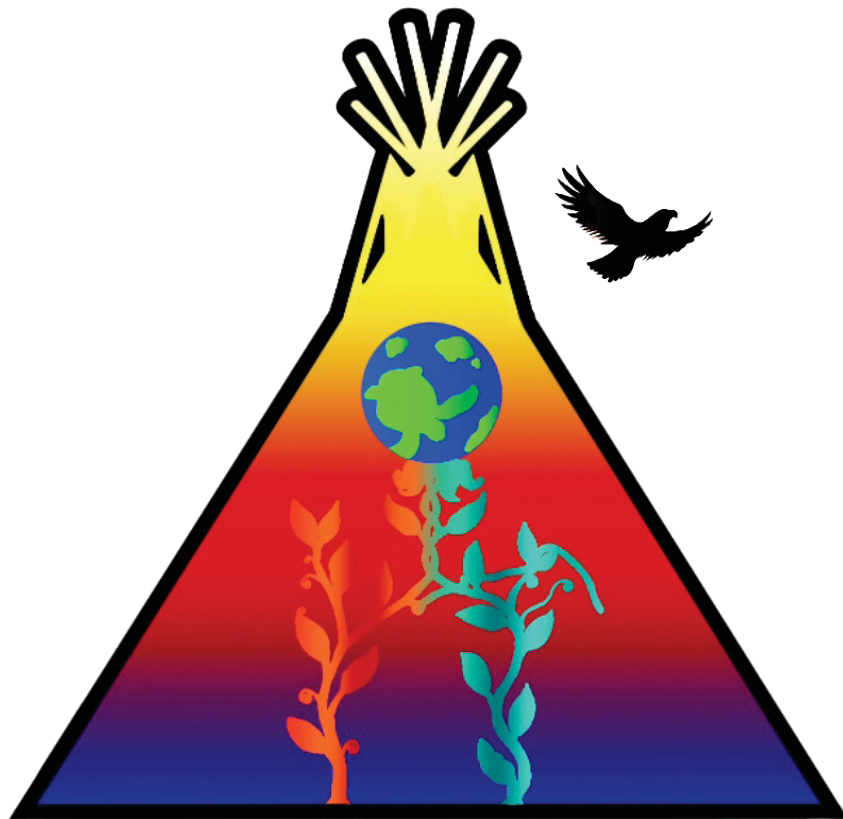


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The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development is the first journal devoted exclusively to issues and practices in the field of economic development and Aboriginal peoples' communities. The journal, published jointly by Captus Press and Cando (Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers), offers articles that are of interest to those who teach and those who work in the field.

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The Artist

Rebecca Brittain

Rebecca Brittain is a Dakota Sioux/Plains Cree woman from the Dakota Whitecap First Nation.

She attended the Indian Teacher Education Program at the University of Saskatchewan from 2017–2020. Thus far, she has obtained three years of education and is currently taking time off to mother her three children. She recently found a new interest in digital design. Rebecca accepts any opportunity to be creative, especially with her children. Rebecca’s passion for creativity extends to her children, and she seizes every opportunity to explore art with them. Her ultimate aspiration is to inspire and influence not only her own children but also her future students, passing on the teachings she has gained through her own journey in art and design.

The Artist's Statement — Economic Reconciliation

Rebecca Brittain

The outline of the tipi symbolizes community connectedness and a place of warmth, security, wellness, and sacred tradition and value. Inside the tipi, two individual vines intertwine: one representing corporate Canada and the government, and the other representing Indigenous peoples. The intertwining vines embody reconciliation between these two groups through acceptance, balance, understanding, and engagement. Both vines show a similar level of support, highlighting that Indigenous peoples are equally capable, powerful, knowledgeable, and hard-working as mainstream society. Together, through reconciliation, we can contribute greatly to the Canadian economy through our history, land, and resources. That's why I chose to have the intertwined vines holding up the Earth (economy). The "Turtle Island" landmass on the Earth acknowledges the land of Indigenous peoples, affirming our equal right to be involved in shaping the economy. With a call to action, we can make it happen and increase opportunities for ourselves in the process.

The image represents the vision of economic reconciliation, with the value of this vision held within the tipi. Through the intertwined vines and acknowledgment of Turtle Island, the image conveys the message that Indigenous peoples have an equal right to shape the Canadian economy. By taking action, we can make this vision a reality and increase opportunities for ourselves.

Editor's Comments

We strive to make our journal timely, useful, and informative. We want to go that extra mile for you, so we are increasing our accessibility. We are moving to open access beginning with our next issue in 2024. You will be able to access our articles online as well, and we will continue to offer a print copy. It is a very exciting journey for us. Also, I would like to invite you to consider writing a book review of current literature in the field of Indigenous community economic development. Please reach out to the Cando office if this is of interest, and we will discuss your ideas.

This issue brings important issues to the foreground. The conversation regarding the meaning and relevance of treaties in today's context of Indigenous relationships is addressed thoughtfully in the two commentaries, one focusing on fisheries and the other on the Robinson treaties in Ontario. The positioning expressed by the authors is particularly relevant.

In the next section, the articles in Lessons from Experience cover the country and an impressive array of topics. Consider Whitecap Dakota First Nation, which centres the community in all its endeavours and engages in building alliances through successful partnerships across the board. Other issues that are raised include making the best of procurement opportunities, celebrating and recognizing economic developers, and fostering youth engagement. This involvement often begins with dance and later evolves into the development of youth as change leaders in their communities.

Follow the journey of a provincial funding body that has opened its doors wide to the B.C. Indigenous community through relationship-building and grants. Agriculture has been an opportunity that has a history of being taken up by Indigenous folks. What is happening in that sector these days to support initiatives across Canada? Farm Credit Canada's strategies are outlined here. There are never enough success stories to motivate and inspire. Victoria LaBillois is no exception, as she tackles challenges head-on and shares her vision.

Understanding some of the impacts of COVID on Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations is outlined in an article by Coates and Finnegan in Lessons from Research. Recognizing the caring outreach that CEOs did for their communities while facing big challenges in their corporations is heartening, and one of the many reference points raised for future crisis management. Also in this section, similarities with the U.S. experience are looked at for illumination of the Canadian context in the Kelly article. The author considers key challenges that Canadian Indigenous leadership in reserve communities are facing from institutional government oversight impacting development initiatives, especially in land and governance.

Investigating relationships between important economic health indicators in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities has been a consistent focus in previous issues of the journal. In this issue's statistical analysis, presented collectively in The State of the Indigenous Economy section, a longitudinal perspective on the Canadian experience is provided, highlighting the significant positive impact of education.

Wanda Wuttunee

Commentary on the meaning and
relevance of treaties in today's context
of Indigenous relationships

Treaty Rights as a Source for First Nation Social and Economic Development: The Marshall Decision in Atlantic Canada

Fred Wien

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY

Richard Williams

PRESIDENT OF PRAXIS RESEARCH AND CONSULTING LTD.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, First Nations across Canada have used a variety of instruments to rebuild their economies and societies, not without a struggle but also with measurable success. These instruments include levers like certain provisions of the Indian Act related to taxation on reserve, the pursuit of specific and comprehensive land claims, Treaty Land Entitlement settlements that have provided an avenue for the creation of urban-based reserves and business development, and Aboriginal and treaty rights recognized by the Supreme Court.¹ It is the latter that is the subject of this article, especially the two Marshall decisions issued by the Court in 1999, which recognized the treaty right of First Nations in the Maritime region to fish for a moderate livelihood.² In this article, we will describe the decision, the reaction to it from various parties, ongoing flashpoints that have the potential to generate tension and conflict, and some possible paths forward.

¹ Wanda Wuttunee and Fred Wien, (eds.), *Engraved on Our Nations: Indigenous Economic Tenacity* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, forthcoming 2023). See also Carol Anne Hilton, *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 2021).

² Jeffery Calaghan, Lucia Westin, and Dan Vancleave, “The Indigenous Right to a Moderate Livelihood”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–79.

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THE MARSHALL DECISION

When he was charged in August 1993 with illegal fishing under Canada's Fisheries Act, Donald Marshall Junior was already well known in the Maritimes and nationally. Coming from Membertou in Cape Breton, and son of the Mi'kmaq Grand Chief at the time, "Junior" was the victim of a wrongful prosecution for murder which caused him to spend 11 years in prison, beginning in 1971, for a crime he did not commit. As recounted by his partner, Jane McMillan:

Junior loved to fish. He was a grateful harvester and enjoyed cooking what he caught. He embraced the solitude of wandering down the river with his fly rod or jig and the excitement of setting nets in the Bras d'Or Lakes. Junior's passion for fishing led us to catch eels for a living. Eels are an important facet of Mi'kmaw culture, and eel fishing a time-honoured custom. After the catch, we would take out the choice eels, and Junior would spend hours cleaning them to pass to the Elders in the community. He also fished for feasts and important events like Treaty Day and Mawiomi (powwows).³

After being charged in 1991 with catching, selling and possessing eels without a licence and outside of the prescribed fishing season, the ensuing court case made its way to the Supreme Court. His defence was that the Peace and Friendship Treaties signed between representatives of the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqey, and Peskotomuhkati peoples on the one hand and representatives of the British Crown on the other in the 1725–1780 time period enshrined his inherent right to sell the catch of his hunting and fishing without regard to more recent regulations. His lawyers further argued that the relevant treaties are recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982.

The Court agreed, holding that:

... the Peace and Friendship Treaties of 1760–1761 confirmed the right of the Mi'kmaw people to provide for their own sustenance by taking the products of their hunting, fishing, and other gathering activities, and trading for what in 1760 was termed "necessaries." The Court found that the concept of "necessaries" is equivalent in current times to the concept of a "moderate livelihood," and a moderate livelihood includes such basics as "food, clothing, and housing, supplemented by a few amenities." It does not, however, extend to the open-ended accumulation of wealth.⁴

The initial Court decision left considerable confusion in its wake, as well as escalating tensions at the waterfront and, in some cases, acts of racism and violence. It left unclear, for example, what moderate livelihood means, who would be responsible for managing the fishery, how the decision would impact the sustainability of the resource, and how it would fit into (or not) the existing regulatory regime lodged with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Because of widespread concern, the Court issued a second decision later in the fall of 1999 (called Marshall II). While it did not speak to all of the outstanding issues, the second decision did clarify that the Marshall First Nations would manage their own involvement in the moderate livelihood fishery and that DFO could only regulate if there was a compelling reason for doing so (such as protecting the sustainability of the

³ L. Jane McMillan, "Fishing with Donald Marshall Jr.", in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 69–74.

⁴ Callaghan, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

resource), if they formally consulted with the affected First Nations about this planned infringement of their treaty right, and if they made the case for doing so.⁵

THE INSHORE FISHING INDUSTRY IN THE MARITIMES AND FIRST NATION PARTICIPATION

In 2018, the Canadian fish harvesting industry generated some \$3.7 billion in landed value. Of this amount, an estimated \$2.4 billion was landed by fleets in the Maritime provinces and Quebec. Almost all of the landed value in Eastern Canada came from independent owner-operated inshore and midshore vessels. The value of lobster harvests amounted to \$1.7 billion in the region in 2019, making it the most valuable of the various species that were caught.⁶

Commercial fishing is controlled through the issuance of licences by DFO, and more than 6,000 licences were issued for lobster in 2020 in the three Maritime provinces and Quebec. Of course, the employment impact goes well beyond the licence holders to encompass the crews on the boats and those engaged in related occupations such as processing and transportation. Bearing in mind that most fishing takes place within seasons of six months or less, Atlantic coast fish harvesters averaged over \$33,000 in fishing income in 2019 and have seen an 84% growth in after-inflation earnings since 2010. The major challenges facing the commercial fishery include the aging of the harvester workforce and the closure of fishing on certain endangered stocks, including mackerel and herring. As well, the surge in market demand for seafood generally has driven up the value of fishing licences and quotas, making it much more difficult for new entrants to become enterprise owners and for First Nations to purchase licences to create jobs and incomes for their communities.⁷

Fishing was, of course, central to the economic base of Indigenous communities not only pre-contact but also in later times. Yet, they were gradually pushed aside as American and European settlers flooded into the region during the 17th and 18th centuries, claiming land near the ocean shore, along rivers, and in the most fertile agricultural areas. Federal policies and other events furthered this dislocation and the undermining of traditional ways of making a living. Indigenous communities were progressively displaced and marginalized by the creation of reserves throughout the region in the early 1800's, the controls imposed by the 1876 Indian Act, the requirement for children to attend residential schools, the effects of the Great Depression, and the attempts in the 1940s in Nova Scotia to centralize the Mi'kmaq population in two locations that both lacked ocean fishing access. When limited entry licensing was introduced in the 1970s, there were no programs to enable First Nations to purchase licences, boats, and gear for their communities, and without property as collateral Indigenous individuals could not access provincial fisheries loan board services.⁸ The exclusion from fishing was so complete that, by the time of the Marshall decisions in 1999, Coates reports that there were only one or two fishing licences in the whole community of Eskasoni, the largest First Nation in Nova Scotia.

⁵ Naiomi Metallic and Constance MacIntosh, "Canada's Actions on Mi'kmaw Fisheries", in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–35.

⁶ Rick Williams, "An Overview of Commercial Fisheries", in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–7.

⁷ Rick Williams, *ibid.*, pp. 3–7.

⁸ Fred Wien, "A History of Exclusion", in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–34.

Before 1999, the Eskasoni First Nation had little connection to the East Coast fishery. The band held a licence or two at different times and allowed the licences to be fished by a band member. People from the community harvested eels but had little presence in the commercial fishery in the region.⁹

In the last two decades, however, First Nations in the region have gradually started to reclaim their place in the fishery, aided in no small measure by court decisions recognizing Aboriginal and treaty rights. This resurgence has taken three forms:

- (a) Having **the right to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes** recognized in the Supreme Court's *Sparrow* decision of 1990. While this right as recognized by the Court does not permit commercial fishing (i.e., selling fish for income), it does permit each community to designate certain fishers who will catch lobster and other species, making them available in the community for food, for social occasions such as weddings, and when ceremonial events are being undertaken.¹⁰
- (b) Having **the right to fish to obtain a moderate** livelihood as recognized by the Supreme Court's Marshall decisions handed down in the fall of 1999. This right as interpreted by the Court does allow the catch to be sold to a limited degree, but being able to exercise the right has generated controversy. This situation is described more fully below.
- (c) After the Marshall decisions, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans invested millions of dollars to build First Nation fishing capacity under the umbrella of what are called **communal-commercial fisheries**. This amounted to integrating Marshall First Nations into the existing commercial fishery through the use of short-term interim agreements that provided DFO-issued licences and quota allocations to fish during the regular commercial season, subject to DFO regulations and conservation requirements. Along with the licences, funding was provided for the acquisition of vessels and gear, as well as for building up fisheries governance, harvester training, and at-sea mentoring. The economic benefits in terms of outcomes such as employment, training, and business development have been substantial, according to a report prepared for the MacDonald-Laurier Institute. The report estimates that on reserve economic benefits from commercial fishing in the region grew from a paltry \$3 million in 1999 to \$152 million in 2016.¹¹

There is considerable debate about the meaning of the federal government's investment in the communal-commercial fishery. The Supreme Court of Canada left it to future negotiations to define moderate livelihood fishing and self-government rights, but in response to the crisis that ensued after the 1999 decision, DFO pushed ahead with expanding First Nation access to the commercial fishery on the assumption that communal commercial fishing was in fact contributing to generating moderate livelihood outcomes. Most First Nations have

⁹ Ken Coates, *The Marshall Decision at 20: Two Decades of Re-Empowerment of the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet* (Ottawa: The MacDonald-Laurier Institute, 2019), p. 10.

¹⁰ Rick Williams, "Development of First Nations Fisheries Since the Marshall Decision", in Wien and Williams, op. cit., pp. 8–23.

¹¹ Coates, op. cit. See also John Paul and Joseph Quesnel, "The Marshall Legacy", in Wien and Williams, op. cit., pp. 35–40.

never accepted that interpretation, but there has been no progress on negotiating a new treaty that would define and set the terms for the implementation of the right. Statements by First Nation leaders implying that nothing has been done since 1999 to meet the moderate livelihood right are heavily contested both within DFO and in the commercial industry.¹²

FIRST NATION PERSPECTIVES

Within the First Nation communities in the region, there are of course a range of views about the treaty right to fish for a moderate livelihood and how that right should be implemented. However, there seems to be substantial agreement on these core points:

- Despite the Court's decisions in Marshall I and II, the federal government is still a long way from supporting the implementation of the right in a satisfactory manner. First Nation representatives argue, for example, that DFO has until recently consistently declined to deal with the matter at the negotiating table on the grounds that it did not have a mandate to discuss the issue. And in practice, the Department and the federal government more generally have failed First Nations by failing to protect their fishers from racism and violence, by seizing their lobster traps if it was concluded that regulations were being violated, and by imposing regulations (such as the requirement to fish during officially mandated seasons) without consultation or making the case that an infringement of the treaty right was justified.¹³
- First Nation representatives maintain that their treaty right includes the right to manage the moderate livelihood fishery themselves, except for the exception noted in Marshall II. Furthermore, they are committed to doing so responsibly, with particular attention to maintaining the sustainability of the resource. As stated by the Fisheries Lead for the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs, "We have the right to self-government, and that includes our right to govern our fisheries. We are developing our own sustainable livelihood fishery, separate from the commercial fishery, as we have a responsibility to protect our affirmed Treaty Right and the court ruling. By working together, we will develop sustainable community fishing plans as this is important to our people today and to the sustainability of the resource for future generations."¹⁴
- They also maintain that the issue is not only making room for moderate livelihood fishers on the water operating under community-approved fish management plans. The point of exercising governance rights is to enable First Nations to participate in the fishery on their own terms, allowing them to fish according to time-honoured principles deeply rooted in their cultures, such as *Netukulink*.¹⁵ They point to eel fishing, for example,

¹² Rick Williams, "Development of First Nations Fisheries Since the Marshall Decision", in Wien and Williams, op. cit., pp. 8–23.

¹³ Standing Senate Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, *Peace on the Water: Advancing the Full Implementation of Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik and Peskotomahkati Rights-Based Fisheries* (Ottawa: Senate of Canada, 2022).

¹⁴ The Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Chiefs, "Chiefs' Positions on Moderate Livelihood", in Wien and Williams, op. cit., pp. 105–113.

¹⁵ As defined by the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, "Netukulimk is the use of the natural bounty provided by the Creator for the self-support and well-being of the individual and the community. Netukulimk is

which is practised in this manner with different levels of effort and different fishing technologies depending on the time of year, with the proceeds shared within the communities, and with strict attention backed by both Indigenous and Western science on the sustainability question.¹⁶

- Not surprisingly given the events in the fall of 2020, First Nation representatives express great concern over the safety of their fishers and community members. They call on federal ministers to speak out against the racism and violence directed toward First Nation community members and to increase enforcement to ensure the safety of everyone, on and off the water.

NON-INDIGENOUS COMMERCIAL HARVESTING PERSPECTIVES

As with First Nations, commercial harvesting organizations also take varying positions on the subject of Indigenous participation in the fishery and achieving reconciliation. However, the following themes encompass the issues about which they are most concerned:

- When it comes to negotiations pertaining to their Aboriginal and treaty rights, First Nations in the region insist that these are matters to be discussed between their representatives and those of the Crown. Furthermore, the appropriate federal representative is Indigenous and Crown Relations Canada rather than DFO. Commercial harvester organizations, on the other hand, are accustomed to having a seat at the table when matters affecting their interests are discussed. While DFO has, separately, organized some briefing sessions to keep commercial harvesters informed, this is not seen to be adequate. “We don’t feel that we’ve been heard. We have significant problems with the fact that DFO has failed to figure out a way to include us. We understand the nature of nation-to-nation negotiations, but there has to be a place for commercial harvesters.”¹⁷
- Commercial harvesting organizations insist that there be a single regulatory system managed by DFO and enforcing one set of rules for the industry:

Harvester leaders argue that if each First Nation, or a group of Nations, can exercise a right to unilaterally decide how much fish to catch, or how many lobster traps to set, and where and when to fish, there could be chaos. Either total fishing effort will keep ramping up, putting fish populations in danger, or there will be escalating conflicts between communities, fleets, and regions over who will see their shares reduced to maintain sustainable catch levels.

achieving adequate standards of community nutrition and economic well-being without jeopardizing the integrity, diversity, or productivity of our environment.” (Quoted from Senator Dan Christmas, “Exploring the Rights and Wrongs of the Moderate Livelihood and East Coast Indigenous Fishery”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 122)

¹⁶ Amber Giles, Lucia Fanning, Shelley Denny, and Tyson Paul, “A Mi’kmaw Approach to Managing Fisheries”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–119.

¹⁷ Rick Williams, “Perspectives from Commercial Harvester Organizations”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

- There is great concern among commercial harvesting organizations that two of the bedrock principles for which they have long strived, not succeeding until 2019 in having them enshrined in legislation, will be undermined if First Nation participation takes certain forms. One principle is that fishing in most of the inshore fisheries will be undertaken only by owner-operators — that is, by the person possessing the licence, who needs to be physically present on the boat. Related to this is the principle of fleet separation, meaning that processing companies cannot own licences to harvest fish when it comes to the inshore fishery. With seven First Nations, led by Membertou, joining forces with a multinational corporation to purchase Clearwater Seafoods, which is the largest shellfish processing company in Canada and possibly the world, the worry is that Clearwater or other processing corporations will find ways to work around the fleet separation restriction by partnering with First Nations to gain control of harvesting licences.¹⁸

CURRENT ISSUES AND FLASHPOINTS

It becomes apparent, then, that there are significant issues to be addressed. This is not to say that progress has been negligible since the events in the fall of 2020. There have been no major breakthroughs, but one might describe what has developed as a kind of “muddling through”. DFO has, for example, shown itself to be somewhat more amenable to sitting down with First Nation representatives to discuss their treaty right to fish for a moderate livelihood. Some First Nations in Nova Scotia, for their part, have taken the initiative to develop their own fish management plans either for one community or several. DFO approved these plans in 2022 and renewed them for 2023 with an understanding that moderate livelihood fishing will utilize DFO licences and take place during the DFO-approved fishing seasons. At Listuguj First Nation, the community has developed an agreement with DFO whereby fishers from the community will significantly reduce the number of lobster traps used during the “regular” spring season in exchange for being able to fish in the fall when non-First Nation fishing is closed down.

Yet, a fundamental divide between the Marshall First Nations and the commercial harvesters persists, and tensions remain high. First Nations have a vision of a rights-based fishery (contrasting with what is termed a privilege-based fishery for non-Indigenous harvesters) that includes their own systems of governance over matters such as developing their own fish management plans, setting the rules for their fishers, having their own guardians enforce the rules, and integrating traditional knowledge with Western scientific evidence on matters such as sustainability. Commercial harvester groups are saying, on the other hand, “You are welcome to participate in the fishery as long as you fish in our seasons, follow our rules and are policed by our officials.”¹⁹

Both sides have leverage over the situation: First Nations have treaty rights backed by the Marshall decision and other Supreme Court rulings, while commercial harvester groups are powerful partners in the existing co-management system and have considerable local political influence, as evidenced in the 2020 federal election. The federal government, for its

¹⁸ Ryan Stack, “The Clearwater Purchase”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 178–181.

¹⁹ Fred Wien and Rick Williams, “Flashpoints and Possible Pathways”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 184–186.

part, seems to favour one side and then the other on an issue-by-issue basis in its policy and related decisions.

In addition to this fundamental divide, several other flashpoints have emerged and need to be resolved, including:

- Interpreting the meaning of the moderate livelihood right. What does it mean to earn a moderate livelihood, how many First Nation community members can exercise this right, and does the right include authority to self-regulate? The Supreme Court recognized the self-government right for moderate livelihood fishing, but with the critical caveat that DFO can step in to protect the resource for conservation or for other “*compelling and substantial public objectives which may include economic and regional fairness, and recognition of the historical reliance upon, and participation in, the fishery by non-aboriginal groups*”.²⁰ Any override by DFO must be preceded by in-depth consultations with First Nations and by making the case to justify its actions. DFO has, in several important instances, not abided by these conditions.
- Addressing the tension arising from First Nations exercising their right to engage in direct nation-to-nation negotiations with the federal government, a process that often excludes commercial harvesting groups from participating in decisions that affect their livelihoods and runs counter to the co-management principles governing most fisheries management processes.
- A key issue is creating trust and fairness in the enforcement of regulations. Commercial harvesting interests adhere strongly to the idea that there should only be one regulator, while First Nations hold out for the right to manage their own fishery, for which they require capacity development. First Nation communities see moderate livelihood fishing as a means for a larger number of their community members to access commercial fishing, but in a modest and occasional way, using less costly boats and gear and operating in safer near-shore fishing grounds. This type of small-scale, artisanal fishing activity could also provide an access point for young community members to gain the knowledge, experience, and skills necessary to become professional fish harvesters and be able to compete in the regular commercial fishery.
- An important issue is making it possible for First Nation fishers to enter the lobster fishery, where the total numbers of licences and traps are rigidly restricted by DFO to protect the stocks. In each region, there are hundreds of non-Indigenous competitors who have, over decades, protected their local fishing grounds and devised many unwritten rules and traditions to manage competition among neighbours fishing from the same ports.²¹ It’s a zero-sum situation, meaning that more licences and trap allocations for First Nation entrants must mean less for existing commercial harvesters and therefore fewer jobs and incomes in their communities. Progress in developing First Nations fisheries to date has involved a “willing seller, willing buyer” approach, with DFO buying up licences from retiring fishers and making them available, often in creative ways, to First Nations. With

²⁰ Supreme Court of Canada Judgment in *R. v. Marshall*, November 17, 1999, <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1740/index.do>

²¹ Rick Williams, “Unique Challenges in the Lobster Fishery”, in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

a booming lobster market, high prices for licences are now a major barrier to expanding Indigenous access. As an alternative approach, First Nations leaders have proposed that commercial harvesters, in a spirit of reconciliation, might give up fishing a small number of traps (5 to 10 has been suggested out of some 300 or so utilized on a typical boat) to make room for First Nations.

- Additional flashpoints have to do with multiple centres of leadership within both sides and, in some cases, weak influence over members; communication challenges arising from misinformation through social media; and both institutional and inter-group racism. When several First Nations in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland purchased a controlling interest in Clearwater, fears arose that this would lead to vertical integration in the industry, where the previously established lines between a processing company on the one hand and independent owner-operated fishers on the other would be eroded.²²

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Since the Marshall decision, the federal government has made significant investments in building fishing capacity within the Marshall First Nations, and they have responded impressively to the opportunities that were opened up under what came to be known as the communal commercial fishery. In the view of First Nations, disputed by some non-Indigenous commercial fishing groups, the federal government's actions did not represent the recognition and implementation of their right to fish for a moderate livelihood. In their view, for the more than two decades that followed the Supreme Court's decision, negotiations concerning moderate livelihood were off the table. Sipekne'katik First Nation then forced the issue in the fall of 2020, putting boats in the water outside of the approved fishing season and issuing their own moderate livelihood fishing licences. At a later date, several Mi'kmaw First Nations in Nova Scotia set out moderate livelihood fishing plans, which DFO approved; but as noted above, they are using DFO licences and fishing in season. The significant innovation that occurred is being able to divide one DFO lobster licence and its trap allocations among multiple crew and boats on the water, which non-First Nation harvesters can't do. For them, one licence means one boat and crew.

The current pattern is one where First Nations are pressing their right to fish, and in some areas they encounter resistance on the wharves and on the water and are blocked from being able to purchase bait or find buyers for their catch. Over the last several decades, this pattern of pursuing a right in the face of resistance has not been without precedent, such as in the case of moose hunting in Nova Scotia. One saw it as well in the 1990s when Membertou First Nation in Cape Breton was starting to rebuild its economic base. At that time, some merchants in the Sydney area reacted in a hostile manner, claiming that Membertou had unfair advantages, such as with taxation of on-reserve businesses or access to federal grants. Yet, Membertou persisted, and it is now abundantly clear not only that the members of Membertou are considerably better off than they were previously but also that Membertou is making a huge economic and social contribution to the wider Cape Breton region. This is evident in many indicators, ranging from employment being provided for

²² Fred Wien and Rick Williams, "Flashpoints and Possible Pathways", in Wien and Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 197–205.

Sydney residents, contracts being awarded to tradespersons, valuable services such as a hockey arena and a trade/convention centre being made available to the public, and donations being provided for charitable purposes.²³

It is conceivable that a similar scenario could play out in the inshore fishery, if the conflict can be contained in the short term and wise decisions are made by all the parties involved. That is, First Nations could find room to participate in fishing for a moderate livelihood, while at the same time the industry is strengthened for all concerned. First Nations have a lot to bring to the table — their youth, for example, to an industry where 40 per cent of working fish harvesters are at or beyond the usual retirement age; their traditional knowledge of how to fish sustainably; and the advantages they might have in areas such as attracting investments, product branding, and marketing. There are also negative consequences that need to be avoided by the industry, especially the harm that would ensue to markets in Canada and abroad, including Europe, if incidents of violence and racism were to continue.

The challenge in a complicated situation such as we have described is where and how to intervene to pursue a longer-term vision. It is worth noting that not all the flashpoints are equally deserving of priority attention, and some are connected to others so that making progress on one leads to another issue receding in importance. Strengthening enforcement, for example, might represent a strategic catalyst for wider changes in that both commercial harvesters and First Nations believe strongly that the protection of resources for future generations is a high priority. This would require much more rigorous enforcement mechanisms in all fisheries for all participants. If DFO were to significantly strengthen its enforcement programs and practices while helping build First Nation capacities to enforce their fisheries management plans while cracking down on harassment by non-Indigenous actors, it is reasonable to expect that opposition by commercial harvesters to First Nations “running their own show” — an opposition rooted in fears of out-of-control Indigenous fishing — would significantly recede. In a situation where First Nation harvesters could feel safe and well supported in conducting their fishing operations on land and at sea, and where non-Indigenous harvesters were confident that agreements and management plans were being fully implemented in all fisheries, new foundations of trust and co-operation could rapidly take shape to energize reconciliation in other fields of activity and community relations.

²³ Mary Beth Doucette and Fred Wien, “How Does First Nation Social and Economic Development Contribute to the Surrounding Area? A Case Study of Membertou”, in Wuttunee and Wien, *op. cit.*

Into Relevance: Treaty Words Matter

David Newhouse

PROFESSOR & DIRECTOR, CHANIE WENJACK SCHOOL FOR INDIGENOUS STUDIES
TRENT UNIVERSITY

Rebuilding Indigenous economies is a long, complex, and arduous set of tasks. It involves the creation of new institutions that can harness Indigenous innovation and creativity and channel Indigenous ideas and values into actions that improve the quality of Indigenous lives, enabling us to participate effectively in the world we find ourselves in. Treaties were one such institution.

Treaty-making and treaties were the institutions that our forefathers used to accomplish these important tasks. Treaties were, from Indigenous perspectives, a way to create on-going relationships of mutual benefit with the newcomers, designed to help Indigenous peoples and newcomers to live well together. Almost from the day that they were signed, treaties were interpreted by Canada through the lens of a land deal to enable the expansion of its territory. Treaties, while important to Canada for its territorial growth, came to be seen as irrelevant and were largely ignored until the 1970s.

The 1996 Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples spoke of the promise of treaties: “If what Aboriginal peoples thought they had won had been delivered — a reasonable share of lands and resources for their exclusive use, protection for their traditional economic activities, resource revenues from shared lands, and support for their participation in the new economy being shaped by the settlers — the position of Aboriginal peoples in Canada today would be very different. They would be major landowners. Most Aboriginal nations would likely be economically self-reliant. Some would be prosperous.” The Commissioners called for a renewed treaty process that would enable Aboriginal nations to exercise control over their lands, waters, and economic matters.

The Government of Canada acknowledged the existence of treaties and recognized that there were differences in interpretation. In the 1969 Statement of Indian Policy of the Government of Canada (aka the White Paper), the government described these differences as “the anomaly of treaties between groups within society and the government of that society (that) will require that these treaties be reviewed to — how they can be equitably ended.”

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The Indian Association of Alberta began the Red Paper, its response to the White Paper, by boldly stating: “To us who are Treaty Indians there is nothing more important than our Treaties, our lands and the well-being of our future generations.” On treaties, they elaborated: “The intent and spirit of the treaties must be our guide, not the precise letter of a foreign language. Treaties that run forever must have room for the changes in the conditions of life. The undertaking of the Government to provide teachers was a commitment to provide Indian children the educational opportunity equal to their white neighbours. The machinery and livestock symbolized economic development.”

The Chiefs of Manitoba also profoundly disagreed with the stated desire to terminate treaties and said so in Whabung: “It is the position of the Manitoba Indian people that the treaties as negotiated in the context of their time and as they exist today, are in fact, unconscionable agreements. They were negotiated by the Crown, on its part, in the full knowledge of the potential of this country, in the flowery language of its time and in an incomprehensible and foreign tongue that was not understood by our fathers. The terms of the treaties were unconscionable in that they did not ensure fair and equitable treatment to us and must rank in history as one of the outstanding swindles of all time.”¹

Both Indigenous groups, among many others, provided evidence that the treaties had not been implemented fairly and needed to be restructured. Treaties and their proper implementation were the foundation of a just and honourable approach to creating the conditions for success. Since the 1970s, there have been academic and Indigenous oral histories that help us better understand the treaties from Indigenous perspectives and how they might be used as institutions to further Indigenous economic development.

As a result of Indigenous advocacy, the strong Indigenous reaction to the White Paper, and the 1973 *Calder* decision, Canada recognized the importance of the treaties in 1973 with its first policy statement on Indian land claims, known as the “Statement on the Claims of Indian and Inuit People”, followed by the 1981 statement titled “In All Fairness”. Treaty rights were officially recognized in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. The Comprehensive Land Claims Policy of 1986 set out the process for negotiating new treaties. A half century of jurisprudence has made clear the nature of Aboriginal rights in Canada. In 1989, Canada and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indigenous Nations (now the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations) established the Office of the Treaty Commissioner to foster a strong and effective continuing treaty relationship. Four years later, in 1993, the governments of Canada, British Columbia, and BC First Nations created the British Columbia Treaty Commission to oversee the process of negotiating treaties in that province.

In 2014, Canada established the Aboriginal and Treaty Rights Information System to provide information pertaining to potential or established Aboriginal or treaty rights. Three years later, in 2017, it issued the Cabinet Directive on Modern Treaty Implementation. This directive was accompanied by the Statement of Federal Principles on Modern Treaty Implementation. These directives and statements created a whole-of-government approach to treaties and treaty implementation. A Deputy Minister’s Oversight Committee, consisting of representatives from 18 departments, oversees Canada’s treaty process.

In 2017, Canada and the Modern Treaty and Self-Governing First Nations held the Canada–Modern Treaty and Self-Governing First Nations Forum, the first in a series of

¹ Whabung refers to the 1971 statement, “Whabung: Our Tomorrows”, by the Indian Tribe of Manitoba (now the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs).

annual meetings to discuss treaty affairs. Crown–Indigenous Relations adjusted its organizational structure in 2015 to create a unit responsible for the implementation of treaties: The Modern Treaty Implementation Office.

Treaties and treaty-making represent, for some, a way to continue the process of confederation and to right past wrongs, and they remain at the heart of an Indigenous political agenda. After a half-century hiatus, lasting from the 1923 Williams Treaties, Canada restarted treaty-making through the modern land claims agreement process. The 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement initiated the period of modern treaty-making. The Prairie Treaty Nations Alliances in the 1980s advocated for treaty modernization. The Yukon Land Claims Agreements in 1993 and the Nisga’a Treaty in 1999 are excellent examples of the outcomes of the continuing process.

Canada’s attitude towards treaty-making has changed. In the 2018 Provisional Annual Report on the Implementation of Modern Treaties and Self-Government Agreements, Crown–Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs characterized treaties as “a key component of Canadian nation-building.” Modern treaties, the report goes on to state, “promote strong and sustainable Indigenous communities while advancing national socio-economic objectives that benefit all Canadians.” This is an incredible change from the attitudes expressed in the 1969 White Paper.

The half century since Whabung demonstrates that treaties remain relevant to both Canada and Indigenous peoples. While new treaties are being negotiated, historic treaties are being scrutinized. Indigenous leaders and their political/legal advisors have developed an adeptness at reading and interpreting the treaties, winning the argument that there is more to treaties than the words written on paper.

Indigenous leaders began to pay attention to the interpretation of treaties and the treaty provisions. One of the most challenging cases involves the Robinson treaties of 1850: Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior.

The Robinson treaties were negotiated to secure mining rights to lands occupied by the Anishinaabe between Lake Superior and the Huron watershed. The Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior treaties were agreements with several Anishinaabe nations to cede large tracts of land to the Crown. In return, the Anishinaabe were to receive reserve lands and rights to hunt and fish on the lands if they were not “taken up” for resource development and settlement. An important and critical feature of the treaties was the form of payment: a one-time cash payment and yearly payments to individual treaty beneficiaries.

The 1850 Robinson-Huron treaty states:

1. “the sum of two thousand pounds of good and lawful money of Upper Canada, to them in hand paid, and for the further perpetual annuity of six hundred pounds of like money, the same to be paid and delivered to the said Chiefs and their Tribes at a convenient season of each year.”
2. “to allow the said Chiefs and their Tribes the full and free privilege to hunt over the Territory now ceded by them, and to fish in the waters thereof, as they have heretofore been in the habit of doing; saving and excepting such portions of the said Territory as may from time to time be sold or leased to individuals or companies of individuals, and occupied by them with the consent of the Provincial Government.”

And

3. “The said William Benjamin Robinson, on behalf of Her Majesty, who desires to deal liberally with all her subjects, further promises and agrees, that should the Territory hereby ceded by the parties of the second part at any future period *produce such an amount as will enable the Government of this Province, without incurring loss, to increase the annuity hereby secured to them, then and in that case the same shall be augmented from time to time, provided that the amount paid to each individual shall not exceed the sum of one pound Provincial Currency in any year, or such further sum as Her Majesty may be graciously pleased to order.*”

In legal terms, this is known as an escalator clause. The annuity payable to the Anishinaabe beneficiaries would increase according to the value of the harvest from the land. The annuity was raised once in 1874, 25 years after signing, to \$4 per person and has not changed since then.

In 2012, the contemporary beneficiaries of the treaty filed a claim in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice, asking the Crown to fulfill the promise to increase the annuity as the value of production from the land had increased over the last 137 years. Six years later, in 2018, the court found that “the Crown has a mandatory and reviewable obligation to increase the Treaties’ annuities when the economic circumstances warrant.” The court ruled that “the economic circumstances will trigger an increase to the annuities if the net Crown resource-based revenues permit the Crown to increase the annuities without incurring a loss.” Ontario tried to claim Crown immunity from claims of breaches of fiduciary duty but was rejected by both the trial and appeal courts of the province. Ontario has appealed the Ontario Court of Appeal decision to the Supreme Court of Canada while the third phase of the Superior Court trial continues.

The third phase of the trial now focuses on the annuity and its potential increase. The outcome hinges on interpretation of the escalator clause: has the wealth produced from the territory exceeded its costs? This is the job of economists and accountants. The Government of Ontario argues that the cost of harvesting the natural resource wealth of the area exceeded its revenues by between \$7 billion and \$12 billion. As a result, no increase in annuity has been possible. As one Crown lawyer said, “Mining research, re-forestation, insect control, forest fire management, surveys, land agents, as well as expenses in connection with colonization roads and railways without which harvested resources could not be moved to market” are so huge that net revenues “have been negative since about 1960”.

Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and former head of the World Bank, testified that Ontario resource developments have generated about \$126 billion after costs and that at least 84% of this, or \$105.8 billion, should go to Indigenous communities. Ontario reports that treaty communities have received only about \$300 million.

The words of the historical treaties matter. The words we are using in the modern treaty process matter. Treaties, both historic and modern, have moved from irrelevance to relevance in the space of two generations of Indigenous leaders. The Robinson treaties court case demonstrates the power of words across the centuries. Indigenous leaders, educated in the law and Indigenous oral traditions, work with Elders and university academics to use these words to create new relationships and to hold Canada accountable for the Crown’s words. Treaties, both historic and modern, are becoming the living documents envisioned by Indigenous leaders of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Treaties, interpreted from Indigenous perspectives, can become the basis for the continual renewal of the relationship

between Canada and Indigenous peoples and for finding creative and novel ways of sharing the wealth of this country. Treaties, interpreted from the perspective of the 2023 repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, can become the institutions for building a new relationship with the newcomers. Based on the principle of mutual benefit by sharing the land and its wealth, they can become effective institutions of economic development. The lesson of the Robinson treaties court case is that words matter.

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Introduction

John Chenoweth

This issue's Lessons from Experience provides an opportunity for all of us to learn from and celebrate each other through an introduction to the ED of the Year Award Winners, followed by an introduction to the host of Cando's annual conference, Whitecap Dakota First Nation, and the tremendous economic work it has achieved over the past several decades. We will then turn our attention to British Columbia, where a small B.C. corporation finds many ways to support economic development opportunities for Indigenous organizations.

Our cross-country venture takes a turn into Ontario, where we are introduced to the concept of procurement and how a program within the federal government may prove valuable to Indigenous communities and individuals. Travelling further east into Quebec, we are introduced to an Indigenous entrepreneur who is the CEO of a construction company operating in the highly successful wind energy sector. The goal of the operation is to secure employment opportunities for Mi'gmaq community members within the Gaspé region.

Travelling west to Saskatchewan, we are introduced to an individual who supports Indigenous individuals and communities to explore and be immersed within the Indigenous Agriculture realm. Although Indigenous communities have a long tradition of harvesting plants for sustenance, the goal of Farm Credit Canada is to provide learning opportunities about agriculture and farm management. Lastly, we are very pleased to share the story of a unique charity founded in Ontario that speaks to the joy of dance. The charity is a model of working with Indigenous youth in a medium that excites and promotes health and well-being.

2022 Economic Developer of the Year Award Winners

Sam Laskaris

CANDO CONTRIBUTOR

Recognize! Celebrate! Honour!



In 1995, the Cando Economic Developer of the Year Award was created to recognize and promote recent or long-standing Indigenous economic vision of sustainable economic self-sufficiency.

Throughout the years, it became apparent that there were businesses and individuals also deserving of recognition for their contributions to the advancement of Indigenous economic development. That is why today Cando grants Economic Development of the Year Awards in three separate categories:

Individual EDO | Community | Indigenous Private Sector Business

development initiatives throughout Canada. All winners, past and present, share a desire to advance their communities as each pursues a

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Three candidates exemplifying outstanding Indigenous economic development were awarded at the Cando 28th Annual National Conference that was held on May 16–19, 2022, in Whitecap, Saskatchewan. Two finalists in each of the categories were selected to present to an audience during a special plenary at the conference. After all finalists were given equal opportunity to present, the conference delegates voted via a secret ballot for the finalist who they believed was the most deserving of the top award in each category.

It is an honour to present to you the 2022 Economic Developer of the Year Award winners!



Albert Derocher
ED of the Year Winner
— *Individual EDO Category*

David Kobliski,
Nelson House Development Corporation
ED of the Year Winner
— *Community Category*



Leslie Walker, Walker Home Construction
ED of the Year Winner
— *Indigenous Private Sector Business Category*

Cando Economic Developer of the Year Award Winner

Individual Category

Albert Derocher

Flying Dust First Nation, SK

Albert Derocher has spent the majority of his working career improving the fortunes of his Flying Dust First Nation.

It was way back in 1981 that Derocher first started working as a summer student for his First Nation, based in Saskatchewan.

Derocher is currently the general manager of the Flying Dust Holding Corporation, the company that oversees all of the economic development for the First Nation.

“It means a lot,” Derocher said of the fact he is in the running for the accolade. “It means I’m being recognized for a lot of the work I’ve done and for the advocacy I’ve done for First Nations issues.”

Derocher said plenty of others could have just as easily been recognized for their efforts.

“There’s a lot of good folks out there who are working very hard as well,” he said.

Derocher, who, along with his wife, helped raise 10 children (seven girls and three boys), is proud of the fact that he’s been able to work for so long for his First Nation.

“I love my community,” he said. “We all work very hard. We’re a growing progressive community.”

Flying Dust has about 600 members who are living on reserve. The First Nation’s various businesses employ 230 people, with about 90 per cent of those being Flying Dust members.

But none of the Derocher children, aged 26 to 36, are living at home now or working for the First Nation.

“They’re all out doing their own thing,” he said, adding his children were all encouraged to become independent outside of their community and then, if they so choose, can return to their First Nation.

Derocher has had numerous noteworthy accomplishments during his work career with his First Nation.

One of his proudest highlights was the creation of the Riverside Market Garden, a venture that started off with two employees but now features five full-time workers and 20 seasonal workers.

Derocher said there are increased planting efforts this year to better help feed some community members.

“We’ve been told there will be a real food shortage,” he said.

Derocher can also boast about another initiative, the Flying Dust Power Corp., which is expected to be operational and producing power for the community by late 2023.

“It’s been 10 years in the making,” he said. “It’s been a long road.”

Derocher was also an instrumental figure in the \$2.5 million additions to the First Nation’s arena that are reaching completion. Besides facility upgrades, the renovations included an expansion of a retail store selling sporting goods.

Cando Economic Developer of the Year Award Winner

Community Category

Nelson House Development Corporation

Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN), MB

It seems like it's at least once a week that David Kobliski will receive a phone call seeking some advice.

Kobliski has served as the Executive Director for the Nelson House Development Corporation, the economic arm of Nisichawayasihk First Nation in Manitoba, for the past 25 years.

"A lot of First Nations look at our community as a model," Kobliski said. "We do have a model that works. And others can do it on a smaller scale or on a bigger scale."

Kobliski said he doesn't mind fielding calls from others who are looking to improve fortunes in their communities.

"The satisfaction I get is seeing a First Nation generating their own sole-source revenue and reinvesting into their own community," he said.

Thanks in large part to Kobliski's efforts, the work Nelson House Development Corporation has done has earned some recognition.

Kobliski, who is 60, said it seems his past quarter century of work has gone by rather quickly.

"I was kind of reflecting and looking back," he said. "Twenty-five years really flew by."

The first business Nisichawayasihk First Nation owned was a gas bar. It allowed the First Nation to keep revenue in its own community.

Several other businesses that the First Nation now owns have followed suit. They include grocery stores, a hotel, and a high-speed Internet company.

Kobliski said one business is not any more noteworthy than the others.

"All of them stick out because all of them are still around and they're all still successful," he said.

The Nelson House Development Corporation is also involved in a major joint venture. It has a partnership with Manitoba Hydro and owns 32 per cent of a hydroelectric dam project.

"All the rest of them are owned by the First Nation," Kobliski said of other business interests.

Kobliski said he has been preaching about the importance of owning businesses to officials in his First Nation for a very long time.

"I've always said to our leadership that in order to be self-sufficient and self-governing, you have to generate your own revenue," he said.

It's the same advice he doles out to others who call his First Nation looking for some guidance.

"I do try to assist other First Nations with what we've done here," he said.

Kobliski said he is planning to retire from his executive director role, probably within the next year.

But he does plan to continue working. In fact, he believes he will start his own consulting business.

"I will be providing the path to other First Nations and showing them what the benefits are," Kobliski said.

Cando Economic Developer of the Year Award Winner

Indigenous Private Sector Business Category

Walker Home Construction

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, YT

Leslie Walker had a promising music career that was put on a hold.

But Walker, a member of Champagne and Aishihik First Nations in Yukon, doesn't seem to mind, as he's managed to find plenty of success in another career.

Back in 2011, Walker was a member of Common Knowledge, which was named the best band at the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards.

But for a good chunk of the past decade, Walker has concentrated on Walker Home Construction, his Whitehorse-based business that specializes in residential and commercial construction services and products.

Walker added that his company has been recently recognized by other associations.

"It's a little overwhelming to get these opportunities," he said. "This is the vision I always wanted to work towards. It's happened 10 times faster than I thought it would."

Walker was always rather handy. He had been hired to do various jobs in the past, even when he was doubling as a musician.

"I took a risk, and then I started my company," he said.

In the early days of his business, Walker said he was known as 'The Trailer Guy'. He would go around and fix mobile homes in trailer parks.

And then he started working on home additions, while also building fences and decks. He then started taking on larger projects, building homes and commercial businesses.

Walker doesn't have an exact total of how many houses he's worked on since launching his company in 2009. But it is in the hundreds.

Also, his company now has more than 30 employees. And about 70 per cent of those workers have First Nations ancestry.

Their jobs range from being apprentices to lead hands to site supervisors. Whenever possible, Walker Home Construction also enjoys dealing with subcontractors who are First Nations owned and operated.

Walker said he's seen other workplaces that have a strictly businesslike approach. But that's not something he's in favour of.

When they're at work, he wants his employees to be happy, laughing, and having a good time.

"We're trying to create a life for ourselves and our families," he said.

Though his musical career is on hold for now, Walker is hoping it is something he can eventually return to.

"I picked up the guitar and wrote a song the other day," he said. "I'm never going to put it down."

Walker added that he's hoping his company becomes even more successful so that he will have the opportunity to do other things, like get back and devote more time to his music.

"But right now, my main focus is this company," he said.

*Strengthening Community, Building Opportunity
in a Spirit of Alliance:
Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Saskatchewan*

Wanda Wuttunee

PROFESSOR EMERITA, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Located 26 kilometres south of Saskatoon, the community of Whitecap Dakota First Nation (Whitecap) has approximately 700 members. A major tourism attraction with a million visitors annually, Whitecap offers the best golf course in Saskatchewan, with a 4-star resort and casino. Whitecap has created diversified own source revenue streams from not only business profits, but through its Land Code, which generates land lease and property tax revenue. Exerting its jurisdiction, it also receives revenues from several types of taxation that were previously going to federal and provincial governments. With a healthy record of job creation, Whitecap is a regional economic force in Saskatchewan. Whitecap's business model is shared here for the benefit of both business and government leaders as they work to strengthen Indigenous community health and wellbeing across Canada.

Chief Darcy Bear, Whitecap leader for more than 30 years, stepped into a crisis situation when first elected. The community had no money in the bank and a pile of accounts payable. By putting community at the heart of every move from the due diligence process to strategic planning, Chief Darcy, Council, and his leadership team have moved diligently and consistently forward, building partnerships to the benefit of the community of Whitecap and their partners. An important milestone of note is the recent community endorsement of the Self-Government agreement that was reached between the federal government and Whitecap in a 92% vote of confidence in October 2022. The culmination of extensive community consultation over a 10-year period, Whitecap becomes one of only 78 self-governing Indigenous nations in Canada.

This case study will consider the journey, key foundational decisions and rationale, leadership strategies and wise practices for reference when building healthy, sustainable, and successful communities.

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THE EARLY YEARS — DIGGING OUT FROM UNDER

Chief Darcy Bear was 23 years old when first elected to Council after completing a Business Administrative Certificate from the University of Saskatchewan. He had been raised by his grandparents with a strong work ethic and a healthy respect for his language and culture. Three years later he was elected chief on October 6, 1993, and developed a plan that would address the community's unemployment of 70%, poor financial health, and lack of economic opportunity. "Stick to the plan" encapsulates the driving theme for restoring Whitecap's financial health after consolidating debt with a financial institution.

Chief Darcy recalls those early days: "In 1995, we signed a financial transfer agreement with the federal government, and there are only 11 First Nations in Saskatchewan that have that agreement. I had started lobbying immediately after being elected, so we got our first residential subdivision, our first school, and our first community water treatment plant in 1996." Many of the 34 existing housing units were built on crawl space foundations with substandard materials and replaced with units that meet the national building code. New housing totalling 174 units was built under section 95 of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Affordable Housing program. The next section documents Whitecap's impressive development journey, remembering that it is a relatively small community with few resources.

WHITECAP'S GOLF COURSE, CASINO AND HOTEL PROJECTS

With their financial house in order, Whitecap was set to focus on business development. In order to oversee their development plans, Darrell Balkwill was hired as CEO of their development corporation in 2003 from the Saskatoon Tribal Council, where he had worked

FIGURE 1
Dakota Dunes Golf Links



Source: From "Dakota Dunes Golf Links" by George Bowditch, 2022, SaskGolfer. <https://www.saskgolfer.com/dakota-dunes-golf-links/>

for 17 years. In that year, the leadership resurrected a golf project idea that had been around when Chief Darcy was in high school. The golf course opened two years later, in 2005.

Chief Darcy describes the process:

Our vision was to use our beautiful rolling dunes, which [were] shared by our experienced consultant who had built golf courses in North America and in Europe. We kept our golf course as natural as possible and took advantage of our sandy soil to reduce expensive drainage fees, [resulting in] a savings of \$3.6 million. We got the capital cost down to \$5.2 million, which included irrigation and a temporary clubhouse.

As a small nation, we lacked capital, so we needed partners and approached Chief Harry Cook of Lac La Ronge, as they have the successful Kitsaki Development Corporation with over \$100 million in business, and Chief Harry Lafond of Muskeg Lake, [which] had the first Urban Reserve in Canada with more than 500 employees on their lands. They had [an] economic vision, and we got along. I showed them the business plan, the need for equity with federal grants, and a debt repayment plan in 12 years. We ended up paying it off in six years. We bought out both our partners and were very thankful that they helped kick-start the project. That course opened in 2005.

The Saskatchewan Tribal Council was considering opening a casino in downtown Saskatoon, but the bid was vetoed by Saskatoon citizens in a plebiscite. The focus shifted to Whitecap, which was Plan B for location choices. They had their resort/commercial zoning in place already that listed a casino as a possible option, which was a bonus. The project was

FIGURE 2
Dakota Dunes Casino



Source: From "Dakota Dunes Resort & Casino" by Tourism Saskatchewan Canada. <https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/listings/3368/dakota-dunes-resort-casino>

FIGURE 3
Dakota Dunes Resort



Source: From “Dakota Dunes Resort”. <https://www.dakotadunesresort.com/media.php>

taken to the community for support, which was achieved at a community meeting, with the \$70 million casino opening in 2007. Chief and Council worked in partnership with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Association, and the Saskatoon Tribal Council to bring the casino project to fruition (Dakota Dunes Casino, 2021).

Gaming in Saskatchewan is a partnership with the 74 First Nations through SIGA. SIGA manages daily operations. Fifty percent of the profits go into a First Nation trust and is shared among all Saskatchewan’s First Nations; 25% goes to the province; and 25% goes to charities operating within the regions of the First Nation communities and includes Indigenous charities.

As part of Whitecap’s tourism plan, the next project was a hotel. The 155-room hotel, called Dakota Dunes Resort, opened in 2020. Financed completely by Whitecap, this project included a \$13.6 million water and sewer system expansion. Whitecap’s leadership considered approaching Indigenous Services Canada, but their funding cap was \$3 million, which would mean Whitecap had to finance more than \$10 million. The leadership reviewed the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program, which could only be accessed at that time by non-First Nations communities. The program financed infrastructure projects with each of the local community, federal, and provincial governments contributing a third of the project cost.

Chief Darcy successfully approached Brad Wall, Saskatchewan’s premier at the time, and asked for provincial support to back Whitecap’s bid to access this federal program, as Whitecap was prepared to put in one-third of the infrastructure upgrade cost. Chief Darcy recalls:

I showed the premier the economic benefits through jobs created and an economist’s estimate of the benefits to the province. It was then seen as an investment.

Then we lobbied the federal government. I remember sitting in the Minister’s office and the deputy minister asking if the province was really supporting Whitecap — he asked three times — and the response was ‘yes’ each time. Instead of

paying \$10 million and the feds paying \$3 million, we paid \$4.67 million as our one-third share. In 2018, Minister Goodale came to Whitecap to announce the infrastructure project, and now, for the first time, this program is available to all First Nations across the country.

Chief Darcy states most emphatically that, “We’re still citizens of Saskatchewan, and as Canadians, we should be able to access these programs. There are often turf wars between the province and the federal government as to who has responsibility. We have to get beyond that to the fact that we’re all Canadian citizens. We all have to work together, and we have to make change together.” The next section documents Whitecap’s strategy for diversifying its own source revenues.

DIVERSIFYING REVENUE STREAMS: TAXATION, INDUSTRIAL SERVICES, LAND LEASES, BUSINESS PARK

The Nation’s efforts to diversify its revenue streams besides business profits focus on taxation and industrial services, as well as land leases and attracting businesses to their business park.

Chief Darcy states, “We had our own taxation system before the Europeans came; it was called sharing, which was done voluntarily as opposed to an imposed model of taxation.”

Saskatchewan allows First Nations to capture fuel and tobacco taxes. Whitecap gives 100% of the tobacco tax to its members and only takes a portion of the fuel tax. A real property tax is paid by all their businesses to the Whitecap government. Chief Darcy shares the rationale underlying community support for this tax:

For example, if the casino had been located in Saskatoon, the casino would pay property taxes to the City of Saskatoon because it requires services. If we didn’t have the real property tax, then we would have to subsidize the operations of the casino and take something away from the members in order to finance those services. It made sense to our members, and so they supported it.

Whitecap takes advantage of a federal First Nations GST program to retain GST charged on every purchase in the community, including each slot machine and table in the casino. These revenues of more than \$1 million were going to the federal government and are now collected as the Whitecap Community Improvement Fee (originally named First Nations GST) and are reinvested in improving the quality of life in the community.

The province agreed that the liquor consumption tax of 10% collected from the golf course clubhouse, the hotel restaurant, lounge, and casino could remain in the community so long as it was charged on every purchase made in the community’s licensed establishments. A million tourists visiting Whitecap and community members pay this tax if they choose to drink in those licensed Nation establishments, and the taxes collected go to support Whitecap’s language and culture initiatives.

The Industrial Services Division of the Whitecap Development Corporation provides essential services to the “resource, oil and gas, utilities and pipeline sectors” (Whitecap Development Services, 2021). Partnering with respected service providers, Whitecap offers wide-ranging services, including engineering; earthwork and infrastructure building; porta-

ble work spaces; medical, health, safety, security, and training; as well as electrical and instrumentation construction and maintenance, control systems, and integrated modular solutions for Saskatchewan's utility, mining, and oil and gas sectors.

The new business park will produce a revenue stream from land leases will create employment opportunities. With business owners generating profits and carrying the risk, Whitecap is, most importantly, reducing its overall economic risk profile and gaining benefits for the community. CEO Darrell explains:

The first phase of the development of a business park is 30 acres with the infrastructure needed to attract business. The leadership has also developed an extensive package of laws and bylaws that will control what business development looks like in the community, including how land leases work and what property taxes look like. We set similar standards [to] what other jurisdictions are doing. They are easy to understand and are available on our website.

In the next section, the Nation framework that supports continued economic development in Whitecap will be explored.

NATION GOVERNANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

It is important to begin to understand the reality that Indigenous communities have faced in order to appreciate the distance travelled by Whitecap Dakota First Nation, as an example, in the last decades. Chief Darcy recalls:

I remember my grandfather talking about needing a pass to leave the reserve and a permit from the Indian Agent to sell a crop, wood, or livestock. No other Canadian farmer had to do that. The Indian Act was not set up to support indigenous people; it was set up to segregate them from the rest of society. The settlers were able to buy land all around our community and create jobs that offered employment and hope. Those opportunities did not include opportunities for us.

All our development corporations have been started in the last few decades. So, the non-Indigenous corporations have a head start on us, and we have a long way to catch up. They've been able to generate wealth and take those retained earnings and reinvest in other opportunities to grow and grow. That's why the funding caps have to be lifted in the federal Community Opportunity Readiness program, for example.

It's not our fault that we are so far behind because we were contained [in] our reserves. The Government knew [that] if they kept Indians dependent, they would hold power over them. Then the Canadian Government looked to the south and the residential school experience, and they brought that here to take away our culture and our language, our identity, our pride, and [our] ability to parent. How can you learn to parent when you only see your parents [for] maybe two months of the year, if that?

That's one of the things I ponder on: what kind of impact is it when you don't see your parents for 10 months out of the year and you never hear the words "I love you"? You don't know their nurturing. Before the Europeans came, the commu-

nity raised the child, and kinship was really important. Everyone had a role in helping and teaching our children. It was a big loss to our people and our communities. That's why there's so much dysfunction. The non-Indigenous people would be dysfunctional too if their children were taken away for 10 months of the year. Imagine communities with no sounds of children playing, laughing, or crying.

We are resilient, and we endured it; and now we want to be part of the Canadian economy.

Whitecap leadership's policies of accountability and transparency are considered here. Consider their move to self-government, including taking authority over the administration of their lands as well as improving community infrastructure in the areas of health, education, and safety.

1. Accountability and Transparency

Whitecap's leadership focuses on community and is accountable and transparent to its members and partners. A Comprehensive Community Plan was recently updated that sets the priorities for nation-building and is member-driven. Whitecap's economic plans are outlined in a 20-year master plan, complemented by sector-specific strategic plans. At the heart of these plans are the following important guiding principles for economic self-sustainability (Economic Development, 2021):

Economic Mission: To create an economically self-sustaining community with financially independent members through the effective use of economic tools that maximize the available resources, respect the Dakota culture and protect the environment while protecting and enhancing inherent rights.

Economic Goals:

1. To create employment opportunities that will allow all Whitecap members to earn an income at least equal to the provincial average.
2. To provide Whitecap members with the opportunity to access the education, training and work experience necessary to gain employment.
3. To self-generate sufficient sustained revenues to continuously improve the quality of life for Whitecap members and support the investment required for planned community growth.

There are at least four community meetings held each year where all plans, updates, new community projects and programs, etc., are discussed with members. The leadership also meets with the elders at monthly lunch meetings. Decisions are made when the majority of members agree, and projects go ahead only with community support. Chief Darcy emphasizes the importance of really listening to community members.

2. Self-Government

The Nation has steadily moved towards self-government in phases and was able to remove much of the negative influence of the Indian Act. Chief Darcy outlines this movement:

We've phased in self-government by signing a Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management with Canada in 2003 that replaces 25% of the Indian

Act, a membership code that replaces 5% of the Indian Act, and we have our own election code that replaces a further 5% of the Indian Act.

We're going to keep section 87 of the Indian Act so that we don't pay provincial or federal income taxes while working on reserve. We'll keep section 6 so that we are still recognized as Indians, and section 87 will continue to apply to us. We also want to keep section 2 that relates to lands so that our lands will remain reserve lands.

As was mentioned earlier, Whitecap has successfully taken the major steps required to become fully self-governing through the recent community endorsement of the Self-Government Agreement. The effective date for self-government is September 1, 2023, and full implementation of this agreement will be achieved over the coming years, thus removing many of the legislative obstacles that currently disrupt Whitecap's plans for a healthy and prosperous community.

The replacement of the 44 land administration provisions in the Indian Act began with the Framework Agreement through First Nation Land Management, which was followed by the development of a community-driven Whitecap Dakota Land Code, which placed governance authority with Whitecap. Only about 31 per cent of First Nation communities in Canada are in one of the stages of developing a land code (Signatory First Nations, n.d.).

As a result of the land code process, Whitecap developed a land use plan that sets development standards that protect the environment for the community. It is supported by a zoning strategy that identifies "land set aside for residential, resort/commercial, community services, cultural areas, the business park, natural areas, and agriculture" (Bear, 2022). The comprehensive zoning policy is an essential component of Whitecap's development plans, as seen in Figure 4, and reflects important community priorities for ensuring a quality of life for Whitecap members as development plans unfold.

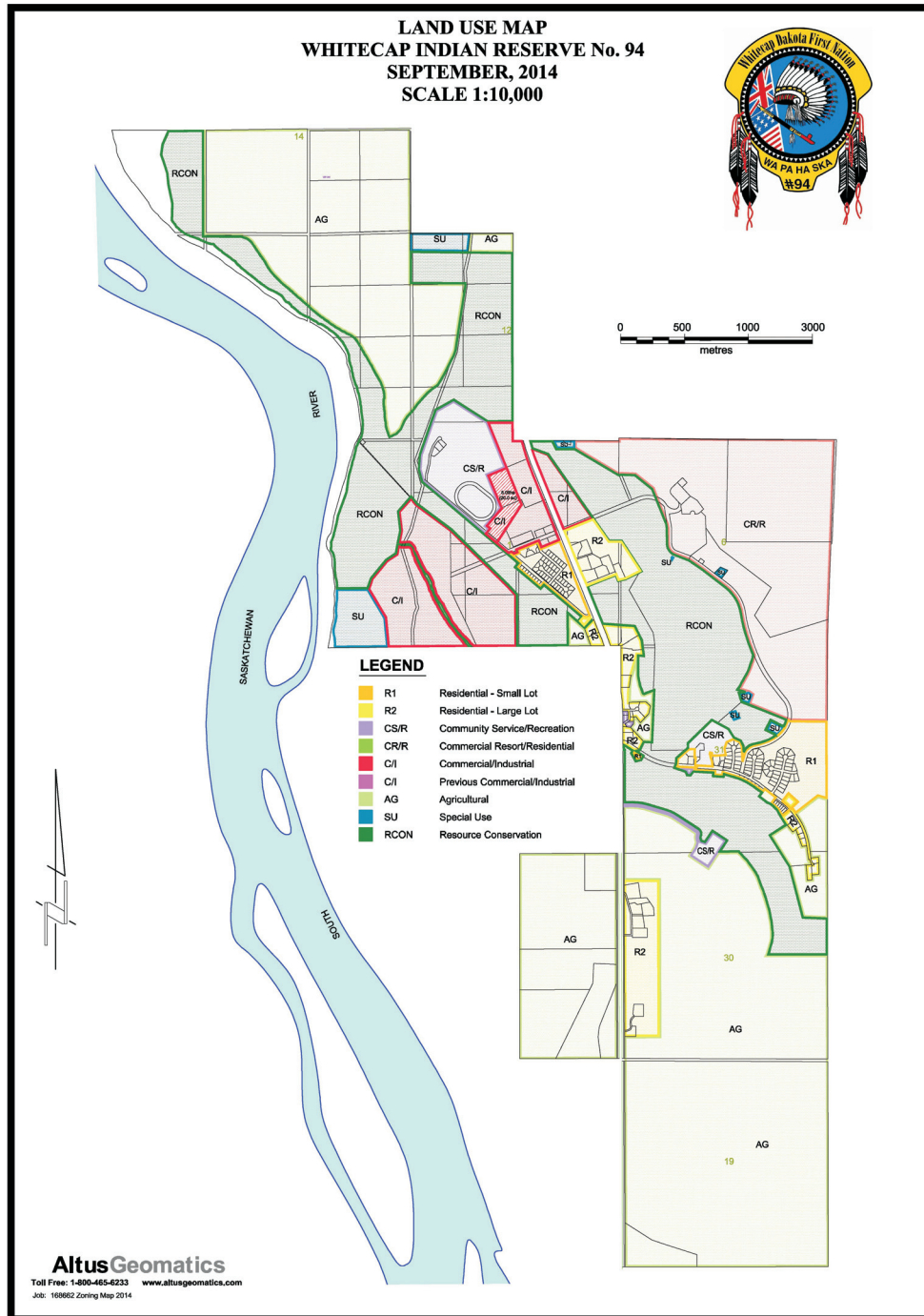
Another benefit of the land code process is that a whole environmental assessment of Whitecap lands was undertaken. Chief Darcy explains:

Some families had their own landfills, but there is a reclamation process paid for by the federal government, so we received a clean bill of health on our land. There are no more landfills on Whitecap Land. All of the garbage goes to a regional landfill. We do have a transfer station for some of the other garbage, like construction debris. We have door-to-door pickup like you see in cities. We have the black bins and the blue bins for recycling. Leadership committees and community members were all involved in [the] discussions.

It also included capping all the wells in the community since we have a water treatment plant. We needed to manage that risk, as there was a possibility that the old wells might potentially contaminate the aquifer.

It is critical to note that a strong leadership team is essential to Whitecap's overall success. In Chief Darcy's experience, the team will put the vision into an action plan. The strategy works to the strengths of the team and supports transparency and accountability, which helps bring the community on board. The community must understand what the leadership is doing through regular meetings and must give direction to the leadership. "You also need to believe it to achieve it. You need a team and community support to implement an action plan to bring the vision to fruition. One of my team members said I was crazy when I said I

FIGURE 4
Whitecap Indian Reserve No. 94 Land Use Map



Source: From "Dakota Dunes Resort", <https://www.dakotadunesresort.com/media.php>

would approach the province regarding the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Fund. We got it done!” (Bear, 2022).

3. Infrastructure

Chief Darcy grew up in a time when the community had no modern infrastructure and still had to chop wood and haul water. Essential infrastructure supports for education, health, and safety have greatly improved under his tenure as leader. Houses are built to code, and every home has high-speed fibre optics that eases access to online education and brings many benefits for members. Importantly, all elders have air conditioning, making them the “coolest elders in Saskatchewan”.

Education

The Nation has a regional education authority in partnership with the Saskatoon public school division. All teaching staff are Saskatchewan public school division employees. The community has a school for pre-kindergarten to grade 4 students, which follows the same provincial curriculum but is enhanced with language and cultural programming.

Grade 5 and older students are bused to a new school located 20 minutes away in Saskatoon and make up 10% of the student population. Whitecap made a strategic investment of \$2.7 million, or 10%, in the \$27 million school project. The students have access to elders every day, supports, and a cultural room that has a wall display of Whitecap’s complete history. Students are encouraged to follow their dreams wherever that may take them, and they are supported through scholarships to continue training and further education. Most importantly, this support is unconditional, placing no burden of any type of repayment on the young people who access the Post-Secondary Education Program.

Health

In 2007, Chief Whitecap was acknowledged as a city founder; it was his suggested location for a new colony in 1882 that became the City of Saskatoon (Chief Whitecap’s Community, 2022). This close relationship with Saskatoon is in the spirit of alliance that is in keeping with their traditions — Dakota translates as “friend” or “ally”. This spirit marks many of Whitecap’s broader partnering relationships to the benefit of the Nation (Our Community — History, 2021).

For example, Whitecap has a provincial primary care health clinic that is available to everyone, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous. While the federal government and Health Canada could only offer a segregated model for Whitecap members, Whitecap’s leadership went to the province and asked for expanded services for tourist visitors and all residents, regardless of ethnicity. The province pays for a full-time nurse practitioner, and further supports are provided by the Saskatchewan Health Authority and through their partnership with the Saskatoon Tribal Council. Elders receive homecare, and their prescriptions are delivered to their homes by the clinic.

Community Safety

Whitecap’s ability to promote a shared vision for community safety has resulted in a level of safety that is rare for First Nations. Saskatoon’s Fire Department provides top-notch

training for volunteer fire fighters in Whitecap under a partnership agreement, and Whitecap's fire fighters are often able to put out fires before backup comes from Saskatoon.

Another partnership agreement with the province, the federal government, and Whitecap supports two RCMP officers who live in the community. An economic argument was successfully made that rested on the safety of the one million tourists who visit the small community each year. Whitecap has entered into a successful Community Safety Officers pilot project with the province of Saskatchewan and Muskoday First Nation, located near Prince Albert. Under this project, community safety officers provide peacekeeping duties under existing provincial authorities. The project is supported by amendments to the Summary Offences Procedures Act that will respect and enable police and court enforcement of First Nation's laws, using Indigenous justices of the peace. This brings a measure of safety and security that is not enjoyed by many First Nations across Canada, and Whitecap's leadership is looking to make this a permanent service.

This achievement is particularly notable because the RCMP will not enforce Nation bylaws or land codes across Canada since no provincial prosecution service will prosecute as they are not enactments for the purposes of provincial law.

WHITECAP DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Whitecap Development Corporation is an important governance tool and the main means of meeting the community's economic goals. The next section will outline key operational strategies that underpin the success enjoyed by the community.

The Whitecap Development Corporation's board is made up of the Chief and Councillors and two community members, for a total of five board members. The issue of potential conflicts that might arise when mixing politics and business has been carefully considered and actively avoided. As CEO Darrell points out, it has been very effective to have community input from long-standing community members rather than having two separate entities — political and economic. At the same time, the board faces few challenges because its members have a clear understanding of potential conflicts of interest, which is further safeguarded by strong community accountability mechanisms.

Community accountability takes the form of regular community meetings, as previously mentioned. In the Nation, each band councillor represents a number of portfolios, and there is a community committee for each council member with regular reporting to the community. CEO Darrell notes that every economic development and land project goes through the community committees for review, feedback, and communication to the rest of the community. There are men's and women's groups, as well as youth groups and Elders, that are also consulted regularly. The Chief and Council move forward once they have received the mandate from the community to move on an initiative.

This focused community engagement, for example, was critical to community support for the casino project. CEO Darrell recalls that it was a strong due diligence process and transparency upfront regarding risks that helped answer any questions and gain community support in the end. There was extensive education on the downsides of gaming — how it can turn from entertainment to addiction. Programming was put in place to address any negative risks for community members associated with operating a casino.

CEO Darrell comments, "Increasing community security was important, and I believe we've been successful in minimizing the negatives by also getting ideas from the community

for mitigating risks. It's created revenue streams and employment opportunities and allowed us to lever into taxation, more land leases, and more land management that generates other revenue streams for the community."

Overall, economic strategic plans dovetail with the Comprehensive Community Plan and focus on improving the quality of life for Whitecap citizens. The only times plans have derailed, according to CEO Darrell, are a couple of times when opportunities were identified and pursued that weren't part of the strategic plan. Sticking to a robust strategic plan underpins Whitecap's success, and following effective due diligence procedures is extremely important. Their eight-point Business Selection Criteria focus on profitability, employment creation, location, investment requirements, community impacts, financial risk, management capacity, and partnership potential. An assessment of partnership potential considers the overall viability of working with a potential business, including a review of their vision, goals, and business practices. The stability of Whitecap's leadership and overall vision has had a huge positive impact on community success in building a strong team and a cohesive community.

Economic Partnerships

In the spirit of alliance, Whitecap's leadership consistently focuses on forging strong partnerships, as can be seen by the numerous examples already listed in this paper, with First Nations communities, neighbouring communities, as well as municipal, provincial, and federal governments.

Before working with a partner, the due diligence process must conclude that there is an alignment with Whitecap goals and values. In determining their negotiating position, the leadership team identifies how outcomes can be achieved so that all parties end up in a win-win position. The question "what do you need to see out of this?" is often asked in preliminary discussions.

Just before the casino project was going to open, there was a problem. Chief Darcy recalls,

We had a secondary road from Saskatoon to Whitecap with no shoulders and lots of curves, but we knew that if we went to the provincial government to ask for [a] highway, we wouldn't get it. I told the team that we had to look at the bigger picture and talk about a tourism corridor going from Saskatoon to Lake Diefenbaker. We got the city of Saskatoon on board, with four rural municipalities, two towns, and our First Nation signing an MOU for a tourism corridor. It was hard for the province to say no to such a collaboration.

The first phase of the new highway from Saskatoon to Whitecap cost \$10 million, but the province said that they couldn't provide the funds until April 1. I offered bridge financing until April 1. Within three weeks, I had three letters from financial institutions, and lo and behold, the province found the money. The five phases cost around \$43 million, and Whitecap managed three of those phases. It was the first time in the history of the province that a First Nation actually managed a highway project. All our partners wanted to brand the tourism corridor "Chief Whitecap Trail". This was the first time in [the] history of the province that a highway was named after a chief.

CEO Darrell adds that politicians want to see benefits for the community and the region or a reduction in dependency on government funding. In any event, whether it is politicians, corporate partners, or banks, it is important to identify the creative thinker and champion who can see a way forward beyond existing rules or policies.

Employment opportunities have exploded, with 700 jobs created so far in a community of 600 with 300 to 350 members who are seeking work. The unemployment rate hovers around 5–8%. As Don Redbear, a Whitecap member, proudly notes,

Every member has an equal opportunity for employment. We are a tight-knit community and want the same things for our kids. I had worked on pipelines and in construction outside of Whitecap. I was hired for the construction of the resort, and then I applied for “Manager of Maintenance” and got the job four years ago. It is great to work in the community and not miss out on family gatherings. My kids see me going to work each day, and that work ethic is being passed on.

The future looks bright for further Whitecap Dakota First Nation partnerships. They have recently entered into an MOU with two First Nations in Alberta. Chief Darcy shares, “We have made an economic alliance with T’suu Tina Nation and Enoch First Nation in Alberta. We all have casinos on our lands, conference centres and hotels, spas, and golf courses. We have lots in common, so we want to build some synergies and capitalize on our strengths — like our purchasing power.”

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Whitecap has not let its small size, lack of resources, history, or the common restrictive legislative barriers facing Indigenous leadership restrict its plans to prosper its members and achieve self-governing authority over their affairs. Their high level of engagement with community members in all areas that affect the community is part of the solid foundation that has been a major catalyst underlying their extraordinary success story. A strong, stable leadership team, a clear vision, and goals documented and honoured in comprehensive strategic plans are also essential to their achievements. Whitecap has acted as a trailblazer in numerous situations, benefitting all those they interact with because of their win–win negotiating strategy and the creative abilities of the leadership to forge new paths where others might stop at seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Whitecap’s adverse conditions that Chief Darcy faced at the beginning of his career as a leader might have posed an enduring handicap. However, the community achieved financial stability and leveraged limited resources through highly effective partnerships. These partnerships included collaborating with other First Nations on the golf course and casino projects; forming an alliance with the provincial government to access federal infrastructure funding previously unavailable to First Nations for the hotel project, which led to a policy change granting other First Nations access to the same funding; and building relationships with surrounding communities in lobbying the provincial government for an improved highway corridor catering to tourists. The list of firsts achieved by Whitecap is long.

Their citizens enjoy a standard and quality of living that is noteworthy amongst Indigenous communities in Canada. Employment opportunities abound, which is reflected in the dramatic drop from 70% unemployment in 1993 to 5–8% in 2022. Many services, including

education, health, and safety, are but a few of the benefits enjoyed by the whole community, from youngsters to elders.

At a time when the conversation is focused on the many challenges, it is most encouraging to showcase Whitecap's achievements in surmounting those challenges. They host many visitors from Indigenous communities wanting to learn more about their story and hope that can help make a difference.

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Indigenous Organizations Increasingly Being Funded by B.C. Corporation

Sam Laskaris

CANDO CONTRIBUTOR



Laurel Douglas
ETSI-BC

Laurel Douglas has certainly proven to be a changemaker. Douglas was brought on board as the CEO of ETSI-BC in May 2020. The full name for the British Columbia-based not-for-profit corporation is the Economic Trust of the Southern Interior. ETSI-BC, previously known as the Southern Interior Development Initiative Trust, was launched in 2006 by the B.C. government to administer a \$50 million endowment fund that was intended to support economic investment in the southern interior of the province. Governance of the trust is carried out by the 13 individuals who serve on ETSI-BC's board of directors. Five of the board members are appointed by the province. The other eight are district representatives within ETSI-BC's coverage area.

This article draws on a personal interview with the author in August 2022.

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Douglas' time with ETSI-BC has certainly been heralded, including by officials of Indigenous communities. A total of 32 First Nations lie within ETSI-BC's responsibility locations. Since Douglas' arrival, they have no longer felt neglected. "Up until I joined ETSI-BC, we had only ever funded three Indigenous organizations in the entire time that we had been in existence," she said. "And since then, we've funded 15 different organizations."

It didn't take Douglas long to start earning recognition for her accomplishments at ETSI-BC. Slightly more than a year after she joined the corporation, Douglas was recognized as one of B.C.'s most influential leaders by Business In Vancouver (BIV). Leaders in 14 sectors were chosen. Douglas was selected in the Public Sector and Economy category. "Criteria for this recognition [were] based on months of research into what's important to the BC economy," read a BIV release. "Individuals were selected based on a range of factors, including achievement within an organization or sector, professional contributions, peer recognition, awards and other recognitions, board appointments, community and political engagement, philanthropy and non-profit work, and more" (ETSI-BC, 2021).

Several months before that accolade was bestowed upon Douglas, she was selected as the Business Leader of the Year for 2020 by the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce. Kelowna Chamber President Jeffrey Robinson praised Douglas' earlier work efforts and felt ETSI-BC and its partners would benefit from her hiring. "Laurel, through her long-standing support of the community, has enriched our city and our region," Robinson said. "She has championed entrepreneurs and provided valuable community leadership in the economic development and post-secondary sectors. She continues to leave a legacy of strategic thinking, impact, and collaboration in the positions she has held. In her new role at ETSI-BC, we are confident that her steady hand and clear-headed planning will create great outcomes for this important regional economic development organization" (Kelowna Chamber, 2020).

Douglas believes her corporation could have done a better job in the past of letting Indigenous communities know what it is all about. "We had a very low profile with our Indigenous partners, and that's what we're trying to correct by reaching out to them proactively," she said. "It's the project consultants and myself who are having those conversations with the different representatives of the 32 First Nations that are located in our region."

Douglas said ETSI-BC reps have been on their own awareness-raising campaign for the last couple of years. "We're trying to engage with the 32 First Nations in our region and make sure they know about the support we provide and to encourage them to partner with local governments and non-profits. I have a strong belief that collaboration breeds better outcomes, and so we need to engage better with our Indigenous partners," she said. Douglas is confident that positive steps are being taken. "We're definitely making progress," she said. "We actually have a plan right now to reach out to each of the First Nations just to make sure they know about us and that we have the right connections with the people in charge of economic development."

Douglas added that a major shift in thinking has taken place since she joined ETSI-BC. "We really redirected the organization to be more of an economic development funding organization and support the non-profits, the First Nations, and communities in our region," she said. "Previously, the organization did a lot of Indigenous lending, directly providing financial assistance to businesses to help create jobs. So now we're doing it in a more indirect way."

Douglas also said simply getting out and meeting various Indigenous leaders from different communities has proven to be beneficial. "I enjoy the fact that I think we've suc-

ceeded in really engaging with the community in a meaningful way,” she said. “We’ve got a lot of engagement and a lot of First Nations in our intakes now. We’ve had a lot of input during our consultation process, where we basically went out and asked communities what they were looking for. We had excellent participation by all the stakeholders in those discussions. We’re really creating an economic trust that is really integrated into the fabric of the region. So, I’m pleased with that.”

Paul Wiest, a project manager for ETSI-BC, said three recent Indigenous projects his corporation has been involved with include the ʔaqam community, the city of Cranbrook, and a venture titled Boston Bar.

The ʔaqam community is nestled beside the St. Mary’s River and has large pieces of land next to the Kootenay Rockies International Airport. “Funding from ETSI-BC will allow the community to hire a project manager to assist in the development of the industrial lands at the airport and support new business investment,” Wiest said.

Meanwhile, ETSI-BC funding contributed to a feasibility assessment for an interpretive centre, a collaboration between Ktunaxa First Nation, and the city of Cranbrook. “The City of Cranbrook recognized that, as part of their work towards truth and reconciliation, they needed to collaborate with the Ktunaxa First Nation in establishing their vision of a tourism interpretive centre that would have a more visual and tangible presence of the Ktunaxa history and culture for visitor experiences,” Wiest said.

As for the Boston Bar initiative, Wiest offered the following thought. “This project will provide an avenue for tourists to better understand the history of the local Indigenous communities that reside within the Fraser Canyon and contribute to First Nations reconciliation and collaboration,” he said.

ETSI-BC is not only involved with massive projects. It also helps others on a somewhat smaller scale. For example, in early 2022, it was announced that Enactus Okanagan College had received a \$25,000 grant from ETSI-BC to help launch and expand student-led projects that create environmental and community impact. Enactus Okanagan College is a student-run organization. The grant it received from ETSI-BC was intended to support economic development projects that will have noteworthy benefits that are also long-lasting for the region. “We are excited to see how this grant helps Enactus grow, teaching more people entrepreneurship and community development skills while generating insights and learning for future projects,” Douglas said (Verster, 2022).

Douglas believes she was well suited for her ETSI-BC position. “My background is in economic development,” she said. “I switched out of the corporate sector many years ago, having had a career in finance [and] tech, and I’ve led several major economic development organizations in B.C. I offered to reconfigure this organization back in 2020,” she said. “It was something I had a unique skillset for.” Douglas’ credentials were also praised in an Investkelowna.com blog dated November 28, 2022. “Prior to making the shift to economic development, her corporate career spanned senior underwriting, business development, and strategic planning roles in the tech sector in Canada, France, Germany, and the UK, with major telecom equipment manufacturers and financial services firms,” the blog said. “Ms. Douglas has been a co-founder or angel investor in several tech ventures along the way” (COEDC, 2022).

While pleased with the recent work ETSI-BC has accomplished, Douglas believes even more can be done. The capacity to implement some goals can be improved. “We’d like to have more funding available, obviously,” Douglas said. “I think that’s the limitation we’ve found. We’ve had some issues in the past relating to the lending [that] was done that [may

have] limited our [grant] budget. While I'm building our relationships and the number of people who apply to us for funding, I'm also trying to build that relationship with better funders and also build up our asset base again as well." Following its final funding intake for 2022, which closed on Nov. 1, ETSI-BC officials announced they had received a total of 33 applications, requesting a total of more than \$900,000 in funding. But for this particular intake, ETSI-BC was planning to divvy up a total of \$375,000.

Douglas, who is not Indigenous, is one of just two ETSI-BC staff members. The corporation also has four project contractors. "We're trying really hard to reduce the overhead so that we can get as much money out to the communities as possible," Douglas said. She added that she doesn't believe it is an issue that ETSI-BC staff do not have any Indigenous ancestry. "What we do have is an increasing number of Indigenous board members now," she said. "So, the whole governance structure changed, which is going to have a lot more direct input from the First Nations in our region." Douglas believes this is rather important. "We're trying to make sure that our support is provided throughout the entire region to all of the residents, including the First Nations," she said. "There's been sort of a lack of engagement in the past."

More First Nations involvement will happen in part because of the Declaration Act Action Plan, which the B.C. government released this past March. The action plan includes information on how to implement requirements for the Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples. "We're all going to be participating in this process, which the provincial government will be leading, to involve First Nations in our region in the governance of our organizations," Douglas said.

Douglas believes there are various ways to determine ETSI-BC's success. "Economic development is one of those nebulous fields," she said. "You can count the number of jobs that your projects help to create or maintain. Or you can count the number of businesses that your projects have helped start or keep in business. But that's not really the only indicator for us." Douglas added ETSI-BC officials are focused on relationship building. "We want to create value for the economic development ecosystem in our region," she said. "So, relationships and the number of partners and the number of people that apply for projects for funding from us in our intakes — those are all indicators of how successful we've been reaching out and connecting with the right people."

Douglas also said her corporation tracks the specific outcomes of each project. "We're a funding agency, so each project will have different performance indicators they will have to report on," she said. "But for us as an organization, the number of engagements we have and the partners that we have [are] super important. The number of sectors we support is key because we want to make sure we have a really well-diversified economy in our region."

Douglas also has a message she'd like to pass on to youth. "There's a lot of focus on young people finding a job where they're making a difference," she said. "Economic development is an area where you can make a difference. It's a field that is kind of hard to define, but it's a great area for younger people to consider making a difference in. You get to make lots of connections with different players in an ecosystem, and you can get creative with taking the assets your community has and combining them in a different way to help people have a greater quality of life."

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Career Change Now Finds Payne Working with Federal Government in Procurement

Sam Laskaris

CANDO CONTRIBUTOR

Perhaps the person most surprised that Barry Payne is employed by the federal government is Barry Payne himself. Payne, a member of Hiawatha First Nation in Ontario, is currently working with Procurement Assistance Canada (PAC) as an Indigenous procurement specialist. Payne had previously run various successful businesses, including a furniture company and a staffing company. He was also enjoying his share of success with a relatively recent initiative he called his own social enterprise. He was utilizing his numerous connections, offering advice, and helping First Nations people get established in their businesses.

“I started OnNation, which was my giveback to society or to First Nations, trying to leverage my connections for people, helping them get established, and giving them advice,” Payne said. OnNation was thriving. “It was doing great,” Payne said. “The first contract we got was with Metrolinx in Toronto, \$7 million for an email software program, and it looked like we were going like gangbusters.” Agreements with other large firms ensued. “Then the pandemic hit, and like everything else, it went down the toilet,” Payne said.

When his last individual venture went belly-up, Payne, who said he was too young to retire, hopped on LinkedIn to search for any new opportunities. As it happened, he connected with a former colleague on the career platform. “She asked if I had ever considered working for the federal government,” Payne said of his contact. “I said, ‘What? The federal government? I never thought those two trains would meet.’” Payne was told he’d be an ideal candidate to work for the Canadian government. “She said we’d like to have somebody like you because of your background,” Payne said. “I was selling to the federal government for so long. I had probably sold well over \$250 million in various products in my lifetime to the federal government.”

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Plus, Payne had other useful attributes. “She thought having somebody like me in there, somebody people could identify with, since I am Indigenous and have some sales skills, would help,” he said. PAC hired Payne as part of a short pilot project in April 2022. Federal officials were keen to have Payne use his knowledge to help Indigenous people increase their bidding efforts on federal government contracts. The pilot project was deemed so successful that Payne was retained for another year. “It started out as a three-month pilot project for them, with me reaching out to Indigenous companies and people I know to encourage them to bid,” he said. “And the next thing you know, it’s just taking off, just snowballing. They would tell me there’s an organization we’re having problems chatting with, and they won’t return our calls. So, I would reach out to them because I know most of the people, and get them engaged. They just decided to extend that pilot for another year.”

With PAC, Payne was not exclusively assigned to work with Indigenous people. He’s also assisting LGBTQ2S individuals, people with disabilities, those that come from other racialized communities, and women entrepreneurs. His mission is to help increase their bidding efforts on federal government contracts and hopefully assist them in winning bids. “My mission is to share my knowledge and experience with others to increase their business success; as I always say, if I can do it, anyone can. Sometimes they just need some advice on how to do it,” Payne said.

Representatives of the Canadian government are undoubtedly pleased with the work Payne is doing. That’s because the federal government has mandated that at least five per cent of all its procurement opportunities be awarded to Indigenous businesses. “My goal, by getting involved with the procurement side, is that I want the waters to be a little safer for the next generation,” he said. “I met a whole lot of sharks [in] the early days. They were coming out of the woodwork to work with you, to partner with you. They weren’t doing it for good reasons. They were doing it for the money side of it — the access to opportunity.”

In considering a bid, Payne recommends spending time reviewing the statement of work or requirements for a specific bid and asking whether this is something that can be accomplished with confidence. After reviewing the Evaluation Criteria, decide if there is a competitive edge that will set the bid apart. Examine the instructions on how to bid carefully. Reach out to the contracting authority and ask for clarification early on in the process. Wasted energy can be avoided by reading through a specific bid carefully and thoroughly. Do not invest any more time or effort if the mandatory requirements are out of reach.

Payne maintains that while they can’t prepare a specific bid, they are there to offer general assistance and different kinds of help. They can support those who are new to the bidding process in refining the approach, finding new government clients, and, if necessary, helping find the right place to lodge a complaint.

Payne said he believes the federal government is doing its best when it comes to meeting its goal of Indigenous procurement figures. He believes his hiring is just a little proof of that. “If you’re looking at my department, Procurement Assistance Canada, it’s doubled in size in numbers,” he said. “Unlike a typical bureaucracy of the Canadian federal government, it really has reinvented itself. It’s gotten away from that whole concept where you have to have degrees up the yin-yang before they consider you. Now they’re looking at experienced people. They’re bringing this experience into the department to help leverage [it] and to help these Indigenous companies become successful. So yes, the federal government is putting its money where its mouth is.”

Payne believes a five per cent Indigenous procurement goal is realistic. “The business is there,” he said. “It’s a matter of how [badly] you want to work. The government has com-

mitted to five per cent, and they're doing everything they can possibly do to get [that] five per cent. My feeling is [that] if we don't make the five per cent, it won't be on the government this time. It will be on the Indigenous side because there is no capacity. We're trying to build capacity. And the feds are literally going out of their way to try to create capacity. That's where people like me fit in." Payne also said his bosses have set rather simple goals. "For my particular department, Procurement Assistance Canada, our goal is what I call job security," he said. "The more businesses that we have that are going to be successful, the more secure we'll be in our roles as Indigenous procurement specialists. So, the goal for me is to get as many successful Indigenous sources as I can, even if it is one at a time."

Now that he is on the government side of the table, Payne said he has noticed a difference in how things are done. "In the past, my role as an Indigenous business bidding on a contract would be to impress upon the procurement person who is doing the tendering that they mention to the contracting person that we'd like to make sure there's a set-aside component to benefit Indigenous businesses," he said. "A lot of times, I'm guessing 90 per cent of the time, the contracting person forgot. Now, if an opportunity is pursued, the contracting person actually has to fill out a form [explaining] why they didn't include a set-aside component. They're not going to want to fill out a form and say why I didn't do a set-aside. So, they're obviously going to include set-asides."

Payne does not believe that all corporations have a line of thinking like his. His hope? "The corporate world actually 'walks their talk' [and] actually supports what they're saying about truth and reconciliation," he said. "A lot of them spent a lot of money on fancy websites that state that they support truth and reconciliation. But when it comes time to actually support Indigenous businesses, it's meaningless. To me, the biggest hindrance is getting corporate Canada to actually support Indigenous businesses."

Payne, however, is loving his current job. "What gives me satisfaction is I get to use the 20 some odd years of experience of selling to the federal government in all types of capacities at all levels of government," he said. "The satisfaction is sharing [not only] my knowledge and experience of how to win tenders but also the hard lessons I've learned."

When needed, Payne doesn't mind giving his opinion on things that can go wrong. "Hard lessons to me, and this went on and it still goes on to this day, are what I call empty promises," he said. "The hard lesson is knowing when to cut bait. With the corporations, you can pick up the phone; they're all going to see you, [and] they're all going to talk to you. But at the end of the day, nothing happens. You just spent six months spinning your wheels. That was a hard lesson for me."

Since he is Indigenous himself, Payne believes that's important when talking to other Indigenous business owners these days. "Inherently Indigenous businesses come to the table with a totally different view," he said. "One of the things I always tried to impress upon clients was the fact [that] it's like a soup or a stew. Everything we do has many, many ingredients to it. A financial statement for us isn't just a bottom line with a lot of numbers on it. A financial statement for us is social impact as well." Payne believes it's best to simply be himself right off the bat when dealing with others. "When I approach First Nations, I approach them with no ego involved. It's a different philosophy. A lot of [the] ways we encounter people [are] through our teachings and our way of relating. I think that leads to our success and our ability to be effective."

Payne, however, realizes that securing funding is a major stumbling block for many Indigenous business owners. There are countless stories across the country of Indigenous people having horrible relationships with banks and other funding agencies. "I started out in

the late 90s, and I've encountered a lot of racism," Payne said. "In a lot of cases, the bank managers wouldn't talk to me or wouldn't talk to my partners. Racism was evident even in the pandemic funding. From a funding perspective, it's still hard, to this day, to get funding. The banks all profess that they have their Indigenous banking units, but they still don't really help that much. It's still a tough go if you're starting out an Indigenous business." With Payne's guidance, Indigenous entrepreneurs often find themselves approaching things a bit differently. "The ability to adapt is great about Indigenous people," he said. "We've been adapting for hundreds of years."

Payne added some advice he'd share with others looking for success in their fields. "The NIKE philosophy — Just Do It," he said. "And do it. And do it. The opportunity is there. You need two things in order to be successful. You need brains and a heart. And then you just have to show up and work. You really do because I'm not going to say the government is giving you the business, but you have to show up and your business will be there." And it's never too early for youth, who have an entrepreneurial spirit, to start thinking about and planning their futures. Payne also has tips for these individuals. For starters, seek out the numerous resources that are available now — items that were not readily accessible when Payne was younger. "When I was growing up, we didn't have support mechanisms in place," he said. He suggests others listen to as many motivational resources as possible. "It's positive thinking," he said. "You need positive thinking, and birds of a feather flock together. [It] should be easy for a kid to get that. You want to hang around with positive people; that will make you positive."

LaBillois Provides Mi'gmaq Employment Through Her Businesses

Sam Laskaris

CANDO CONTRIBUTOR



Victoria LaBillois
Wejuseg Construction

Source: WHO ARE WE — Wejuseg Construction

Victoria LaBillois wanted to be part of the solution. Mission accomplished. Many times over.

LaBillois, a member of Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation in Quebec, knew drastic changes were necessary for members of her community to benefit from the various projects taking place on their traditional territory. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, she worked for her First Nation, holding positions of director of economic development and intergovernmental relations. LaBillois was disappointed that, despite varying local projects, community members were often excluded when it came time to hire individuals to assist with different initiatives.

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LaBillois recalled that the two largest industries in the Gaspé Peninsula, which includes Listuguj, were fisheries and forestry. “We were excluded from those industries for various reasons,” she said. “It took a Supreme Court ruling for us to get access to commercial fisheries, and that was a long battle. And that was a recent battle. We’ve only been involved for 20 years. And if I look at forestry, when our people tried to get involved commercially, they were told that all the allotments were already handed out. And we couldn’t get access to these, so we had to blockade, we had to protest. Our people fought us, and governments fought us. Everything was going on. It was like the deck was stacked against us.”

LaBillois’s previous work experiences enabled her to understand how community members were being passed over for employment opportunities. “I worked for a time for [the] Chief and Council as director of economic development and intergovernmental relations in the late 1990s and early 2000s,” she said. “Just seeing everything happening around us, without us. The band is always the largest employer, and we were excluded from all of these projects happening across our traditional territory. You needed to move mountains to be a part of that.”

LaBillois said her First Nation’s fortunes began to improve when it became involved with wind energy projects earlier this century. When word spread that a wind farm was being built 45 minutes east of Listuguj, LaBillois was keen to be part of the action early on. She secured a tour site invitation. It took her only a short time to determine she was interested in getting involved to help create opportunities for her community members. “One of the things I came up with after looking at 300 pieces of heavy equipment was starting an excavation contracting company, just like that.” LaBillois said. “I didn’t know anything about it. But I have an MBA, and I know a little about business that I picked up in university and running previous businesses.”

LaBillois launched Wejipeg Excavation Inc. in 2011. “That first year, I leased equipment on three different projects,” she said. “Learning about maintenance, heavy equipment, and considering growth strategies, which meant purchasing equipment, [all] that developed over time to the point that I decided to go into a joint venture.”

That venture became Wejuseg Construction Inc., a company that she co-owns and leads as president. “When I created these companies, it was not to work in the community. It was not to work ‘on reserve’,” LaBillois said. “The band already creates employment [and] has a public works unit that looks after local projects. My goal was to create companies that bring [a] skilled Mi’gmaq labour force to projects across our traditional territory off the reserve.”

Wejuseg means “powerful wind”. The company’s philosophy is as follows:

With the completion of the wind park in Gaspésie, Quebec, we were able to train and engage over 100 Mi’gmaq tradespeople. Creating an energy source from the wind was empowering. Watching our community learn skills and engage in the project was uplifting. These projects were on Mi’gmaq land and were completed with the help of the Mi’gmaq people. Pride in our work is paramount and naming the company Wejuseg is our way of honouring our Mi’gmaq heritage. We have the desire and the expertise to create big things. (Wejuseg Construction Inc., n.d.)

Though she had to overcome numerous barriers, LaBillois persevered. “I had to learn everything,” LaBillois said in a 2021 magazine article for her alma mater, the University of New Brunswick. “I researched the industry from scratch. I was confident because I had the tool kit for business, and having the MBA allowed me to be taken more seriously.” LaBillois added that she doesn’t mind being a trendsetter. “There were not many women in the field at the time, and no Indigenous construction companies,” she said. “But barriers don’t stop me.

I find ways to go over them or around them. I walk on the job site as if I own it because I know I belong there. Growing up on a reserve setting and being treated like a second-class citizen has taught me to be resilient” (UNB Alumni News, 2021).

Launching a pair of companies enabled LaBillois to assist members of her community immediately. “One of the immediate impacts I think about is the employment I create for people in the community,” she said. “Of course, I hire the talent. Non-Indigenous employers in the region would overlook these people. I hire people who can have multi-barriers. These are people I know [who] can get the work done. So, I create employment. I create investment in the community because the dollars come into the community. Of course, I’m spending in the community, and I try at every turn to hire sub-contractors or to procure from different companies in my community that otherwise wouldn’t have that chance.”

Though they were once thriving companies, both Wejipeg and Wejuseg were greatly hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. “Everything flipped with COVID,” LaBillois said. “With COVID, the province of Quebec had shut down construction right from the get-go. Amidst all the uncertainty, I thought that was the end of the trail for both Wejipeg and Wejuseg. I didn’t know how we would survive, what we would do to survive.”

As it turned out, both companies could stay afloat because of a change in thinking. LaBillois’ businesses could keep operating because of the work they took on in her First Nation. For starters, there was a \$3 million project to install storm drains in her community. Her companies then got involved with significant infrastructure investment in the community, providing work for a housing development program.

Since both of her companies survived the first few years of the pandemic, LaBillois once again turned her attention to some larger federal projects, hoping to be involved with significant initiatives in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. “It forced serious reflection on where the company is going,” LaBillois said of some of the dark days her business endured during the pandemic. “Survival isn’t enough. We want to thrive. We want to also live in abundance. Shedding that mentality of scarcity is a challenge. So, we’re getting back to the original *raison d’être* for the creation of Wejipeg and Wejuseg.”

Admittedly, LaBillois was still determining whether either or both of her companies would still be around today. “There were some dark days during COVID, some dark days when I thought this is it,” she said. “But all the blood, sweat, and tears that I put into it — just like that, a global pandemic comes along, and I’m wiped off the face of this landscape. It was a struggle. I’m happy to say we survived that and are still here.”

Though her businesses have survived and at times thrived, LaBillois said being an entrepreneur, especially an Indigenous woman, has not been easy. “Racism, sexism, you name it, it’s out there,” she said. “But you need to look past it. And I think when I encounter this, it’s hurtful, frustrating, and makes you angry, but you need to move on from that. And I say I’m not the jackass whisperer. I can’t fix all these issues. I’ve just got to keep going and doing my own thing.”

LaBillois also realizes she will have to continue to overcome challenges each step of the way. “There’re always challenges,” she said. “People look at running your own business as this glamorous role and [think] that you’re the boss and call the shots. No two days are the same. It could be cash flow issues and waiting on payment, especially in construction; you could wait up to 90 days, which is the standard wait for payment. I always say sub-contractors are bankrolling general contractors.” LaBillois realizes that no matter how successful her companies become, challenges will remain. “It could be being overlooked for opportunities or projects,” she said. “It could be systemic bias — me not being taken seri-

ously as an Indigenous woman working in construction. There are lots of challenges that exist.”

LaBillois, however, plans to move forward. And not just for her interests. “I think it’s important that we all benefit [and] that the benefits accrue communally,” she said. “I’m not here to build this big empire. I’m here to ensure that our people are included in the regional economy, and I have the capacity and resources to kick down doors to make that happen. That’s what I’m going to do.”

And she’s not just doing so for herself. “It’s important for me because, recall, the original driver for me to create this company was to bring this talent of Mi’kmaq labour pool that was often overlooked in our region. The goal was to bring Mi’kmaq talent to projects away from the territory,” she said. “That is very important to me — that our people are working on our territory and that they’re also reaping the benefits.”

The word “quit” is not part of LaBillois’ vocabulary. In November of 2017, LaBillois was interviewed by CBC News at a conference in Moncton, N.B., which was geared towards helping Indigenous women start and run successful businesses. “Well, when the going gets tough, the tough put on lipstick — you just have to get it done,” LaBillois said. “I think it takes a strong degree of tenacity and courage to get up every morning and keep trying. No is not an option, right?” (Letterick, 2017)

LaBillois is also hoping that many others will follow in her footsteps. Before her appearance on the 2019 Cando Conference’s Women-in-Business panel, she spoke about her accomplishments. “We need to raise our women and continue to break the barriers,” she said. “Our women need to see success stories in real people they can relate to. My message is a call to action — whatever you are thinking about doing, just start today. There is no better time.” LaBillois also offered advice for other women who are contemplating similar roles: “Stand your ground, know your stuff, and own the room when you walk in — you are not a doormat” (Narine, 2019).

For LaBillois, however, success does not have to be measured in dollars and cents. “It’s not about making money or creating an empire,” she said. “It’s about creating these opportunities in the community and being that face of Indigenous business that [says] yes, we are here and capable, and we have a talented workforce. To me, that’s a success.”

LaBillois is also okay with passing on other advice, a wise practice she deems necessary for success. “Financial literacy is foundational to entrepreneurship and launching your own business,” she said. “So, to youth thinking about it, you need to protect and nurture your credit score, your credit. Educate yourself on this. Some key advice I was given early on was to borrow money when you don’t need it because when you need it, it’s harder to come by.”

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Soonias Leading Farm Credit Canada's Indigenous Agricultural Efforts

Sam Laskaris

CANDO CONTRIBUTOR



Shawn Soonias
Farm Credit Canada

Farm Credit Canada (FCC), the country's largest agricultural term lender, has been around since 1959. But it's only been the last few years that the Crown corporation, which reports to the Canadian Parliament through the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, has taken a much more serious approach to Indigenous agriculture. "How to support Indigenous agriculture wasn't part of the mandate and wasn't maybe looked at seriously until [the] early 2000s," said Shawn Soonias, a member of the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. "Leadership made some efforts to understand the opportunity and what the role might look like. It was [in] 2019 that the company was able to create that role that I occupy as director of Indigenous relations."

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Soonias believes Indigenous agriculture will now remain a focus for FCC officials. “Moving forward, we have a lot of deep connections with national Indigenous organizations, some key well-respected political leaders, Elders, and community members that we’ve used for advisory and engagements,” he said. “We’ve had ceremonies with some of our leaders in these spaces, so there is that level of direct connection with communities in terms of mentorships.”

Soonias is pleased to see FCC has some long-term planning when it comes to assisting Indigenous agriculture. “FCC is Canada’s leading financial institution that is 100% dedicated to Canada’s agriculture and food sectors,” he said. “We have the knowledge, experience, and expertise to support Indigenous agriculture in the same ways we have supported Canada’s agriculture and food industry — from individuals to national brands and everything in between. This, of course, will not happen overnight. We are planning not for the next quarter but rather [for] the next quarter century.”

Soonias said there are various ways his corporation is setting current goals. “FCC has undertaken a variety of processes to inform both our goals and actions in support of Indigenous agriculture and food,” he said. “This includes research, informal and formal engagement with Indigenous businesses and economic development corporations, government, industry, education and training institutions, non-profits and the academic sector to create better understanding, collaboration and synergies in support of Indigenous agriculture.”

In the spring of 2021, FCC officials released the results of an online survey of Indigenous producers and stakeholders. Despite the fact that they reported having poor to average experiences, more than 70 per cent of the producers indicated they planned to increase their participation in the sector over the next five years. “FCC is working to become a stronger partner in the advancement of Indigenous agriculture in the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration,” Soonias said of his corporation’s role. “As Canada’s leading agriculture lender, we are uniquely positioned to contribute to the success of Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs in this diverse and dynamic industry” (FCC sees opportunities for Indigenous agriculture, 2021).

Although Soonias believes the FCC still has plenty of work to do to become a better partner, it can also be an industry leader. “There is a rich history and traditions of Indigenous agriculture prior to European settlement, and we are now several generations removed from those practices and knowledge,” he said. “FCC not only has an opportunity to better understand the landscape of Indigenous agriculture in Canada but, more importantly, [to] provide Indigenous entrepreneurs with learning opportunities about agriculture and farm management.”

Work towards this goal will begin by having the FCC provide Indigenous awareness and relations training to its approximate 2,300 employees across the country. Training will help workers better comprehend both legislative and systemic barriers preventing Indigenous communities from fully taking part in Canada’s agriculture industry. It will also give employees an understanding of the historic, economic, and social challenges facing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit across Canada (FCC sees opportunities for Indigenous agriculture, 2021).

Though it is hoping to be viewed as a leader, Soonias realizes the FCC has plenty of work to do in this regard. In its own 2021–2025 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy, Soonias said the FCC is keen to hire more diverse talent. Only about three per cent of FCC’s employees self-declared as being Indigenous. “This is very important,” Soonias said of the need to increase that percentage. “Representation matters. The national percentage of Indige-

nous peoples in Canada is 4.9 per cent so we should at least get there. We also know representation by province and, even further, by community is different. While we know we still have much work to do, the number of Indigenous employees at FCC has continued to grow in at least the last four years.”

Though there is renewed Indigenous interest in agriculture, in an April 2021 Alberta Farmer Express article, Soonias talked about some massive barriers. “We see a tremendous amount of interest in all forms of agriculture,” he said. “But a lot of our communities are in a situation where they’ve been a couple of generations removed from agriculture, so they’ve got to recapture and reconstruct some of their skill sets. We’ve got our work ahead of us to address some of these things” (Blair, 2021).

Soonias added Indigenous agriculture is currently frequently focused on gardening, greenhouses, and the production of Indigenous foods. But he believes other parts of the sectors, including food processing, livestock, aquaculture, and non-timber forest products, also have plenty of potential. He told the Winnipeg Free Press this past October that there is a growing momentum among First Nations that want to be in control of their own lives. “There is a sense of urgency now,” he said. “Many Indigenous communities are beginning to take a much closer look at operationalizing their lands, from breaking new ground to reducing lands leased to non-residents, first to enable food security, then towards employment and financial sovereignty” (Whetter, 2022).

Though he’s only been at FCC for a handful of years, Soonias has worked for 30 years now with various organizations that support Indigenous groups. “I am still taken aback by my own naivete about other people’s lack of awareness,” he said. “I won’t call it ignorance, but [a] lack of understanding or awareness of the history, perspectives, and values held by Indigenous people in Canada. Understanding is lacking around what Indigenous organizations strive to accomplish and how.”

In an August 2021 interview with Industry West Magazine, Soonias said his greatest fear is that Canada will not reconcile with Indigenous peoples in ways or on a timeframe that will make a real difference. “One thing COVID revealed was that governments can and will do what is needed when a national response is required, even under a minority government,” he said. “I see reconciliation as a priority in Canada and hope that we can move forward as a nation. I approach my role at the FCC with reconciliation as the main driver, and I know that many other governments, businesses, institutions, and people are similarly passionate and focused on reconciliation. I remain optimistic that our grandchildren’s Canada will look and feel much more inclusive than the one we have grown up in” (Staff, 2021).

Soonias added that FCC reps also need to be aware and cautious of their presence in Indigenous communities. “Other sectors such as oil and gas, LNG, and mining have had decades to develop their understanding, awareness, trust, and relationships with Indigenous communities and businesses,” he said. “This is new to agriculture and food, so Indigenous peoples will take best practices and lessons learned from the other sectors and experiences and expect to move at the speed of light once they set their sights on agriculture. So, what we communicate to industry and how we help prepare stakeholders to build relationships and support Indigenous agriculture is important.”

Soonias added that there is also plenty of time to review FCC operations. “This includes reviewing how we do things, make decisions, market our products and knowledge, [and] what these supports look like to ensure they are inclusive, accessible, and culturally appropriate to our Indigenous customers,” he said. “This also includes our lending policies, risk appetite, definition of agriculture, credit directives, and other areas in order to mitigate

the barriers the Indian Act has for on-reserve security and how financial institutions have allowed this to prevent lending on-reserve.”

Soonias is certainly an ideal individual to be serving in his current position with the FCC. “The role allows me to bring my full skill set and experience,” he said. “I’ve held senior roles in child welfare, justice, education, as an independent officer of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, First Nations, municipal, provincial, and federal governments, and the non-profit sector. All of these roles have created a deep understanding of the social and economic challenges faced by Indigenous peoples, and these are all important lenses to bring to the agriculture sector. It is also critical to my role in building understanding and reconciliation informally through interactions with industry stakeholders, as well as internally for our employees’ knowledge around Indigenous awareness and how to build trusting relationships with the Indigenous community.”

Soonias’s responsibilities as the FCC’s director of Indigenous relations are much more complex than they sound. “The work of supporting Indigenous agriculture efforts is much more than simply business or economic development with Indigenous peoples,” he said. “This is about revitalizing the innovation, creativity, knowledge, and role of Indigenous [people] in agriculture. This is about meeting the domestic and export demand for healthy food. This is about strengthening Canada’s economic resiliency and role as a net exporter of clean, healthy agriculture and food products.” Soonias, however, believes goals must be accomplished by making sound decisions. “For our communities, some of the wise practices really need to be explored as part of due diligence,” he said. “We’ve seen examples of where communities might rush into sectors and partnerships with companies that may not be in their best interests or without having the right kind of business knowledge in a sector and not being able to make really well-informed decisions.”

Soonias believes Indigenous agriculture can play a vital role as part of a much bigger picture in the future. “This is a growing sector, not just for Indigenous people, in terms of enhancing how we use our lands,” he said. “We see the dynamics of global trade, global networks, and the fragilities of the food supply chain that were revealed through COVID. And they seemed to be more acute and apparent with the war in Ukraine. There’s going to be more pressure on Canada as one of the net producers of food that is going to be exported, and I think Indigenous peoples can really live into that.”

Soonias believes there are countless Indigenous agricultural success stories across the country.

These include the following:

- Kainai Nation in Alberta, which has the largest irrigation operation in Canada and is exporting premium Timothy hay internationally
- North America’s largest shellfish producer, Clearwater Seafoods, of which 50 per cent was acquired in a \$1 billion deal in 2020 by the Mi’kmaq Coalition
- Saskatchewan’s Boreal Heartland, a company utilizing traditional foraging practices in remote areas to create employment
- Manitoulin Brewing Company in Ontario, which has become successful in the food/beverage industry in part by building a brand that encourages tourism to further enhance customer engagement
- Saskatchewan’s NWC Wild Rice Company, which has not only achieved success by using traditional wild rice lands to create opportunities but also created a brand attached to their food

Soonias said FCC officials are hoping to encourage Indigenous youth to continue to enter the industry. To that end, the corporation has a program in partnership with Regina's Scott Collegiate. "We recognize Indigenous youth have not traditionally gone into agriculture," Soonias said. "It's not something where they would see role models in their community. Much like STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and some of these other areas, we have to build that awareness, that passion, and that pipeline. For young people, this is a huge opportunity in this sector. It's one of the most important sectors in Canada's GDP — it is our food security and our sovereignty."

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Outside Looking In: Inspiring Indigenous Youth with Innovative Programming

Sam Laskaris

CANDO CONTRIBUTOR



Tranter, 2020

After a career as a professional dancer, Tracee Smith was looking for her next challenge in her mid-20s. Upon obtaining her MBA, Smith, a member of Missanabie Cree First Nation in northern Ontario, had to decide whether to completely leave her previous dance life behind. She chose not to. That proved to be a wise decision indeed, as for the past 16 years Smith has been serving as the CEO of Outside Looking In (OLI), a charity she founded. OLI has various components, but it is primarily known for its dance program. It will work with students in various Indigenous communities and then invite them to Toronto to showcase their dance program in front of an audience.

“In your head, it sounds like a good idea, but until you actually try and do it and see how people respond to it, that’s when you really realize how powerful the program is,” Smith

This article draws on a personal interview with the author in August 2022.

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said. “After years of watching the kids where they start and where they go, it is heartening to see what they’re doing as adults. It’s nice to be able to say we had a small part in helping them develop into amazing adults who are now contributing to their own community.”

Smith is thrilled she was able to combine her own dance experience with overseeing OLI operations. “I was fascinated with the socio-economics of our communities,” she said. “A lot of our communities struggle economically. There aren’t a lot of jobs, and, as a result, kids don’t have any opportunities to play around with what they’re good at or discover what they like. Smith said the goal of OLI is not to turn everybody into a dancer. Far from it.

Instead, the charity is keen to bring focus into the lives of Indigenous students. “I think the thing I’m most proud of is that I started the organization to combat high school dropout rates that are a lot higher for Indigenous kids than the Canadian mainstream,” she said. “With our program, they have to stay in school, they have to achieve the requirements of our program, and they have to finish school.” Following up with various communities has proven that OLI is indeed achieving its goals. “When we went back after year 10 and looked at where our kids were, 97 per cent of our kids went on to graduate, which surpasses the Canadian graduation rates,” Smith said. “I’m very proud of that. We can say that we were a big part of helping them graduate from high school, which was really why I started the organization.”

Smith told *The Brantford Expositor* last May that she started OLI in 2007 to give Indigenous youth a reason to go to the school or to come back if they had dropped out. She added that the idea is to get students out of the traditional classroom and into a space where they can engage physically, emotionally, and socially. “Culturally, it’s a lot closer to our culture versus sitting at a desk all day,” said Smith, adding that the “carrot” for students is getting to dance and hear music every day. Smith also said she created the program as a tribute to her mother, who grew up in northern Ontario and had few opportunities during her childhood (Thompson, 2022).

Smith said she was more fortunate than her mother while growing up. “I had the best of two worlds,” she said. “I [have] danced since I was four. I turned professional. And then, when I got to a point in my mid-20s, I said, ‘What am I going to do now?’ I completed my MBA, and I realized that I could go right into business and leave dance behind. Instead, I married the two passions, and I started a business with dance. So, I turned my business into a charity.”

Though dance is the medium to achieve goals, Smith wants others to know what OLI is hoping to accomplish with its program. “What a lot of Canadians see about Indigenous people is such a small part of our community,” Smith said. “There are amazingly talented people. (Indigenous) people aren’t all troubled, like the media try to construe. They don’t need us to come rescue them. This program is about making the next leaders of these communities. They’re the ones going to college, to university. They’re the next political leaders; they’re the ones making a change in their communities. It’s a program for kids who want more and who want to see positive change in their communities. That’s what it’s about” (shedoesthecitey, 2017).

Smith herself notes that the OLI program over the years has had unexpected impacts within communities. “They do fundraisers, and I never foresaw that it brings the community together,” she said. “It’s really brought the various families closer in communities. Many of our students have run for Chief and Council. They’re starting to influence policy in their communities.”

Smith always sensed that success via the OLI could go on to generate even greater opportunities for those in the program. “I felt if we could engage kids through dance, they’re going to be more likely to economically contribute to society,” she said. “And that’s exactly what’s been happening with this organization. We engage them, and we keep them engaged. They’re involved with their communities. They’re successful with our program, and then they strive for more. They want to do our program again.” And that’s why many Indigenous communities continue to remain involved with the OLI. “A lot of our kids do our program over and over and over again,” Smith said. “Next, they graduate high school, and they’re ready for the next step. They might go into full-time employment, or they’ll go into post-secondary education. Our alumni are all employed. It’s very rare [that] we find a kid [who] is staying at home doing nothing. Our kids are engaged, and they’re more likely to have jobs or go to school.”

In a 2016 *Toronto Star* article, Smith said that students in the OLI program “self-select” by working hard. “Sometimes when we go into communities, [we hear] parents say the bar is too high, but I always say, ‘Just watch your kids, because they will reach it’” (Taekema, 2016).

OLI operates with a budget of \$3 million annually. “We do well with that,” Smith said. “But if we had \$10 million, I could do more amazing things.” OLI doesn’t apply for any government funding. “All of our money is received through private corporate sponsorships or through donors,” Smith added. “To me, that’s what keeps me up at night. It always has.” Despite its numerous successes, Smith believes OLI could potentially be doing even more if additional funds were flowing into communities or being lent out. “We know our kids, and we know their issues,” she said. “We know they live in overcrowded housing. We have many kids who don’t have clean water or running water in their house. People are wrong if they think that doesn’t affect the kids day to day. If you don’t have clean water or fresh food and you don’t feel very well in the morning, then you’re not going to do well in school. Even if we have this amazing program, if those kids have experienced five hurdles before they can get out the door, they’re not going to be at school. The fact [that] our kids make it to school every day is pretty amazing.”

Smith said school days become even more interesting for OLI participants. “Dance is so powerful,” she told the *Nunatsiaq News*, a publication covering happenings in Nunavut as well as the Nunavik territory of Quebec. “A lot of kids come together from different parts of the community, and it begins to break down those barriers. You kind of lose yourself in the moment. There’re lots of studies that show how certain endorphins get released when you dance. Your stress reduces” (Tranter, 2020).

When possible, Smith said OLI likes to hire its former students to run its program in their communities. “I think it’s important to give the opportunity and see who applies, but I think at the same time it’s important to chase people,” she said. “Sometimes people don’t know if they’re ready for a full-time job or they’re not sure if they can do it, especially our alumni. But when you empower them by telling them that yes, you can do it and that you should be ready for this kind of job, they’re excited.”

OLI has had its share of challenges as well. “When you run a small charity, the [challenge is] that you don’t want to lose any money,” Smith said. “You don’t want to lose any sponsors. You’re trying to stay relevant. We charge a fee for our program. We make sure the community is very serious about the program because we don’t want to go into communities that aren’t ready for such an intense program.”

Upon reflection, Smith said she was uncertain how long OLI would last. “The challenges are more at the community level when you start really implementing the program. There are challenges [for] staff, volunteers, and the kids in the program to work through. Their challenges are really your challenges. From an organization perspective, if you had talked to me in Year 4, I would have said, I don’t know if we’re going to be here next year because you don’t know where your money is coming from.”

Smith also said there are various ways OLI representatives determine success. “If the communities think that the kids were successful, then we were successful,” she said. “If the communities want us back again, then we were successful. And once you start diving into each kid and how our program helped them, that’s success too. And every kid has a different story about how our program helped them. That’s success to me. And the fact we’re still here 16 years later shows that we’ve been successful, and we’ve stuck the course and rode the waves.”

Smith admitted, however, that she’s had some moments wondering whether she should continue running OLI. “There’ve been many times when I’ve wanted to give up,” she said. “There have been times when you say I’m going to throw in the towel. There are times when people can be very mean and rude, and there are people who try to take you down. I think all of us have experienced that. But you have to let those days go and just wait until tomorrow to start again. We’re telling the kids not to give up [and] to just stick with it, so we have to do the same things. We have to ride those waves. There’s always going to be good times and there’s always going to be bad times, no matter what.”

Smith believes OLI performances can also be enlightening for members of the public. “The reason it’s called Outside Looking In is because non-Indigenous people can come to our show and learn about these communities,” she said. “It’s a multi-media show. A lot of people are always inspired and made to feel a little bit different. I get a lot of non-Indigenous people saying to me that I’m going to see a lot of Native dancing. I tell them that Natives are dancing, but they are not Native dancing, which is the stereotypical thing. It’s an education about who we are, rather than who we should be. Sometimes there are changes in attitude when people come to our shows, which is good.”

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Introduction

David Newhouse

In this issue, we address two important issues: COVID-19 and poverty. As this issue goes to press, the World Health Organization has just ended a world-wide public health emergency that addressed COVID-19. The impact of the three-year pandemic on Indigenous communities was severe, with many nations and communities resorting to lockdowns to prevent the spread of the virus. Economic activity throughout the world, including in Indigenous communities, was severely curtailed. Indigenous communities demonstrated incredible strength in the face of an unprecedented public health crisis as they worked to protect the health of their communities and nations.

Ken Coates and Greg Finnigan examine the impact of the pandemic on Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations (AEDCs). The AEDCs, like all enterprises, faced challenges in keeping their companies operational. AEDCs, because of their community mandate and because they had access to or could access goods and services, helped communities in ways that were not normally part of their purview. Some procured and delivered PPE, groceries, and medicines to remote communities in addition to supporting the enterprises in their portfolios. The use of a crisis management framework for the development of AEDC responses proved to be effective.

Poverty within Indigenous communities remains high despite a half century of development effort since Wabung in the early 1970s. Liam Kelly examines Native American experiences to see if we might learn from them. Kelly reviews the experience through the lens of institutions rather than programs. He highlights the importance of ensuring that the key institution of land and its governance are reformed as they are foundational to economic development as well as creating access to credit,

mortgages, and other banking services. He argues that more research is needed in remote and rural communities to understand the institutions that can work at these sites.

*The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on
Aboriginal Economic Development
Corporations (AEDCs), 2019–2021:
An Interview-based Perspective with CEOs*

Kenneth Coates and Greg Finnegan

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

ABSTRACT

Collaborating with the Canadian Council on Aboriginal Business (CCAB), the authors investigate how Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations (AEDCs) responded to and, in most cases, weathered the commercial disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Working from survey interviews, supplemented by business data from previous CCAB national surveys and other governmental information, the authors explore the challenges that CEOs faced and how they managed their companies through the COVID crisis. For many of the AEDCs respondents, the problems they were facing were not necessarily brought on by the pandemic but were outgrowths of pre-existing socioeconomic disparities that had been exacerbated by COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, these CEOs battled to maintain operations, manage and support staff in trying circumstances, and keep their assets operating or safely managed. They frequently assisted their home communities with services not normally within their purview, including producing PPE products and delivering groceries and medicine to remote communities. This report focuses on crisis management and can be a useful reference point for policymakers and decision-makers looking to create coherent responses to whatever the next crisis faced by EDCs might be.

Key Words: Indigenous economic development, business response to COVID, resiliency, digital divide, social inequality

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the pandemic, the *Indigenomics Institute* reported that the Indigenous economy in Canada was valued at some \$32 billion, with the potential to grow to \$100 billion by 2023–2024 (Hilton, 2021). This growth rate would have outpaced the overall national economy if not for the pandemic. On the labour force side of the equation, Hilton (2021) notes that *the Indigenous youth population is set to reach one million by 2027 and is growing at four times the national average, representing, if it can be harnessed, a considerable future labour force within Canada*. However, Statistics Canada notes that unemployment for Indigenous Canadians is still unacceptably high, while high school and university graduation rates remain substantially below the national average (Anderson, 2021).

This paper reviews the thoughts, opinions, and plans of a selection of ten Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations (AEDCs) Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) who managed their corporations through the COVID-19 pandemic to understand the impacts of the pandemic on their corporations, out of a total of 260 AEDCs, or 0.03%. The research is built upon in-depth interviews using a survey instrument that was jointly designed by the authors and researchers from the Canadian Centre for Aboriginal Business (CCAB). AEDCs represent Indigenous community owned institutions that, when at their best, are generators of financial investment opportunities and wealth generators (what equates to own-source revenue), hubs for employment and training opportunities, and incubators for entrepreneurship. They represent one of the major pillars of Indigenous sovereignty, along with self-government, control of resources and territory, cultural integrity, and linguistic survival. Their CEOs commonly work to build opportunities that could improve the lives of Indigenous community members while navigating the challenging waters between expectations and reality, as well as between traditional Indigenous beliefs and practices and settler society's demands for access to land, resources, and labour.

THE SURVEY

This Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) and the University of Saskatchewan (USASK) survey completed in 2021 during the pandemic was funded by a Canada Social Sciences and Humanities Research grant and through matching support from staff at the Johnson-Shayomo Centre for Public Policy — Policy North research group and research staff at CCAB. The survey instrument consisted of twenty-two questions that were vetted by CCAB staff, university ethics, and a former CEO of a Canadian AEDC. CCAB received permission from participating AEDCs to link the current interviews to previously surveyed business records collected by CCAB in their 2019 Aboriginal Business Survey. This added depth to the analysis and effectively bracketed the pre-pandemic scenario with today's ongoing dilemma, data for which was captured in the first section of the questionnaire, which covered current business characteristics using the same questions as the 2019 business survey. The survey questions covered five themes: general impact, impacts on relationships, financing and funding, and outlook and recovery.

The SSHRC Partnership Engage Grant provides limited funding for the initial exploration of a current research problem between university researchers and other public sector research organizations, in this case, the Canada Council for Aboriginal Business. In this case CCAB and USASK agreed to conduct ten in-depth interviews with the senior management of a selection of Canadian Indigenous development corporations. The sample

drawn reflects, to the best of our ability, national coverage; however, due to the severe challenges the pandemic has created in Indigenous communities, not all of the original sample could participate. In total, ten surveys were conducted, of which CCAB had detailed business survey data for eight from a previous national business survey conducted in 2018–2019. This survey resulted in an oversampling in Saskatchewan, with four AEDCs. It also includes three respondents from the far north, with two from the Yukon and one from the NWT. AEDCs also completed surveys in Nova Scotia (representing Atlantic Canada), Ontario, and British Columbia, providing a strong but not perfect cross-country breakout. It should be noted that a number of CEOs felt unable to participate; they were just exhausted from dealing with COVID.

The interviews are supplemented by financial data collected by the CCAB prior to the pandemic in their national business survey of Indigenous businesses as well as information gleaned from the CCAB's larger-scale COVID pandemic survey reports (CCAB Original, 2020 & Phase II, 2021). The financial data for the AEDCs involved in this study were collected between May and June of 2018, with this data representing a baseline for comparison to the 2021 data collected during the interview process in 2021. This paper highlights the findings of the more in-depth interviews held with the senior executives of ten AEDCs selected from across Canada. The survey instrument is included as an appendix. Anonymity was key to allowing the participating CEOs to speak freely. Concerns were expressed by the authors regarding respondent fatigue within the Indigenous AEDC community, especially coming from the COVID-19 pandemic and in general from the personal experience of one of the authors as a past AEDC CEO.

This survey of AEDCs asked participants three questions:

- Have these positive business projections been affected by more than two years of pandemic economics?
- How have Aboriginal economic development corporations (AEDCs), the engines driving the Indigenous economy, weathered the pandemic?
- How are these AEDCs preparing for the post-pandemic recovery?

We also recognize that in these traditional, underserved, and often remote communities, the AEDC and the local economy are inextricably linked to social welfare and community well-being. Health Canada numbers show that Indigenous Canadian communities have been more severely impacted by COVID-19. The pandemic has laid bare the inequality within Canada and across the globe, between haves and have-nots, between the educated and those who are ill-equipped to understand, let alone trust the health sciences, and revealed the lack of resiliency in many of Canada's Indigenous communities, where the memory of western plagues and pandemics represents a deep scar (Daschuk, 2013). The crowdsourced data derived from Statistics Canada (2020) indicates the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit:

- Indigenous participants report a greater impact on their ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs than non-Indigenous participants.
- Indigenous participants report worsening mental health.
- Indigenous women participants, in particular, report strong impacts on economic well-being and mental health.

They concluded that these stronger adverse impacts are linked to pre-existing vulnerabilities, including longstanding and persistent disparities in socio-economic conditions.

COVID-19 AND THE HEALTH OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES AND THEIR AEDC

Indeed, on-reserve First Nation communities have suffered a higher infection rate and a much higher death rate than non-Indigenous Canada (Indigenous Services Canada, 2022). The 2016 census of Canada reported that there were 820,120 Status First Nations people in Canada, of which 40%, or 331,025, lived on-reserve. Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) reports on confirmed cases of COVID-19 testing results daily, but note that due to home testing and individuals choosing not to get tested, these numbers underestimate all positive COVID-19 cases in First Nations communities. Reports of deaths are inevitably also undercounted and will not be adjusted until after the pandemic has ended and a more refined analysis of the pandemic's impact on society can be scrutinized. Gupta and Aitken (2022), in their Statistics Canada study on the impacts of COVID-19 on racialized populations in Canada, offer this conclusion: *The relationship between low income, racialized populations and COVID-19 mortality could be explained by multiple pathways. Current literature suggests that people with non-White racial or ethnic backgrounds tend to have lower socio-economic status, less adequate housing, worse access to a health care provider, and poorer healthcare provider experience* (Gupta & Aitken, 2022).

As of January 6, 2022, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) was aware of the following situation on First Nations reserves:

- 57,344 confirmed positive COVID-19
- 3,927 active cases
- 2,472 hospitalizations
- 52,848 recovered cases
- 569 deaths

Using 2016 census population counts as a denominator, which is an underestimate of the current on-reserve population due to the higher birth rates commonly associated with First Nation reserve communities, we can provide an estimate of the on-reserve Indigenous Death Rate for Canada and compare it to the national level to provide one proxy measure of the impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous Canada.

Using the ISC numbers and Census 2016 population figures, it is possible to estimate the death rate per 100,000 of the on-reserve Indigenous death rate from Canadians nationally and those not living on First Nation reserves as a means of understanding how challenging the pandemic has been for First Nation communities and, by proxy, their Development Corporations (Figure 1). The numbers are tragic, with the on-reserve death rate being twice that of the Canadian rate for people not living on-reserves at 172/100,000 compared to 86.8/100,000 nationally. Canada's response to the pandemic leaves it internationally ranked among the more successful western nations, especially when compared to the USA at 257/100,000 or the United Kingdom at 226/100,000. John Hopkins University and Medicine Coronavirus Resource Centre data shows that the death rates on reserve in Canada are com-

FIGURE 1 Death Rates/100,000 of Indigenous Canadian Living On-reserve Compared to the Rest of Canada, as of Jan. 6, 2022								
Canada Total Deaths	Canada 2016 Census Population	Death Rate/ 100,000	Canada total Deaths — Not On- reserve	Canada Pop — Not On- reserve	Death Rate rest of Canada/ 100,000	Deaths On- reserve	Canada 2016 On- reserve Pop	Death Rate On-reserve/ 100,000
30,788	35,151,728	87.59	30,219	34,820,703	86.78	569	331,025	171.89

Sources: Calculated by authors using data from Indigenous Services Canada, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1598625105013/1598625167707> (Accessed Jan 10, 2022); Statistics Canada, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/41-20-0002/412000022021001-eng.htm>

parable to those in the South and Central American nations of Uruguay (179), Panama (176), and Bolivia (174), all of which have high Indigenous population counts and much weaker public health programs than Canada.

But the impacts of COVID-19 on First Nation communities and businesses cannot just be reduced to the number of diagnoses and the death rates.

The impact must also be recognized through the global reduction in workforce productivity and economic performance. The pandemic has resulted in massive reductions in productivity in the labour force and workplace, affecting all sectors of the economy.¹ We cannot even begin to access the immeasurable damage done to Indigenous youth through the pandemic with the loss of school hours, which was exacerbated by their limited access to online schooling tools, the mental health issues created by quarantining in overcrowded housing conditions, and the probable further erosion of Indigenous family life caused by the pandemic. These students were already falling behind the national standards for educational attainment.

RECENT RESEARCH ON COVID-19 AND INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES AND THE LABOUR FORCE

The challenges created by COVID-19 in the Indigenous labour market are reviewed by Bleakney, Masoud, and Robertson (2021), who recognize that business closures have resulted in layoffs that have increased already persistent inequalities in the Indigenous labour market. Using the Labour Force Survey (LFS), which provides the timeliest data available on labour market characteristics of Indigenous people in Canada (but only for off-reserve populations), they find that young adults and women appear to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic, as well as older *Indigenous workers, who are more vulnerable to the economic and health impacts of COVID-19*. On a more promising note, Bleakney,

¹ For example, see initial investigations at: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/3238/COVID-decade-understanding-long-term-societal-impacts-COVID-19.pdf> and <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/economic-bulletin/html/index.en.html>

Masoud, and Robertson found that the employment rate among Indigenous youth in the three months ending in August 2021 surpassed its pre-pandemic and summer 2020 levels, while the labour force participation rate among Indigenous youth was 66.8%, the highest since the onset of the pandemic. However, they do not provide any clarity on why this may be happening. They conclude that, *following the initial impact of the pandemic, employment recovery had generally been slower among Indigenous people*, while their analytics show that recovery has been remarkable in some provinces and less so in others, possibly related to different COVID-19 health restrictions in place by the respective provinces.

Writing from the Australian perspective, Dinku, Hunter, and Markham (2020) believe that the ongoing digital divide that exists between settler society and the Indigenous community may be a particular problem for Indigenous people working remotely. They state that *poor access to the internet for a substantial number of Indigenous households may also exacerbate access to remote education*. These statements could be just as readily applied in the Canadian context, where the digital agency divide between Indigenous and settler society widened through the pandemic, with remote Indigenous Canadian communities suffering poor internet connections while their limited household incomes could hardly support the need to gear up for a transition to digital education.

Whether the pandemic experience differed for First Nation children in Canada, both on- and off-reserve, will have to await post-pandemic educational reports. But given that 29.7% of off-reserve First Nation households were already found to be in the low-income segment of the economy (prevalence of low income based on the low-income measure, after tax — LIM-AT, percentage based on 2015 income data), compared to only 13.8% for the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2018), with the increasingly technology-enabled workforce, Indigenous households, both on- and off-reserve, were ill-equipped to participate in the remote work environment or to participate fully in the digital agency learning environment.

The survey results indicate that COVID-19 had not only negative impacts on AEDC finances, especially on business revenues, but also surprisingly positive outcomes related to employee–management relations, community response, and “pulling together” as a community to combat the pandemic — a response that was often regional and national in scope. It is important to remember that AEDCs do not function in the same way as settler-society businesses. As Anderson et al. (2005) state, *the goal of Indigenous people pursuing “development” in Canada is not economic development alone, but economic development as part of the larger agenda of rebuilding their communities and nations and reasserting their control over their traditional territories*. Financial outcomes during the pandemic very much depended on the industrial sectors the AEDCs were involved in, with tourism and retail sales being heavily impacted along with exports of commodities such as seafood.

The level of corporate diversity that AEDCs had achieved prior to the pandemic would also have directly impacted their resiliency. Finally, the severity of public health measures enacted locally, such as lockdowns and restrictions, which led to either temporary or permanent closures, meant that some industries were more impacted than others. For example, Graney’s report in *The Globe & Mail* (2020) noted that the Alberta government’s policy of declaring the oil industry and the oil sands programs as essential services shielded many Alberta and Saskatchewan AEDCs that held contracts in the sector. The survey found that AEDCs demonstrated resiliency during the last year and a half by responding quickly to the fast-changing environment, accessing funding from the federal and provincial governments, diversifying their subsidiaries before COVID, and successfully transitioning to work-

ing from home, among other strategies. Being empathetic is a clear message that permeated most of the interviews, and almost every participant stated they felt optimistic for the future despite listing pressing needs and challenges. Is it not the core mindset of entrepreneurs to be optimistic?

Brüssow and Timmis (2021), in an editorial on the societal consequences of long COVID on the labour force, noted that the economic recovery of low- and middle-income counties may be much slower. Their prescription for resolving this begins with the recognition of the greater impacts of societal long COVID on less economically secure communities and policies that can be developed to bridge the gap coming out of the COVID pandemic. Societal long COVID in this case relates to the issue of trust within society and with the government. Aassve et al. (2021), accessing attitudes of immigrants arriving in America from the *General Social Survey* database, conclude that the social disruption and mistrust caused by the Spanish Flu of 1918, including social distancing, the sheer number of deaths, and those deaths being concentrated within the young adult population, were greater among immigrants from countries that had suffered higher death rates than from countries that had lower death rates. This speaks directly to Indigenous Canada, which suffered much higher death rates than the general population during COVID-19. This, coupled with the long history of inequality in settler-Indigenous health and education outcomes, will only add challenges for Indigenous AEDCs as they reopen post-COVID-19.

Prior to the pandemic, many AEDCs made major contributions to the financial positions of their respective communities. Through audited statements, it is possible to determine the impact of development corporations on the financial performance of First Nation governments. Using a sample of 68 Ontario First Nation audit reports from 2013 and 2014, Richards and Krass (2015) *found that own-source revenue constituted, on average, 31% of total band revenues; these are funds primarily ... generated by AEDCs.* They found that First Nations *with higher per capita own-source revenue increase their spending on economic development activities[] but only modestly increase their investment [in] education and health,* two essential sectors of their society that require investment.

In a detailed analysis of twelve First Nations audited statements, Coates and Finnegan (2022a) found that five of the sampled communities had a 20% or higher reliance on own-source revenue within their total revenue package, with three of these being as high as 40% or more. They found that own-source revenue contributed to the finances of all of the First Nations in their sample but was rather marginal for a third of their sample group. On average, their smaller national sample indicates that First Nations appear to rely on own-source revenue for 19.5% of their total revenue during the period 2018–2020, a figure considerably lower than that found by Richards and Krass (2015) in their Ontario case study at 31%. How the downturn in the economy caused by the pandemic will affect AEDCs will then spill directly over into how their communities finance government and government programs.

For small and often remote Indigenous communities, adjusting to a downturn in government own-source revenues would be difficult to accommodate. It takes years to build and invest in businesses and projects; economic opportunities are often very limited for Indigenous communities, while their political and economic resiliency is generally not seen as high. Membertou, one of Canada's most successful Indigenous communities with a substantial base in urban land development, gaming, and commercial real estate, is currently relying on own-source revenue for 69% of their total funding (Coates and Finnegan, 2022b). How this translates through the current multi-year pandemic will test their management abilities and their bankers' willingness to extend support throughout the pandemic. Membertou listed

32 outstanding loan and mortgage instruments in its 2019 audited statement valued at \$65.1 million prior to the pandemic, much of it financing commercial ventures and housing. Even with this substantial economic base, Membertou reported a 28.9% unemployment rate in 2021, down slightly from the 36.6% rate of 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2023: Membertou 28B, Indian reserve).

INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS

At the announcement of the formation of Eagle Spirit Energy Holdings Ltd. in 2012, Dave Tuccaro, one of Canada's top Aboriginal businesspeople, stated that *major corporations do not understand that the era of business-as-usual [approaches] to offering beads and trinkets to First Nations for projects in their traditional territory is over. Aboriginal people are not anti-business, and they recognize the opportunities that development brings, but projects need to be done on their terms* (Cision News, 2012).

Economic opportunities for remote Indigenous communities, which make up the majority of our sample AEDCs, are usually limited unless major mining or other natural resource activities, such as fisheries and timber harvesting, are active in the region. Many AEDCs operate community grocery stores or convenience stores, which provide considerable revenue and some local jobs but usually have a low ROI.² Due to their small, remote markets, these grocery/convenience stores usually carry high freight charges and often struggle to find skilled managers. Again, due to their remoteness, AEDCs often invest in some form of freighting or expediting venture in an attempt to reduce freight costs by investing directly in the sector. As many of the AEDCs we are studying are active in the natural resource sector, it is common to find drilling firms, camp catering companies, and heavy iron/machinery firms in their investment portfolios. Less common are firms that specialize in tertiary-level skill sets, such as surveying and remote sensing, GIS mapping, or geological sciences, such as mineral exploration. Swartz (2014) notes that a few AEDCs have invested in aviation (either fixed-wing or rotary), although this is less common.³

The sample also demonstrates the increasing reach of AEDCs, as six of the ten were selling services or goods into other provinces or territories in Canada and, as such, operating outside of their local communities or traditional territories. A further four replied that they were selling services or goods internationally, while 30% noted selling into the North American marketplace. Surprisingly, one AEDC replied that they do not do business in their own community, which in this case shows the division between local community development corporations operating at the community scale and an AEDC investing in larger-scale regional and national projects (Figure 2).

² Greg Finnegan, co-author of this study, was the CEO of the Na-cho Nyäk Dun Development Corporation 2016–2020, which operated Mayo Foods, Mayo Yukon. Over a decade of data showed that the grocery store in this remote community never achieved a return on investment above 4% per annum.

³ Between 2016 and 2020, the Na-cho Nyäk Dun Development Corporation partnered with firms in surveying and geomatics, invested in a venture capital group, acquired a 50% share in an airplane leasing firm, developed its own mineral exploration company, and searched for investment or ownership opportunities in an information technology service.

FIGURE 2 Business Geography		
Question: In the past year, in which of the following places did your business have clients?	Yes	No
Within your local community	9	1
In other parts of your province/territory	10	0
In other provinces/territories in Canada	6	4
In the U.S./Mexico	3	7
In countries other than the U.S./Mexico	4	6
Source: USASK/CCAB Survey 2021		

The AEDCs that participated in the survey collectively owned seventy-five business entities, 7.5 each on average, with a range of two to thirteen separate business entities.

Indeed, while eight of the sampled AEDCs interviewed were owned by a single First Nation, it is not uncommon to find multiple Indigenous communities joining together to finance and manage an AEDC; for example, there are over twenty-five communities working collectively in one of the sampled AEDCs, while another provided economic development opportunities to eight communities.⁴

GOVERNMENT/BANKING SUPPORT

Eight of the ten businesses surveyed mentioned that they applied for COVID-19-related funding from the federal government, with the other two AEDCs saying they did not qualify for any of the programs. The most common programs accessed were the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA), the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS), and the Indigenous Community Business Fund (ICBF).⁵ Half of the AEDCs applied for COVID-related funding at the provincial or territorial level of government, but most businesses that accessed COVID-19-related funding said that the money they received was not very impactful. It was helpful but fell short of their larger funding needs. Those denied funding support lacked the financial records required to meet

⁴ AEDCs also partner with each other and with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous private sector firms to establish business entities and project their economic reach into larger economic regions and opportunities. The First Nation AEDCs may be either active or silent partners in these partnerships, but the goal is to share proportionately in the profits and acquire jobs for band members. First Nation AEDCs can use their government ownership status to attract grants and research funds for the partnership and, in some instances, their tax position to reduce exposure to corporate taxes. A number of the larger AEDC revenues in this data are related to these partnerships.

⁵ Information on these programs can be accessed at: <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/covid-19-faq-financial-support> and https://apeetogosan.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ICBF-Information-FAQ_FINAL.pdf

FIGURE 3 Government Procurement		
<i>In the past year, in which of the following places did your business have clients?</i>		
Level Of Government Sales	Yes	No
With federal government	1	6
With the provincial/territorial	6	2
With municipal government	3	4
Source: USASK/CCAB Survey 2021		

government approval, specifically being unable to prove revenue from the prior fiscal year, which speaks to auditing and accounting challenges.

The USASK/CCAB 2021 survey asked CEOs: *Did your organization have outstanding loans with banks or an AFI (Aboriginal Financial Institution) prior to the pandemic?* While there is a general perception that most AEDCs received considerable support from their banks or their regional AFI when it came to financial management issues, our sample population appears to have had less contact than expected based on the question related to loans. Six of the ten respondents reported having loans prior to COVID-19 with the banks, three did not, and one gave no response. Only two respondents had financial commitments with an AFI or the First Nation Financial Authority; seven did not. Again, one did not provide a response. Very few CEOs provided feedback to us regarding their relations with their bankers, with only two offering a commentary:

Banks were fairly receptive and understanding. Did what they could. Overall positive.

and

The FNFA was open to assisting us with payment plans and granted it. It was a bit of a process, but it saved \$200,000 in interest. Charter banks were not.

The national banks would have had little interest in foreclosing on financially distressed clients during the pandemic.⁶ Meanwhile, AFIs, which often helped manage government funding for Indigenous businesses during the pandemic, are clearly mandated to find solutions and support Indigenous business activity. An early CCAB survey found that over one-third (36%) of Indigenous business respondents had no current lending relationships with banks, credit unions, or government lenders, a finding running parallel to these results. Peredo, Schneider, and Popa (2022), in their review of the growth of Indigenous banking, note that, *In sum, the financial landscape oriented to Indigenous entrepreneurs is expanding*

⁶ In light of the COVID-19 crisis, six of Canada's largest banks (RBC, TD, BMO, Scotiabank, CIBC, and National Bank) announced that they will allow some customers to defer their mortgage payments for up to six months. See: <https://www.canada.ca/en/financial-consumer-agency/services/mortgages/mortgage-deferrals.html>

in terms of the actors and the types of services offered. This lack of an existing lending relationship may pose a barrier to organizations requiring quick access to capital in a crisis or when a limited-time opportunity to purchase or invest in projects occurs. It also brings into question the historic distrust between banking institutions in settler society and Indigenous communities and businesses, although the major banks in Canada stress Indigenous business banking and have established specialized divisions to address the issue and bridge the gap.

The sample also included a range of new and older AEDCs, with a couple of the firms in existence for less than 4 years and five between 20 and 40 years of experience. On average, the AEDCs in the sample had eighteen years of business experience. One question that business surveys are loath to ask is how frequently there has been a turnover in the senior executives, which speaks to continuity and stable leadership. Also, the data on years since formation is useful; however, it should not be equated with continuity of business activity as many AEDCs go through periods of limited activity, especially those dependent on the boom-and-bust economies of the resource sector.

AEDC FINANCE AND REVENUE

Of the ten AEDCs participating in the review, CCAB had financial reports for eight based on participation in the 2018 CCAB survey. These eight collectively had revenues of just over \$291 million in gross revenue in 2018 and employed 1247 employees either directly or through their subsidiaries. The AEDC revenues as reported to CCAB ranged from a low of \$2.5 million to more than \$90,000,000. Four of the 2018 AEDCs had revenue in excess of \$25 million, and only one had less than \$10 million. These were substantial companies. It should also be noted that the research team did not select the companies to be interviewed based on their 2018 revenue. Indeed, many firms declined to participate, probably due to the stress of the pandemic on their staff.

By 2021, the financial situation had radically changed, with five of the eight AEDCs reporting losses in gross revenue totaling \$141 million. The total revenue generated by the ten AEDCs in 2021 was estimated to be \$302 million, but only one firm generated \$74 million of this increase. This firm increased its revenue from \$90 million to just over \$165 million in the three-year interval from 2018 to 2021. Removing this highflier from the equation, we see revenues for the other firms dropping from \$200 million to \$86 million, a 57% reduction in revenue generation.

The two new participants in 2021 reported that they would be posting losses in 2021 compared to their earnings in 2018, which had been progressing in a positive trend prior to the pandemic. Again, CEOs were reluctant to discuss the losses they were incurring, citing late audit reports or skirting the question with indirect responses. However, one CEO of a firm that is posting a 50% reduction in revenue but who has years of experience in their position noted:

The negative side of COVID-19 has been [that] it's cost us money, for sure, in some areas. It cost us some money to implement the new technology to be able to have remote workstations, laptops, [and] things like that; we've had to pay for them. There's been a loss of revenue as well on the resource side; tour buses can't come to Canada, so that's been a real hit for us. The other one would be losing staff, either from fear of COVID or actually getting COVID, you know, or just the

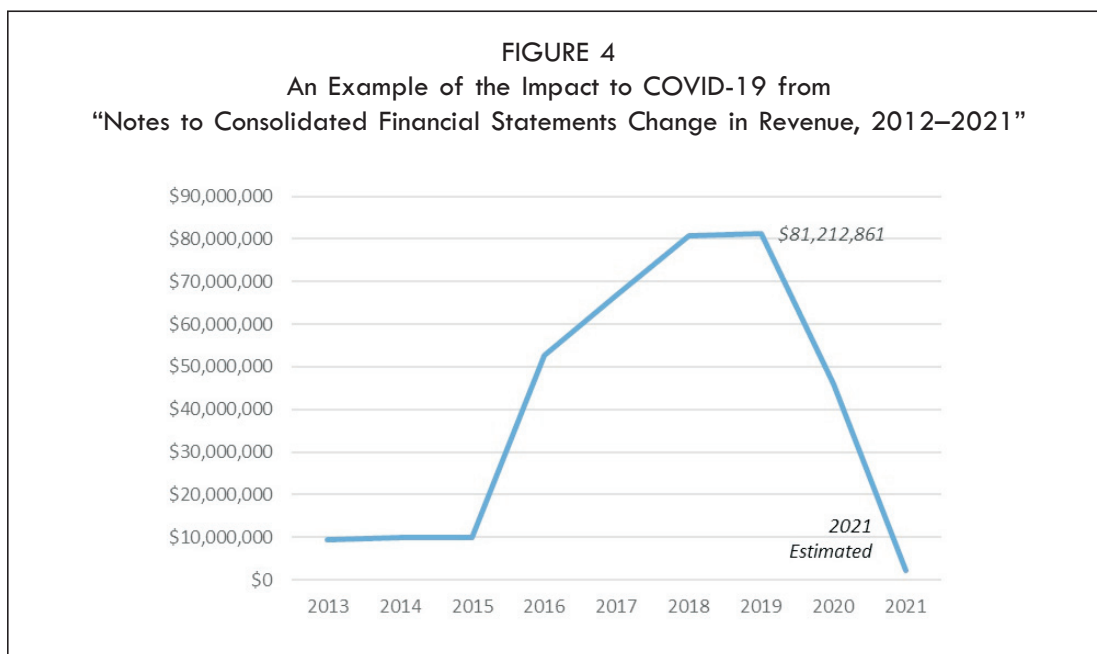
depression that has gripped a lot of people around this pandemic. We've seen, you know, some of the good top staff members that show up to work every day slide down a road of alcohol and all that stuff, and it's been very challenging to try to operate an essential service like the store, which is the only store, the only gas station, the only bank, and the only postal outlet in the community.

Only three of the ten AEDCs reported revenue increases, one of which jumped from around \$90 million to over \$160 million, as noted previously, an increase of around 80%. As the CEO of that firm stated:

We had a strong balance sheet coming into COVID; not everyone did. We were actively looking for opportunities, such as distress sales, in the hospitality sector. We were able to take advantage of that. More buying opportunities. However, every positive opportunity was someone else's loss — like other companies failing or [losing] jobs.

However, this AEDC leader's ability to respond to the pandemic was in the minority, as most went into what might best be called "survival mode", with the emphasis being on protecting their community, their family members, and their staff. Many of the AEDC CEOs interviewed were themselves community members, and the survival of the Elders, their employees, and poor community members was their core concern, including, as some stated, mental health.

... And keeping everybody safe, that is the other one. It has always been my priority. I have a couple of high-risk staff members, and that is, number one, to me; it is more, more than anything [that] nothing happens to them. I do not want to see any of my staff go down with this, perish because of the disease.



or

So, again, the cultural norm of our operations, for our business enterprises, and safety for Elder[s], both at work and in the community, (we do not want COVID) causing impact.

Losses could be truly staggering for partnerships that failed during the pandemic, as shown by the collapse of one AEDC's gross revenues, which had been steadily climbing since the formation of their construction partnership in 2015–2016 (Figure 4). This AEDC reported that the partnership ended in 2020, possibly under the pressure of the pandemic (Indigenous Services Canada, Notes to Consolidated Financial Statements). For 2021, the CEO was estimating AEDC revenues of only \$2.3 million. That is a staggering 97% decline in revenue over two years.

Other AEDCs suffered, too, especially those with revenue streams from tourism and casinos. As one CEO stated:

From a retail perspective, our gaming has been negatively affected in particular, so that's, you know, slot machines and VLTs and stuff like that, so that [have been] closed by orders of the government a few times [and] that are actually closed right now. So, that has affected us both revenue wise and with employment.

Of interest was one CEO's perspective on tourism, when they noted that:

Our corporation is more interested in wealth and revenue generation. That's why they aren't into tourism.

On Canada's coasts, where Indigenous fisheries have become big business with hundreds of millions in investment going into fishing fleets, processing plants, fishing quotas, and fish farms, one CEO noted that their international sales for specialist products had taken a major hit:

Seafood did take a hit. This year, countries like China and Italy both got hit pretty hard with COVID early on, and [they are] our two biggest or top three biggest export[s] or so; that really took a chunk out of us for seafood sales, especially lobster and scallops.

On the northwest coast, the transboundary nature of fish stocks created havoc for First Nation fisheries. The burden of cross-boundary COVID-19 measures added to the already stressful situation of dealing with American Homeland Security.

We transport fish from Canada — the fish that are caught on the Canadian side of the U.S. border — and then we transport them to the U.S. So, [for] the last number of years, we have had an increasing requirement to transport [goods] across the border because of Homeland Security. And then COVID-19 came in on top of that. So, there [are] little layers of [regulations] — you know, is this Homeland Security? Or is it Homeland COVID-19 stuff? This is just another regulatory cost that we deal with in our wild fish operations.

FIGURE 5 Estimates of Gains and Losses by AEDC 2018–2021				
Organization	Revenue 2018 (EST)	Revenue 2021 (EST)	Change 2018–2021	% Change
AEDC 1	\$13,700,000	–\$318,000	–\$14,018,000	–102.3%
AEDC 2	\$10,000,999	\$870,000	–\$9,130,999	–91.3%
AEDC 3	<i>Not Reported</i>	≈\$42,500,000	<i>Estimated Loss</i>	—
AEDC 4	\$57,604,000	\$14,000,000	–\$43,604,000	–75.7%
AEDC 5	\$28,500,999	\$42,850,000	\$14,349,001	50.3%
AEDC 6	\$75,202,997	\$2,300,000	–\$72,902,997	–96.9%
AEDC 6	\$92,000,000	\$166,000,000	\$74,000,000	80.4%
AEDC 8	\$2,501,998	\$1,300,000	–\$1,201,998	–48.0%
AEDC 9	<i>No Survey</i>	\$5,000,000	<i>Estimated Loss</i>	—
AEDC 10	\$11,500,000	\$25,000,000	\$13,500,000	117.4%

Source: USASK/CCAB Survey 2021

Effectively 70% of the AEDCs interviewed in this process reported dropping revenue between 2018 and 2021, with losses ranging from 48% to a staggering 102% (a negative revenue position as the AEDC paid down debt owing to their Trust), as shown in Figure 5.

THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE FACING INDIGENOUS INDUSTRY

The CCAB's COVID-19 Indigenous Business Survey Phase II (2021) found that the most pressing need brought forward by Indigenous businesses continued to be a *return to normal* as their primary concern during the pandemic. Some CEOs reported that they are unable to adapt to remote work or have faced cancellation of contracts due to the pandemic, with 72% responding that they still needed financial support. The CEOs interviewed in the CCAB COVID-19 survey noted that the main challenges they have to deal with are:

- Declining or no cashflow due to prolonged business closures, decreased demand for services, or cancelled contracts is especially challenging for the tourism industry.
- Prolonged lockdowns and restrictions are impacting businesses, especially in tourism, retail, and hospitality, and gravely impacting revenues, such as casino profits, which are limiting the ability of the AEDC to financially support their governments and other social programs.
- Communication with community, leadership, and governments (which was often challenging before the pandemic) became more difficult for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the decision by many Indigenous governments to shut down without work-from-home plans or limited access to the internet and the tools to work from home. For some, it took them a while to adjust to videoconferencing and working from home.

Some community political leaders needed financial and professional support from the AEDC. Some AEDCs have poor relationships with the political leadership and community members.

- The lack of childcare during the pandemic created challenges for families, both for those working from home as well as those expected to be working on-site during the pandemic.
- The cost of doing business became more expensive as the price of construction and raw materials increased, and the uncertainty of the availability of goods and services, as well as labour, further magnified the challenges faced by those working in remote communities.
- Initial challenges remain: access to capital, equity, and funding; intergenerational trauma; CERB re-enforcing state dependency for some Indigenous people; and communication of health and safety protocols with governments. *Even more reporting and protocols to deal with than before while staff numbers ... dwindled or [their] effectiveness ... dropped off.*

Finally, some 36% stated that meeting public health regulations could be costly (paying for PPE, body temperature scanners, increased cleaning, reduced in-store capacity), and some reported challenges communicating the protocols to staff. The two-week isolation period and travel restrictions were difficult for remote, northern, and border communities with a labour shortage and more dependent on the tourism industry. In some cases, the AEDCs were dependent on interprovincial or migrant workers (for example, the Provincial Nominee Program).

To make matters more difficult, they needed to address all these changes, protocols, and economic challenges while employment and the sourcing of staff became an issue for many participants, as they mentioned finding and keeping employees was difficult due to CERB, travel restrictions, and health protocols. Finding skilled Indigenous staff was challenging even before COVID, and this pandemic exacerbated it. Almost all participants reported staffing as a major problem.

PIVOTING

Some of the most interesting business stories that appeared during the pandemic's early days related to the ability of small firms to pivot production in response to demands for PPE gear such as hand sanitizer, masks, and medical gowns. One example, drawn from Aboriginal Australia, is Yarn Strong Sista, an Aboriginal education consultancy that worked exclusively in early childhood teaching, delivering an in-class suite of hands-on lessons. Locked out of classrooms, they went to online delivery and adjusted their programs to include Zoom meetings with Aboriginal men undertaking rehabilitation, delivering culturally attuned programs stressing Aboriginal cultural artifacts. As Professor Evans of the Melbourne Business School (2020) notes: *We know that businesses everywhere are doing it tough, but stories like this tell us how resilient First Nations businesses are. Indigenous people have been in business for 60,000 years. We've experienced challenges before, and 2020 will be just another challenge in our long history that will enable us to adapt and to show how culture is more relevant than ever.* Other firms pivoted from alcoholic drinks to hand sanitizers to address the demand for the product in First Nation communities. (Taylor, Bakes, & Richardson, 2020). Feel-good stories of these successful pivots seemed to abound on the

internet and in the media, as there were few enough positives in 2020. CBC Windsor led with “The pandemic pivot: A check-in with companies that shifted to help during COVID-19” (September 13, 2020), while Global presented “5 Canadian businesses on how they pivoted to online platforms” (*Global News*, January 23, 2021), and BNN Bloomberg ran with “‘Great amplification and support that’s happening’: Small business owners pivoting during COVID-19” (November 3, 2021).

However, the AEDCs surveyed here did not pivot their products or services, possibly due to the industries they were in. Industries like gaming and hotels, construction, mining, and energy services were difficult to pivot. These firms’ management focused more on continuity and adapting their processes to working from home than changing their products/services or diversifying their portfolios. Where change did occur was at the level of internal administration, for example, by adapting to working from home, adopting new technologies, and changing job roles and expectations. More than anything, COVID-19 meant that senior management had to take on more jobs and responsibilities. This may lead to early burn-out for these oft-overworked business leaders, an issue that could be followed up with in a future survey; however, there was no talk of burn-out or mental fatigue by those interviewed, which speaks to a considerable resiliency within the AEDC ranks.

One CEO with a camp catering company in their portfolio noted that with the almost total shutdown of their mining business clients, they found themselves tackling smaller catering opportunities regardless of the size or value of the project. Most said they did not, or could not, pivot, or that it was *business as usual*. One CEO did note that their specialized Indigenous clothing manufacturing line went from selling wholesale to direct e-commerce sales; although this may have been a logical next step in the business development, COVID-19 certainly pushed them into the online sales market.

HOW WILL THEY RECOVER?

The survey also asked the AEDC CEOs about their perspective on recovery and the major barriers they see to getting their businesses back up and running. Health authorities are guarded in their discussions of the pandemic and its various waves and concerns about new variants. Several of our CEOs optimistically talk about a “return to normal” — to a pre-COVID-19 business optimum.

Government restrictions — we keep saying things will open, but then we move back. It will be dependent on when we can get back to normal.

This is especially the case for those AEDCs that have invested in tourism and gaming and that have hotels and golf courses or plans for these on the books. They must return to an open economy with high customer turnover, unrestricted travel, and open borders. There is no other business model on which they can pivot.

The biggest barriers will be the industries we are in and how long they will take to turn [around]. When people travel more, the hotels will fill up; when there [are] hockey tournaments and concerts, the hotels will rebound. The biggest barrier will be time and returning to normal.

Several participants laid the blame for tighter labour markets on the government's response to COVID-19, which included offering living wage supports; however, most were very empathic to the plight of their workforce, especially their Indigenous community members, and saw the heavy fiscal burden that Canada and the provinces took on as a viable short-term solution to a highly unusual event, a global pandemic. Some did express concern that the high debt levels incurred by the government will lead to reduced funding for Indigenous businesses as the government reduces programming for Indigenous organizations as part of larger fiscal clawbacks.

Most of our participants noted that they had undertaken some business planning and repositioning during the pandemic as they attempted to reposition their corporations. Some of these were very extensive; one CEO noted they had developed a 160-page emergency response plan for repositioning the firm during COVID. Equally, they stated that they need funding support from governments to plan and research how to restructure existing firms and initiate new business opportunities. They were equally in agreement that they lacked the financial and staff resources to manage these planning exercises and that the capital equity coming out of the pandemic was exhausted. Many mentioned that they used outside consultants, lawyers, accountants, and other professionals to develop their business plans, which usually include community consultations and interviews, all of which would have been cancelled during COVID-19 or transitioned online.

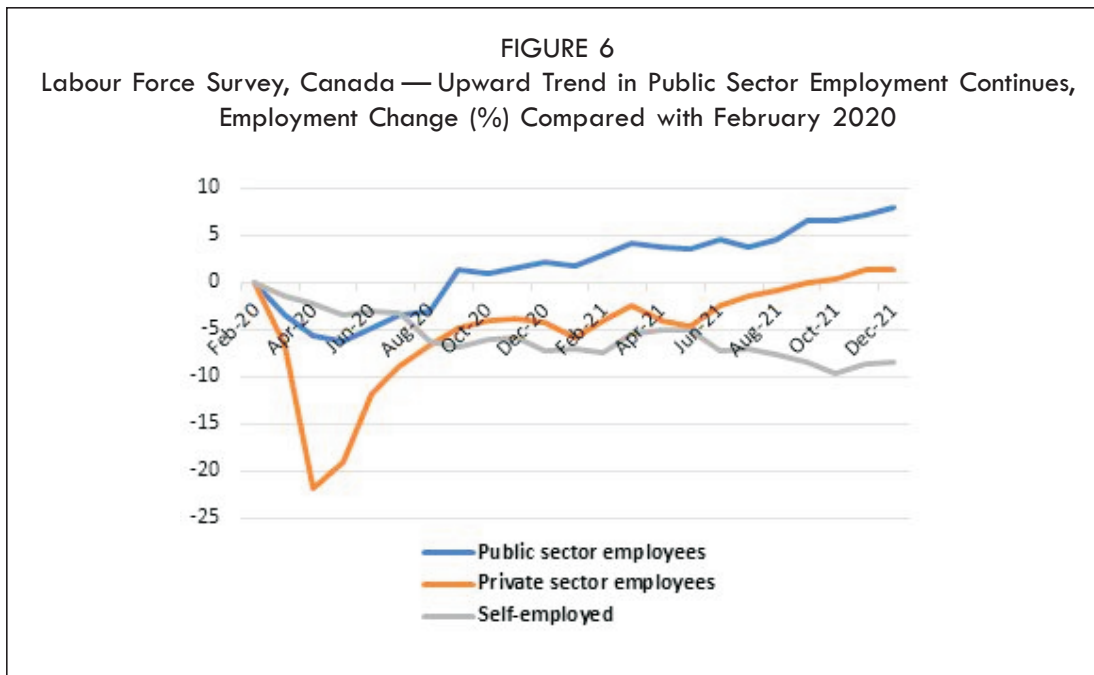
Other participants brought up the contracted labour problem but recognized the internal challenges. They noted that *lateral violence* was still an issue in the communities, as was low self-esteem, both by-products of the residential school system, and a far too great dependency on the welfare state. One CEO also noted that Canada needs to emphasize working around an economy instead of social programming and that the First Nations need to break their dependency on welfare. In response to what they need to recover, one CEO stated:

We need to undo the societal damage that Canada has done to the communities. Healing needs to happen on all sorts of levels; (we) need a major mindset change. A sizeable portion of the population [needs] to learn [that] they are good human beings and that they have potential and skills.

This speaks to the need to work with the communities to harness the young Indigenous labour force positively, to engage them in a dialogue around education, labour market opportunities, and the need for them to participate in rebuilding their communities. *Training, funding, hiring*, as one CEO neatly summarized.

While labour shortages should resolve themselves as the pandemic is brought under control, as vaccination levels reach herd immunity levels, and as wage support programs terminate the mismatch between available labour, the skills required by developing AEDCs are still very much an issue for Indigenous corporations.

Education and skills/training programs are still required, as one CEO noted: *No one wants to fund someone to learn how to get off the couch*. But these life skills often have to be learned in a formal setting, as the colonial regime that has plagued Indigenous Canada needs to be unlearned. This mismatch between available labour and required labour is behind CEO calls for the return of the temporary foreign worker program. However, the one issue that AEDC CEOs agree about is capital/equity and funding guarantees. The recovery depends upon access to capital, and as one CEO stated, on-reserve communities have no money and often no jobs.



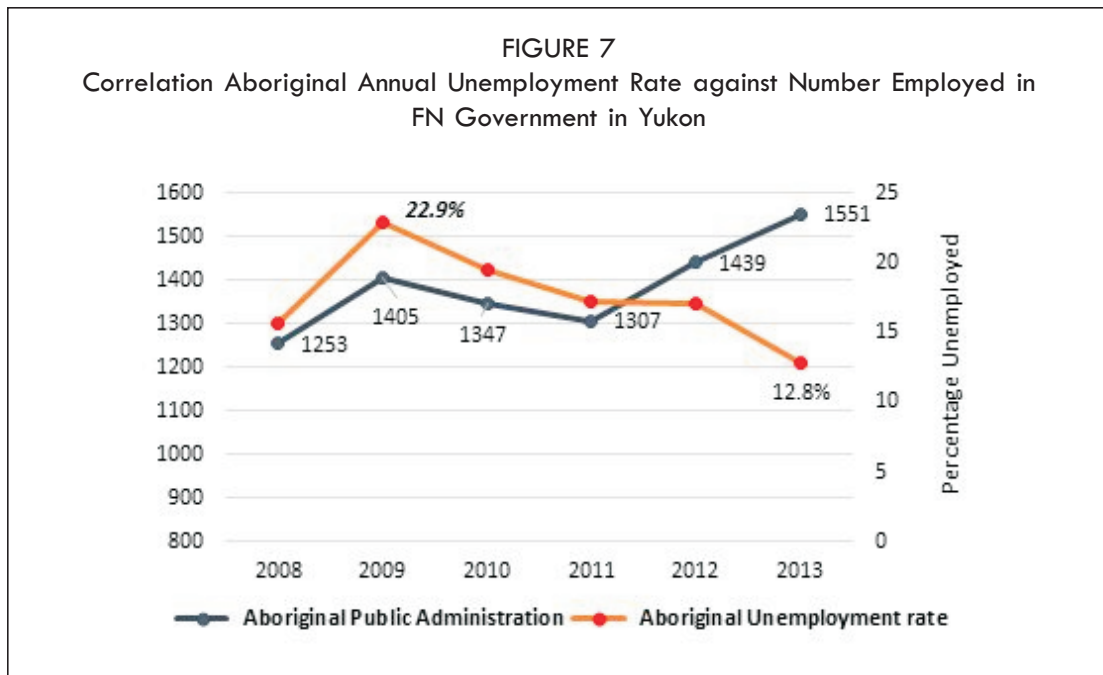
Access to capital (pre-pandemic and post-pandemic) is a huge issue in Indigenous Canada as a whole and for all AEDCs. With the Mill project, it is hard for them to maintain equity when they have no access to capital. Most reserves have no money. We need ... some kind of loan [guarantee] to allow Indigenous people to truly participate in the economy.

PANDEMIC AND THE INDIGENOUS ECONOMY

Statistics Canada reported in December 2021 that, compared with December 2019, total employment among Indigenous people was up 10.4% (+67,000) in December 2021. Increases in manufacturing (+19,000; +47.8%) and public administration (+15,000; +32.7%) contributed most to these gains (Figure 6). Over the same period, employment increased 0.7% (+138,000) among non-Indigenous people (three-month moving averages; not seasonally adjusted).⁷

While this points to a recovery in the Indigenous labour force, it does not necessarily equate with long-term recovery, as Finnegan (2013) showed for the 2008–2009 era recession. “Aboriginal” governments in Yukon acted as security nets for their people during this period of high unemployment, adding jobs in First Nation government to help community members bridge a period of considerable distress (Figure 7). However, many First Nation

⁷ The Labour Force Survey (December 2021) information for Indigenous people reflects the experience of those who identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, and who live off reserve in the provinces. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220107/dq220107a-eng.htm>



governments are reported to have been at minimal staffing levels during the pandemic, and this option was clearly not available to them (Coates and Finnegan 2022b).

Indigenous self-employment continued to be problematic throughout 2021, dropping by a total of 8.5% from February 2020 to December 2021. Self-employment, while a small percentage of the total employment of Indigenous people in Canada at only 4.7% of all workers (considerably less than the Canadian non-Aboriginal rate of 7.6%), is an essential foundation for the building of entrepreneurship and wealth in the economy.

However, these are often the small business owners working on contracts in the construction, transportation, and resource extraction industries, as well as in the service industries, such as professional services, health care, and other services such as hairdressing and retail trade. These businesspeople have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and its frequent work stoppages, community shutdowns, and interprovincial and international travel restrictions (Figure 8).

CONCLUSIONS

Within our sample, the prioritization of the health and safety of staff was a common theme, almost without exception. CEOs and boards stressed the long-term health and safety of their employees and their communities over financial gain. Senior managers moved into front-line positions when and where necessary to ensure that vital services in community stores were covered. One CEO in the Yukon who was not a participant recounted driving for upwards of five hours each way to deliver food and medicine to the remote Indigenous community he worked for in 2020–2021, dropping the supplies off at the barrier on the highway, and driv-

FIGURE 8
Canada Labour Force Characteristics, 15 Years and Over,
Indigenous Compared to non-Indigenous, 2017–2021

		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Indigenous	Total (x 1000)	1,033.50	1,073.80	1,114.30	1,153.80	1,195.90
	Percentage Change		3.9%	3.8%	3.5%	3.6%
	Not in Labour Force	375.6	393	409.5	454.1	433.2
	Annual % Change		4.6%	4.2%	10.9%	-4.6%
	Participation rate	63.7	63.4	63.3	60.6	63.8
	Unemployment Rate	11.4	10.4	10.2	14.2	11.6
Non-Indigenous	Total (x 1000)	28,730.70	29,146.70	29,580.50	29,898.80	30,130.20
	Percentage Change		1.4%	1.5%	1.1%	0.8%
	Not in Labour Force	9,873.00	10,110.60	10,164.30	10,737.70	10,535.40
	Annual % Change		2.4%	0.5%	5.6%	÷1.9%
	Participation rate	65.6	65.3	65.6	64.1	65
	Unemployment Rate	6.2	5.8	5.6	9.4	7.4

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0359-01 Labour force characteristics by Indigenous group and educational attainment (x 1,000), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410035901>

ing back home. Another senior business manager volunteered to manage the office of another remote community, as the staff and council were too sick to come to work, even to print the welfare cheques.⁸ Countless selfless acts could be recounted across Canada as Indigenous AEDC staff pitched in to assist their communities; these are just two. The AEDC staff responded quickly and, in most cases, effectively, to the COVID-19 pandemic; there was no playbook provided to them on how to manage businesses during a pandemic. It is apparent that they did not use COVID-19 as an excuse to close their businesses or take time off. They effectively transitioned to working at home, using e-commerce and e-communications tools to continue to operate their businesses and protect their corporate assets. A few thrived during COVID, increasing their revenue and growing their assets by buying distressed businesses.

However, the majority of AEDCs — upwards of 7 of 10 in our population and 73% in a national survey completed by CCAB — saw their revenues drop precipitously and had to lay off staff and close businesses. At the same time, they struggled to manage under the burden of the COVID-19 lockdowns required to keep the population safe until vaccines could be developed and administered (CCAB, 2021). The 2021 CCAB national survey found that almost half (48%) of Indigenous businesses laid off staff either temporarily (33%) or permanently (15%) due to the pandemic, while only 11% hired new staff. The pandemic has cre-

⁸ Personal correspondence Chris Cowx, CEO, Copper Niisuu Development Corporation with Greg Finnegan 2020, 2021.

ated a new business environment, changed business practices, and trained a new generation of Indigenous businesspeople in, if nothing else, risk management, while clearly drawing upon a strong empathetic core that is central to Indigenous culture.

Indigenous peoples have long and complicated histories in business, trade, and economics. Trading activities predated the arrival of Europeans by thousands of years, with long and resilient commercial networks that spread from coastal areas to the interior, throughout the prairies and parklands, and across vast distances from north to south. European traders, particularly those in the fur trade, capitalized on, undermined, and transformed Indigenous commerce. After Confederation in 1867, the Government of Canada imposed the Department of Indian Affairs, the Indian Act, reserves, and other controlling mechanisms on Indigenous people, all of which restricted Indigenous access to the mainstream economy and cut off First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people from business and employment opportunities.

Over the last 50 years, Indigenous people and communities have fought for opportunities to participate in the Canadian economy. It was a tough battle, resisted by governments and businesses for much of that time. But the combination of constitutional recognition, negotiated settlements, modern treaties, court decisions, procurement arrangements, and, more than all other elements, Indigenous initiative, pried open commercial access. Aboriginal economic development corporations played a critical role in this Indigenous economic resurgence, combining entrepreneurship with community ownership and a new commercial model that placed a high priority on the combination of business success and collective Indigenous well-being.

The global pandemic was just the latest in a series of challenges facing Indigenous communities and businesses. Indigenous communities and businesses were more vulnerable than much of Canada because of pre-existing Indigenous economic conditions, limited access to investment capital, the challenges of attracting skilled workers to remote communities, and the convoluted market forces of a disease-ridden world. Across Canada, Indigenous economic development corporations retrenched, innovated, adapted, retrenched, and survived, in the fine and long tradition of Indigenous peoples operating within historically unwelcoming national and international economies. In those adaptations and in improved relations with the broader business community and the Government of Canada, there are hopes for continued commercial innovation, business development, and a positive economic impact on Indigenous people and communities.

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APPENDIX 1: CHECK ON FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

The financial reporting of the First Nation AEDC can be cross-referenced in many cases to First Nation annual audited statements filed with Indigenous Services Canada under their notes for revenue and/or for financial assets, as shown here for a sample First Nation. In the CCAB business surveys, this First Nation reported no revenue, which was clearly a misinterpretation of their financial position. Although they state that they are *not for profit*, NFPs still generate revenue, as shown below in Figure A1, which totalled \$8,709,192. We can also see here that expenses were over \$7.8 million, leaving a net income of \$799,937 after amortization in 2018. However, the financial position took a considerable downturn in 2019, with each of the First Nation's economic development companies being shown to be losing money, with an accumulated loss of \$497,366. This was a month prior to the first WHO announcements regarding the pandemic, indicating that this First Nation was seeing a downturn in its economy prior to the pandemic. We have not used the audited statement data here to amend this First Nation's entry in the research paper, as the AEDC itself, as a separate business entity, may hold shares in these firms as well as other assets, such as hydropower, not listed here. But this does show another avenue to explore First Nation government investment in businesses. As the CEO notes on the impact of COVID-19 on their renewable power business, *our energy has not changed either[;] the sun continues to shine[,] the wind continues [as] well, so you are still using energy[,] so that has not been affected.*

FIGURE A1
Notes on a First Nation's Consolidated Financial Statements,
Investments in Business Enterprises

Financial Position							
Cash	\$ 18,213	\$ 105,116	\$ 74,320	\$ 55,942	\$ -	\$ 253,591	\$ 396,577
Receivables	68,884	8,913	791	959,559	123,294	1,161,441	1,558,970
Taxes recoverable	-	281,823	7,505	164,438	21,271	475,037	564,970
Prepays	156,375	1,156	117	23,509	13,708	194,865	361,505
Inventory	-	-	120,063	611,355	-	731,418	439,261
Future income taxes	-	-	-	11,723	20,892	32,615	26,342
Property, plant and equipment	5,767	11,054,439	99,774	340,788	1,210,045	12,710,813	11,873,855
Total assets	249,239	11,451,447	302,570	2,167,314	1,389,210	15,559,780	15,221,480
Bank indebtedness	-	-	-	1,092,817	152,366	1,245,183	869,029
Accounts payable	78,706	404,209	208,067	279,722	9,409	980,113	1,811,326
Taxes payable	3,454	-	-	20,245	2,067	25,766	59,503
Long-term debt	-	-	89,583	-	429,167	518,750	495,834
Due to related parties	1,790,400	1,882,137	153,808	18,748	160,338	4,005,431	3,831,885
Total liabilities	1,872,560	2,286,346	451,458	1,411,532	753,347	6,775,243	7,067,577
Share capital	100	11	11	121	200	443	443
Deficit	(1,623,421)	9,165,090	(148,899)	755,661	635,663	8,784,094	8,153,460
Total liabilities and equity	\$ 249,239	\$ 11,451,447	\$ 302,570	\$ 2,167,314	\$ 1,389,210	\$ 15,559,780	\$ 15,221,480
Results of Operations							
Revenue	\$ 1,931,857	\$ 92,475	\$ 1,335,427	\$ 7,946,401	\$ 145,219	\$ 11,451,379	\$ 8,709,192
Expenses	(2,017,687)	(257,136)	(1,518,792)	(7,895,463)	(163,987)	(11,853,065)	(7,861,415)
Amortization of purchase price	-	-	-	(81,605)	(14,075)	(95,680)	(47,840)
Net income (loss)	\$ (85,830)	\$ (164,661)	\$ (183,365)	\$ (30,667)	\$ (32,843)	\$ (497,366)	\$ 799,937

The survey data also showed an unexpectedly high revenue of \$75 million for one of the AEDCs in 2018, a figure that was mirrored in the First Nation's annual audited accounts submitted to Canada. This revenue appears to be related to partial ownership in a regional engineering firm, which itself was a partnership of two engineering companies and two First

Nation communities in the region.⁹ Without this revenue, this small AEDC would be reporting a total revenue of just over \$200,000, indicating that they lack a diversified investment portfolio and were less able than others to weather the pandemic storm.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ABORIGINAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATIONS¹⁰

Name of company	
Name of participant	
Name of interviewer	
Date of interview	

Preamble: Thank you (*person's name here*) for volunteering to participate in this interview on the impacts of COVID-19 on your First Nation Development Corporation. Your past participation in CCAB research has been greatly appreciated and is continuing to help shape national and regional policies that support Indigenous economic development.

As a reminder, the purpose of this research is to understand how First Nation EDCs across the country have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since First Nation EDCs have unique business models and objectives, it is important to conduct dedicated research about them. Your participation will influence CCAB's advocacy for greater government support and policy changes to support First Nation EDCs.

These interviews will be used to inform a minimum of two research reports: one for CCAB and at least one paper to be submitted to an academic journal. You will have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft reports prior to publication.

All interview responses will be anonymized, and responses will be treated as confidential information. All analytics will be reported in a manner that does **NOT** reveal you, the company, or the First Nation.

Do you consent to CCAB sharing some of the responses you shared with us in 2018 with the two other project partners? This will allow us to observe the changes over time.

Yes

No

Is it ok if we record the audio of this interview? This will allow us to focus on the conversation instead of note taking. The audio will be deleted once the project is complete.

Yes

No

⁹ See Saulteaux Consulting & Engineering, <https://sceinc.ca/>

¹⁰ This is an edited version of the original guide.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Yes No

Business Characteristics

We would like to start by covering some of your firm's business characteristics.

Question about AEDC	2019 Responses from CCAB Database	2021
1. Where is the head office located?		
2. What is the legal structure of the AEDC?		
3. Previously, you noted that [X number] of communities owned the AEDC. Is this still accurate?		
4. How many businesses does the AEDC currently operate?		
5. To help us classify responses, what were the business's gross revenues for the past fiscal year (2020)?		
6. Over the next five years (on average), do you expect the AEDC's profit to...? READ.		
7. Roughly how many employees work for the AEDC and all subsidiary businesses in total at all locations?		
8. What are your top 5 industries in terms of revenue generation?		
9. In the past year, in which of the following places did your business have clients?		

Questions 1–9 for reference

1. Where is the head office located?
 - a. Is your head office still _____ ?
2. What is the legal structure of the AEDC?
 READ LIST IF NECESSARY
 - 01 — Joint Venture
 - 02 — Trust
 - 03 — Corporation
 - 04 — Subsidiary
 - 05 — Limited Corporation
 - 06 — Cooperative
 - ...
 - 98 — Other (SPECIFY)
 - 99 — DK/NA

3. How many communities are owners of this AEDC?
Previously, you noted that _____ [X number] of communities owned the AEDC. Is this still accurate?

RECORD NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES:

4. How many businesses does the AEDC currently operate?

RECORD NUMBER OF BUSINESSES:

5. To help us classify responses, what were the business's gross revenues for the past fiscal year?

DO NOT READ EXCEPT TO CLARIFY — CODE ONE ONLY,

02 — Less than \$25,000

03 — \$25,000 to less than \$50,000

04 — \$50,000 to less than \$75,000

05 — \$75,000 to less than \$100,000

06 — \$100,000 to less than \$250,000

07 — \$250,000 to less than \$500,000

08 — \$500,000 to less than \$1 million

09 — \$1 million to less than \$5 million

10 — \$5 to less than \$15 million

11 — \$15 to less than \$30 million

12 — \$30 to less than \$60 million

13 — \$60 million to less than \$120 million

14 — \$120 million to less than \$240 million

15 — \$240 million to less than \$500 million

16 — Above \$500 million

99 — DK/NA

6. Over the next five years (on average), do you expect the AEDC's profit to...?
READ.

01 — Increase

02 — Stay the same

03 — Decrease

99 — DK/NA

7. Roughly how many employees work for the AEDC and all subsidiary businesses in total at all locations?

ACCEPT AN ESTIMATE BUT NOT A RANGE.

RECORD NUMBER: _____

8. What are your top 5 industries in terms of revenue generation? [RECORD]

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

9. In the past year, in which of the following places did your business have clients?
READ IN THE ORDER SHOWN.
- a. Within your local community
 - b. In other parts of your province or territory
 - c. In other provinces or territories within Canada
 - d. In the U.S.
 - e. In countries other than Canada and the U.S.

General Impact

We will now begin the interview process, which we hope to keep under thirty minutes.

In January 2020, no one was expecting a global pandemic to spread across the world and impact every aspect of our lives. But by March, we were starting to have to deal with and respond to lockdowns, closures, layoffs, and, sadly, deaths throughout our communities and across Canada.

International travel ground to a halt, borders, both national and internal, were closed and barriers erected. Business meetings and conferences moved to platforms like Zoom, we just slowly stopped meeting people and talking over ideas.

We are now over a year into the emergency responses to the pandemic, with vaccine distribution plans and perhaps a return to normalcy on the horizon. We want to know how your EDC has coped, how you have managed to weather the storm, and how you see your firm emerging from COVID-19.

1. In the last 12 months, how has your business been impacted by COVID-19?
[CODE, BUT DO NOT READ]
- Decrease in revenues
 - Increase in revenues
 - Decrease in demand for products or services
 - Increase in demand for products or services
 - Unreliable internet, causing disruptions for at-home workers or e-commerce
 - Staff absences due to self-quarantine or illness
 - Staff absences due to family responsibilities, including home schooling
 - Disruptions in your supply chain
 - Cancellation of meetings, gatherings, or events
 - Cancellation of contracts
 - Cancelling staff travel
 - Closed or restricted travel in and out of the community
 - Pressure to find new ways of providing services or goods
 - Additional costs resulting from public health requirements to physically distance
 - Additional personal debt (to support the business)
 - Higher anxiety from staff
 - No current impacts
 - Don't know / not applicable
 - Prefer not to answer

2. We understand that many First Nation EDCs were experiencing other challenges and barriers before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Do you feel that COVID-19 has magnified existing business challenges that you were having prior to the pandemic, adding a new layer of complexity to your already challenging business activities?

If yes, can you provide examples?

3. We understand that businesses have had to implement a variety of strategies throughout the pandemic. What are some of your DevCorp's strengths in how you handled the events of the past year?

4. During 2020, did you pivot (explain) or reposition your firm due to the pandemic?

Prompt on a pivot: ColdAcre, a small, year-round food factory business that sold fresh grown lettuces and herbs to restaurant chefs in Whitehorse, saw its sales plummet quickly during the lockdown but quickly repositioned to pre-boxed, farmgate-sales via internet-driven subscriptions to families and who were looking for fresh local food to serve at home.

If so, can you share a COVID-19 pivot or repositioning story with us?

5. How have First Nation, regional, or provincial public health guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your business operations? For example, social distancing, lockdowns, reducing store capacity, working from home, etc.

Relationships

Based on data from our COVID-19 Indigenous business surveys as well as conversations we are having within our networks, we know that the impacts of COVID-19 have been severe for many companies, but others have had fewer or even positive impacts. Depending on a business's industry, location, and ability to adapt, their experiences have varied widely. Additionally, the company's relationships with their First Nation or surrounding community are likely to have an impact on their experiences throughout the pandemic; these are relationships we would like to explore in this research. For these next questions, we'd like you to consider the relationships and business connections your AEDC has made.

6. In the past year, have you had to take on more responsibility than before as requested by your First Nation in response to COVID-19?
7. When we interviewed your business in 2018, the respondent told us that your EDC had a number of different businesses and partnerships (see list below). I will list each business one by one, and please tell me whether or not they are still active.

FOR INTERVIEWER — say each business' name and ask if it is still active, probing why the business has closed if applicable. The rest of the information is for context and internal data analysis.

2017	Is this business still active?	If the business is closed, why? What happened?
1 Name: Ownership amount: Partner: Purpose: Outcome:		
2 Name: Ownership amount: Partner: Purpose: Outcome:		
3 Name: Ownership amount: Partner: Purpose: Outcome:		
4 Name: Ownership amount: Partner: Purpose: Outcome:		
5 Name: Ownership amount: Partner: Purpose: Outcome:		

8. Has your business created any new businesses, partnerships, or collaborative response plans in response to the COVID-19 pandemic? These could be with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, businesses, and governments.

2021
1 Name: Partner: Purpose: Outcome: Active: Changed:
2 Name: Partner: Purpose: Outcome: Active: Changed:

2021
3 Name: Partner: Purpose: Outcome: Active: Changed:
4 Name: Partner: Purpose: Outcome: Active: Changed:
5 Name: Partner: Purpose: Outcome: Active: Changed:

Financing and Funding

9. What is the main source of financing for the AEDC currently?

2017	2021
01 — Band Funding	01 — Band Funding
02 — Revenue from AEDC	02 — Revenue from AEDC
03 — Revenue from Trust	03 — Revenue from Trust
04 — Business loans or lines of credit from financial institutions	04 — Business loans or lines of credit from financial institutions
05 — Aboriginal financial institutions (AFIs) or capital corporations	05 — Aboriginal financial institutions (AFIs) or capital corporations
06 — Provincial/territorial government grants or loans	06 — Provincial/territorial government grants or loans
07 — Federal government grants or loans	07 — Federal government grants or loans
08 — Own source revenue	08 — Own source revenue
98 — Other (SPECIFY) _____	98 — Other (SPECIFY) _____
99 — DK/NA	99 — DK/NA

10. Did you apply for Federal Government funding to support your DevCorp and staff during the pandemic?

Yes _____

No _____ → PROBE and ask why not?

11. If yes, can you tell us which programs you applied to and/or received?

PROBE for details if “applied but did not receive” or if they mention only some of the funding was received. Why do they think this was the case? What barriers did they experience?

	Applied and received	Applied but did not receive
Business Credit Availability Program (BCAP)		
Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)		
Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS)		
Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy (CERS)		
Indigenous Community Business Fund (ICBF)		
Regional Relief and Recovery Fund (RRRF)		
Northern Business Relief Fund		
Indigenous Tourism Stimulus Development Fund		
Relief measures for Indigenous businesses		
Other (please specify)		

12. Did you access Provincial/Territorial Government funding to support your DevCorp and staff during the pandemic?

Yes _____

No _____

13. If Yes, can you tell us which programs?

14. Was the total funding you received sufficient to maintain your business operations (including grants, government funds, or loans...)?

Example: keeping employees working, maintaining production, paying rent or fees, keeping businesses afloat, etc.

15. Prior to the pandemic, did your organization have outstanding loans with:

Major banks: Y/N

AFI: Y/N

16. If yes, did you need to reschedule/renege your loan payments during the pandemic?

Yes _____

No _____

17. If so, how did the banks respond?

Probe if necessary: If you have loans both at the Big Banks and at an AFI, did they have different responses?

Outlook and recovery

18. What are the biggest barriers to your DevCorp's growth and full economic recovery after the pandemic?

19. Does your DevCorp need help with anything coming out of the pandemic? Some examples include training, funding, business plans, etc.

If so, what do you need?

DO NOT READ — CODE ALL THAT APPLY

E-commerce training and platforms for online sales

Web development

Social media and/or digital marketing training

Operating virtual platforms (e.g., Zoom, Facebook Live, Slack, Microsoft Teams, etc.)

How to engage clients remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., workshops, virtual events, etc.)

How to diversify our client base (e.g., exporting workshops, reaching new clients)

Grant, proposal, or application writing

Financial planning

Long-term business planning or continuity planning

Counselling services to improve health and wellness among staff

Training on COVID-19 safety regulations

Other:

20. What are the EDC's top priorities for the next 12 months?

21. Thank you for your time today. We appreciate your participating in this interview. Do you have any final remarks, or was there something we did not ask you about that you'd like to share?

Concluding Question

22. Is there anything you would like to ask us? If so, I can attempt to answer or I can refer your question to the research leads: Greg Finnegan, Ken Coates or Samantha Morton.

Thank you for participating. The CCAB and the University of Saskatchewan will send you the final reports for you to review before they are published. We will also send you a complimentary PDF copy of the final reports once they are published.

Which email do you prefer we send the reports to? _____

Institutional Explanations for the Persistence of Poverty on First Nations Reserves in Canada: A Review of the Native American Economic Development Literature

Liam D. Kelly

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

ABSTRACT

The institutions governing First Nations reserves in Canada are commonly cited as a key barrier to economic development. Despite these claims, few studies have empirically assessed the institutional arrangements governing reserves. Conversely, there is a much larger and more developed literature on Native American economic development and the institutions governing reservations. While there are many important differences between First Nations reserves and Native American reservations, there are several key similarities that allow for comparisons. First, the institutional arrangements governing land, specifically federal trusteeship over land, are broadly similar in both contexts. The restrictions on property, especially the prohibition on using reserve and reservation lands as collateral, also create important similarities in the availability of credit, mortgages, and other banking services. Finally, while Native American tribes generally have more sovereignty over their lands and economies, First Nations are increasingly reclaiming the right to manage their lands and economies with similar levels of autonomy. This review summarizes the Native American economic development literature in these three areas and identifies relevant considerations for First Nations in Canada. The article concludes with a discussion of future research priorities.

Key Words: First Nations, institutions, credit, self-governance, economic development

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous people in Canada face disproportionate levels of poverty compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Feir & Akee, 2019). This is particularly true for those living on reserves, where many First Nations people in Canada¹ reside. Low incomes, poor health and education outcomes, and limited employment opportunities are common issues across many communities (Indigenous Services Canada, 2019). Despite countless policies and initiatives, most reserves remain “islands of poverty in a sea of relative wealth” (Anderson & Parker, 2009, p. 105).

Arguments for the persistence of poverty in Indigenous communities in North America range from dependency and social organization issues to factor endowments and institutions (Cornell & Kalt, 1992); all of them stem from colonization and the significant traumas and constraints imposed on Indigenous Nations in North America. While the economic issues that exist on reserves and reservations are almost certainly multifaceted, Anderson and Parker’s (2009) review article provides evidence that the institutions governing reserves and reservations are a key factor inhibiting economic development. In recent years, the Indigenous economic development literature has grown precipitously, including several studies published in top economics journals (e.g., *Econometrica*, *Law and Economics*, *Applied Economics*, etc.). Many of these recent studies support Anderson and Parker’s (2009) key arguments. Nevertheless, better-quality data, unique natural experiments, and robust econometric methods have contributed to a more nuanced and detailed view regarding the implications of the institutions governing reserves and reservations.

Despite the recent growth of studies on economic development in Indigenous communities, the majority of the literature is based on research from Native American reservations; there remains a lack of empirical analysis of the institutions governing First Nations reserves in Canada. While there are some similarities between First Nations reserves and Native American reservations, the experiences of Native American tribes cannot be directly applied to the Canadian context. On average, Canadian First Nations have smaller populations and less land² and are located in more remote areas than Native American reservations (White-Harvey, 1994).

While there are many important differences between First Nations reserves and Native American reservations, there are several key similarities that allow for comparisons. First, the institutional arrangements governing land, specifically federal trusteeship over land, are broadly similar in both contexts. Restrictions on alienation and collateralization, allowances for leases, and federal oversight are the norm on most reserves and reservations. The restrictions on property, especially the prohibition on using reserve and reservation lands as collateral, also create important similarities in the availability of credit, mortgages, and other banking services. Finally, while Native American tribes generally have more sovereignty over their lands and economies, First Nations are increasingly reclaiming the right to manage their own affairs with similar levels of autonomy.

¹ There are three groups of Indigenous people in Canada: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Reserves were only created for First Nations, although not all First Nations live on a reserve.

² White-Harvey (1994) provides evidence that the combined area of every reserve in Canada would cover less than 50% of the reservation held by Arizona’s Navajo Nation.

This article reviews the economics literature on economic development in Indigenous communities, focusing on issues related to property institutions, credit, and sovereignty. The purpose of this study is to identify key results from the Native American economic development literature that have relevance for Canadian First Nations. Importantly, since Anderson and Parker (2009) provide a review of the pre-2009 literature, my focus is on studies that have been released since their review was published.

INSTITUTIONS GOVERNING FIRST NATIONS RESERVES IN CANADA

When the *British North America Act*³ was issued in 1867, it granted the Canadian federal government, under Section 91(24), exclusive authority and jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for the Indians”. This ‘transfer’ was further codified eight years later in the *Indian Act* and remains in force today for most First Nations communities. The *Indian Act* regulates most activities on reserves. This includes how land is managed and used, who gets Indian Status, how Chiefs and Band Councils are elected, how Band membership is determined, and how funding is allocated (Coates, 2008). Similar to the arrangement on Native American reservations, the Canadian federal government holds reserve lands in trust. The *Indian Act*⁴ defines an *Indian reserve* as a “tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart ... for the use and benefit of a band.” This arrangement has been frequently cited as a barrier to economic development, as it creates uncertainty and raises the cost of transacting reserve land (Alcantara, 2007; Anderson & Parker, 2009; Aragón, 2015; Aragón & Kessler, 2020; Flanagan & Alcantara, 2005; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2018).

The nature of trusteeship over reserves closely resembles the arrangement on Native American reservations. Most importantly, reserve and reservation lands cannot be sold. This creates a barrier to accessing a mortgage or other forms of credit. The inability to collateralize reserve lands has been cited as a key factor inhibiting improvements in housing on reserves (Canada, Parliament, Senate. Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2015). Despite the restrictions on alienation, most reserves and reservations do allow land to be leased, often to an outside party, on both a short- and long-term basis. The primary constraint on leases is that Band Councils or individual Band members must seek federal approval before land can be formally transacted. This creates unnecessary delays and raises the cost of transacting reserve lands.

One important difference between First Nations reserves and Native American reservations is the existence of fee-simple land ownership. Except for the Nisga’a, Tla’amin, and other self-governing First Nations, fee-simple ownership does not exist in any First Nations communities in Canada.⁵ Conversely, the *Dawes Act*, as well as Minnesota’s *Nelson Act*, allotted large amounts of tribal land to individual Native Americans (Akee, 2020). Some of this land was fully converted to fee-simple ownership and was therefore free to be bought

³ *The British North America Act, 1867*, SS 1867, c 3.

⁴ *Indian Act*, RSC 1985, c I-5.

⁵ First Nations that have negotiated a modern treaty and/or self-governance agreement with the federal government often hold at least some of their land in fee simple, but the title is held by the nation not an individual.

and sold by non-Native Americans. Other lands were locked into allotted trusts, which closely resemble certificates of possession⁶ on First Nations reserves.

While the institutions governing reserves and reservations are not equivalent, several important similarities do exist. Most notably, property institutions and credit markets have similar characteristics in both contexts. Conversely, most Native American tribes have more autonomy and control over their lands, resources, and economies than First Nations. Still, a growing number of First Nations have completed or are in the process of negotiating a modern treaty, a self-governance agreement, or other related reform. Past experiences with institutional reform on Native American reservations can help to inform expectations about the outcomes of similar changes in Canada. The next section reviews the economics literature on property institutions and land tenure in First Nations and Native American communities.

PROPERTY INSTITUTIONS AND LAND TENURE

Stable and well-constructed institutions facilitate trade, mitigate conflict, and increase economic efficiency. Conversely, unstable and poorly defined institutions, including insecure property rights, are argued to be one of the key factors explaining the slow pace of economic development in some areas (Besley & Ghatak, 2010; Chang, 2011; North, 1990). This parallels the situation on reserves and reservations, where institutional constraints are frequently cited as the key factor inhibiting economic development (Alcantara, 2007; Anderson & Parker, 2009; Aragón, 2015; Aragón & Kessler, 2020; Flanagan & Alcantara, 2005; Pendakur & Pendakur, 2018).

The two earliest studies to empirically assess property institutions on Native American reservations both focus on agricultural productivity. Trosper (1978) finds that land tenure and other institutional constraints explain the smaller scale and lower productivity of ranching activities on the Northern Cheyenne reservation compared to proximate white ranchers. Once these differences are accounted for, he finds that Native American ranchers are more technically efficient than proximate white farmers. Similarly, Anderson and Lueck (1992) find lower agricultural productivity on Native American tribal trust lands compared to off-reservation farms. They argue that less secure forms of land tenure increase capital costs, facilitate ownership fractionation, result in suboptimal farm sizes, and lead to the general underutilization of reservation lands. More recently, Ge et al. (2020) find that, conditional on land being irrigated, tribal trust land is over 30% less likely to have capital-intensive sprinkler irrigation and around 10% less likely to be planted with high-value crops compared to proximate non-reservation lands.

While the previous three studies are specific to farmland and agricultural productivity, similar results have also been found in other contexts. Akee (2009) uses a unique natural experiment in Palm Springs, California, to assess differences in the efficiency of the housing market on plots of reservation and non-reservation land. His analysis is facilitated by a late 1800s policy that evenly divided Palm Springs into 1-mile square blocks and assigned ownership on an alternating basis between the *Agua Caliente Tribe* and non-Native American

⁶ Certificates of possession are parcels of reserve land that have been allocated to an individual Band member. They represent the most individualized form of property on reserves. Research by Brinkhurst and Kessler (2013) and Aragón and Kessler (2020) finds that a greater prevalence of CPs is associated with improved economic outcomes.

landowners. The results show that non-reservation parcels of land were developed more rapidly and more extensively than reservation parcels. It wasn't until after 1959, when the restrictions on Agua Caliente lands were lifted, that the number of homes and real estate values on reservation parcels began to converge with those on non-reservation parcels.

Akee and Jorgensen (2014) provide a different perspective on the constraints of reservation land tenure. Their analysis focuses on the apparent lack of business investment on many reservations. Following from Akee (2009), their study also exploits the quasi-experimental nature of land allocations in Palm Springs. After holding local amenities and other characteristics constant, in addition to land quality, they find no difference in business investment between trust and fee-simple properties. Since reservation lands can be leased and developed with outside funding sources, they argue that the inability to collateralize land is not a significant barrier to economic development. In addition, the sixty-five-year limit on lease contracts for land on the Agua Caliente reservation provides security to potential lessees. Akee and Jorgensen (2014) caveat that their results are due, in part, to the active land market that exists in Palm Springs; more remote communities are unlikely to have similar experiences.

Recent studies related to First Nations reserves in Canada find similar results to those found on Native American reservations. Aragón (2015) assesses the benefits of clarifying and reforming property rights via modern treaty agreements. He finds evidence that modern treaties have increased real incomes for on-reserve band members, primarily due to increased commercial and resource development activities. In addition, consistent with a positive shock to local labour demand in the presence of a relatively inelastic labour supply, he finds evidence of increases in wages, house prices, and rental rates. These results are partially confirmed by Pendakur and Pendakur (2018), who find positive income effects for several opt-in legislative reforms that seek to improve property institutions on First Nations reserves.

In the context of forestry, Nelson et al. (2019) find that First Nations with area-based forestry licences harvest more forest products than First Nations with volume-based licences. They contend that this is due to the tenure security created by area-based licences. Interestingly, they also find that First Nations that have engaged in some kind of governance reform are more productive than First Nations that have not.

Another important aspect of reserve and reservation land tenure that has been the focus of considerable policy and academic work is the issue of privatization. Despite the apparent economic benefits of privatization, many First Nations communities have expressed opposition to any attempts at privatization and appear to prefer maintaining a collective approach to managing their lands (Jobin & Riddle, 2019). This is similar to concerns on Native American reservations, where historical allotment policies have created considerable opposition to privatization (Carpenter & Riley, 2019). While there is some evidence of the benefits of private property rights on reserves and reservations, the literature does not provide a convincing argument for widespread privatization.

Several recent studies demonstrate the complexities of privatization on reserves and reservations. Akee (2020) examines the *Nelson Act*, which allowed for reservation lands in Minnesota to be allotted and privatized. The study examines economic outcomes on two Minnesotan reservations — one that was allotted and one that was not. The results demonstrate that the allotted reservation saw reduced homeownership rates, an increase in household size, and a dramatic shift from self-employment to the wage sector. This was due to non-Indigenous landowners purchasing or leasing reservation lands and displacing Native

American landowners. Importantly, there is evidence that many of these land transactions were fraudulent and amounted to theft. This is supported by Leonard et al. (2020), who demonstrate that reservations with high-quality land were targeted for land titling and allotment, while those with low-quality land were often ignored. The negative implications of allotment led them to identify a ‘U’-shaped relationship between per-capita incomes and a reservation’s share of prime agricultural land.

Another recent study, Leonard and Parker (2021), demonstrates the often-unintended consequences of privatization policies. They study the extraction of spatially expansive natural resources, namely shale oil extraction on the Fort Berthold reservation inside the U.S. Bakken reserve. They demonstrate that the subdivision of the Fort Berthold reservation that occurred under the *Dawes Act* substantially increased the costs of obtaining permission to extract oil and therefore reduced productivity. They argue that the fragmented ownership structure of the reservation resembles the tragedy of the anticommons, as extraction costs are determined by the number of landowners holding exclusion rights.

Despite the negative implications of allotment, there are positive examples of private property rights on reserves and reservations. For example, Anderson and Lueck (1992) demonstrate that individually held tribal lands are more productive than tribal trust lands, despite both being less productive than fee-simple lands. Similarly, Aragón and Kessler (2020) find that individualized forms of property rights (e.g., certificates of possession) are associated with improved economic outcomes on First Nations reserves. Still, they caveat that the economic significance of private property rights is quite small and unlikely to significantly alter economic outcomes on reserves. There is also an issue of self-selection, as more urban and economically developed First Nations are more likely to adopt individualized forms of property rights (Brinkhurst & Kessler, 2013).⁷

The studies discussed in this section provide a nuanced view on the importance of institutions and property rights for economic development on Native American reservations and First Nations reserves. In general, the empirical evidence suggests that stable and well-defined property institutions are more important than privatization. This confirms one of the key conclusions of the literature review done by Anderson and Parker (2009). Their review produces two main conclusions. First, strong, but not necessarily private, property rights to reserve and reservation lands and resources are important determinants of productivity. Second, they find that stable political and legal institutions improve economic opportunities on reserve lands. One issue that Anderson and Parker (2009) do not address is the constraints on collateralizing reserve and reservation lands and the implications for the availability of credit and other banking services.

CREDIT, BANKING, AND MORTGAGES

The nature of property institutions on reserves and reservations creates numerous barriers to accessing credit. Since reserve and reservation lands are held in trust, they cannot be used as collateral. Banks and other financial institutions are therefore hesitant to make loans to people living on reserves and reservations, as they often lack an asset that can be fully collateralized. This limits people from borrowing money to buy, build, or repair a house, or

⁷ The issue of self-selection has also been identified with respect to the First Nations Land Management Act (Doidge, Deaton, & Woods, 2013).

to mortgage their existing home to start a business.⁸ These barriers to accessing credit have been argued to be an important constraint on economic development on reserves and reservations.

Laderman and Reid (2010) analyze the Section 184 Indian Home Loan Guarantee Program, which is an optional reform available to Native American tribes in the United States. This program provides a guarantee for mortgage loans to Native Americans residing on reservations that have chosen to participate in the Section 184 program. Interestingly, while they do find a marginally higher loan approval rate for those living on reservations participating in Section 184, this effect disappears after including tribal fixed effects, which is a statistical tool used to control for underlying characteristics of individuals or groups. In this context, including fixed effects in their econometric analysis allows Laderman and Reid (2010) to effectively control for many underlying tribal characteristics that may influence loan approval rates, such as whether a tribe has established a Native Community Development Financial Institution. Their results demonstrate that Native American Tribes are self-selecting into Section 184 and that the factors influencing this self-selection are more important for loan approval rates than for a loan guarantee. Importantly, similar loan guarantee programs have been created in Canada. The First Nations Market Housing Fund and the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation's on-reserve loan program, as well as bank-specific on-reserve loan programs, provide loan guarantees or other alternative pathways to accessing mortgages and loans on reserves. Still, as demonstrated by previous literature on Native American reservations, loan guarantees may not be the primary constraint to credit on reserves.

Akee and Jorgensen (2014) assess whether property institutions' inability to use reservation land as collateral explains the persistently low levels of business and economic development on Native American reservations. Interestingly, after holding local amenities and other characteristics of the parcel constant, there is no difference in the level of investment on trust and fee-simple properties. Their results provide further evidence that the prohibition on collateralizing reservation lands is not the primary constraint on business investment and economic development on reservations.

In addition to the aforementioned restrictions on collateralizing land, there is also evidence that many reserves and reservations are under-served by traditional banks (Buckley & Kashian, 2019). This is due in part to the limited banking services available in many rural and remote communities, but it has also been argued that the restrictions on collateralization make providing banking services on or near reserves and reservations high risk and rarely profitable. In addition to these restrictions, low incomes and poor employment prospects create further barriers to accessing credit.

Two other studies, Dimitrova-Grajzl et al. (2015, 2018), help to further characterize credit usage on reservations. Using Equifax risk scores and data on the use of various consumer credit products (e.g., mortgages) on reservations, they find that the use of most forms of consumer credit, especially mortgages, is low on reservations. Furthermore, Dimitrova-Grajzl et al. (2015) find that average bankcard credit limits are lower in predominantly Native American areas compared to areas where the share of Native American residents is lower. Importantly, both studies find that credit history is the primary factor determining

⁸ Mortgages are one of the most common sources of start-up funding for small businesses (Åstebro & Bernhardt, 2003).

credit limits and not the racial makeup of an area. Furthermore, they find that tribal institutions and the restrictions on property are not necessarily the issue and that location effects may be more relevant. This provides further evidence of the constraints faced by rural and remote reserves and reservations. Importantly, they do find that tribes with state jurisdiction over legal matters have more favourable credit outcomes than those that manage their own legal matters. This furthers the argument that issues related to governance are a primary explanation for the persistently low levels of economic development on many reserves and reservations.

SOVEREIGNTY AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

As First Nations continue to negotiate modern treaties, self-governance agreements, and other related institutional reforms, it is important to understand the economic implications of enhancing sovereignty and self-determination. While several recent studies have begun to unpack the complexities of these reforms, there remains some uncertainty about their implications. Past studies of changes in governance structures, such as political and fiscal decentralizations, provide a starting point for my review in this area. For example, Martinez-Vazquez and McNab (2003) review the economics literature on the causal relationship between fiscal decentralization and economic growth. They identify a multiplicity of potential direct and indirect effects of decentralization, such as changes to consumer and producer efficiency, the geographical distribution of resources, corruption, and capture by elites. Their analysis demonstrates that increasing local autonomy can have positive and negative implications.

In the context of Native American reservations, both positive and negative effects of self-governance have been identified. Decentralized governance may be more responsive and adaptable, but it can also succumb to corruption and power dynamics and be viewed as less legitimate than a centralized authority. Cornell and Kalt (2000) find that federal policies of self-determination help explain some of the differences in unemployment and income growth on American Indian reservations. They argue that since self-determination policies were implemented, which began in the 1970s, economic growth has taken off and has begun to close the gaps in income and development that exist between reservations and the rest of the U.S. population.

Despite the benefits identified by Cornell and Kalt (2000), the evidence on the impact of self-determination is not entirely positive. Anderson and Parker (2008) and Brown et al. (2017) assess Public Law 280 in the USA, which required some Native American tribes to transfer judicial jurisdiction over civil disputes to state authorities while allowing others to retain judicial sovereignty. Both studies find that per capita incomes grew significantly faster on reservations subject to state jurisdiction than on reservations under tribal authority. Furthermore, Cookson (2010) finds that tribal governments under Public Law 280 are more than twice as likely to invest in a casino due to the law's influence on contract stability. These studies demonstrate that if tribal governments are unable to credibly provide stable contract enforcement, then they may thwart the opportunities created by being sovereign and therefore more responsive than a state government.

Dippel (2014) demonstrates the long-run implications of forced co-existence and poor governance on Native American reservations. He finds that reservations where multiple autonomous sub-tribal bands were forced by the government to integrate into a single community are over 30% poorer today than reservations that lack this dynamic. He argues that

this process created conflict and social divisions, which led to poor governance structures being developed. Political conflict between groups discouraged the kinds of collaborative institutional development and reform that have happened on many other reservations.

An additional perspective on local autonomy and governance on Native American reservations comes from Akee et al. (2015). They study the long-term economic benefits of the adoption of written constitutions on Native American reservations. In the early 20th century, many tribes began the process of developing their own constitutions in collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Interestingly, Akee et al. (2015) find that the political party of the U.S. President (i.e., Democrat or Republican) influenced important aspects of constitutional design. Specifically, they find that constitutions developed under Republican presidents were more likely to involve the direct election of the chief executive (the presidential system), whereas constitutions developed under Democratic presidents were more likely to indirectly elect the chief executive (the parliamentary system). Akee et al. (2015) argue that the parliamentary-style system was more conducive to the communal decision-making processes that are prevalent in many Native American communities. They find that constitutions with the parliamentary system had much larger impacts on long-run tribal economic development. Their results highlight the importance of institutional reforms that are aligned with local institutions and community norms.

In the Canadian context, recent studies by Aragón (2015) and Pendakur and Pendakur (2018) provide evidence that modern treaties and self-governance agreements can increase incomes, wages, and employment levels on reserves. Despite these benefits, there is evidence that the impact of these reforms is not universally positive. For example, Pendakur and Pendakur (2018) find that the benefits of self-governance agreements and modern treaties may be greater for non-First Nations households. Furthermore, Pendakur and Pendakur (2021) find evidence that these reforms can increase inter-group inequality between the First Nations and non-First Nations populations on reserves. These results also align with those of Aragón and Kessler (2020), who find that the benefits of individualized property rights on reserves are largely driven by the in-migration of non-Indigenous people. These studies demonstrate why institutional reforms on First Nations reserves can be so contentious and should be pursued cautiously.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This article provides an in-depth review of the economics literature pertaining to institutions and economic development in Indigenous communities in North America. This review identifies three common themes related to institutions and economic development on reserves and reservations: restrictive and inefficient property institutions, limited credit availability, and issues related to sovereignty. With respect to property, there is a wide range of studies that demonstrate the benefits of reforming and improving property rights and the institutions governing land. One issue that has been studied in the United States but not in Canada is the issue of fee simple ownership. While the majority of reserves do not hold their land in fee simple, communities such as the Nisga'a, Tla'amin, and other self-governing First Nations hold some form of fee simple land. Understanding these communities' experiences with private property rights is an issue that should be prioritized in future research.

The restrictive nature of property institutions on reserves and reservations also creates difficulties accessing credit, mortgages, and other banking services. Since reservation and

reserve lands are held in trust, they cannot be used as collateral. Banks and other financial institutions may be hesitant to make loans to people living on reserves and reservations, as they often lack an asset that can be fully collateralized. This is an area of research that has not been pursued in Canada. Future research should explore the extent to which banks in Canada are similarly hesitant to provide services and loans to First Nations living on reserves and the implications of this for economic development.

The final theme identified in this article relates to the benefits and, in some cases, consequences of Indigenous self-governance. This is a complex area, as movements towards self-governance may not be based exclusively on economic criteria. Self-governance and independence likely have inherent sociological benefits that cannot be easily quantified (e.g., pride and autonomy). Still, it is important to understand the implications of changing existing governance structures. Despite the potential benefits of self-governance, several recent studies on Native American reservations highlight a persistent issue, investors often prefer federal management over tribal governance. This raises important questions about the economic implications of self-governance on First Nations reserves and whether similar dynamics exist in Canada. Self-governance may allow a First Nation to enter into contracts and agreements with more expediency than under the *Indian Act*, but good and credible governance is still required to attract investment and facilitate economic development.

The growing trend towards reform and self-governance on First Nations reserves in Canada is unlikely to regress. Whether through legislative reform or litigation, First Nations are increasingly reclaiming the right to manage their lands and communities with greater autonomy. The implications of these changes are not certain. While some communities have begun to grow diverse local economies, many First Nations remain stuck in a persistent cycle of poverty. In particular, there are concerns that many rural and remote First Nations will not benefit from the types of reforms discussed in this review. It remains unclear what the best approach to economic development is in these communities. Future studies should focus on the implications of reform in rural and remote Indigenous communities. For example, the Inuit have negotiated self-governance agreements across large swaths of northern Canada, but there has been very limited empirical analysis of the benefits, or lack thereof, of these reforms.

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Introduction

Robert Oppenheimer

The state of the Aboriginal economy, as well as the Canadian economy in 2020, was severely and negatively impacted by the coronavirus. However, it should be noted that the value of education was confirmed. As levels of education increased, wage rates and employment measures continued to show improvements. This is the case for both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

National economies are often measured in terms of their gross domestic product (GDP). The Canadian GDP in 2020 was down 5.4%. This was the steepest decline in Canadian GDP since 1961, when the data was first recorded. To measure the Aboriginal economy, unemployment, employment, and participation rates may be used. All three of these measures were very negative for 2020. In the following article, these three rates are examined for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Rates are also examined for Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals by gender, age, province, and education level.

Indigenous and Non-Indigenous
2021 Unemployment, Employment, and
Participation Rates:
Improved from 2020 — Education is Critical

Robert J. Oppenheimer

PROFESSOR EMERITUS, JOHN MOLSON SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

ABSTRACT

Unemployment rates were lower, and participation and employment rates were higher for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada in 2021. The meaningful improvements in 2021 are in comparison with the COVID-19-induced negative rates of 2020. The employment and unemployment rates have not fully recovered from their 2019 pre-COVID rates. This is the case for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Employment, unemployment, participation, and wage rates are and have been more favourable for non-Indigenous individuals than for Indigenous individuals. When educational levels increase, employment, unemployment, and participation rates improve. Employment measures are examined by gender, age, and education, and Métis and First Nations employment measures are compared.

Key Words: Indigenous education, Indigenous wages, Indigenous employment, Indigenous unemployment, Indigenous participation

INTRODUCTION

Employment data for Indigenous individuals 15 years and older living off Reserves and for non-Indigenous people is presented for 2017 through 2021 to enable the reader to assess the changes over time. The focus of the discussion provided is based on the changes between 2021 and 2020 as well as between 2021 and pre-COVID 2019.

EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND PARTICIPATION RATES

The employment rate is the percentage of those working in the total population who are over the age of 15. The participation rate is the percentage of those employed and those seeking to be employed over the same total population of those over 15 years old. The higher these rates, in general, the better the economy is thought to be doing. In contrast, the lower the unemployment rate, the better the economy is considered to be doing. The unemployment rate is the percentage of those seeking employment divided by those employed and those seeking employment. The combination of those employed and those unemployed (that is, those seeking employment) is considered the labour force. Therefore, another way of defining the unemployment rate is the percentage of those unemployed in the labour force. It may be helpful to note that employment and unemployment rates are not directly related as they are measured in different ways.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

The unemployment rate for Indigenous peoples in 2021 was 11.6, compared to 14.2 in 2020. This is a decrease, or improvement of 18.3%. The non-Indigenous unemployment rate in 2021 was 7.4, compared to 9.4 in 2020, a decrease of 21.3%. Thus, the percentage decrease in the unemployment rate was greater for non-Indigenous than Indigenous peoples in 2021.

The unemployment rates for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples had not recovered from their 2019, pre-COVID, rates. In 2021, they were 13.7% higher for Indigenous peoples and 32.1% higher for non-Indigenous peoples than they were in 2019. Unemployment rates continue to be significantly higher for Indigenous peoples than non-Indigenous peoples, although the difference between these rates narrowed somewhat from 2019 to 2021.

EMPLOYMENT RATES

The employment rate in 2021 for Indigenous peoples was 56.4. This was an increase of 8.5% from the 52.0 rate in 2020. For non-Indigenous people, the employment rate in 2021 was 60.2, an increase from 58.1 in 2020, which was a 3.6% increase. The employment rate for Indigenous people in 2021 recovered to almost the same level that it was in 2019, which was 56.8. This is a difference of only 0.7%. Non-Indigenous employment rates were 2.9% lower in 2021 than they were in 2019. There is a wide gap in the employment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but it is narrower in 2021 than it was in 2019.

PARTICIPATION RATES

The participation rate increased for Indigenous peoples by 5.3% in 2021, growing from 60.6 in 2020 to 63.8 in 2021. This was larger than the 1.4% increase for non-Indigenous people in 2021, which had participation rates of 65.0 in 2021 and 64.1 in 2020. The participation rate for Indigenous people also increased in 2021 from its pre-COVID rate of 63.3 in 2019. This contrasts with the decrease for non-Indigenous, when in 2019 their rate was 65.6, compared to 65.0 in 2021. The difference in the participation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous narrowed in 2021 and is also smaller than it was in 2019.

SUMMARY

Unemployment, employment, and participation rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in 2021 improved from 2020. However, the Indigenous unemployment rate in 2021 was higher than in 2019, prior to COVID-19. Their participation rate increased, and their employment rate was marginally lower. For non-Indigenous people, unemployment, employment, and participation rates were better in 2021 than in 2020 but worse than in 2019. These three rates have been worse for Indigenous peoples than for non-Indigenous people every year since the data has been available. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1
Unemployment, Employment, and Participation Rates, Canada
Indigenous Peoples Living Off of the Reserves and Non-Indigenous People

	Indigenouss					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	2021 % vs Non-Indigenous
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Unemployment rate	11.3	10.1	10.2	14.2	11.6	-18.3	13.7	36.2
Employment rate	57.1	57.6	56.8	52.0	56.4	8.5	-0.7	-6.7
Participation rate	64.4	64.1	63.3	60.6	63.8	5.3	0.8	-1.9
	Non-Indigenous					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Unemployment rate	6.2	5.7	5.6	9.4	7.4	-21.3	32.1	
Employment rate	61.7	61.7	62.0	58.1	60.2	3.6	-2.9	
Participation rate	65.8	65.4	65.6	64.1	65.0	1.4	-0.9	

Unemployment Rate: % seeking employment divided by those employed and seeking employment (also defined as the % seeking employment divided by the Labour Force)

Employment Rate: % employed of total population over age 15

Participation Rate: % employed and seeking employment of total population over 15

Labour Force: those employed and seeking employment

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table: 14-10-0365-01

COMPARING RATES FOR FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS

Unemployment Rates

In 2021, the unemployment rate for First Nations was 14.4, which is 63.8% higher than the 8.8 rate for Métis. The First Nations unemployment rate decreased by 4.4% in 2021 from 2020, versus a 33.8% decrease for Métis. Despite the improvement in the unemployment rate in 2021 for First Nations and Métis, they are both still higher than their 2019 pre-COVID rates.

Employment Rates

The employment rate for Métis was 59.6 in 2021, compared to 54.3 in 2020, an increase of 9.8%. For First Nations, it was 53.2 in 2021 and 50.0 in 2020, an increase of 6.4%. The Métis employment rate was 60.3 in 2019; for First Nations, it was 53.3. These rates are lower in 2021 than they were in pre-COVID 2019 by 1.2% for Métis and 0.2% for First Nations.

Participation Rates

The participation rate was 65.4 for Métis and 62.2 for First Nations in 2021. Thus, the participation rate was 4.9% lower for First Nations than for Métis in 2021. In 2020, participation rates were 62.6 for Métis and 58.9 for First Nations. The Métis participation rate increased by 4.5% in 2021 from 2020, while for First Nations it increased by 5.6%.

The First Nations participation rate increased to 62.2 in 2021 from 60.5 in 2019, an improvement of 2.8% from 2021. In contrast, the participation rate for Métis in 2019 was 65.8, a decrease of 0.6% compared to 65.4 in 2021.

Summary

Unemployment, employment, and participation rates improved for First Nations and Métis in 2021. When compared to 2019, pre-COVID, First Nations' participation rate improved, their employment rate decreased marginally, and their unemployment rate was higher in 2021. Métis unemployment, employment, and participation rates were worse in 2021 than they were in 2019. Métis have consistently had more favourable unemployment, employment, and participation rates than First Nations. (See Table 2.)

EMPLOYMENT RATES BY AGE AND GENDER

In 2021, employment rates increased for Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women in each of the three age groups of 15–25, 24–54, and 55 and over, except for Indigenous men over 55. Their employment rate decreased by 4.6% from 36.8 in 2020 to 35.1 in 2021. The largest percentage increase was for Indigenous women 15–24, which was 13.7%. The next largest percentage increase was for Indigenous men, 15–24, which was 13.4%. The highest employment rate was 85.9 for non-Indigenous men 25–54, followed by 76.1 for non-Indigenous women 25–54.

Indigenous men in each of the three age categories and Indigenous women in the 15–24 and the 25–54 groups have had consistently lower employment rates than non-Indigenous men and women. The exception is the employment rate for Indigenous women 55 and over.

TABLE 2
Unemployment, Employment, and Participation Rates, Canada
First Nations and Métis
 In thousands, except for rates

	First Nations					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	First Nations vs Métis
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Population	496.3	515.8	535.4	554.7	579.1	4.4	8.2	-1.2
Unemployment rate	13.5	11.7	11.9	15.1	14.4	-4.6	21.0	63.6
Employment rate	53.3	54.1	53.3	50.0	53.2	6.4	-0.2	-10.7
Participation rate	61.6	61.2	60.5	58.9	62.2	5.6	2.8	-4.9
	Métis					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Population	515.8	532.9	550.4	566.9	586.4	3.4	6.5	
Unemployment rate	9.4	9.0	8.4	13.3	8.8	-33.8	4.8	
Employment rate	59.7	59.9	60.3	54.3	59.6	9.8	-1.2	
Participation rate	65.9	65.8	65.8	62.6	65.4	4.5	-0.6	

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table: 14-10-0365-01

It has been higher than for non-Indigenous, except in 2020. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women 55 and over have the lowest employment rates.

Employment rates were higher in 2021 than in 2019 for Indigenous men 25–54 and for Indigenous women 15–24 and 25–54. They were lower for all others, including all non-Indigenous age groups for both men and women. Overall, employment rates have declined since pre-COVID 2019. (See Table 3.)

Unemployment Rates by Age and Gender

Unemployment rates decreased significantly in 2021 for men and women in all three age categories, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The largest Indigenous decreases were 23% for Indigenous women 15–24, Indigenous men 15–24, and Indigenous women 55 years and older. Despite these improvements, the rates of unemployment are still very high, at 18.7 for Indigenous men 15–24 and at 15.4 for Indigenous women 15–24.

The improvements in unemployment rates were better for non-Indigenous people. Their largest decrease was 36.6% for women 15–24, moving from 19.4 in 2020 to 12.3 in 2021. Their next largest improvement was a decrease of 30.1% for men 15–24, which was a change from 20.6 in 2020 to 14.4 in 2021.

Unemployment rates have not recovered from their pre-COVID levels of 2019, with the exception of Indigenous women aged 15–24. Their unemployment rate marginally decreased by 0.6%, from 15.5 in 2019 to 15.4 in 2021. This rate decreased from 20.0 in 2020. However, it has the second highest unemployment rate. Indigenous men, 15–24, had the highest rate of employment at 18.7 in 2021. It was also the highest at 24.3 in 2020. Non-indigenous

TABLE 3
Employment Rates by Age and Gender, Canada
Indigenous Peoples Living Off of the Reserves and Non-Indigenous People

	Indigenous Peoples					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	2021 % vs. Non-Indigenous
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Both Sexes								
15 years and over	56.4	56.8	56.8	52.0	56.4	8.5	-0.7	-6.7
15-24 years	49.9	48.9	51.0	44.6	50.7	13.7	-0.6	-9.3
25-54 years	69.9	70.4	72.2	68.3	75.8	11.0	5.0	-8.8
55 years and over	34.0	36.0	34.4	31.7	32.3	1.9	-6.1	-6.8
Men								
15 years and over	58.0	59.0	59.0	54.7	59.0	7.9	0.0	-9.0
15-24 years	50.1	48.6	52.8	44.9	50.9	13.4	-3.6	-7.5
25-54 years	72.6	73.4	74.9	70.7	75.6	6.9	0.9	-13.6
55 years and over	35.4	39.4	36.2	36.8	35.1	-4.6	-3.0	-14.8
Women								
15 years and over	54.9	54.8	54.7	49.5	53.9	8.9	-1.5	-4.3
15-24 years	49.7	49.3	49.1	44.4	50.5	13.7	2.9	-11.1
25-54 years	67.4	67.6	69.8	66.1	70.2	6.2	0.6	-12.7
55 years and over	32.8	32.9	32.8	26.8	29.9	11.6	-8.8	2.3
	Non-Indigenous People					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Both Sexes								
15 years and over	61.5	61.5	62.0	58.1	60.2	3.6	-2.9	
15-24 years	56.8	56.6	58.1	49.7	55.4	11.5	-4.6	
25-54 years	82.4	82.8	83.5	79.8	82.5	3.4	-1.2	
55 years and over	35.4	35.4	35.9	33.9	34.5	1.8	-3.9	
Men								
15 years and over	65.6	65.6	65.9	62.2	64.3	3.4	-2.4	
15-24 years	55.6	55.7	56.8	49.5	54.7	10.5	-3.7	
25-54 years	86.2	86.6	86.9	83.4	85.9	3.0	-1.2	
55 years and over	41.0	40.8	41.6	39.5	40.3	2.0	-3.1	
Women								
15 years and over	57.6	57.6	58.1	54.0	56.2	4.1	-3.3	
15-24 years	58.0	57.6	59.6	49.9	56.1	12.4	-5.9	
25-54 years	78.6	79.1	80.0	76.1	79.1	3.9	-1.1	
55 years and over	30.4	30.5	30.7	28.7	29.2	1.7	-4.9	

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table: 14-10-0365-01

women 15–24 had an unemployment rate of 14.4 in 2021 and a rate of 20.6 in 2020. Non-indigenous men 15–24 had an unemployment rate of 13.4 in 2021 and a rate of 20.0 in 2020. The lowest unemployment rate in 2021 was for non-Indigenous women 25–54 at 5.9. The next lowest was for non-Indigenous men 25–54 at 6.3.

Unemployment rates are highest for 15–24-year-olds, for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women. The unemployment rates for Indigenous men and women in each of the three age groups have been significantly higher, and this has been the case since the data has been available. (See Table 4.)

TABLE 4
Unemployment Rates by Age and Gender, Canada
Indigenous Peoples Living Off of the Reserves and Non-Indigenous People

	Indigenous Peoples					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	2021 % vs. Non-Indigenous
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Both Sexes								
15 years and over	11.4	10.4	10.2	14.2	11.6	-18.3	13.7	36.2
15–24 years	17.0	16.8	16.6	22.2	17.1	-23.0	3.0	21.6
25–54 years	9.8	8.8	8.5	11.7	9.8	-16.2	15.3	37.8
55 years and over	10.9	8.3	8.7	13.8	11.9	-13.8	36.8	38.7
Men								
15 years and over	13.4	11.9	12.0	15.6	12.7	-18.6	5.8	40.2
15–24 years	19.8	19.1	17.5	24.3	18.7	-23.0	6.9	23.0
25–54 years	11.0	10.2	10.0	13.0	10.5	-19.2	5.0	40.0
55 years and over	14.4	9.5	11.6	15	14.2	-5.3	22.4	49.3
Women								
15 years and over	9.5	8.7	8.4	12.7	10.4	-18.1	23.8	31.7
15–24 years	14.0	14.4	15.5	20.0	15.4	-23.0	-0.6	20.1
25–54 years	8.6	7.4	6.9	10.5	9.1	-13.3	31.9	35.2
55 years and over	7.1	6.9	5.8	12.2	9.4	-23.0	62.1	20.2
	Non-Indigenous					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Both Sexes								
15 years and over	6.2	5.8	5.6	9.4	7.4	-21.3	32.1	
15–24 years	11.2	10.6	10.7	20	13.4	-33.0	25.2	
25–54 years	5.4	4.9	4.7	7.7	6.1	-20.8	29.8	
55 years and over	5.6	5.2	5.0	7.8	7.3	-6.4	46.0	
Men								
15 years and over	6.6	6.0	5.9	9.5	7.6	-20.0	28.8	
15–24 years	12.8	11.9	12.0	20.6	14.4	-30.1	20.0	
25–54 years	5.5	4.9	4.8	7.7	6.3	-18.2	31.3	
55 years and over	5.9	5.5	5.3	7.9	7.2	-8.9	35.8	
Women								
15 years and over	5.8	5.5	5.2	9.4	7.1	-24.5	36.5	
15–24 years	9.5	9.2	9.4	19.4	12.3	-36.6	30.9	
25–54 years	5.2	4.9	4.5	7.8	5.9	-24.4	31.1	
55 years and over	5.3	4.8	4.7	7.7	7.5	-2.6	59.6	

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Table: 14-10-0365-01

EMPLOYMENT RATES BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Education is a critical aspect of employment. The higher the level of education, the higher the employment rate. This is the case for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The employment rate is lower for Indigenous peoples, and this has been the case historically. However, when examined by the level of education, the rates are higher for Indigenous high school graduates or those with some post-secondary education than for non-Indigenous people with similar levels of education. For Indigenous peoples, the employment rate was only marginally lower for those with less than high school graduation and for those who had completed post-secondary education.

Employment rates improved in 2021, and they did so more for Indigenous people with high school completion or higher levels of education than non-Indigenous people. They improved by the same percent for those with less than a high school graduate level of education. The rates were below the 2019 pre-COVID levels, except for Indigenous peoples who had not completed high school. They improved from the low level of 30.6 in 2019 to 31.1 in 2021. (See Table 5.)

TABLE 5
Employment Rates by Highest Level of Educational Attainment, Canada
Indigenous Peoples Living Off of the Reserves and Non-Indigenous

	Indigenous Peoples					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	2021 % vs. Non-Indigenous
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Total, all educational levels	56.4	56.8	56.8	52.0	56.4	8.5	-0.7	-6.7
Less than high school ¹	31.9	32.0	30.6	29.5	31.1	5.4	1.6	-0.3
High school graduate or some post-secondary ²	59.8	57.9	59.4	52.9	56.5	6.8	-4.9	4.4
Completed post-secondary education ³	69.8	70.5	70.3	63.5	69.1	8.8	-1.7	-0.3
	Non-Indigenous					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
Total, all educational levels	61.5	61.5	62	58.1	60.2	3.6	-2.9	
Less than high school ¹	32.9	33.1	33.1	29.6	31.2	5.4	-5.7	
High school graduate or some post-secondary ²	58.3	57.5	57.4	52.1	54.0	3.6	-5.9	
Completed post-secondary education ³	71.0	70.9	71.2	67.3	69.3	3.0	-2.7	

Notes

1. Highest level obtained is some high school.
2. Highest level obtained is a high school degree or some post-secondary (in other words, worked toward, but did not complete, a degree, certificate [including a trade certificate] or diploma from an educational institution, including a university, beyond the secondary level).
3. Completed a certificate (including a trade certificate) or diploma from an educational institution beyond the secondary level. Also included are certificates below a Bachelor's degree obtained at a university and university degrees at the bachelor level or higher.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Characteristics by Indigenous Group and Educational Attainment, Table 14-10-0359-01, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1410035901>

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

As previously reported, unemployment rates decreased for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in 2021. This was the case for every educational level examined. Significantly, the higher the educational level, the lower the rate of unemployment. This applied to both Indigenous peoples and the overall Canadian population in 2021 and every year preceding it. Education is highly correlated with reduced unemployment.

The highest rates of unemployment are for those with less than a high school graduate level of education. For Indigenous people with less than a high school graduation, their unemployment rate was 21.1 in 2021, while for the Canadian population it was 13.9. The lowest rates of unemployment in 2021 were for university graduates, with Indigenous graduates having a rate of 6.2 and the Canadian population having a rate of 5.1. In 2021, Indigenous people who are high school graduates and have some post-secondary education had a rate of unemployment of 12.8, while for the Canadian population it was 9.8. The unemployment rate is higher for Indigenous peoples than for the Canadian population in all four of the education categories reported, and this is the case in each of the years recorded.

Unemployment rates in 2021 did not recover from their 2019 rates. This was the case for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, regardless of educational level. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6
Unemployment Rates by Highest Level of Educational Attainment, Canada
Indigenous Peoples Living Off of the Reserves and Canadian Population

	Indigenous Peoples					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	2021 % vs. Canadian Population
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
All levels of education	11.4	10.4	10.2	14.2	11.6	-18.3	13.7	35.3
Less than high school ¹	19.8	19.3	19.1	22.0	21.1	-4.1	10.5	34.1
High school plus some post-secondary ²	12.3	11.6	11.4	16.0	12.8	-20.0	12.3	23.4
College or trade ³	8.9	8.0	7.4	11.8	9.3	-21.2	25.7	28.0
University ⁴	5.6	3.4	5.5	8.4	6.2	-26.2	12.7	17.7
	Canadian Population					% Change 2021/2020	% Change 2021/2019	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
All levels of education	6.4	5.9	5.7	9.5	7.5	-21.1	31.6	
Less than high school ¹	12.6	11.7	11.3	16.3	13.9	-14.7	23.0	
High school plus some post-secondary ²	7.5	7.0	7.2	12.9	9.8	-24.0	36.1	
College or trade ³	5.6	5.0	4.7	8.3	6.7	-19.3	42.6	
University ⁴	4.5	4.4	4.2	6.7	5.1	-23.9	21.4	

Notes

1. Includes no education or education below high school graduation.
2. Includes high school graduation or some postsecondary education (not completed). diploma from an educational institution, including a university, beyond the secondary level).
3. Includes trade certificate or diploma from a vocational school or apprenticeship training; non-university certificate or diploma from a community college, CEGEP, school of nursing and similar programs at this level; and university certificate below bachelor's level.
4. Includes bachelor's degree and university degree or certificate above bachelor's degree.

Source: Statistics Canada, Unemployment rates of population aged 15 and over, total and with Indigenous identity, by educational attainment, Canada, Table 14-10-0361-01, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410036101>

TABLE 7
Average Hourly and Weekly Wages and Average Usual Weekly Hours
Indigenous Peoples Living Off of the Reserves and Non-Indigenous People

	Indigenous Peoples					% Change 2021/2020	2021 % vs. Non- Indigenous
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Average hourly wage rate (\$)	23.86	24.36	25.35	26.81	27.17	1.3	-10.9
Average weekly wage rate (\$)	872.35	897.52	936.56	993.68	1,016.46	2.3	-8.4
Average usual weekly hours	34.9	35.4	35.5	35.7	36.0	0.8	1.7
	Non-Indigenous					% Change 2021/2020	
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		
Average hourly wage rate (\$)	26.15	26.9	27.83	29.59	30.12	1.8	
Average weekly wage rate (\$)	955.26	982.92	1,014.74	1,083.60	1,101.72	1.7	
Average usual weekly hours	35.2	35.3	35.2	35.5	35.4	-0.3	

Source: Statistics Canada, Average hourly and weekly wages and average usual weekly hours by Indigenous group, Table 14-10-0370-01, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=1410037001>

AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGES

Average hourly wages increased by 1.3% for Indigenous peoples and by 1.8% for non-Indigenous people in 2021. This is lower than usual. The average annual increase from 2008–2020 was 3.2% for Indigenous people and 2.9% for non-Indigenous people.

Wage rates on average have been consistently lower for Indigenous peoples than for non-Indigenous people. Hourly wages were 10.9% lower for Indigenous people than for non-Indigenous people in 2021. Indigenous average weekly hours worked were 36, compared to 35.4 for non-Indigenous. (See Table 7.)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The employment, participation, and unemployment rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples improved in 2021. However, they were worse than they were in pre-COVID 2019, except for the participation rate of Indigenous people, which improved. All three rates have been consistently worse for Indigenous people.

Métis unemployment rates have been consistently lower, and their employment and participation rates have been consistently higher than for First Nations. These three rates were improved in 2021 for both Métis and First Nations. They still have not recovered from their 2019 levels, except for the participation rate of First Nations, which improved.

In 2021, employment rates increased for Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women in the three age groups, except for Indigenous men 55 years and older. The unemployment rate decreased for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, both men and women, in each of the three age groups. Unemployment rates were higher in 2021 than in 2019, except for Indigenous women 15–24 years old.

The higher the level of education, the higher the employment rate and the lower the unemployment rate for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This is highly signifi-

cant. It means that education is an important aspect in determining employment and unemployment rates for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Employment rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are similar when examined by educational level. This is the case for every year for which data is available.

Wage rates on average have been consistently lower for Indigenous peoples than for non-Indigenous people. Wage rates increased in 2021, but at a lower rate than in recent years.

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This section brings you the current literature in the field of Indigenous community economic development.

Book Review

Carol Anne Hilton, *Indigenomics:
Taking a Seat at the Economic Table*
(BC: NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS, 2021)

Wanda Wuttunee

PROFESSOR EMERITA, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

David Newhouse

PROFESSOR & DIRECTOR, CHANIE WENJACK SCHOOL FOR INDIGENOUS STUDIES
TRENT UNIVERSITY

Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world, for that matter, have come a very long way in addressing challenges and obstacles to nurturing and building healthy nations, communities, and economies. It has been our privilege to shed light on the resilience and tenacity demonstrated in stories and actions across this nation over the last half century. Community and business leaders have demonstrated incredible tenacity and strength in addressing the real economic challenges arising from a history of exclusion. There is a strong coterie of fellow researchers in the academy who have followed this journey, and without a doubt, we, as Indigenous people, are a powerful people, as noted throughout Carol Anne Hilton's new book on the future of the Indigenous economy. The book, based upon her work at the Indigenomics Institute, paints a picture of a future full of opportunity and promise for those who are ready, with gratitude to those who are making the way forward.

The Indigenous world of the early 21st century is not the world of the mid-20th century. We now conceive of our communities not just as social entities but as economies to be shaped to meet our own development goals and contribute to the Canadian economy. This conception was inconceivable to those reviewing the Indian Act in the 1950s or to Hawthorn and his UBC researchers in the 1960s. This conception provides opportunities to bring new thinking to the table and a new generation of leaders, unburdened of the constant necessity to create economic space for Indigenous peoples. What is the next generation of thought

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leaders adding to this long conversation? Carol Anne Hilton, author of *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table* (2021), is from the Hesquiaht Nation, a small community that was devastated by a tsunami in 1964, causing most families to move to town. She earned her MBA from the University of Hertfordshire, England. While she has no record of scholarly articles, she has teaching experience in several Canadian business schools and serves on several boards. Her book is based on her extensive experience as a policy advisor and on the applied research of the Indigenomics Institute, which she founded.

Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table is an interesting addition to the small but growing field of research on the Indigenous economy. The catchphrase “Indigenomics” is catchy, and the author has made sure that readers get the drift that it is intended to replace any reference to Indigenous economic development or community development, where it sucks every unsuspecting thing into its great maw and relabels it “Indigenomics”. It is a rebranding strategy taken to a fever pitch through repetition that seems to have caught on in some circles, including social media, where the concept was first pitched, according to the author.¹

The author centres herself and her work in the introduction. It begins with acknowledging the ancient ones² and then notes a move “away from the standard format of academic-focused referencing of previous external work or thought, this book instead draws from living examples of current leadership...”³ This is not entirely accurate, as can be seen in the endnotes, which are rife with a wide-ranging use of previous external work. One result is that the author shares ideas that have already been published without acknowledging those sources, which she must be unaware of, and ignoring the good work done by so many, including Indigenous scholars, who arguably offer “internal” work “in relation to the growth of the Indigenous economy”.⁴ For example, in the section entitled “The Risk of Doing Nothing”,⁵ the author raises the important point that the cost of doing nothing to support the Indigenous economy is enormous. This idea was first captured in the first edition of the *Cando Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* in 1999, when the bold message and challenge to action made by Charlie Coffey, RBC Executive Vice-President, Business Banking, aimed full-bore at Canada’s corporate sector in a presentation made to an international audience.⁶ It is a message that continues to deserve the attention given to it in this book.

This book is not about Indigenous economic development per se. It is about making a case for “taking a seat at the economic table”. She argues for a goal of developing a \$100 billion Indigenous economy from its current \$32 billion in five years. It’s a bold goal and one that deserves some attention. The argument presented stresses differences and the very poor track record of the Canadian government in supporting Indigenous community economic development. She argues for the development of a complex set of development

¹ Brett Dolter, “Sustainable Inclusive Development”, *Alternatives Journal*, (2017) 43(1): 56. Available at ProQuest Document Preview, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/423bcf5052478a0a21db7941ea950a91/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=35934>

² C.A. Hilton, *Indigenomics: Taking a Seat at the Economic Table* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2021), p. 1.

³ Hilton, p. 5.

⁴ Hilton, p. 5.

⁵ Hilton, p. 154.

⁶ Charles Coffey, “The Cost of Doing Nothing: A Call to Action”, *The Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development*, (1999) 1(1): 127.

activities, almost all of which have been brought forward by the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Harvard Project on Indian Economic Development, and other development advocates over the last thirty years. The strength of her work is its conception of Indigenous strength and action as the basis for future action. It is an attempt to provide a conceptual framework for what is normatively framed as Indigenous economic development.

The book is readable, and the author makes the subject matter accessible to a broad audience with potential interest for grassroots community developers, university undergraduate students, policymakers, and the corporate sector. The author's selection of leaders who are interviewed captures the positive dynamism gifted to those who work in this field. These leaders are clear thinkers with a consistent clarion call: the time is now to move on realizing commercial economic power and making an important contribution to this work. The impressive array of experience includes several resource sector specialists, a bridge builder on major developments, an Indigenous knowledge advocate, a developer/management consultant, and a financial value creator. The leadership in many communities commonly says that they support development, but they need to be meaningful partners in a respectful and inclusive economy.

Numerous concepts are introduced that are excellent springboards for fruitful discussion in university faculties across the country, with the proviso that instructors be well-versed in the area to encourage meaningful critical dialogue. The author offers the concept of the Indigenous Economics Mix as integral to a strategy to continue growing the Indigenous economy to \$100 billion. Development strategists would see this as an important aspect of any economy's development: don't put all your eggs in one basket. Diversify. And build on your strengths. This mix defines an Indigenous economy built from a wide variety of actions: equity ownership, capital, entrepreneurship, trade, philanthropy, procurement, clean energy, technology, social finance, investment, commerce, and infrastructure.⁷ An important challenge for designing such an economy comes from tracking economic growth towards a target from an Indigenous economic strength baseline. Accurate growth forecasting will also be critical to managing a very necessary shift in the Canadian–Indigenous economic relationship, which includes the Indigenous Economics Mix.⁸ The author sets the stage for growing the Indigenous economy with this “modern, constructive economic design”. We wonder about the Indigenous foundations underpinning Indigenomics when all of the development tools look like those used in modern capitalist economies. Is there a role for one of the most important desires of modern Indigenous society: Indigenous knowledge and its value set?

The book raises numerous discussion points. A target of \$100 billion for a future Indigenous economy seems to have come out of the blue. What is the rationale for a \$100 billion target and not \$200 billion or more? A major focus of the book is the damage that the Indian Act has wrought, which very understandably continues. I have a close affinity with a quotation that says, “Teach Indigenous brilliance and success as much as you teach Indigenous suffering and trauma.”⁹ The incredible brilliance of economic tenacity and resilience in the face of the Indian Act and many more traumas suffered by Indigenous peoples is unfortunately

⁷ Hilton, p. 158.

⁸ Hilton, p. 170.

⁹ Indigenous Values Initiative, *Reminder*, Facebook (October 1, 2020), <https://www.facebook.com/indigenousvalues/photos/a.1955819574654955/2836851946551709/?type=3>

overshadowed by the emphasis on the Indian Act here. The history of Indigenous economic agency is downplayed here, and so the question arises: can a reasonable discussion of a \$100 billion target miss a grounding in the rich economic history engraved on our nations that offers a large part of the necessary foundation for such an undertaking? How did and do the incredible success stories listed in the book thrive despite the Indian Act? Wuttunee recalls asking a leader in the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs Secretariat, “So what about the Indian Act?” His response was, “What Indian Act?” That was 20 years ago, and there were similar sentiments shared by Tsuut’ina Nation leadership in the early 1990s. The vision of many of our leaders has never been passive in the face of obstacles.

Other questions that come to mind and that were shared by our colleagues include the following: Is the discussion here complete without considering whether the Indigenous economy is to be separate and apart or to be interwoven into the mainstream economy with values intact? What is an appropriate rate of return if profit maximization is no longer the goal? What targets for continued state funding (if it should continue) and bank financing are appropriate in the new, modern Indigenous economy? Can true sovereignty exist beyond own-source funding that continues to include state transfer payments? Is this book really a thinly disguised polemic? Why are the noticeable shifts in world priorities around climate change and the environment not acknowledged in the very polarized tables in Chapter 1 on a western world view? Why is there only one seat at the economic table and not more? Why is there only one economic table and not many? Why is science portrayed as static here? Is that reasonable, given modern views of science? If equal attention is not given to brilliant and distinct Métis and Inuit values in their economic development, is the proper term “Indigenomics” or First Nation-nomics? How applicable is the discussion of values that focuses narrowly on the author’s personal history? Can a \$100 billion target be achieved outside of resource development, which is often contrary to Indigenous values but lies at the heart of much of the discussion of the experts who are interviewed here for the future of the Indigenous economy in Canada? Are communities permitted to exercise their sovereignty by pursuing resource development on their lands in the new tomorrow? Would they, or should they, be banished from inclusion in the Indigenous economy? On the face of it, the design and the Indigenous Economics Mix elements presented here are not new. How could they be reinvigorated and bring new dimensions to understanding the Indigenous economy?

At its heart, *Indigenomics* is not a challenge to the Canadian economic system and its foundation but an argument for inclusion in it. It does not offer a reasoned critique of the political-economic system that created the exclusion of Indigenous peoples or offer the alternative efforts that Indigenous economic and business leaders are bringing to the table. Perhaps all of these are part of the Indigenous economic mix, and *Indigenomics* is wide enough in its conception to include them?

Some of the best resources we used in the university courses we taught brought up important discussion questions, such as those noted here. The economic leader interviews and the catalysts for discussion are the most attractive features of this book, making it a very intriguing addition to the conversation. This book makes an important but flawed contribution to the ongoing discussion about Indigenous economic development. It can be a source of ideas for those who work diligently and with good intent in this arena. For others, it raises alarm bells about the direction of Indigenous developments.

Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development

Call for Papers Volume 14, Issue 1

Published jointly by the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando) and Captus Press, the *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* (JAED) is published annually and is a unique resource for anyone interested in Indigenous community economic development. Its intent is to explore ideas and build knowledge in the field of Indigenous economic development theory and practice. The journal prefers a broad interpretation of research and knowledge and encourages a wide variety of contributions in this area. We want to know what people are doing, what is working, what is not working, and why.

In addition to becoming an Open Access publication, JAED will publish two issues per year beginning in 2024. As a result, Volume 13, Issue 2 will not be published.

Volume 14, Issue 1 of JAED will be published in Spring 2024 in preparation for the Cando 30th Annual National Conference.

Papers should relate to one of the following areas:

- Emerging areas of Indigenous Community Economic and Enterprise Development
- Indigenous Small Business and Entrepreneurship
- The Analysis of the Indigenous Economy
- Sharing and/or Evaluating Current Indigenous Economic Activity
- Indigenous Corporate Responsibility, Social Auditing, and the Triple/Quadruple Bottom Line
- Economic Partnerships and Government Relationships
- The Relationship between Indigenous Knowledge and Economic Development
- Indigenous Land Management and Economic Development
- Indigenous Organizations and Management
- International Indigenous Trade and the Global Economy
- Indigenous Community Development: The Role of Elders, Women and Youth
- Change: Traditional and Modern Indigenous Economies
- An Historical Analysis of Indigenous Economic Development in Canada
- The Role of Research in Indigenous Community, Economic, and Business Development
- Community Wellness and Making Poverty History

The Journal features academic articles, examples from economic practitioners, book reviews and the state of the Indigenous economy.

Lessons from Experience from post-secondary students, practitioners, academics, consultants and executives include interpreted case studies, evaluation and commentary on popular and current approaches, as well as tools of Indigenous economic development, advocacy of particular approaches and solutions, successful or failed efforts, and the identification of important economic development problems that are in need of solutions. Submissions to this section should be 2000–3000 words.

Lessons from Research from academics features scholarly inquiry, debate and commentary on how we frame, perceive, interpret, research and contribute to the field of Indigenous economic development. Submissions to this section should be 15–20 pages or 4,000–6,000 words, include 5 key search words and follow APA citation guidelines.

The State of the Indigenous Economy features current views on the evolving state of the Indigenous economy and responses to changes in the global economy, corporate activity, and government policy — for example, the Federal Framework on Aboriginal Economic Development, or the social economy. Submissions should be 1,000 to 4,000 words, include 5 key search words and follow APA citation guidelines.

Reviews of Current Books and Literature features recent literature exploring aspects of economic development relevant to Indigenous peoples and community development.

The deadline for receipt of submissions for Volume 14, Issue 1, is October 30, 2023.

Manuscripts should be single spaced, with 1.5 inch margins all around, and page numbers at the bottom middle. The title page should indicate the journal section for which you are submitting. All identifying information should be restricted to this one page.

Submission of a manuscript implies commitment to publish in the Journal. Submission to JAED also implies that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere, nor is it under consideration by another journal. Authors who are in doubt about what constitutes prior publication should consult the editor. Review for publication will take approximately 8–12 weeks from the time of receipt. Academic papers will be subject to the usual double-blind peer-review process.

Authors of accepted submissions will also be offered the opportunity to have their submissions posted on Captus Press’s JAED open access site within stipulated guidelines. We are increasing the visibility of JAED by including a DOI (a permanent identifier) for all articles; and soon, two worldwide online databases — ProQuest and EBSCO — will include and distribute the journal’s articles. Past articles may be accessed on the University of Saskatchewan’s Aboriginal portal at Search: Aboriginal portal (usask.ca).

Submissions may be forwarded as attachments by email to Svitlana Konoval at skonoval@edo.ca. Inquiries may be made by email, or by phone at (780) 990-0303 x 2317 to Svitlana. Before making a submission, please reach out to Svitlana, as there are a few new requirements as JAED moves to Open Access in 2024.



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