independence. Recognizing that Aboriginal youth who complete high school are twice as likely to be employed and that those who earn university degrees triple their earning potential (Atleo, 2010), Ch'nook focuses on promoting, increasing and supporting successful Aboriginal engagement in business education studies. In this way, it builds the capacity and skills that enable Aboriginal communities to participate in regional economic development opportunities and supports creating a sustainable and self-sufficient economic future for Aboriginal communities across British Columbia and Canada.

HISTORY

Ch'nook was initiated when the late Maurice Young, past President of Finning, and John McArthur, Dean emeritus of the Harvard Business School, provided the initial resources and encouragement for the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia to focus more attention on Aboriginal business education in British Columbia. An initial plan was developed by Dr. Jo-ann Archibald, then the Director of the First Nations House of Learning, and Dr. John Claxton, Professor Emeritus at the Sauder School of Business, which drew on the success of the long standing UBC Native Teacher Education Program (NITEP).

In 2002, FortisBC (then Terasen Gas) stepped forward as the first multi-year funding partner, followed by the Vancouver Foundation. Early efforts at Ch'nook focused on exploring different avenues for promoting Aboriginal engagement in business education studies, which involved the formation of the Ch'nook Aboriginal Advisory Council. It created partnerships with five business programs in British Columbia plus the development of events and workshops with high schools and communities. Increased funding and new sources of support from Encana, BC Hydro, the Sauder School of Business and the University of British Columbia led to the launch of the Advanced Management Program (AMP) in November 2006. In the spring of 2007, funding from the BC Ministry of Advanced Education provided the funds needed to design, develop and launch Ch'nook Scholars Program focused on supporting and bringing together Aboriginal post-secondary business education stu-



dents studying at institutions across British Columbia. During the same period, funding from Aboriginal and Northern Development Canada (then Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) facilitated further work with high schools and led to the development of Ch'nook's Cousins initiative which raises awareness of the opportunities for career and community related to enrolling in business education studies in universities and colleges. In June 2009, TD Bank Financial Group contributed core funding to Ch'nook's British Columbia efforts and, as a lead supporter, enabled the expansion and strengthening of all of Ch'nook's initiatives.

Ch'nook bridges relations between Aboriginal communities, organizations, universities, colleges and a range of industry sectors through

creating a common understanding of business principles and a common language for dialogue that enables Aboriginal communities and senior Aboriginal leaders to become equal and informed partners. Therefore choosing a name and logo was considered a very important undertaking—both name and logo needed to represent Ch'nook's mission, goals and objectives. The name Ch'nook was chosen as a reminder of the Chinook jargon that was used as a language of trade—a language that bridged other languages and cultural differences and made trade and cooperation possible. Ch'nook's name is strongly representative of its mission to promote increased Aboriginal engagement in business, management and entrepreneurship studies and contribute to creating a sustainable and self-suffi-

cient economic future for Aboriginal communities across Canada. Working with community, business, and academic partners, Ch'nook promotes business as a viable career choice for Aboriginal students and supports them in graduating from management and business education studies. It does this while supplementing their studies with a strong Aboriginal perspective and context usually missing from their home institution business programs.

CH'NOOK'S LOGO



The logo represents Ch'nook's mandate as a modern, professional Aboriginal learning organization. It represents Ch'nook's vision of encouraging openness and sharing and the value for giving back to the community that are so important in Aboriginal culture. It is intended to represent the passing of knowledge from generation to generation or from the elders to youth; from educational institution to student; interaction of past students with future students; the passing of skills and confidence; a circle of giving back to the community; a continuous exchange of ideas; a progression to towards future success; unity and harmony in business partnerships; and, the never ending cycle of Ch'nook's dedication and energy to provide the best opportunities for education. Ch'nook's name and logo symbolize its values of encouraging, enabling and enhancing the skills and capabilities of Aboriginal business students, community leaders and practitioners through facilitating knowledge sharing, individual achievement and contribution back to the community.

CH'NOOK'S CORE ACTIVITIES: THE THREE PILLARS

Ch'nook's has unique experience, which it has gained over ten years of working closely with Aboriginal communities, post-secondary business

students, high school students, band managers, council members and entrepreneurs. This practical experience has had an impact on its vision and values leading to the development of a wide range of business education learning opportunities organized around three central pillars of engagement.

The first pillar, custom workshops and the Advanced Management Certificate Program (AMP), addresses the learning needs of senior Aboriginal leaders and community entrepreneurs already engaged in business or responsible for financial decision-making in their communities. This program is taught by senior University faculty, senior Aboriginal leaders and knowledge experts. It integrates Aboriginal context, values and perspectives into the business skills required for success in managing existing businesses, in developing new and successful ones or for serving on band council.

The second pillar, Ch'nook Scholars, focuses on supporting post-secondary Aboriginal business education students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in British Columbia through providing them with scholarships, bursaries, mentoring and internship opportunities. Ch'nook hosts two Gatherings a year for Scholars during which students meet Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business leaders and attend workshops designed to provide an Aboriginal context and perspective that extends and complements business studies in their home institutions.

The third pillar, Ch'nook Cousins, works with Aboriginal high school students to open up the possibility of studying at a college or university after they graduate from high school. Working in conjunction with Ch'nook's Regional Partners, Aboriginal high school students attend workshops in local colleges or universities, develop personal insights into what it might be like to attend a university or college and learn more about business education studies. Ch'nook Scholars co-facilitate Cousins workshops and mentor high school students in their regions. In this way, Ch'nook creates proactive linkages and opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between Aboriginal leaders, business professionals, University/College faculty, corporate leaders, students and Canada's Aboriginal communities. It focuses on designing and delivering innovative business education initiatives that address different learning needs across three generations of

Senior Aboriginal Leaders Advanced Management Program (AMP)	Post- Secondary Students Ch'nook Scholars	High School Students Cousins
Senior Aboriginal Leaders Advanced Management Certificate Program (AMP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a part-time program designed for Aboriginal participants with at least five years of work experience and a strong interest in business • integrates Aboriginal values with the business skills required for success in managing existing businesses, in developing new and successful ones or serving on band council • more than 150 hours of content covering Aboriginal Values and Business Leadership, Aboriginal Entrepreneurship, Human Resource Management, Marketing, Business Strategy, Operations, Financial Management and Accounting • courses are taught by senior University faculty, senior Aboriginal leaders and industry sector knowledge experts 	
Post-Secondary Students Ch'nook Scholars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engages Aboriginal business and management students studying at all post-secondary institutions in British Columbia and Canada • approximately 40 top full-time Aboriginal students are recognized each year as Ch'nook Scholars and receive much-needed access to scholarships, mentoring opportunities and priority selection for key Ch'nook activities including two Gatherings a year • aims to educate and inspire Aboriginal students' business education experiences through mentoring, internships, gatherings, career and professional development and academic and financial support 	
High School Students Ch'nook Cousins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motivates and informs Aboriginal high school students in grades 11 and 12 • promotes the benefits of pursuing careers in business, entrepreneurship and management • facilitates direct connections with post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal post-secondary business students (Ch'nook Scholars) and corporate partners to help inform their educational and career choices 	

Aboriginal business education participants. Most recently, colleges and universities across Canada have taken note of Ch'nook's success and have approached Ch'nook to collaborate with them to introduce this model for increasing Aboriginal engagement in business education studies in their province.

SUCSESSES

Ch'nook's success is measured across a number of dimensions. What follows is a brief description of the success of each of Ch'nook's four programs: Advanced Management Certificate; Scholars; iTrek; and Cousins. Graduates of the Advanced Management Certificate program

(AMP) have gone on to launch and manage successful community and private businesses and have assumed leadership roles in their nations as Chiefs, council members or as economic development officers. Some graduates leveraged the AMP to consolidate business knowledge gained from practical experience in order to further their studies in undergraduate business, MBAs or other programs.

Ch'nook's Scholars initiative provides an important safety net for Aboriginal students studying in post-secondary institutions across the province. Not only do students benefit from scholarships and bursaries, they join a supportive network of Aboriginal business education students from around the province. Ch'nook Scholars bond during province-wide Gatherings focused on providing an Aboriginal context and perspective to their business studies. They also benefit from access to Scholar and alumni support during their studies, thereby enhancing achievement and increasing completion and graduation rates. Interaction with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business leaders as well as participation in Ch'nook's iTrek (international Indigenous business learning) mean that Ch'nook Scholars are business leaders of tomorrow — they gain a strong understanding of what it means to participate in business in their communities and at the regional, national and international levels. Finally, participation in mentorship and internship opportunities has created enhanced employment opportunities for Ch'nook Scholars within their regions and the province.

Ch'nook's Cousins initiative focuses on promoting post-secondary participation in business education to high school students through practical workshops usually based in our Regional Partner institutions. Success in this context involves engaging as many high school students as possible in lively workshops that enable them to experience being in a post-secondary institution and interacting with faculty while learning more about the benefits of studying business. The success in Ch'nook's Cousins initiative is evident in that for the first time, students who participated in its Cousins program are progressing into Ch'nook's Scholars and in some cases their parents are enrolling in the Advanced Management Certificate program.

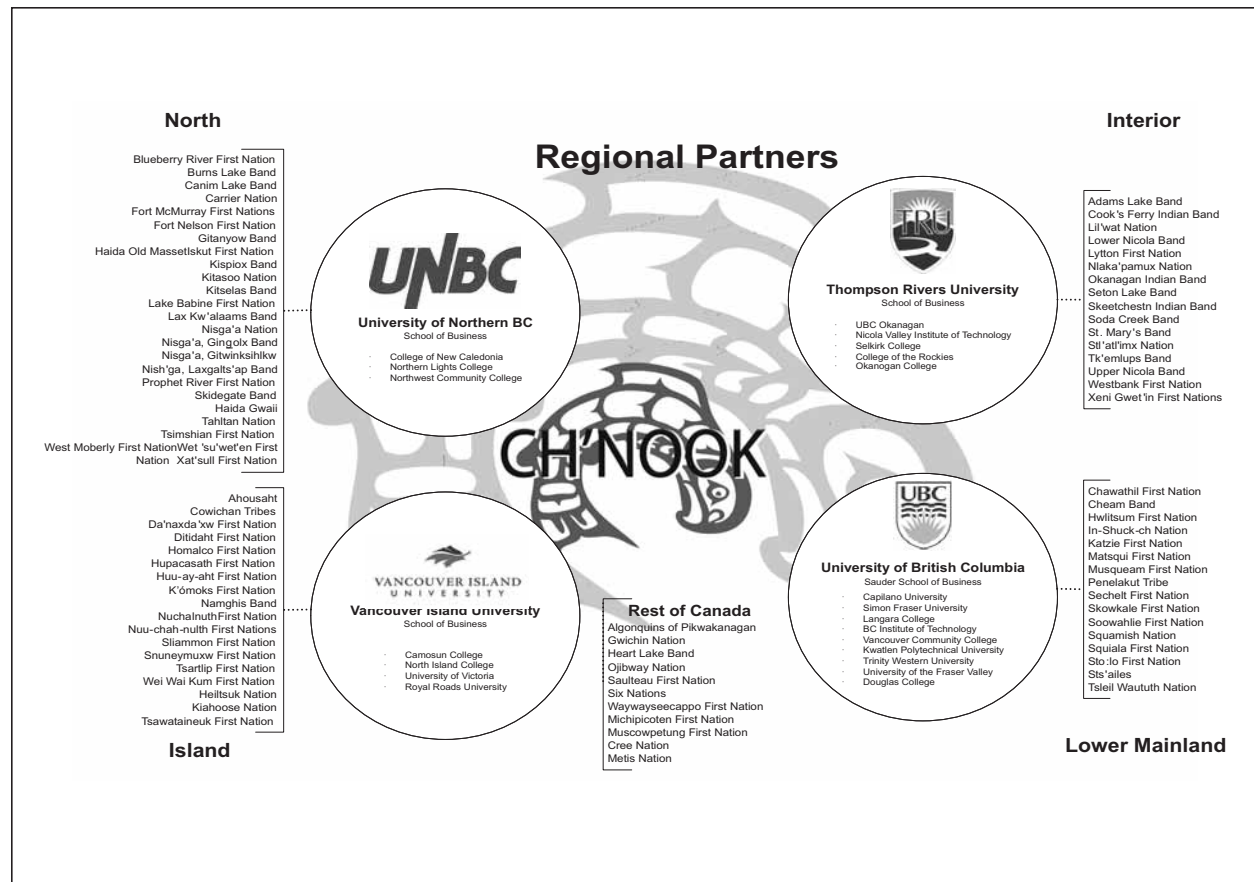
Three key success factors enable Ch'nook's efforts in British Columbia and its current efforts

at building a national initiative across Canada: institutional neutrality, the Ch'nook Aboriginal Business Education Accord and its network of Regional Partners. First, a central dimension of Ch'nook's success is that, while it is housed in the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia, it remains institutionally neutral. This enables Ch'nook to focus on contributing to cross-institutional efforts at recruiting Aboriginal business students through its Cousins and Scholars events and activities. Once Aboriginal business students are studying business and management in home institutions, Ch'nook's Scholars initiative works closely with these institutions to complement and supplement students' business education studies by providing an Aboriginal context and perspective during two annual provincial-wide Gatherings. Most importantly, Ch'nook works to promote successful graduation and post-graduation experience through the provision of scholarships and bursaries and mentorship and intern opportunities with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal companies and organizations.

Second, Ch'nook initiated and led efforts to encourage business and management programs in British Columbia's twenty-five universities and colleges to sign the Ch'nook Business Education Accord. Signed in August 2009, the Accord represents an important milestone that marks cross-institutional agreement on the need to focus on and cooperate in province-wide efforts to increase Aboriginal participation in business education. It encourages institutional commitment at the senior management level to increasing Aboriginal engagement and bridges internal linkages between business schools and Aboriginal student relations that will increase communication and effectiveness in their institutions.

Third, in British Columbia, Ch'nook has identified and signed agreements with four business schools to increase cooperation as Regional Partners designed to enhance and amplify Ch'nook's initiatives at the regional level. These four schools are the University of British Columbia, University of Northern BC, Thompson Rivers University and Vancouver Island University.

Working closely with its Regional Partners, Ch'nook ensures that its extensive provincial footprint is amplified by strong local presence that is relevant and responsive to British Colum-



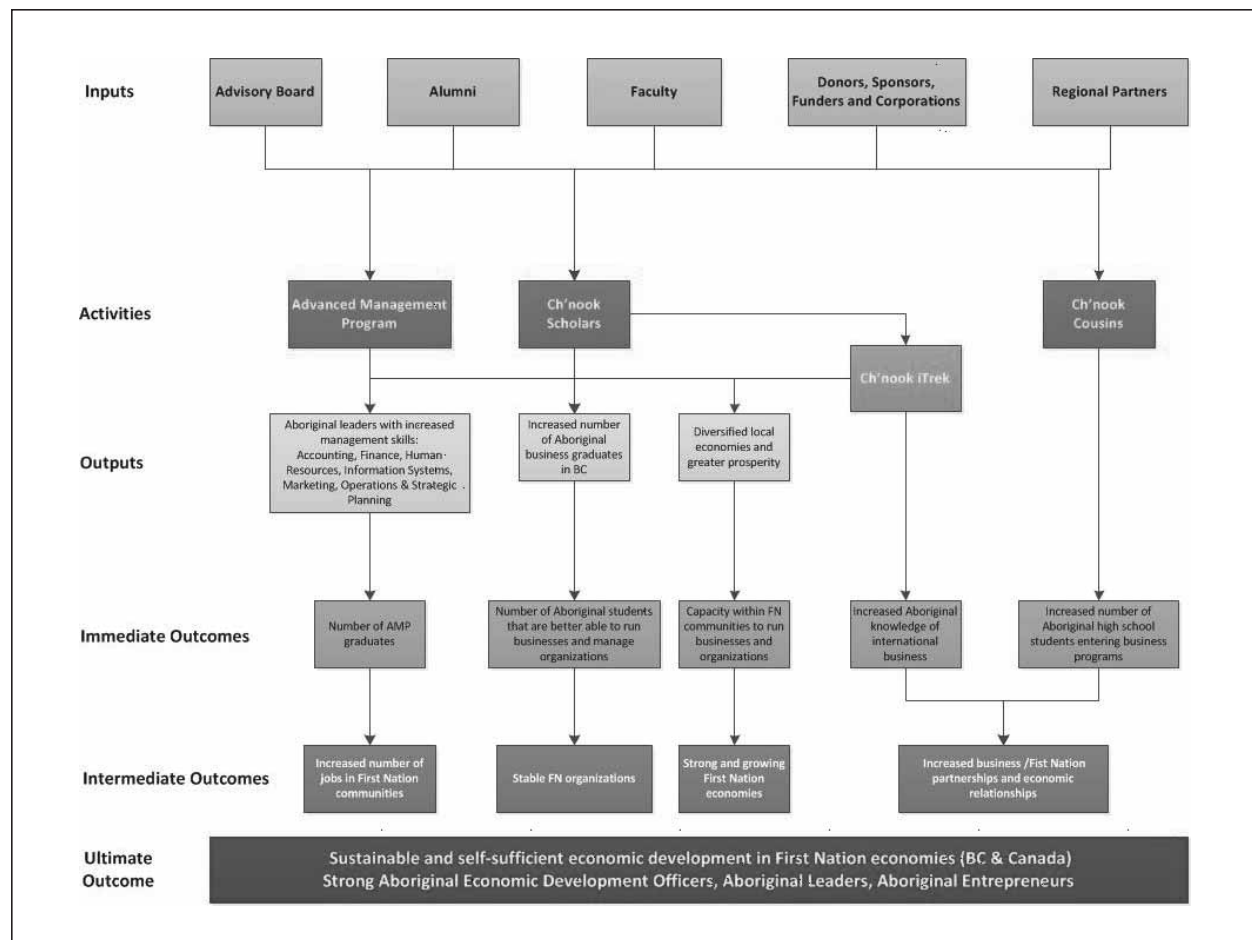
bia's Aboriginal communities. Ch'nook is in discussions with potential Regional Partner institutions across Canada to build out Ch'nook as a national initiative bridging Aboriginal business education students, entrepreneurs and senior business and community leaders from across Canada.

Ch'nook's success is grounded in consultation and collaboration with its Advisory Board, alumni, faculty, donors, sponsor corporations and regional partners who provide support, advice and input that guide the initiatives values, vision and mission to increase Aboriginal engagement in business education studies.

Ch'nook's mandate of promoting business as a viable career choice for Aboriginal students and supporting them in achieving post-secondary degrees in management and business is crucial to creating a sustainable and self-sufficient economic future for Aboriginal communities in British Columbia and across Canada.

SEEKING TO COLLABORATE

Ch'nook is a pioneer and leader in facilitating Aboriginal engagement in business education studies that foster strong working partnerships between Aboriginal communities, organizations, post-secondary institutions and Canadian corporations and it actively seeks to engage communities, institutions or corporations in dialogue through a range of channels. Ch'nook recognizes that collaboration and consultation are important processes that can benefit Aboriginal communities across Canada. Ch'nook's Scholars and Cousins initiatives as well as Aboriginal business resources can be accessed on its website (www.chnook.org). Participation in open forums for knowledge exchange and opportunity sharing are hosted in Ch'nook's Indigenous Business LinkedIn group site and its Twitter feed (@ChnookNet). Finally, Ch'nook maintains a strong regional presence through promoting a range of events and workshops in conjunction



with its Regional Partners (University of British Columbia, University of Northern British Columbia, Vancouver Island University and Thompson Rivers University).

Ch'nook is an active network of institutions, skilled and motivated Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business and academic professionals and alumni who share a vision for supporting and encouraging Aboriginal business education students to become the next generation of community leaders. Proud Aboriginal leaders with the business, leadership and management skills needed to be full and equal participants in regional economic development opportunities that build sustainable and self-sufficient economic futures for their communities and generations to come.

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