



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 29, 2006

PRIVATE SECTOR AND ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY MEET TO RESOLVE NOVA SCOTIA'S SKILLED WORKER SHORTAGE

Membertou, Nova Scotia – An innovative Nova Scotia forum, *Workforce Connex*, is being hosted today at the Membertou Trade and Convention Centre to help resolve barriers and create opportunities that will open the potential for the private sector to effectively train, recruit and retain an untapped Aboriginal workforce.

Delegates will review the Nova Scotia workforce supply/demand issues to determine how the talent of Aboriginal people can be effectively accessed to develop a skilled and consistent supply of workers to support the ongoing needs of sectors such as construction, transportation, manufacturing and tourism. Participants will represent the private sector (business and training institutions), Aboriginal employment centres and government.

Nova Scotia employers are searching for ground-breaking solutions to address the current shortage of skilled workers caused by migration. The shortage is expected to accelerate in upcoming years due to the aging Nova Scotia workforce.

"Through open dialogue built on mutual respect and understanding, the forum will increase and strengthen the Aboriginal community's partnerships with private sector employers", said Dan Christmas, spokesperson for the Nova Scotia Aboriginal employment organizations and senior advisor for Membertou. "We are very pleased that the partnerships formed at this event will ultimately translate into training and job opportunities for Aboriginal people in Nova Scotia.

"Canada is experiencing an Aboriginal baby boom," said Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. "Aboriginal people are the nation's youngest and fastest growing human resource. This young upwardly mobile labour force needs workplace opportunities for training, skills development and employment. Awakening companies to this opportunity is a goal for *Workforce Connex*."

According to the Statistics Canada's 2001 Census, the median age for the Nova Scotia population is 38.8, considerably higher than the average median age for the Canadian Aboriginal population at 29 years of age. From 1996 to 2001, the Canadian working age population grew by five per cent, while the Aboriginal labour force grew by 25 per cent.

Employers participating in the Nova Scotia *Workforce Connex* forum are innovative thinkers motivated to develop an Aboriginal presence in their workforce. This, according to a survey conducted by the Canada Labour and Business Centre, is not the standard for Canadian business. The survey found that Canadian business and labour leaders do not consider the hiring of Aboriginal people an important solution to help solve their skill needs; only 13 per cent of business leaders and 21 per cent of labour leaders rated this activity very important. "This finding suggests that on a national scale, a disconnect exists between the potential skills contribution made by the Aboriginal workforce and the view held by some business and labour leaders on this contribution. This is the reason for *Workforce Connex*," said Lendsay.

Workforce Connex is a national forum series that will be hosted in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and Labrador. The outcomes of the Nova Scotia forum will be integrated into a national private sector/Aboriginal partnership strategy. The Nova Scotia forum is hosted by the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada in cooperation with the Nova Scotia regional planning committee (Department of Education, Nova Scotia Community College, Trucking Human Resource Sector Council, Nova Scotia New Car Dealers Association, Mi'kmaq Employment & Training Secretariat, Aboriginal Peoples Training & Employment Commission and Service Canada). The project is funded by the Sector Council Program, Human Resources and Social Development Canada.