

News Release



ABORIGINAL HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL OF CANADA
CONSEIL POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DES RESSOURCES HUMAINES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

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NATIONAL FORUM SERIES LAUNCHED TO HELP EMPLOYERS TAP INTO ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE TALENT AND ADDRESS CANADA'S SHORTAGE OF SKILLED WORKERS

Saskatoon, SA - Workforce Connex, a national forum series to help resolve barriers and open the potential for industry to effectively access, train, recruit and retain an Aboriginal workforce, has launched in Ontario. The national series will host forums in Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Labrador, Quebec and Alberta.

Through open dialogue, the forums will link the private sector and Aboriginal Employment Centres together to form partnerships that offer resolve to Aboriginal employment training, recruitment and retention issues. "The outcome of the forums will ultimately translate into employment opportunities for Aboriginal people", said Bonnie Vermette, Employment Counselor and member of the Ontario Workforce Connex planning group. "Many regions of Canada are experiencing a shortage of skilled workers. Employers are searching for innovative solutions to address the issue and capture the many opportunities now available to them. Aboriginal people are ready and willing to answer the call to fill the employment gap."

"Aboriginal people are Canada's fastest growing and largely untapped human resource," said Kelly Lendsay, President and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. Aboriginal people have talent and skills. They are a solution to many of Canada's skill shortages. Almost one in five Aboriginal men aged 25 to 64 with qualifications beyond high school held a trade or college level credential in building and construction technologies or trades. Another 25 per cent were college and trade level graduates of industrial, mechanical or electronic engineering technologies and trades.

From 1996-2001 the Canadian working age population grew by five per cent, while over the same period, the Aboriginal labour force grew by 25 per cent. This young upwardly mobile labour force needs workplace opportunities for training, skills development and employment. Awakening firms to this win-win opportunity is one of goals of the workforce forums. In a survey conducted by the CanadaWest Foundation, Canadian business and labour leaders said that hiring Aboriginal workers is not considered an important solution to solving 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.

At the conclusion of the forum series, the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council and Canada's regional Aboriginal Employment Centres expect that many new regional partnerships will have been established across Canadian due the increased connections, understanding, learning and mutual respect that has been developed through the Workforce Connex series.

The Council is developing the Workforce Connex forums in partnership with Aboriginal employment centres across the country. These centres, part of a national Aboriginal human resource strategy, can help employers to source Aboriginal talent. The Council is also pleased to be working with the federal department of Human Resource and Social development who have provided funding for this initiative.