

# 11th Annual Champions' Event

## Discussion Paper



### Making Inclusion Work

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### Inclusion as a Vision

In the next decade, as “boomers” happily retire, the Aboriginal Human Resource Council is hopeful that Canada’s employers’ will be looking for skilled workers in the growing Aboriginal population.

We hope the current economic downturn will have subsided and the country will be enjoying a new era of growth... perhaps fueled by new sectors, innovative business strategies and technology that is beyond our current ability to imagine. In our vision, Canada will continue to be the envy of the world, admired for its safe lifestyle, democratic society and economic prosperity.

In order to give this vision reality, we have brought a group of Canada’s corporate, government and Aboriginal leaders together to collaborate in a *Leadership Circle*. Partners involved in the *Leadership Circle* will collaborate on efforts to create inclusive workplaces that advance the employment of Aboriginal people.

We believe we have a great vision -- a vision that can only be accomplished with the strong support of Canadian business.

With your support, the council will work hard to illuminate the problem areas so that you can focus on your business and the opportunities that come with inclusion. We will bring some resolve to the difficult social and economic barriers that continue to block Aboriginal people from achieving their full participation in the Canadian economy. We can help bring job ready Aboriginal candidates to your workplace and we can help you create a workplace of inclusion.

### Inclusion in the Workplace

Every day Canadians come together in workplaces across our nation. It’s here where they build enterprises, hope and the reality of a prosperous and independent future for all Canadians. And this is why we place our focus on the workplace, in particular, inclusion in the workplace.

If we can get the workplace right... if we can move our vision forward to resolve many of the larger socio-economic issues facing Aboriginal people today, we will gradually erode the barriers to inclusion.

A productive economy will only grow with the availability of a skilled workforce. In the past few years we have seen how shortages in skilled workers have put increased constraints on businesses within diverse sectors of the economy.

Longer term labour market forecasts estimate that there will be a shortfall of one million workers in the country in the next decade -- mostly in high skilled and knowledge-oriented occupations. The forecast will skew the operations of businesses, impede their level of productivity and distort labour markets. The impact, if left unchecked, could be debilitating<sup>1</sup>.

As the economy further settles, new priority sectors will emerge. It will be important to align the workforce with these growth opportunity sectors. As the trend in diversity continues to take a strong hold in workplaces across Canada, it will be vital for these sectors to build organizations of inclusion that engage the next generation of workers, and promote their productivity. Inclusionary workplaces offer the best opportunity for this to happen.

## **Business Leadership as a Catalyst**

The 11th Annual Champions' Event provides an opportunity for Canadian leaders (corporate, government, Aboriginal, education, labour organizations) to reflect on the ways Aboriginal people will contribute to the nation's economic growth and productivity. What partnerships, strategies and linkages need to be implemented to advance a positive economic development agenda?

Business leaders from every corner of Canada and every sector, big or small, need to develop an appreciation for their unique business case for inclusion and the hiring of Aboriginal people. They must understand that new policies and strategies need to be adopted to make inclusion a reality. They should truly appreciate and engage in the fact that business investment is needed for the short and long-term development of an Aboriginal workforce in Canada.

Aboriginal organizations and communities also need to find new ways to work with employers and prepare their people for the future workforce. Council Governance Champions, Board Members and *Leadership Circle* partners play an important role to amplify the policy and partnership solutions. What can these leaders do to convince another 100, 200 and then 500 business leaders to adopt inclusive workplace strategies?

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<sup>1</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) projects that Canada's annual labour force growth will fall to less than 0.5 per cent between 2000 and 2020 and thereafter net annual growth will be negative.

Could our vision for Aboriginal employment parity be realized “one workplace at a time?” The answer to this question lies with you and other corporate, government and Aboriginal leaders across Canada.

***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.***

*Margaret Mead: The Making of an American Icon*

## **Engaging Youth Toward Strong and Healthy Workplaces**

It's critical that youth play an integral role in reshaping Canada's future workforce. They will inherit the current problems and they will relive the status quo unless they are provided with understanding and opportunity to repaint the canvas.



The Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, our youngest and fastest growing population, represent a large untapped and potential workforce. Currently there are 652,000 Aboriginal people in Canada of working age. By 2020, over 400,000 young Aboriginal people will enter the workforce.

Will the young people entering the workforce in the next few years

encounter workplaces that engage their talent, mind and energy? Indeed our productivity as a nation depends on a high level of employee engagement.

Today's youth can help inform business leaders on workplace designs that will be sure to empower employees of the new generation and support their productivity. Today's new workers are referred to as the “Millennium Generation”. Tomorrow's workforce is positioning itself as the “Inclusion Generation” and the youth can help employers understand this positive reality.

It's in everyone's best interest to develop workplaces today that make the most of tomorrow's valuable human resources.

## **Racism Free Workplace Strategies**

Before our vision for healthy and inclusive workplaces can be realized, racism needs to be aggressively addressed. A paradigm shift in the attitudes of many Canadians needs to occur.

It's real and it's deplorable that hardened attitudes toward culture, age, sex, religion and other personal characteristics of individuals still exist in workplaces across Canada. These stale attitudes, which rebuff minorities and exclude people, have no place in our society and our workplaces. Canada, with its multi-cultural make-up, will flourish with workplaces that celebrate diversity. In an inclusive workplace everyone feels empowered to play a role in the destiny of the organization.

Racism free workplace strategies provide organizations with opportunities to design work environments that motivate productive and happy employees.

## **The Government Gets "IT"**

The structural and societal issues which inhibit Aboriginal prosperity in Canada are many and varied. Many of the unemployment issues must be addressed within the context of a broader socio-economic framework. A new partnership framework by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has established the priority to encourage a closer working relationship between business and Aboriginal communities. The new framework recognizes the importance of aligning human resources with economic and business initiatives.

A new generation of Aboriginal programming has evolved. It encourages Aboriginal people, business and communities, to work with the non-Aboriginal business community in new and positive ways. There are significant resources allocated to build partnerships and solutions.

## Making Inclusion Work

Leaders representing youth, business, government, education and the Aboriginal communities will inspire positive change toward healthy, productive and inclusive workplaces and schools of the future. This collective leadership effort will make “inclusion work.” You can be an integral part of this progressive and landmark movement - a paradigm shift in Canadian workplace culture and performance, which is long overdue.

Advance inclusion through the Inclusion Continuum.

