



# Determinants of Participation in Indigenous Labour Market Programs: Final Report

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March 2016

**Produced by:**

**Social Research and Demonstration Corporation**

**For:**

**Aboriginal Affairs Directorate**

**Employment and Social Development Canada**



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Published in 2016 by the Social Research and  
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## Acknowledgements

SRDC would like to recognize and thank the people who contributed their time to talk with us and provide us with information for this project. By sharing their first-hand expertise, and the experiences of their clients, they have helped us gain a clearer understanding of the barriers and supports to full participation of Indigenous people in Canada's labour force.

# Executive Summary

## Objectives and methodologies

The purpose of this project is to provide background information for the renewal of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy within the broader scope of Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) Indigenous Labour Market Programs.

The research focuses on barriers to participation in Indigenous labour market programs (ILMP). The main categories of barriers included are health and social barriers, barriers related to community infrastructure, barriers related to housing, and the impacts of low economic activity and remoteness.

The project includes three main lines of inquiry: a document/focused literature review, key informant interviews with program agreement holders, and empirical data analyses.

The literature review keys on the four main questions related to participant barriers, as well as program practices used to address such barriers.

The key informant interviews bring in the views of staff from 11 ASETS, SPF/former ASEP agreement holders. A twelfth organization offered in-house evaluative material that contributed to the analysis.

The data analyses include tabulations of ASETS administrative data supplied by ESDC and secondary analyses of Statistics Canada data. The summary below combines data from all three sources, while in the body of the report the findings are identified as being from the literature, empirical data, or key informant interviews.

## Program use and demand indicators

A geographical analysis based solely on ASETS data indicates that the Aboriginal identity populations in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island were more likely than average to be ASETS clients. The corresponding population of Nunavut had the lowest rate of ASETS participation.

Population indicators related to the demand for employment and training services — including high unemployment, low educational achievement, low literacy and numeracy scores, and housing stressors — were all highest in Nunavut, followed by the other territories in most cases. There were significant differences in demand indicators between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in almost all regions.

## Evidence on barriers to participation in Indigenous labour market programming

### Health and social barriers

The lack of a high school diploma was noted as a significant barrier, limiting opportunities for further education and training. According to several sources, even high school graduates may lack skills due to the phenomenon of “social passing” — advancing students according to their age rather than academic achievement. Moreover, young people from remote communities may be hampered by the lack of opportunity to develop skills — like driving, banking and household maintenance — that would help them to persist in out-of-community education and training programs.

Health, disability and psychosocial issues are also reported to be more prevalent among Indigenous populations, particularly in remote regions. These issues point to the importance of the integration of employment services with community development programs. A lack of programming for persons with physical and learning disabilities was also reported in several studies.

Indigenous employment program participants tend to be older than in other populations. Informants pointed out that their clients were mature and motivated to succeed but were also likely to have parental or other familial obligations that require program support — such as child care.

Overall, the presence of multiple barriers among potential participants increases the importance of outreach, application assistance, client assessment and case management functions.

### Lack of community infrastructure

The lack of community infrastructure creates barriers to employment program participation in many Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote settings. The barriers include the absence of training facilities, shortages of trainers, poor transportation links, insufficient communications to support e-learning and relevant, minimal health services and disability support, local labour market information and career counselling.

Wrap supports — child care, in particular — are not available in some communities. Funded childcare promotes longer, more consistent participation in employment programs, provides stable employment in the community and contributes to early childhood development.

Many communities were noted to have strong leadership networks and community service organizations that can contribute to the development of employment programs relevant to local conditions. In-community training, particularly programs that integrated local languages and customs, were valued by participants.

### Community housing-related barriers

The inadequacy of housing across many Indigenous communities is well-documented; however, the literature on community housing-related barriers to education and training programs is sparse.

Data indicate that crowded and unsound housing is pervasive in many Indigenous communities, particularly across northern regions. Some reports noted that community residency-based housing is a barrier to mobility in that housing is in short supply in most communities and the resultant waiting lists make it difficult to find accommodation when training programs are in other communities. Difficulties in finding housing in larger centres can also be an issue for Indigenous people relocating for education and training programs.

## Remoteness / lack of economic development

Remoteness and lack of economic development can present barriers related to the lack of market-based employment opportunities, as well as deficient community infrastructure. Despite the lack of opportunities, attachment to place and family may lead to a reluctance to leave for education and training. Moreover, persistence and completion rates in out-of-community programs are generally low.

Supported community employment can provide a number of benefits related to personal and community development but may reinforce dependency on government programs and crowd out market-based skills development. Programs that integrate employment with traditional land-based skills — like the Canadian Junior Rangers — are well regarded in the literature.

Partnerships with employers, particularly in resource industries, can lead to job opportunities and community development but require significant time and resources among all partners to maximize the benefits. Moreover, resource industries are often transitory in nature which can limit their contribution to long-term community development. Commercialization of traditional activities, such as fishing, can provide stable, (if sometimes seasonal) employment where there is a demand for products and the means to get them to market.

## Promising program practices

A number of promising practices that contribute to the recruitment, assessment, training and outcomes of Indigenous clients were identified in the literature and reported by informants. These include:

- Intensive intake and assessment services that comprehensively identify clients' needs for education, development and training help to create service plans that meet complex needs.
- Having a full range of programming options available — from foundational skills to employability and job-related training to placement to employment retention — to meet clients' needs as identified in their service plans.
- Comprehensive, long-term case management services to keep clients' on track and make appropriate updates to their service plans.
- Providing “wrap supports” — such as transportation, child services and counselling — that are often necessary complements to job-related interventions.

- Two-way engagement with employers to maximize the opportunity for market-based job placements and ensure that employers and other employees are prepared to contribute to participants' workplace development.
- Maximizing the use of experiential learning opportunities — like apprenticeships and on-the-job essential skill development — that mirror traditional learning methods.
- Providing mentoring and coaching relationships for multi-barriered clients, particularly in situations with high unemployment and few market-based opportunities.
- Creating clear and frequent milestones in programs and recognize their achievement to positively reinforce clients' educational and training experiences.
- Providing more employment-related services to teens to motivate academic achievement and the development of job-related skills. Suggestions include:
  - Providing better career counseling and relevant labour market information could help youth to make more appropriate educational choices.
  - High school retention and early drop-out engagement programs could help to avoid “lost years” among Indigenous youth.
  - Peer learning strategies are reported to have achieved some successes among young Indigenous adults and may have applications in the education environment.
  - Regular essential skills testing and remediation could help high school students to identify skills gaps that they could address before graduation.
  - High school trades programs could provide students the incentive and means to learn foundational and job-related skills relevant to the local economy.
  - Licenced driving is a key life skill in areas with little public transportation and driving is a base skill in many resource occupations.
  - Intensive supports during the first few days of out-of-community training or education can help individuals get over the initial barriers that might frustrate them on their own.

## Agreement holder feedback

Key informants were asked to identify the full range of barriers to participation in employment-related workforce development programs and a number pointed to issues with program funding and operations.

Inconsistency of funding creates gaps in service delivery, negatively impacting clients. Sporadic funding, repeated short-term extensions, and lengthy approval processes are associated with delays, service gaps, start-up problems and missed employment opportunities for some clients.

While SPF projects are generally viewed as being well-funded, it was clearly noted that funding levels for ASETS have remained the same in current dollars for many years, despite a growing client base and increasing training costs. Informants report that the formula does not adequately account



for the time to develop programs nor to cultivate and maintain effective partnerships with employers and other stakeholders.

Agreement holders are supportive of program monitoring and accountability but describe a high administrative burden for many operational aspects of the program. They question whether the level of detail required in many reporting transactions contributes to useful assessments of their efficiency and effectiveness.

In terms of measuring the success of labour market programs, key informants felt that focusing on employment results does not adequately represent the full range of benefits for program participants. These may include significant milestones, identified in action plans, that are necessary steps to becoming employment ready.

# Introduction

## Objectives and scope

The purpose of this project is to provide background information for the renewal of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy within the broader scope of Employment and Social Development Canada's Indigenous Labour Market Programs. In particular, ESDC's Aboriginal Affairs Directorate specified four questions to be addressed:

1. To what extent are health and social issues impacting the level and duration of participation in ESDC's Indigenous labour market programming?
2. To what extent is the infrastructure (e.g., transportation, communications systems, water and power) impacting the level and duration of participation in ESDC's Indigenous labour market programming?
3. To what extent is the availability of safe, reliable housing impacting the level and duration of participation in ESDC's Indigenous labour market programming?
4. Is there any correlation between minimum level of economic activity in a community and program participation rates?

This report addresses these questions related to barriers to participation in Indigenous Labour Market Programs, taking account of the overall structure of the program, and identifies practices that have been reported to successfully address these barriers.

## Methodologies

The project includes three main lines of inquiry: a document/focused literature review; key informant interviews with program agreement holders; and, empirical data analyses.

The document/literature review focuses on the four main questions related to participant barriers, as well as program practices employed to address such barriers. The first phase of the review included all program evaluations of ESDC's Indigenous Labour Market Programs conducted in the past 10 years, as well as analytical and program documents provided by the Aboriginal Affairs Directorate. The second phase of the review incorporated key documents cited in the program evaluations and others identified through structured internet searches. The evidence from both stages was recorded in a structured Excel database for analysis.

The key informant interviews were conducted with staff from 11 ASETS, SPF/ASEP agreement holders on a list of potential informants supplied by ESDC. A twelfth organization offered in-house evaluative material that contributed to the analysis. The interviews were conducted according to semi-structured scripts incorporating the main research questions identified for the projects. The interview notes were coded and analyzed according to the same themes as the literature review. The organizations were spread geographically across the provinces and territories, and included a mix of ASETS and SPF agreement holders. This allowed us to hear a range of opinions and experiences; however, it is very important to note that this is not considered to be a representative

sample, and accordingly no attempt should be made to quantify the findings from the interviews. Rather, they provide illustrations and anecdotes of lived experiences of agreement holders, service providers, and most importantly, their clients.

The data analyses included tabulations of ASETS administrative data supplied by ESDC according to our specifications and secondary analyses of Statistics Canada data. The key question for the administrative data analysis was whether information on clients who failed to report to, cancelled or rescheduled programs could provide insights on barriers among non-participants. The secondary data analysis focused on identifying the extent and geographic distribution of documented barriers to employment among the Aboriginal identity population.

## **Report structure**

The first section of the report briefly describes the overall structure of the Aboriginal Labour Market Programs. It then discusses the recommended structural aspects of Indigenous labour market programs identified in the literature review. An overview of population-based barriers to employment in relation to the geographic distribution of ASETS clients follows. The section concludes with a review of key informants' feedback on the current program environment.

The second section presents the evidence on the four key research questions that motivated the project. It includes information from the document/literature review and key informant interviews.

The third section covers promising practices to specifically address barriers to employment and employment program participation relevant to Indigenous populations in Canada. The practices cover most aspects of program development, implementation and operations.

The final section summarizes the results of the study and offers some recommendations regarding the scope and content of Indigenous Labour Market Program consultations and renewal.

## Current Indigenous labour market program environment

### Programs

#### ASETS

The Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) is the key component in ESDC's Indigenous Labour Market Programs. The goal of ASETS is to "increase Indigenous participation in the Canadian labour market ensuring that Indigenous people have the skills and job training required for sustainable, meaningful employment". The target populations include First Nations, Inuit, Métis and non-status Aboriginal people living on and off reserve. The strategy emphasizes demand-driven approaches to workforce development and partnerships with employers, provinces and territories.

ASETS programming covers a wide range of needs among its intended clients — from foundational skills programs to specific occupational related training. The program also supports services — such as childcare — that enables clients to participate in programs.

ASETS programs are delivered through a network of Indigenous service organizations. The network's "agreement holders" work with partners at over 600 sites to assess community needs and design and deliver corresponding programs.

ASETS succeeded an earlier program, the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, in 2011 and was funded at \$295 million annually for five years.

The new Liberal Government has committed to the renewal of the ASETS program guided by consultations with stakeholders to be conducted in 2016. The Budget also announced a two-year pilot project within the ASETS program to support Indigenous community involvement in upgrading local infrastructure.

#### SPF

The Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) is a project-based program separate from ASETS though it shares the goal of creating sustainable, demand-based employment for Canada's Indigenous peoples. The program funds short-term partnerships that provide training-to-employment interventions focusing on high-demand occupations.

SPF was launched in 2010 and funded 87 projects in its first five year mandate. The program was renewed for another five years in 2015 with annual funding of \$50 million until the 2020 fiscal year.

#### FNJF

The First Nations Job Fund is part of a multi-departmental initiative to improve outcomes for income assistance recipients on First Nations reserves. FNJF is administered through the ASETS agreement holder network with the same goal of attaining sustainable, demand-based employment

for the program's clients: 18-24 year-olds who are deemed employable with a year or less of services. The FNJF received \$108.6 million of funding in 2013 for its first four-year mandate.

## Alignment with literature on Indigenous labour market programs

The document and literature review identified a number of structural program attributes that are considered appropriate for Indigenous labour market programs. Since these attributes apply generally to the policy environment rather than specific program practices, they provide the parameters in which specific programs are developed, implemented and applied using a range of practices. As the attributes align quite closely to the current structure of ESDC's Indigenous labour market programs, the descriptions are brief.

### Ownership / control by Indigenous organizations and communities

The active ownership of programs by Indigenous organizations, the capacity to fit programs to diverse Indigenous groups' and individuals' needs, and the ability to track participants in a common system are well regarded by Canadian and international commentators. Indigenous ownership and control support program development and operations that correspond to the culture, language and local economies of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Indigenous ownership and strong engagement in employment-related training is recommended with ASETS-type delivery models receiving strong support in many quarters.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, having the resources to train in one's own community is important to many participants and is discussed in more detail in the Promising Program Practices section.<sup>2</sup>

### Integration of Indigenous cultural practices and modes of learning

Program evaluations, policy studies and literature reviews indicate that the integration of Indigenous culture and traditions — as implemented in a number of ASETS programs — contribute to program success.<sup>3</sup> Although the attributes of Indigenous learning vary somewhat from source to source, the following list incorporates most of the main themes to be found in the literature.

- Indigenous learning is life-long and holistic. Although Indigenous learning was not traditionally conducted in a specific school or training environment, it now incorporates elements of both European and informal traditions such as incorporating local heritage into the school curriculum, often in sessions led by elders.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce and Marlin; Hunter; Dockery and Milsom.

<sup>2</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a; and, Workplace Education Manitoba.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include: ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; Klinga; and Industry Training Authority.

<sup>4</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; Workplace Education Manitoba; Klinga; Industry Training Authority.

- Learning is reinforced through traditional cultural practices and community- and land-based activities.<sup>5</sup>
- Indigenous learning often incorporates spiritual values.<sup>6</sup>
- The Indigenous approach is learner-centred but based on communal values and experience.<sup>7</sup>

## Recognition of the diversity of Indigenous organizations and communities

If the integration of cultural, linguistic and local economic realities are important components contributing to the success of Indigenous labour market programs<sup>8</sup> then it follows that labour market programs should respect and respond to this diversity. Program strategic direction, design and operations should thus reflect the diversity among and within Canada's main Indigenous groups: First Nations, Inuit and Métis.<sup>9</sup> Others note that Indigenous communities vary widely in terms of their proximity to urban centres and large employers, which also plays a role in the design and development of employment programs.<sup>10</sup>

## Community development

Given the well-recognized gaps in social, health and economic indicators between Indigenous communities and their non-Indigenous counterparts, workforce development should not be considered in isolation from other aspects of Indigenous community development.<sup>11</sup> Thus social, health and employment policies should work in concert to address the multiple barriers faced by some community members. Some also suggest that community underdevelopment may be related to oppression by the dominant culture such that community development programs, including employment programs, should also include a healing element.<sup>12</sup>

## Partnerships

Many evaluations and studies stress the importance of developing effective, long-lasting partnerships among service providers, community groups, education institutions and employers.<sup>13</sup> Clients, particularly those with little previous experience, benefit from the access to supported

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<sup>5</sup> Klinga; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>6</sup> Klinga.

<sup>7</sup> Klinga; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Klinga.

<sup>9</sup> Examples include: Kemp; Métis National Council; and Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>10</sup> Curry and Donker.

<sup>11</sup> Harrison and Lindsay; Klinga; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>12</sup> Caverly; Klinga; MacKinnon; Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>13</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009; Klinga; Harrison and Lindsay; MacKinnon; Industry Training Authority; and, MNP LLC.

employment opportunities while service providers receive valuable input on demand-focused program design and delivery. These papers generally counsel that all parties need to invest time, energy and mutual understanding for the partnerships to bring about the intended effects. Recent evaluations are generally sanguine about the partnerships struck in ESDC's Indigenous labour market programs.<sup>14</sup> A more detailed discussion of engagement with employers is included in the Promising Program Practices Section.

### Program coordination / integration

The public policy environment in which workforce development and, in particular, Indigenous labour market programs is complex, involving three levels of government, often with overlapping responsibilities for employment-related programs. For example, potential clients may have programs available from direct, federally funded sources like ASETS and SPF, LMDA-financed provincial programs (some of which may target Indigenous clients), and community development programs financed by INAD or other sources, among others.<sup>15</sup> Having a diverse array of programs from a number of sources can ensure that multi-barriered clients have appropriate programming choices for each step of their journey to sustainable employment but can also result in the inefficient allocation of resources through duplication or lack of coordination in the development and delivery of programs.<sup>16</sup> As presented in more detail in the section on agreement holder feedback, lack of coordination among programs can result in clients being “bounced around like a ping-pong ball”, slowing their progress to access needed supports. One evaluation covering the delivery of programs in a remote region of Quebec noted that having a single coordinating body for workforce development programs in the region eliminated the possibility of overlap.<sup>17</sup>

## Alignment with geographic distribution of Aboriginal identity population characteristics

This section begins with the distribution of ASETS current and past clients by province. It is followed by several socio-economic indicators, mainly from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), that are either anticipated to be related to the demand for ASETS programs or may present barriers to program participation. All of the indicators are presented at the provincial level to match the current level of geographic detail available for clients in the ASETS file. The data from the NHS can be tabulated for sub-provincial regions if matching delineations could be produced from the ASETS file.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2015.

<sup>15</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2015; Harrison and Lindsay; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>16</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2015; and MNP LLC.

<sup>17</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

Nearly a quarter of ASETS clients have been residents of British Columbia, followed by 16% in Alberta and Manitoba, 15% in Ontario, 11% in Saskatchewan and 10% in Quebec (Figure 1). No other province or territory accounts for more than 3% of ASETS's clientele.

**Figure 1 Distribution of ASETS client base by province / territory**

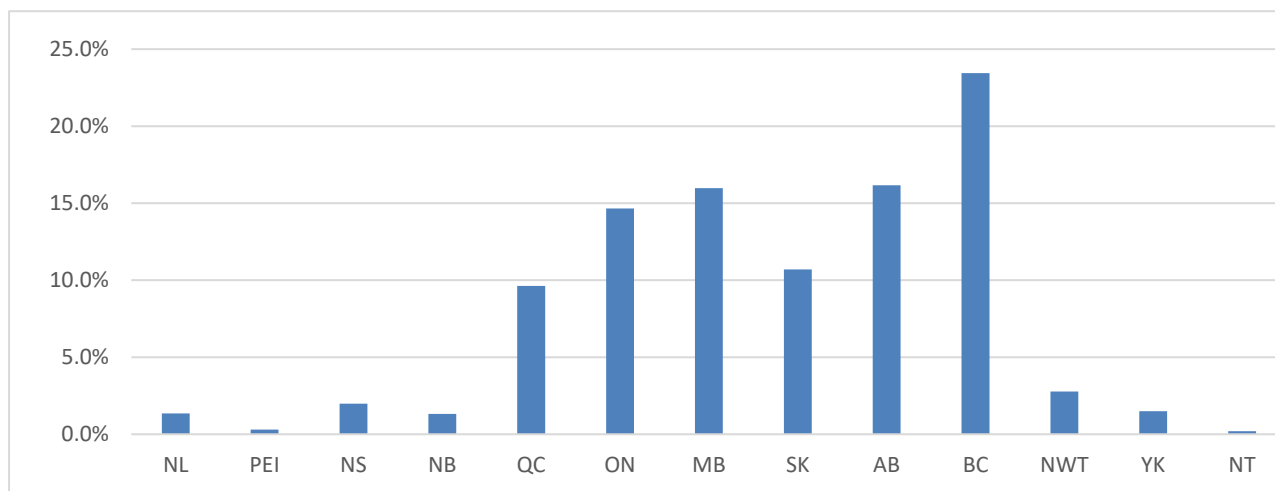
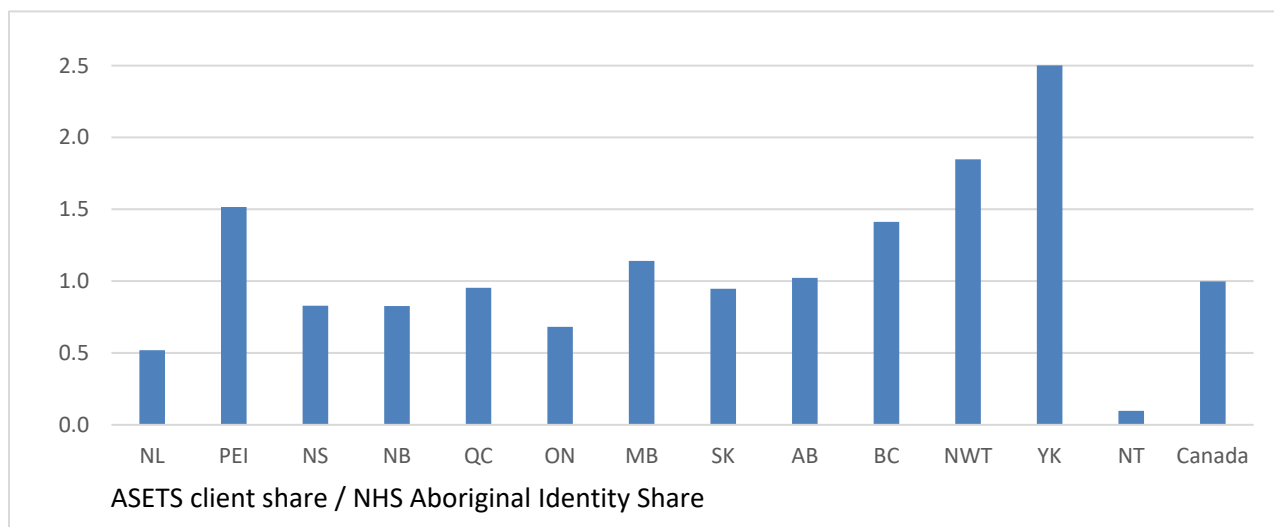


Figure 2 relates the size of the ASETS client base to the provincial Aboriginal identity population from the NHS.<sup>18</sup> It is calculated such that the national proportion of the Aboriginal identity population who are ASETS clients is equal to 1.0 and each province's or territory's rate is proportionate to the national. For example, the Aboriginal identity population in the Yukon is two-and-a-half times as likely to be an ASETS client as the national average. The Northwest Territories, British Columbia, PEI and Manitoba are also above the national average. Alberta is right at the average while the rest of the provinces are below. Nunavut's Aboriginal identity population has the lowest probability of being an ASETS client.

<sup>18</sup> Note that these ASETS service level indicators do not represent all the employment related training options available to Indigenous people. Variation in the use other federal government programs and LMDA- and LMA-financed provincial programs would account for some of the inter-jurisdictional differences in ASETS use.

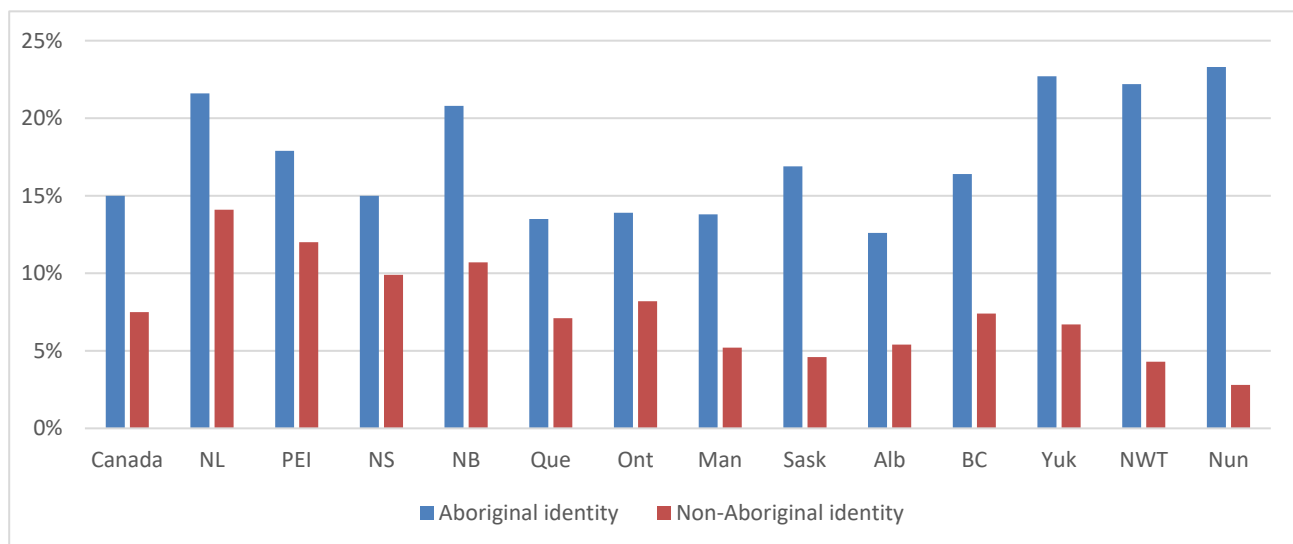


**Figure 2 ASETS client base relative to Aboriginal identity population by province, 2011 NHS**



**Figure 3 Unemployment rate by province and Aboriginal identity, 2011 NHS**

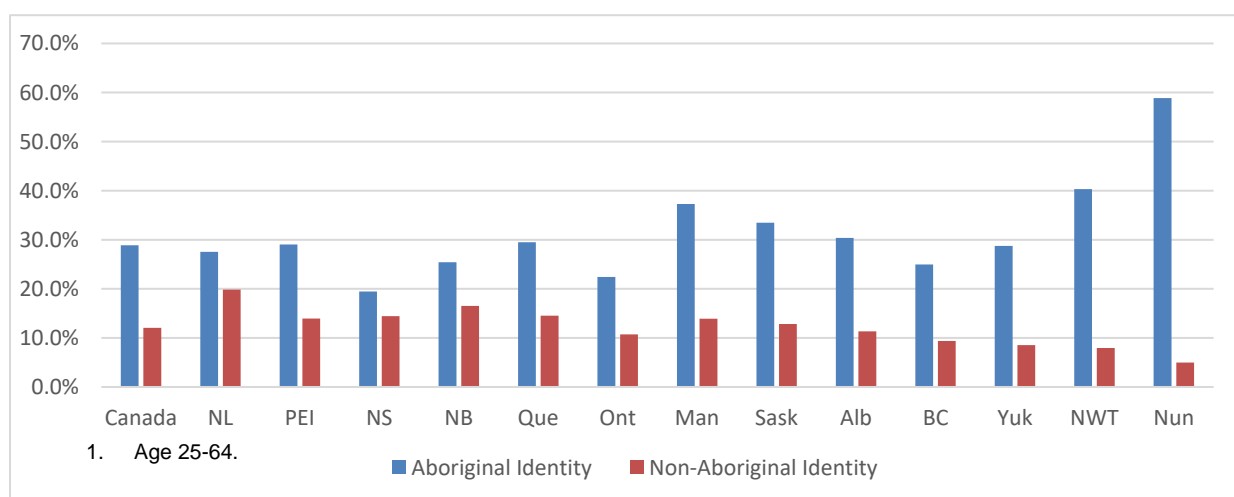
In 2011, the unemployment rate among the Aboriginal identity population was double the national average (Figure 3).<sup>19</sup> The Aboriginal identity unemployment rate exceeded 20% in Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. It was between 15% and 20% in PEI, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. The unemployment rate for the Aboriginal identity population did not fall below 11% in any province.



<sup>19</sup> More current estimates of unemployment among off-reserve Aboriginals are available from the Labour Force Survey but they do not align with any of the Aboriginal group identifiers in the ASETS database.

Individuals who have not completed a secondary education are unlikely to have the knowledge and skills to sustainably participate in the market economy. They are thus a primary target for workforce development interventions. Among Canada's Aboriginal identity population, 29% had not achieved a secondary diploma in 2011 (Figure 4).<sup>20</sup> Fully 59% of Nunavut's Aboriginal identity population had not achieved a secondary diploma, followed by 40% in the Northwest Territories. Among the provinces, Aboriginal peoples in the Prairies had the highest rates of low educational attainment while Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia had the lowest rates.

**Figure 4 Population<sup>1</sup> with no diploma, certificate or degree by Aboriginal identity, 2011 NHS**



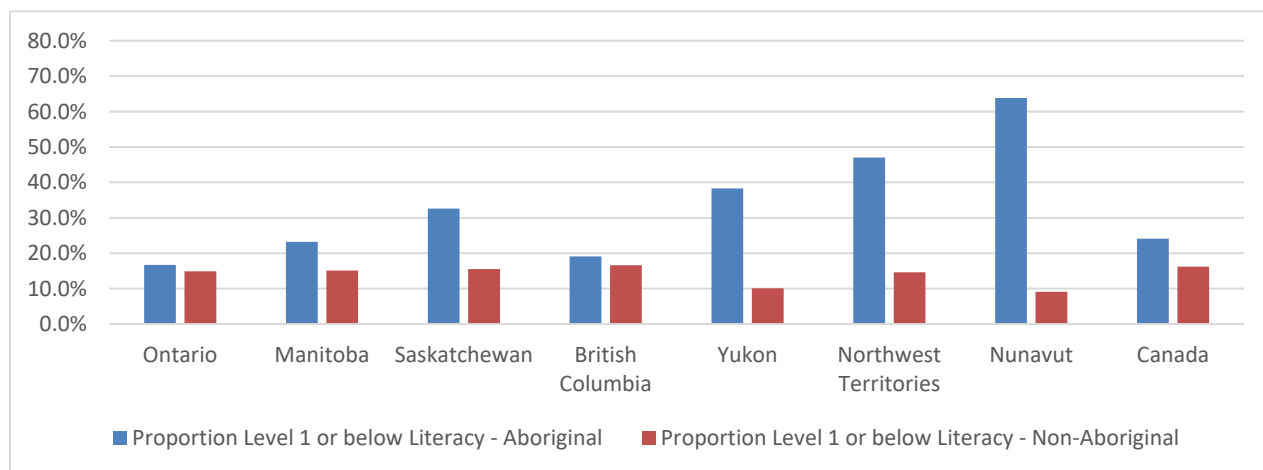
The rates of low literacy among off-reserve Aboriginals present a similar pattern to the rates of low educational attainment.<sup>21</sup> Level 1 literacy is associated with having difficulties with any printed material and a high likelihood of self-identifying as having reading problems.<sup>22</sup> Nearly two-thirds of Nunavut's Aboriginal identity population performed at level 1 or below in literacy, compared to 47% in the Northwest Territories and 38% in the Yukon (Figure 5). Provincial figures were lower, ranging from 17% in Ontario to 33% in Saskatchewan. The differences in the proportion with level 1 or lower literacy between Aboriginal identity and non-Aboriginal populations were not significant in Ontario and British Columbia.

<sup>20</sup> The 25-64 age group is used to represent the adult, working age population. Although most people have completed their secondary schooling by age 25, Aboriginal adults are more likely to return to school later in life than non-Aboriginals (ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a).

<sup>21</sup> PIAAC only included off-reserve Aboriginal persons in its sample design and estimates for this population are only available for the provinces and territories displayed. Although this population does not directly coincide with any ASETS sub-group, PIAAC represents the only major source of measured skill scores for any Aboriginal population in Canada.

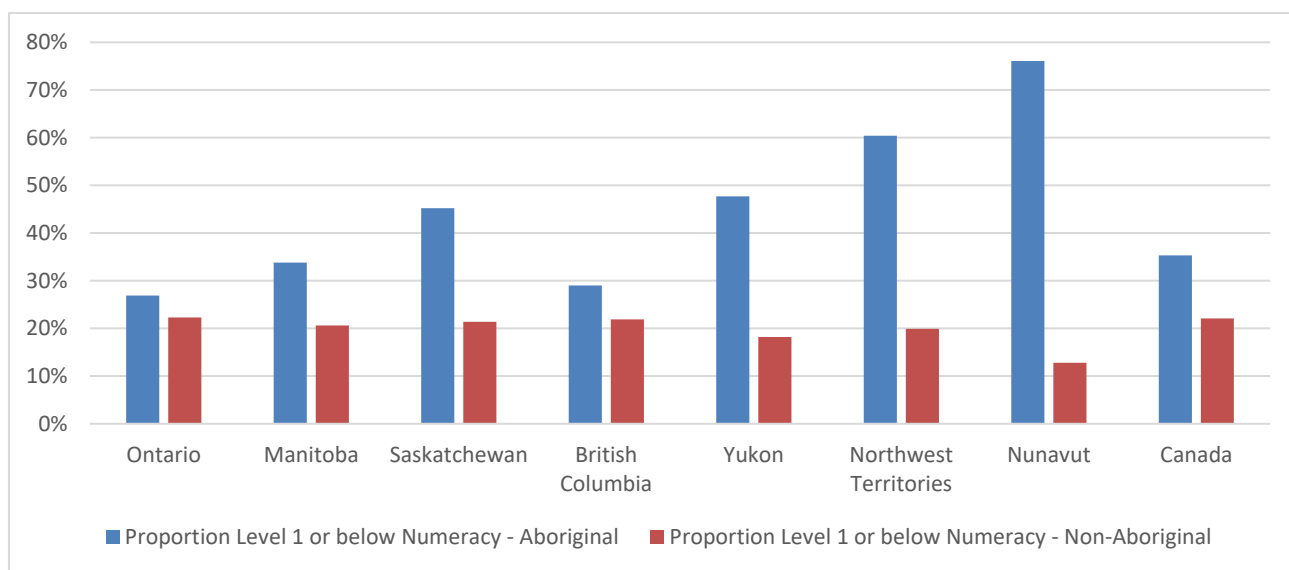
<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada et al.

**Figure 5 Population with level 1 literacy or lower by Aboriginal identity, PIAAC 2012**



The incidence of level 1 or lower numeracy is greater than the incidence of low literacy among both the Aboriginal identity and non-Aboriginal populations, however the numeracy gap between the two populations is greater than the literacy gap and is significant in all jurisdictions (Figure 6). Otherwise, the inter-jurisdictional patterns in low numeracy are very similar to the low literacy patterns. Low numeracy skills present a significant barrier to many fields of study and higher-paying occupations.

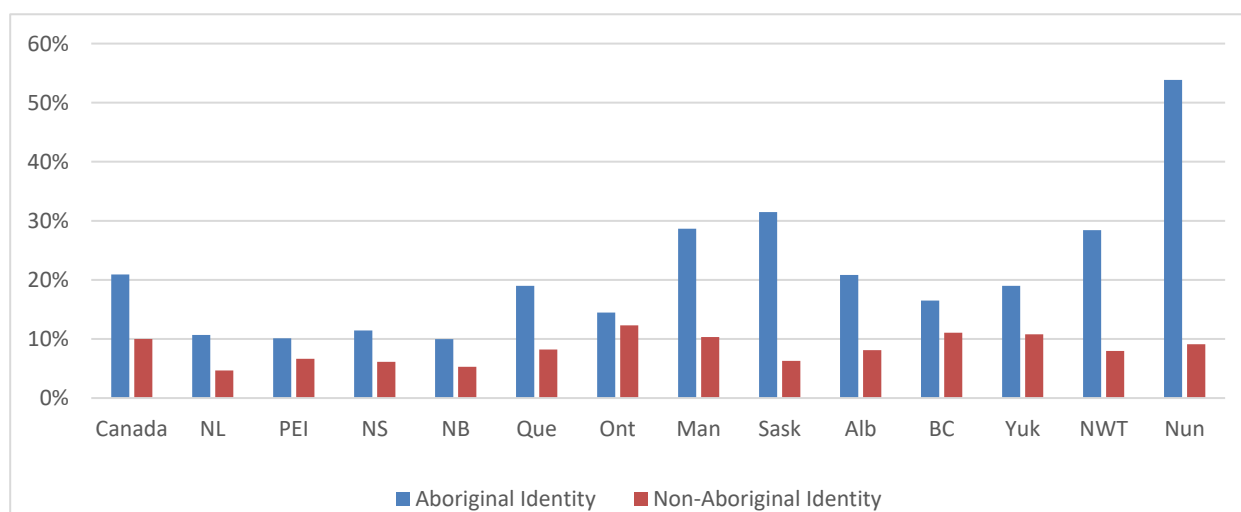
**Figure 6 Population with level 1 numeracy or lower by Aboriginal identity, PIAAC 2012**



Suitable housing refers to the number of bedrooms in relation to the makeup of the household. One bedroom is considered suitable for: each single person age 18 or over; cohabiting couples; two youth ages 6-17 of the same sex; two children of either sex age 5 and under. If any bedroom in a house is used by more than these numbers, the housing is considering unsuitable.<sup>23</sup>

Across Canada, over 20% of those identifying Aboriginal heritage live in unsuitable housing compared to 10% of non-Aboriginals (Figure 7). Over half of those reporting Aboriginal heritage in Nunavut live in unsuitable housing, followed by third of those in Saskatchewan and just under a third in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. The rate of unsuitable housing for the Aboriginal identity population is much lower in the Atlantic Provinces, averaging 10%.

**Figure 7 Unsuitable housing by province and Aboriginal identity, NHS 2011**



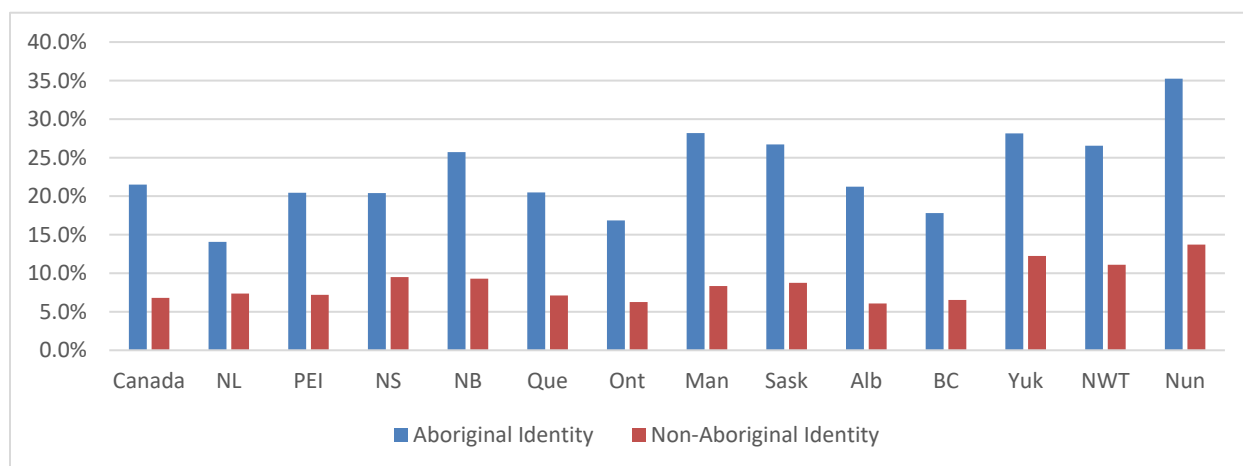
Housing requiring major repairs is also an issue among Indigenous populations. Major repairs include: defective plumbing or electrical wiring, or structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings.<sup>24</sup>

Over 21% of Aboriginal peoples in Canada live in housing in need of major repairs. Again the rate is highest in Nunavut, where 35% of the Aboriginal identity population lives in housing requiring major repairs (Figure 8). Between 25% and 30% of Aboriginal identifiers live in housing requiring major repairs New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario and British Columbia are the only jurisdictions where the rate of housing needing major repairs falls below 20% for the Aboriginal population.

<sup>23</sup> For more details see: [http://cmhc.beyond2020.com/HiCODefinitions\\_EN.html#\\_Suitable\\_dwellings](http://cmhc.beyond2020.com/HiCODefinitions_EN.html#_Suitable_dwellings)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 8 Housing in need of major repairs by province and Aboriginal identity, NHS 2011**



### Key informant interviews: Client characteristics

For the most part, key informants described their clients as being in the 25-30 age range, with some extending into mid-thirties, and fewer in their early twenties. It is important to note that while many applicants to these programs do have barriers to overcome – sometimes multiple barriers – they are also at an age where they may already have addressed challenges presented when they were younger. Some were described as being “a little more mature, used to being away from home”, and “looking for a better life”. Many or most have dependents, either children and/or parents or other family, and they are seeking ways to provide for dependents and home communities. Clients who are not yet ready for employment are generally referred to pre-employment training programs, and/or supports offered mainly in their home communities, such as those provided by FNJF, Band Offices, or INAC.

The key informant organizations are spread out geographically across Canada and have main offices in urban centres. Most of their clients come from home communities in traditional territories, although in recent years there has been a trend to out-migration to larger population centres. The majority of employment opportunities are found in remote sites or smaller towns. There are barriers associated specifically with leaving home communities for training and for work, among the other four main categories of barriers identified. It is worth noting that agreement holders participating in this project are from larger organizations, not typically serving Indigenous people from the most remote and smallest communities with persistent poverty and most severe infrastructure barriers.

### Agreement holder feedback on the current program environment

ASETS agreement holders have been involved in the current framework for up to five years and many were previously involved in the delivery of AHRDS programs since the 1990's. The primary objective of our consultation with agreement holders was to identify the full range of barriers to

participation among potential clients for employment-related workforce development programs. A number of the informants also identified systemic barriers, in addition to individual- and community-based barriers, that they believe impede the attainment of the stated goals of the program. These systemic barriers are summarized below.

## Funding

- Funding is unstable over time, creating gaps that negatively impact clients:
  - Industry partners who have committed to hiring Indigenous workers cannot wait indeterminately for funding to be approved. Several informants described situations where delays meant that employers had to go ahead and hire (non-Indigenous) workers, with the result that program participants lost these job opportunities. Clients are affected by more than just the immediate job loss; it can discourage their momentum and leave them vulnerable to getting off track.
  - “Inconsistency in funding creates unpredictability and instability for our clients.”
  - Funding can be sporadic: organizations are sometimes given a one-month extension, or three months, or one year.
  - Some noted that ASETS funding is relatively flexible, while others felt that it needed to be more so. For SPF, there was indication that more flexibility in funding was necessary to promote client success. In one example, a client faced with costs and challenges associated with transition from training to the work location needed support with truck payments and rent for the first few months while he got settled; funds from provincial funds (described as being more flexible) were used for this purpose. In the absence of this temporary support, he would not have succeeded.
- Funding levels are based on past patterns rather than a bottom-up, global assessment of needs:
  - Indigenous organizations must have better opportunities to be part of the planning process.
  - Government policy makers continue to develop plans without consulting agreement holders; agreement holders need a permanent, consistent dialogue with government to help inform program development.
  - While not a view held by all key informants, a few felt that ASETS agreement holders are treated like “less thans” or “second-class citizens” compared to some provincially-funded programs (e.g., BCEP). They also viewed provincial programs as being introduced without consultation, and significantly better resourced than ASETS.
  - ASETS agreement holders are permanent parts of their communities, with established relationships and infrastructure; they represent “Aboriginal people delivering Aboriginal programs” and if better funded could have some of the other programs rolled in (ESD, SPF), or working together more effectively.

- Funding levels have remained the same in current dollars for many years, resulting in declining service levels for a growing client base:
  - The presence of multiple funding streams can create “stovepipes” and inefficiencies that reduce service levels. To avoid this, some suggested that more funds should be allocated to the client-based ASETS to expand the demonstrated success already being accomplished. At the same time, some expressed that the industry-based focus of SPF was key for stabilizing labour force demand, and called for increased funding.
  - As one interviewee expressed: “I will work with whatever I’m given, but there is never enough money to meet the needs of our people.”
  - While funding amounts have remained fixed, the costs of training for some occupations have increased 300% or more. For example, in one region the 7-8 week training for Heavy Equipment Operators has increased from \$6,780 to \$24,800 in recent years. The sophistication of machinery and operating systems for trades-related occupations has contributed to higher training expenses, not recognized in commensurate increases in funding. As a result, fewer clients benefit.
  - In the words of one agreement holder: “I don’t know why it is so hard to get the money we need to do the work we do.”
- The funding formula does not adequately account for the time to develop programs nor to cultivate and maintain effective partnerships with employers and other stakeholders. Paperwork for initiating projects and partner relationships is extensive and sometimes prohibitive. In the words of one informant: “They want your first-born for a \$40K contract!”

## Operations

- Agreement holders understand and support monitoring and accountability for program operations and outcomes but describe a high administrative burden (“ridiculously high”, “micromanagement at its worst”) for many of the operational aspects of the program. They question whether the level of detail required in many reporting transactions contributes to useful assessments of their efficiency and effectiveness:
  - Audit requests have been received for the use of a ream of paper, for example, or for using more postage stamps than had been budgeted for one month. Audits are frequent, and time-consuming.
  - Paperwork for proposals is burdensome, yet planning is not an allowable expense; organizations must weigh the costs of their time spent in paperwork vs providing service delivery and benefit to clients.
  - Although ASETS funding is relatively flexible, the administrative burden for claiming smaller items such as bus passes “can be so convoluted that it is not worth the time to do so”, with the result that agreement holders seek alternative sources.

- “Policies themselves create barriers”, for example with rules restricting the receipt of social assistance, housing or child care subsidies. In some scenarios, continued support can mean the difference between success and failure for clients. Federal and provincial governments could align program rules for better results.
- Informants spoke of the lengthy proposal review process, noting that approval delays hampered the development of time-sensitive programs, and strained relationships with partners, essentially creating a barrier to clients receiving needed supports:
  - In one example, an agreement holder filing their detailed operational plan in August 2015 did not receive approval until the third week of March 2016 for program start date of April 1; however, their subcontractors need more than 1-2 weeks for planning and recruitment.
  - Interviewees described situations in which after taking significant time to prepare proposals and detailed operational plans, they were given approvals “at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour” to sign in order to obtain funds for programs they had planned. As one said: “You kind of feel like they’re saying ‘If you want money, sign this now’.”
  - As one informant described it, delays put agreement holders in a “reactive” mode where they are rushed to hire contractors and put programs in place. On the other hand, when program staff are able to thoughtfully plan together to meet the needs of their clients, they can be “creative” and much more effective at helping clients overcome barriers. One of their examples of a successful program born of “creative” planning was when they found a way to incorporate traditional Aboriginal knowledge about farming into the curriculum at a Government of Quebec-funded Adult Education Centre. This demonstrated how Aboriginal practices and expertise could be built upon and adapted to a market-driven economy.

## The relationship between funder and agreement holders

Key informants expressed varying views of their relationship with the federal funders. Some were very positive:

- “From the time we both signed the [ASETS] agreement, we [ESDC and agreement holder] have worked together as partners to ensure we achieve results.”
- “ASETS was created for our people. We have a strategic business plan, the principle is demand-driven. My interpretation is how to help my own people.”
- “... the government is really paying attention to what the people are saying.”

Others were not as positive. While expressing appreciation for the funding that makes their programs possible, there were concerns about the relationship:

- “Too many times we speak of ‘partnership’ but communities still have to follow government guidelines.”
- “First Nations need more opportunities to find solutions themselves.”



- “We used to sit together at national tables and work through the issues...had a fairly good relationship...felt like we had their respect. Under Harper’s government, all communication stopped.”
- “Programs change at political will, and very rarely is that done in a consultative matter with us.”
- “I cannot think of an example where we felt genuinely consulted with.”

Among other opinions expressed:

- The pendulum has swung over time from initially high levels of government control, then flexibility and support for capacity-building for agreement holder organizations, then back to high levels of government control during the last 10 years under the previous (Harper) federal government. As expressed by one interviewee: “This comes with a price to pay, and its customer service.”
- Many described positive relationships with individual Service Canada personnel, but lamented frequent staff changes and the ongoing operational inefficiencies that not only eroded service delivery, but also “burned out” good Service Canada SDOs.

Key informants shared optimism about their future relationship with ESDC, under the new federal government:

- “There are changes on the horizon, with a new PM who says that Indigenous people are near and dear to his heart”.
- A Technical working group of the AFN has grown to 55 members and is reported to work well together. It is supported by Service Canada and they “sometimes get the ear of the Minister”.
- Actions taken by the new federal government – such as the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and budget announcements – are viewed as positive signs that the government is committed to truly supporting Indigenous people.

## Measuring success

Key informants were asked how program success is measured and whether there are additional measures that should be included. Without exception, interviewees felt that measuring success solely on having an “employment result” falls short of recognizing other important outcomes of training programs. Even if clients do not secure a job, they may for example gain First Aid and Serve it Right training “which they can use at the community level and will benefit their kids”. Another expressed that the focus on achieving an “employment result” means that programs are forced to focus on clients who are most job-ready, at the expense of those who may need more training, and those with more serious or multiple barriers. This agreement holder was confident that with additional funding and an expanded mandate, they could work with clients in greater needs and achieve similar results. In their own words, following are some of the other comments from agreement holders regarding program success:

- “Success is defined by what people themselves consider success.”
- “Even if they complete the 2-week pre-employment training program, they have at least more confidence.”
- “Participants in training programs develop skills and confidence, and self-esteem. Instructors are not ‘easy’ on them.”
- “Occupational training is transferable from one employer to another.”
- “Success should be measured by milestones, not just jobs. For examples, steps along the way like overcoming addictions, completing [steps towards employability] ladderling.”
- “To see the look in peoples’ eyes. It’s about far more than employment stats...it’s about building self-esteem and confidence.”
- “Success should be measured in terms of where a person starts their journey. For some, success might be a return to school, while for others it may be rehab, which is a milestone for people dealing with addiction.”
- “Addictions diminish or are overcome. There are strengthened communications.”
- “Success is often measured in terms of numbers, but we are realizing that success is not just a statistic...Action Plans note the steps along the way and these should be part of the measures of success.”
- “We can demonstrate value by the barriers they [clients] are eradicating.”

In addition, many noted positive effects of training programs on families and communities. Skilled workers in mining, forestry, oil and gas extraction, and fishing industries have well-paying jobs, improving the economic circumstances of their families, and associated social and community benefits. For one example, in communities where members were trained and working in a mine, attendance rates jumped at the local schools. This was particularly noticeable in a Grade 10 class, where attendance tends to decrease, but instead increased from 75% to 93% from Fall to Spring term with no change in teaching or other factors at the school. Instead, the increase was attributed to “students now coming from families that have meaningfully employed parents.” Other positive outcomes can be found when children follow their parents’ footsteps into their industry; for example, a father working at the Ekati mine since 1998 was financially able to provide better care and education for his son while growing up, and the son is now in training to work at a diamond mine.

Measuring success should also include measurement of career advancement, according to key informants. To be truly integrated into the workforce, Indigenous people should have the same advancement opportunities as non-Indigenous, yet programs typically do not have resources or mandate to follow up with participants beyond a year or 18 months, at most. In smaller centres, and due to close ties among Indigenous peoples, staff may be aware of the career trajectories of past participants for much longer periods of time, but several expressed the importance of being able to track “success” in the longer term to find out whether or not clients are thriving. For example, a woman with multiple barriers who completed training to work in the Tourism industry did not find

work in her field immediately, but was able to get a part-time job at a convenience store. The confidence she gained from her employment there led to her gaining self-confidence and leaving an abusive relationship; she then performed even better at work and was promoted to full-time day manager of the store. When she was in contact with program staff, she expressed her pride in herself, illustrating the importance of being able to track people over time in order to get a full picture of “success”. In another example, program staff indicated that workers completing five years of experience with a national employer at a particular mine site, have skills that are transferable and sought after in many other locations; their career trajectories are very positive.

# Evidence on barriers to participation in Indigenous labour market programming

## Health and social barriers

Many clients lack formal education credentials with the absence of a high school diploma presenting a serious barrier to entry in many trade and technical occupations, as well as to postsecondary studies.<sup>25</sup> Low levels of education generally coincide with poor foundational / essential skills which expands the range of services required to reach the skill and educational requirements of most occupations.<sup>26</sup> Low skill levels can also impede the recruitment of potential clients and their applications to and registration in programs.<sup>27</sup>

The importance of Grade 12 education for participation in today's workforce was noted by all interviewees. One described how for 20 years, some programs for Aboriginals have "trained them to death" but without the foundation of a Grade 12 education, their ability to participate in a career is very limited. Training in the occupations associated with resource extraction – the ones primarily targeted by Indigenous labour market programs – generally requires Grade 12 diploma equivalencies as a pre-requisite. Some exceptions exist, for example, janitorial work, or some positions in the tourism industry. Along with low education levels, low literacy was cited as a barrier for clients. Many programs assess literacy at program intake, and make appropriate referrals for literacy and essential skills training, as required.

Key informants reported that low levels of workplace essential skills – for example literacy, numeracy and problem-solving – form another barrier for Indigenous people. Many programs assess competencies at intake, and incorporate Essential Skills training in their curricula or refer clients to other resources to bring skill levels up prior to occupational training. One described ES training as "critical" to their programming, yet OLES funds are directed to their provincial counterparts instead.

Language was cited as a barrier for clients with home languages different from the prevailing language of industry. For example, on reserves in parts of Quebec where Native languages are spoken at home, the INAC-funded schools teach English before French, even though French is the language spoken at post-secondary institutions and workplaces throughout the region, and the language of certification tests for

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<sup>25</sup> INAD and ESDC, Minum and Specter; Guevera et al.; ESDC, Policy Research Analysis and Geomatics; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2015; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009; Bruce and Marlin; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; and Industry Training Authority.

<sup>26</sup> INAD and ESDC, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2015; Industry Training Authority; Gray, Hunter and Lothar; and, MNP LLC.

<sup>27</sup> MNP LLC.

apprentices. As a result, young people leaving the reserves for training and jobs are faced with the additional barrier of having to learn (more) French while also engaging in labour market training.

Similarly, in remote Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories, for example, where Native languages are spoken first, English may not be taught at school, or not to the extent required for attending occupational training in English, or working in an English workplace, yet the language of industry is English.

The lack of skill and education is concentrated among the young as many Indigenous people return to the skills development system as adults.<sup>28</sup> Key informants suggest that the lack of education and skills among the younger cohorts are likely related to funding and quality issues in the educational system in their area of operations. As well, lack of skill can be exacerbated by “social passing” (advancing students along with their year cohort, regardless of their skill levels), such that the possession of a ‘high school diploma’ is not necessarily indicative of having adequate skills for further education.<sup>29</sup>

The phenomenon of “social passing” was described by several of the interviewees:

- One described how a local high school was being touted as a success story for graduating Aboriginal students with “leaving school certificates”; however, it was a “farce” as the students were told that they didn’t even need to attend school to obtain them, and they were not receiving education to the Grade 12 level.
- The quality of education at schools on reserves was described as lacking (“dismal” by one), due to inadequate funding and difficulties attracting and retaining good teachers; even students who are eager to learn may not have access to good teachers and learning materials, either at the elementary or secondary level. “Graduates” require academic upgrading before they are truly prepared at a Grade 12 level for their next step of training for the workforce.
- One told of referring three “job-ready” clients with high school equivalency diplomas to a Social Worker program at a local college, only to discover three months later that they were assessed at a Grade 8 educational level. They did not succeed in the program but went instead for academic upgrading.

Life skills generally required for participation in the workforce — such as household maintenance, banking and driving — may not be well developed due to lack of cultural relevance for these skills while living in home communities, as well as lack of community resources and community-based, extended-family housing.<sup>30</sup>

Lack of valid driver’s licence is a barrier for many Indigenous people accessing employment programs. For those coming from small and remote communities, driving is not typically necessary, and regardless cars not affordable. There is no driver training, and it can be very expensive to travel to driver and

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<sup>28</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

<sup>29</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Industry Training Authority.

licensing centres – up to thousands of dollars for return flights. On rural reserves, there is either no Service Canada centre for obtaining licensing, or one with limited hours of operation (e.g., one day per week). Lack of valid licensing impacts workers not only in terms of limiting the types of occupations they can pursue, but also transportation to and from work sites. Some clients have fines from previous incidents of driving without licences, or other infractions, and do not have the funds to pay the fines and reinstate their good standing.

Behavioural and health issues are more prevalent among Indigenous people than in other population groups, and community health well-being indicators are lower.<sup>31</sup> There are numerous contributing factors. Literature reviews and sociological studies cite a history of cultural repression and a lost generation related to residential schooling that can lead to a lack of positive role models with respect to education and employment, as well as alcoholism and other substance abuse issues.<sup>32</sup> More directly, poverty and lack of health services and information contribute to poor population health.<sup>33</sup> Negative relationships with government, the legal system and schools may impede entry into and retention in formal programs.<sup>34</sup>

Cultural repression and negative relationships with government and the legal system were cited as barriers. Some interviewees described the social and health barriers faced by their clients – in particular substance abuse, family violence, and mental health conditions – as multi-generational effects of residential schools, and continued effects of shifting from traditional lifestyles to labour market economies. Low self-esteem is a barrier for those who are “not given the chance of learning the talents they have, and after a while stop trying.” Mental health issues that are not properly diagnosed cannot be successfully treated. For some programs, these problems are the biggest barriers to participation, and service providers rely on being able to refer clients to appropriate resources either in urban centres, where there may be more targeted treatment options, or in their home communities, where they can access Band and/or INAC resources.

Social and health problems may contribute to having criminal records, which in themselves remain huge barriers to labour market participation, even when underlying conditions that led to the convictions have been overcome. Convictions must be addressed prior to employment, particularly in very remote work sites (e.g., diamond mines, fishing boats) where harmony among workers in close quarters is essential, and employers are not willing to take chances on workers with incidents in their past.

Some key informants distinguished between women and men in terms of barriers, largely reflecting what is found in the literature: women face more barriers than men related to child care/family care responsibilities, and domestic violence. On the other hand, women tend to have fewer criminal records, and higher levels of education than their male counterparts, so are less barriered for those reasons. As well, several reported that once enrolled in training, women achieve better outcomes. In terms of job opportunities, women are less suited/likely to be hired for occupations requiring physical size or

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<sup>31</sup> INAD and ESDC; and, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce and Marlin; Klinga; Dockery and Milsom; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>33</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; and, Gray, Hunter and Lothar.

<sup>34</sup> INAD and ESDC; and MNP LLC.

strength, or where workers must live together in close quarters for extended periods of time. One agreement holder pointed out that by mandating SPF funds to be for partnering with industry (in the third year of SPF), women in their region are disadvantaged because the main industries in the region are mining and forestry, where 80% of the jobs go to men. Similarly, opportunities for women in the fishing industry are limited to on-shore jobs. Further, the types of jobs for which women are hired in these industries — cleaning, cooking, laundry, processing plants — are lower-paying. On the other hand, another informant from a different region said that women truck drivers are highly sought after by mining companies because the trucks are expensive (\$6M), and when driven by women are found to last longer (up to 16% longer). As well, women are reported to be attending training in the IT occupations (e.g., website development, digital literacy) in higher numbers than men.

An ESDC evaluation noted that there were few program options available for persons with disabilities.<sup>35</sup> Others documented generally low rates of employment among persons with disabilities.<sup>36</sup> Communications-related learning disabilities were also cited as a barrier to participation, application and assessment.<sup>37</sup>

With the incidence of disability significantly higher amongst Indigenous people, lack of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities was noted as a barrier during key informant interviews. Physical disabilities present barriers for labourer jobs or other occupations requiring physical strength and agility. As well, one described the presence of disabilities that are not visible as presenting significant barriers, including anxiety and other mental health conditions or social barriers resulting from being raised in foster care. While programs are getting better at recognizing and treating these types of barriers, there remains much work to be done.

Program entrants tend to be older than in other populations and more likely to have parental or other familial obligations.<sup>38</sup> Such obligations increase the demand for child care to support program participation.<sup>39</sup>

All these factors, especially in combination, reduce the possibility that individuals will seek out, apply for and continue in long-term education and training programs.<sup>40</sup> These issues increase the importance of outreach, application assistance, client assessment and case management functions.

On the positive side, the literature notes that the gaps in education and skills relative to other population groups are slowly closing. Moreover, participants that do achieve educational and occupational credentials generally do well in the labour market, subject to local economic conditions. The active ownership of programs by Indigenous organizations, the capacity to fit

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<sup>35</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b.

<sup>36</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; and, Gray, Hunter and Lothar.

<sup>37</sup> MNP LLC.

<sup>38</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; and, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce and Marlin; MNP LLC; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; and, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

<sup>40</sup> INAD and ESDC; Workplace Education Manitoba.

programs to diverse Indigenous groups' and individuals' needs, and the ability to track participants in a common system are well regarded by Canadian and international commentators.

Without exception, key informants expressed their optimism that progress was being made in terms of overcoming barriers:

- Education levels are higher with young people now than they were 20 or 10 years ago.
- Aboriginals are more self-governing all the time, and overcoming barriers. "Where claims are settled, Indigenous people have higher education, and access to their land and resources, and can participate in business. They now have hope."
- "Since 1999, it's a slow pace but we're getting to where we want to be."
- "Many obstacles exist, but progress is happening, and more quickly when responsibility is given to First Nations."
- "We will hold hands with trainees and carry them until they get to a point where they don't need it. From then on they have established self-sufficiency to carry on."
- "Creating partnerships has taken a long time, but now we're doing better – we're coordinated and working together."
- "Today's [Indigenous] youth are better prepared. They've been able to go to school longer and achieve better. With social media, everybody's closer."
- "Stats indicate continuous progress in education. The gap is closing for education, income, and health."
- One agreement holder described how prejudice against Indigenous people in the workforce has decreased. At the same time, Indigenous people are setting up their own associations that will have certification under the labour code.

## Community infrastructure related barriers

The lack of community learning resources is a significant barrier to participation for individuals in remote communities. Many communities lack training venues, not to mention teachers, trainers and mentors to deliver or support training.<sup>41</sup> The lack of communications infrastructure, in particular high-speed internet, impedes the delivery of high quality e-learning programs.<sup>42</sup> Many sources also note the absence of labour market information and career counselling services that are relevant to remote communities.<sup>43</sup>

In keeping with what was found in the document review, many home communities of ASETS and SPF clients were described as being limited in community learning resources. However, this was not

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<sup>41</sup> Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund; Klinga; MNP LLC; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>42</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Industry Training Authority.



consistent across all areas; nearly all (30 of 33) communities in the catchment area of one of the organizations has adult learning centres where people can take adult basic education, Essential skills training, and more advanced math and English courses that are pre-requisite for certain occupations. Others described more makeshift arrangements with training taking place in Band offices, or church basements, with virtually all instructors being non-resident and non-Indigenous.

In some cases, programs have developed mobile facilities to bring training supports to clients in their home communities. These include driving simulators for young people studying to obtain drivers' licences, to "labs" for education and training, to mentors running programs specifically to help people prepare for the transition to urban centres to pursue their labour market training, and/or to life at remote work sites. Previously, because these communities lack the infrastructure to provide these supports, people would need to move away from home in order to obtain, sometimes, the most basic training. Internet connectivity was not cited as a frequent barrier by key informants, although one described how, despite the presence of mobile training labs, the lack or unreliability of high-speed internet, means they are not a viable way to address infrastructure barriers in all locations. As connectivity continues to improve in rural and remote areas – a provincial premier committed to rural connectivity development at the time of the interviews – and with other technological advances, the potential for mobile and distance-learning opportunities is expected to grow as well.

As noted above, a relatively large proportion of program participants are parents. The lack of in-community child care is cited as a significant barrier to access and persistence in programs.<sup>44</sup> The availability of program-funded daycare promotes sequential participation through the training spectrum while self-funded child care is associated with more sporadic program participation.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, funded daycare provides stable employment in the community and contributes to early childhood development.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, the common model of community residency-based childcare services limits opportunities to undertake training outside of one's community.<sup>47</sup> The lack of childcare funding for Métis communities was also noted by the Métis National Council.

Child care responsibilities were cited as a barrier to participation by all interviewees. Affordability of high-quality care, availability of caregivers that were trusted by parents, and the difficulty of working with the on-and-off schedules at remote work sites were all cited as barriers. As well, many clients are reported to be vulnerable to child apprehension by authorities. One person described having clients who moved their whole family to the city for training and seemed to be doing well, but when neighbours reported a supposed disturbance at their rented home, their children were apprehended without investigation; the parents felt there was no reason for this and naturally were devastated.

For families accompanying parent(s) to urban centres for training, the expense of daycare is also a problem. Unless training is likely to lead to long-term employment, families will choose not to move with

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<sup>44</sup> INAD and ESDC; and, Klinga.

<sup>45</sup> Minum and Specter.

<sup>46</sup> Harrison and Lindsay.

<sup>47</sup> Nunavut Literacy Council.

the parent(s) in training, but stay in home communities. This in turn creates barriers for parents, who do not wish to leave their families behind in order to pursue jobs outside their traditional way of life.

Child care barriers are more present for women than men, as the main or sometimes sole caregiver for children.

Prejudice may exacerbate the challenges faced by Indigenous participants with child care responsibilities; one interviewee described a situation in which a trainee had become derailed when her children were apprehended based on an unfounded complaint from neighbours.

Similar to childcare surveys, the community residency-based housing model and the general scarcity of housing in Indigenous communities are cited as barriers to mobility to undertake training in other communities.<sup>48</sup>

The cost and infrequency of inter-community transportation also makes it difficult for many potential clients to consider training programs in other communities.<sup>49</sup>

Limited or sporadic health care services in remote communities can also limit the participation of clients with health issues, particularly given the relatively poor levels of health found in remote communities.<sup>50</sup>

Suggestions from the literature to improve client services in relation to community infrastructure barriers include:

- Many communities have strong, proactive leadership networks and community service organizations. Such groups can work with service providers to identify community training and development needs and opportunities.<sup>51</sup>
- There is a strong need for coordination among service providers, community groups and employers to initiate programs.<sup>52</sup>
- Participants appreciate opportunities to train in their own communities / language and may perform better and persist longer in locally delivered programs.<sup>53</sup>
- With a high demand for trades in northern industries, more college / technical options should be available.<sup>54</sup>

Key informants also described the importance of coordination among funders, service providers and other stakeholders. In one example, lack of coordination – or more specifically, competition between federal and provincial programs with preferential funding given to one – was described as a barrier to

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<sup>48</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

<sup>49</sup> INAD and ESDC; Klinga; Industry Training Authority; and, MNP LLC.

<sup>50</sup> ESDC, Policy Research Analysis and Geomatics.

<sup>51</sup> Guevara, Gupta, McClung and Spector.

<sup>52</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

<sup>53</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a; and, Workplace Education Manitoba.

<sup>54</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a; Métis National Council.

participation. In this case, the agreement holder described clients “traumatized” by intake interviews at a provincial office, where they felt belittled.

Several other agreement holders described positive relationships between federal and provincial/territorial government initiatives; without exception, they spoke of the importance of their relationships with Tribal Councils, Bands, and employers and many described positive partnerships.

Solid delivery frameworks and community-based support networks are critical to success.

## Housing-related barriers

The literature on Indigenous community housing quality with respect to education and training programs is sparse. A couple of sources noted that community residency-based housing is a barrier to mobility in that housing is in short supply in most communities and the resultant waiting lists make it difficult to find accommodation when training programs are in other communities.<sup>55</sup> Another source reports that finding housing in larger centres is also an issue for Indigenous people relocating for education and training programs.<sup>56</sup>

One community chief argues that inadequate, unhealthy housing is the root cause of many of the health and social issues experienced in Indigenous communities.<sup>57</sup> His proposed solution is new housing, constructed mainly by community members, using local materials, micro-milling technologies and construction techniques appropriate to the local environmental and soil conditions.

In the key informant interviews, unavailability and inadequacy of housing was cited as a barrier to participation in labour market programs:

- An agreement holder in an urban setting reported having clients who were “living in the river valley”; these participants were described as trying hard to attend training to make a difference in their lives, but were not able to afford housing once they moved to the city. They did not have relatives to stay with. They were homeless, and getting some of their food from the food bank,

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<sup>55</sup> Guevera et al.; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>56</sup> Harrison and Lindsay.

<sup>57</sup> Kemp.

although rules against serving people without fixed addresses, or arriving on foot instead of bus or other transport restricted their access to meals.

- Shelters are not suitable accommodations for people who are trying to achieve stability and obtain employment; they may reinforce dependency and habits that are contraindicated for self-sufficiency.
- The cost of housing in many in urban areas (e.g., in Saskatchewan centres) that are close to training and employment opportunities is prohibitive; people have a hard time “affording” to move for training or work in those areas, especially when subsidies are not available.
- There still exists prejudice against Indigenous people among landlords.
- People moving from home communities to urban centres require “immediate connectedness”, perhaps with family or other Indigenous people in the new community. As one interviewee phrased it: “If you don’t see your culture anywhere, you don’t feel like you fit.” Another described a situation in which a young man who had completed training for a job in shipbuilding moved for a job and was placed in a hotel for several days due to a delayed start; without supports, he sought social contact using alcohol, which jeopardized his job placement.
- One agreement holder described the negative impact of a fire on a college residence that they had previously been able to access for program participants. They were able to arrange use of community learning centre and parish hall for instruction, but housing remains a larger problem and program numbers will be reduced until resolved.
- Crowded and poor-quality housing in home communities remains a concern, where sometimes 4-5 families are living together in contradiction of guidelines for healthy housing, and in conditions that are not conducive for those engaging in pre-employment training programs on reserve. As well, the condition of housing stock on reserve is poor.

## Lack of economic development / remoteness

Developing the economies of remote Indigenous communities is a complex process in which a single model or narrow set of policies is unlikely to produce fully satisfactory results. Compared to North America and Oceania, Nordic countries have tended towards sustained policies that integrate Indigenous communities into the market economy.<sup>58</sup> These policies have achieved some success in bringing health, education and commercial services to remote communities but often with the loss of Indigenous majorities and the primacy of Indigenous culture in the communities. Australia has a long-standing program that supported culturally relevant employment in Indigenous communities but is moving away from this model as it is increasingly viewed as promoting dependency and crowding out potential market-based employment and skills development.<sup>59</sup> Canadian

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<sup>58</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

<sup>59</sup> Hunter.

governments have used a number of programs and approaches to remote community economic and workforce development with no one model dominating.

Whatever the development model, it is clear that many remote communities lack educational and training facilities and other infrastructure, as well as limited opportunities to gain work experience through employer partnerships.<sup>60</sup> As a result, few have locally-based skills development programs. Moreover, remoteness can exacerbate some of the logistics and social issues discussed earlier.<sup>61</sup> These are an issue for programs like ASETS, a significant proportion of whose clients live in remote communities.<sup>62</sup> As noted above, community and familial attachments are strong in many Indigenous communities which can lead to a reluctance to leave the community for education and training.<sup>63</sup> Other studies note that those who do leave have low levels of persistence and completion in out-of-community programs.<sup>64</sup>

Government-supported jobs provide some opportunities but also create some issues. Long-term community employment programs in Australia are associated with low incomes, low work hours and program dependency.<sup>65</sup> In Canada, relatively high-wage government jobs can skew the local earnings distribution and the hiring of “just qualified” community members can create entry-level blocks for others since the incumbents are unlikely to advance up the career ladder without significant further training.<sup>66</sup> Income assistance receipt is often high in remote communities and can provide a disincentive to program participation.<sup>67</sup> Since paid work is often intermingled with traditional activities like hunting and fishing in remote communities, programs that support employment in more traditional land- and water-based activities can provide a positive alternative to leaving the community.<sup>68</sup> One such program, the Junior Canadian Rangers, is well regarded internationally and is the model for several recently developed ranger programs in Australia.<sup>69</sup>

Overall, the literature presents somewhat of a conundrum. In-community service provision can improve skills and social well-being but may impede progress towards the mobility often required for more sustainable market-based employment. On the other hand, evaluators also note that the lack of work opportunities and social issues have limited the effectiveness of some training programs.<sup>70</sup> The flexibility of ASETS programming can address the needs of those on both sides of

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<sup>60</sup> INAD and ESDC; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a; and, Industry Training Authority.

<sup>61</sup> INAD and ESDC; and, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b.

<sup>62</sup> Minum and Specter. ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund.

<sup>64</sup> ESDC, Policy Research Analysis and Geomatics.

<sup>65</sup> Hunter.

<sup>66</sup> Guevera et al. and Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>67</sup> INAD and ESDC.

<sup>68</sup> Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>69</sup> Hunter.

<sup>70</sup> Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund.

the fence, but broader community economic development and investment programs would more fully address remote community challenges.

The transition from home communities to urban centres was identified as a significant barrier by key informants. For some, learning to access medical care or ride the bus can be first-time experiences, and for those without (extended) family in the area, additional supports are required for a successful move. While many programs attempt to begin training in home communities to prepare for transitions, the first 72 hours after the move were described as being critical.

According to the key informants for this project, living in remote and rural home communities presents a number of barriers to participation in the labour market. These include:

- Lack of training and job opportunities close to home. This is true not only for long-term, stable employment, but even for gaining job experience that improves eligibility for jobs elsewhere. Lack of job experience is sometimes the only barrier between clients and employment; for one example, the shipbuilding industry does not typically hire welders without one year of work experience, but that one year can be difficult to obtain.
- “There is strength in traditional communities, but no job opportunities other than Band Councils. Teachers, staff at health clinics and housing centres keep their jobs forever and there is no opportunity for others. At 18, people go on welfare and it becomes a way of life. There may be short-term projects for a few weeks, followed by EI, and then back to IA.”
- In some remote communities, teachers and nurses are non-Indigenous; one interviewee described how their programs were aiming to support Indigenous people to take the training required for these jobs in their home communities, but that the distance from more advanced training opportunities is a barrier.
- Economic downturn or “crash” of resource industries that had provided job opportunities. A recent example of this is the decimation of the Fort McMurray/Oil Sands operations.
- Employers laying off workers once wage subsidies end. Long term job stability is required in order for workers and their families to move from home communities to be closer to jobs.
- Reluctance to leave home communities, especially given the tightly-knit and family-oriented nature typical of Indigenous communities, and historical way of life.
- Lack of infrastructure, transport, and internet connectivity, despite strides being made in bringing training and services to communities.
- Loneliness felt by clients leaving their families and communities for training or work.
- Racism and discrimination still pose barriers for Indigenous people at times; reportedly, employers do not tolerate this and are generally good at shutting it down immediately. However, one informant told of blatant racism from a local union; another felt that Aboriginals working in remote camps were subject to discrimination from co-workers. Several others spoke of the persistence of racist attitudes in their urban centres, pointing out that even when racism isn’t a

direct barrier to participation, it further undermines self-confidence, perpetuates poor treatment of Indigenous people and contributes to social barriers.

- Lack of transportation to and from work sites.

## Barriers to program completion

In the interviews, agreement holders described a variety of factors contributing to non-completion of programs. For some, barriers at intake are not resolved and persist in creating challenges that cannot be overcome, for example, lack of adequate funds for housing, or child care, or other necessary costs of training. Unless EI or other training allowances are available, the lack of a stable personal finance plan can be a significant barrier to program completion. For others, social and health barriers that were being managed at the time of intake may reappear, such as substance abuse, or mental health issues. Lack of confidence, lack of labour force experience and intimidation about working can become increasingly problematic as participants near the end of their training and are facing the transition to work. In other cases, although rare, trainees are dismissed from training programs for breaking participation guidelines such as missing sessions, not getting required certificates or being chronically late.

## Promising program practices

The term “best practices” properly refers to program practices that have been evaluated versus alternatives and found to produce the best results in terms of operations or outcomes.<sup>71</sup> Studies that compare particular employment services practices are relatively rare and we did not identify any such studies or evaluations relating to Indigenous labour market programs in the Canadian or international literature. This is not to say that practices identified through other means are not high quality or appropriate to their constituencies. Indeed, the anecdotal information provided by front line service delivery staff and program managers is essential to the development and continual improvement of program features and means of delivery. The following “promising practices” have been identified through program evaluations, policy studies, literature reviews and our key informant interviews. They fit within the structural elements of Indigenous labour market programs discussed earlier and represent a mixture of the current state of practice in the sector and a wish list to more fully address the needs of their clients.

### Intensive intake and assessment services

As noted earlier, many Indigenous labour market program clients have multiple barriers to full participation in the labour market. As a result, many evaluations and studies have argued that high quality assessment tools and processes are essential to identifying the learning and skills development needs of incoming clients<sup>72</sup>. Such tools and processes should be matched by an appropriate array of interventions that address the identified needs of clients.

Some commentators have taken the intake process back one step further. They argue that due to the low levels of literacy and other social barriers to participation among potential clients, greater outreach efforts are required relative to non-Indigenous populations.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, help for clients to apply for programs and fill out forms may be required.<sup>74</sup>

Without exception, key informants spoke of the importance of “intensive” or “systematic and thorough” screening of applicants prior to intake. Applications, CVs, interviews, personal risk assessments and counselling are used to help identify barriers and direct clients to appropriate supports, as required, and to develop individual action plans. Depending on the program, clients may be assessed for education level, language, literacy, as well as their career interests. Those considering work in mining, forestry, oil and gas extraction, or fishing undergo drug testing; jobs involving physical labour may require fitness, cardio and strength assessment as well. Many clients at this stage benefit from assistance obtaining

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<sup>71</sup> Bogan and English.

<sup>72</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch 2013a; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch 2009; Klinga; Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund; Calgary Chamber of Commerce; Industry Training Authority; and, MNP LLC.

<sup>73</sup> MNP LLC; and, Dockery and Millsom.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



“their papers” including birth certificates, school certificates, status cards, Social Insurance Numbers, provincial ID cards, and driver’s licences.

Agreement holders also spoke of the importance of clear two-way communication during the assessment process. One characterized “our people” as being open and honest about their problems: “They can’t lie”, which is a positive feature for helping them access needed services. Intake was seen as a time for both service providers and clients to assess their suitability for particular programs:

- “We set high expectations up front, and people have to meet them”
- “We want them to succeed and set them up for success”

With intensive screening and development of action plans at the beginning of programs, it is not surprising that the agreement holders we spoke with report typically high rates of program completion among their clients (e.g., 92% and more).

## **Offering a full range of programming from foundational skills / employability to job-related training to placement to employment retention / support**

If service providers are expected to help clients address their identified needs across the workforce development spectrum then they must have access to program options that address those needs, particularly as they apply to local community circumstances.<sup>75</sup> The greater the range of services that can be provided in local communities, the less clients will encounter barriers related to intercommunity transportation and housing and the more they will be supported by the local community and case managers (see next section). In communities that are too small to deliver a full range of regularly supported services, mobile training units have been employed with some success.<sup>76</sup>

Key informants clearly distinguished clients who are job-ready from those requiring pre-employment training. For those who are closer to being job-ready, barriers are generally self-identified and include the need for training, job experience, or temporary financial supports. Those requiring pre-employment training are more often living on reserves and coping with underlying social barriers, family issues, substance abuse or problems in their communities. Counselling, healing and time are needed before they are ready to address labour force barriers. Many spoke of the key role of pre-employment training programs – some in urban centres, most in home communities, where clients are not faced with additional barriers associated with the transition away from home. One organization described how several of their reserves discovered that when funding for one program ended, they sought capacity – and found resources – from within the communities themselves to coordinate programs and teach nutrition and parenting skills, and to provide individual and family counselling. They felt that this resulted in a model that was representative of their community and community life. Although the loss of

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<sup>75</sup> Gray, Hunter and Boyd.

<sup>76</sup> Industry Training Authority.

training allowances at the end of the program created challenges, the community had become aware of its capacity and continued to organize new cohorts for pre-employment training.

Pre-employment training programs in urban areas were described as having access to more sources of funding, such as provincial governments, or municipalities.

Further along the continuum, key informants describe best practices in supports for those making the transition from home, and into job training, or employment:

- Having more than one person from a community making the transition at the same time.
- Ensuring strong supports during the critical first few days, and connecting clients with family in the new location (noting that the definition of “family” among Indigenous people tends to be broader, and more closely-knit than in some non-Indigenous groups).
- Allowing for breaks in training schedules for trainees to return home to visit their family. For example, one described splitting a training course that is normally four consecutive weeks into parts: two weeks on, then two off (to go home), then two weeks on. This has the added benefit of mimicking the work schedule of the mining industry that the trainees eventually join.
- Working with spouses staying behind in home communities to ensure their support, and promote program completion. One described how spouses were invited to pre-employment training as well, in order to prepare them for being the only parent at home, and for being solely responsible for household maintenance. Another informant from a different region said that spouses left at home can be jealous, and concerned about their partners being in relationships with others while away from home; to avoid this becoming a barrier for trainees, they address the topic and provide counselling.
- For clients who are ready, and are informed of expectations, hold training off-site in the same types of surroundings and structured schedule as work, e.g. 2 weeks on/2 weeks off, or 7 days on/7 off, with 7 a.m. starts, or in another case 6 hours on, 6 off, for two weeks in preparation for the longer 4-6 week stints away from home required by industry. If flights to training sites are missed, participants can be dismissed from training (as they would be as a full-time employee).
- Even for occupational training done at a centre, not the work site, the workplace can be simulated in terms of hours and expectations; one interviewee described a training program where the door is locked after the 6:30 a.m. start time, and if trainees manifest residual difficulties with for example substance abuse, they are referred back for counseling.
- Bringing the same instructor and coaches from community pre-employment training to larger centers for consistency and support can aid in transitioning for example from a community of 1,500 to 20,000.
- Workplace advancement (apprentices): One organization has helped clients overcome a barrier of fear/intimidation of government entities by taking on the registration function of new apprentices (from the provincial government) until they have finished Level 1 and have found an employer.

After that, when ready for Level 2, they are more confident and further along in their self-sufficiency at which time they merge with the provincial registration system.

- One agreement holder pointed out the need for supports near at the end of training, as some participants “fear” the transition to work choose instead to do another cycle of training although they are may be well- or even “over-” trained.

## Comprehensive, long-term case management services

Long-term relationships between case workers and clients go hand-in-hand with thorough intake assessments as they can keep clients on track to meet their identified milestones. Studies and evaluations highlight the importance of intensive case management in working clients through essential skill development, employability, job-related training, placement services and post-placement support.<sup>77</sup> Strong case management practices are particularly important in relation to clients with multiple barriers.<sup>78</sup> Anecdotally, case workers will often take the extra step to ensure clients are properly prepared for job interviews and are punctual and productive in supported placements.<sup>79</sup>

Informants described how in ASETS one-to-one client-based model, case managers work with clients to feel supported all around and develop individual action plans. Case managers are trained to develop relationships with clients. They also work with urban organizations and with Tribal Councils on reserves. Most spoke positively about the use of case management databases, which they rely on for recording information about clients. Described by one as the “backbone” supporting their entire case management system, these tools are viewed as essential for providing good service. Distinct from earlier comments about administrative burden associated with program administration, the time taken to enter data in these systems is seen as essential for providing good service. If anything, informants would add more fields to the database; for example, LMI for helping clients to choose occupations that are not only of interest, but in-demand locally would avoid what one referred to as a “course to course to course” loop caused by lack of employment opportunities at the end of training. As well, capturing more individual client data would promote easier identification of candidates for posted jobs.

An interest in having current and locally-relevant LMI was noted by several agreement holders, with one describing the launch of a new multi-partner LMI initiative.

There were benefits associated with having consistent filing systems for case notes, and for recording contacts that could be built upon subsequently. Adding more data to action plans would help identify steps and progress along the way: “I have a long list of things they need to do”.

Some agreement holders spoke of difficulties keeping in touch with trainees at the end of programs, while others kept in contact through networks. One described “difficulty in getting outcomes measured

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<sup>77</sup> INAD and ESDC; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund; Calgary Chamber of Commerce; and MNP LLC.

<sup>78</sup> INAD and ESDC; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund; Calgary Chamber of Commerce; and, MNP LLC.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Gray, Hunter and Lohoar.

in a large geographical region. Often clients do not visit the local offices post-training to provide information required.” In other cases, information may not be accurately recorded, for example, when the difference between a diploma and certificate are not understood. Others described how lack of funding for follow-up was a hindrance to their ability to determine outcomes.

One agreement holder described how using a case management model championed by Tribal Chiefs, one community was able to reduce the receipt of Social Assistance from 78% to 24%.

## Wrap supports

“Wrap supports” — also referred to as “wraparound supports” — are programming elements that are not directly related to the development of on-the-job skills but support the participation of clients in such programs. Wrap supports could include child care services, transportation vouchers or interventions — such as motivational interviewing — that otherwise support program participation. ILMP program evaluations have highlighted the importance of wrap services to promote program participation and retention, particularly in the case of barriered clients for whom intensive supports are often essential to their success in programs.<sup>80</sup>

The development of wrap supports in the form of child care services has also been noted to add to community infrastructure, providing meaningful employment and contributing to human capital development.<sup>81</sup> The lack of child care funding for Métis organizations and outside of Indigenous communities was noted by the Métis National Council.

Key informants described how cessation of financial supports creates barriers for clients, and also described some of the ways they help overcome them. One described how they negotiated continuation of a housing subsidy for IA clients, for the first year they go to work. Another (in a different province) negotiated continuation of the child care subsidy. Similarly, arrangements had been made with other P/T/municipal governments/departments to extend IA or EI benefits, or to obtain financial support for transportation costs (personal vehicle, flight or bus pass) or work-related expenses. These arrangements were described as being made between agreement holders and a local entity, not as part of an administration-wide request. Without the provision of these wraparound supports, some clients would be stuck at earlier stages in their trajectory to long-term, full time employment.

In two cases, the introduction of programs to address homelessness, and transition to employment, had made significant differences for clients: Housing First in one city, and an initiative with wraparound supports for people who are “New in Town” in another.

In some cases, programs have been able to provide residences for clients, which appear to work well. Advantages include having a dedicated place to study, not just “live”; co-housing people with similar goals, and in proximity to classes (in the case of residences at colleges where training is being provided),

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<sup>80</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013a; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b.

<sup>81</sup> Harrison and Lindsay.

and providing training for remote workplaces where teams of people (men and women) need to co-exist and rely on one another.

An agreement holder described a Housing First initiative providing wraparound supports to homeless people: housing, food, transportation, life skills, leading to technical skill training and employability.

“The critical element is support from organizations in the community – there must be coordinated services and buy-in from the community.”

## Two-way engagement with employers

Although programs involving partnerships with employers are valued in many quarters, they take time to develop and maintain. Employers can help to design programs; provide input to employability and job skills training; supply mentors; and support job placements, among other functions. Most studies also report that all sides in such partnerships face some challenges in making them work for clients.

Tripartite partnerships involving Indigenous communities, education and training providers, and employers can promote success for clients but require time, resources and consensus building — activities which are often not built into program funding models.<sup>82</sup> On the positive side, the longer a partnership agreement and its commitments persist, the greater an impact it is likely to have on community conditions. Program evaluations noted that finding respected and reputable industry partners contributes to such long-term success, while targeting industries with local labour demand contributes to program job placements.<sup>83</sup> However, many resource extraction industries in remote regions are transitory in nature which limits the prospects for long-term community development.<sup>84</sup> In terms of community involvement, modern governance structures that minimize political influence in band development corporations are generally associated with better performance in partnerships with industry.<sup>85</sup>

On the employer side, companies need to commit not only to the resources required to develop and oversee on-site programs, but also to ensure that their workforce is ready to accept their new co-workers and is sensitized to their cultural practices and training requirements. A number of employers involved in partnership programs have noted some challenges in hiring and retaining Indigenous employees: communications, cultural differences, lack of skills and training, and their own (employer) misconceptions.<sup>86</sup> Some studies have found that negative stereotypes of

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<sup>82</sup> Harrison and Lindsay; Industry Training Authority; MNP LLC; and, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

<sup>83</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. (013); and, ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013a.

<sup>84</sup> Métis National Council.

<sup>85</sup> Curry and Donker.

<sup>86</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

Indigenous people among employers can impede their participation in partnerships and placement programs.<sup>87</sup>

One key informant said that despite progress in societal and employer attitudes, it is “more difficult for FNMI people to get jobs unless they know someone” in the industry or hiring company. Another example of prejudice against Indigenous workers was cited by an agreement holder describing a local union that had been vocal about not hiring them. (This is in contrast to examples of other unions who are supportive of hiring Indigenous people.)

ASEP’s collaborative approach to the development of partnerships and programs was reported to work well in meeting both client and industry’s needs but according to a 2013 report, most industry partners indicated that they would be unlikely to continue in such partnerships in the absence of program funding.<sup>88</sup>

Key informants talked at length about the importance of having an industry-driven or demand-driven approach to secure employment opportunities for clients. Two-way engagement of employers and industry partners is critical, and best practices included:

- Understanding industry needs – types of occupations, levels of skill, and fluctuating shifts. This is true not only for industry-based approach for but ASETS as well; one agreement holder gave an example of why good LMI is necessary: a hairdressing program that graduated numbers of skilled stylists each year, yet who could not find employment because the demand was not there.
- Businesses owned and operated by Indigenous people are advantageous because of shared cultural heritage and practices. This is two-way as well, with employers perhaps better understanding challenges faced by the Indigenous workforce, and workers experiencing more familiarity in their work environment.
- Partnerships among governments, industry, and Tribal Councils, for example, yield promise for supporting Aboriginal entrepreneurs to become business owners, hiring Aboriginal employees.
- Having employers involved from the start of recruitment, by sending flyers describing opportunities and expectations to communities. (It was noted that some but not all provinces/territories are contributors to this as well.)
- Employers must understand the culture of the Indigenous people whom they are recruiting. For example, if working in a remote work camp, a worker will be want to, and be expected to, fly home for the funeral of an elder in their community. While disruptive to the work flow, this is an integral part of many Indigenous communities, and must be respected. (Workers stay connected with their families while away at work camps via Internet and social media, so they are aware of significant

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<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Bruce and Marlin; and, Industry Training Authority.

<sup>88</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

events at home and with the broad definition of “family” it is not infrequent that workers may be called home.)

- Encouraging employers to do selection of candidates; for example, for one mine project, the agreement holder screened 30 candidates from a pool of nearly three hundred, and the employer flew in the 30 for interviews to hire 12 people.
- Unions play an important role, as sources of trades training, supports for trainees, and connections with industry partners. One agreement holder described local unions as “visionary” and among the first in the world to promote and advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous people in trades occupations.
- ASET agreement holders need to continually look for industry partners, and recognize current partners.
- In areas where economic conditions are favourable, e.g. currently mines in northern regions, programs have established Employer Relationship Agreements with a number of large national employers.

In some cases employers are subject to Impact Benefit Agreements or Surface Lease Agreements that stipulate minimum employment rates for Indigenous or Northern populations. Regardless, key informants reported that employers are generally positive about hiring Aboriginals, and have strategies to prepare workers for employment on site, articulating expectations for workers in a labour market economy. Similar principles are built into training programs that mimic work hours, working and living conditions during training. Efforts to establish the work habits that are required by employers are essential. As one agreement holder phrased it: “In order to succeed, they [workers] have to be strong in their own culture, and strong in the work culture”.

Interestingly, one agreement holder suggested that although employers are interested in advancing Aboriginals through a career path, (and thereby making room for more entry level Aboriginals), there is a tendency among Aboriginals not to seek advancement. This was attributed to a reluctance to be “outside of their comfort zone”. Some who have worked to achieve employment and are making a good living for themselves and their families may not be interested in changing jobs.

Employer commitment to advancement was described by one informant as seeing that 27 former trainees had been enrolled in a leadership development program. According to the employer, it was better and cheaper to have “home-grown talent”.

## Experiential learning opportunities

Experiential learning is a key theme in the Indigenous workforce development literature.<sup>89</sup> The role of experiential learning is rooted in Indigenous cultural practices whereby knowledge is passed along informally, often in situations that involve learning very practical skills by individual

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<sup>89</sup> See, for example, reviews by Klinga; Dockery and Milsom; and, Gray, Hunter and Lohar.



observation and practice. Such situational learning may also be reinforced by ritual and local customs.<sup>90</sup> Accordingly, several reviews and evaluations have noted that programs incorporating practical workplace experience and/or apprenticeship opportunities are more likely to produce positive outcomes for Indigenous clients<sup>91</sup> and, concomitantly, that the lack of such programs can contribute to poorer outcomes.<sup>92</sup> Experiential learning can be applied to a wide variety of skills development programs, from essential skills to employability to occupation-specific training.<sup>93</sup> In terms of program design, wage subsidies are suggested as a means of providing on-the-job training opportunities for clients while reducing risks for host employers.<sup>94</sup>

Although not asked directly in the interviews, many key informants spoke of experiential learning opportunities associated with their programs. These include the more obvious examples such as apprenticeship and wage subsidies, to more rudimentary practical skills learned by assisting newcomers to urban centres to access medical care, or navigate urban transit systems.

## Mentoring / coaching relationships

As noted above, experiential learning is reported to be an important touchstone in Indigenous workforce development programs. A parallel theme is the importance of the role of mentors and coaches to support experiential learning practices. Coaching and mentoring can be applied to any phase in the learning continuum, helping participants to overcome both skills-related and psycho-social barriers to employment-related skills development.<sup>95</sup> Apprenticeship programs inherently involve a mentoring relationship and are frequently cited as a desirable component of Indigenous labour market programs.<sup>96</sup>

It should also be noted that the benefits of mentor relationships are not limited to directly passing along workplace skills. Since some communities lack a history of market employment and academic achievement, combined with the ill effects of poverty and cultural repression, many young people may lack role models in terms of peer group conduct and positive relationships with educators and employers. Mentors can provide positive role models in such situations to help lay the groundwork for further skill development.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Klinga.

<sup>91</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; Dockery and Milsom; Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund; Nunavut Literacy Council; and, MNP LLC.

<sup>92</sup> Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>93</sup> Klinga; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>94</sup> Dockery and Milsom; Gray, Hunter and Lohoar; and, N2N and MSRB Consulting Services.

<sup>95</sup> Workplace Education Manitoba; Harrison and Lindsay; Bruce and Marlin; Dockery and Milsom; and, Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Harrison and Lindsay; Nunavut Literacy Council; and Industry Training Authority.

<sup>97</sup> Nunavut Literacy Council; and, Klinga.



Many of the programs we spoke about include mentoring and job coaching, with emphasis on Indigenous people in coaching roles. Some of the best practices cited by key informants included:

- Indigenous job coaches at all stages from intake to completion; “continuation of service” is important so that workers are not left hanging when they face challenges.
- Mentoring with elders on site – at training in communities, in urban areas, staying at residences, and at every training opportunity.
- Job coaching for continuation of services to promote retention and advancement is required so that employees are not left to face challenges alone.
- Coaches in the classrooms, along with instructors.
- Have mentor-monitors for residences where trainees are staying during training, preparing for the work site; e.g. workers on fishing boats or in remote camps learn how to cook and clean for themselves, how to get along with others in close quarters).
- Mentoring that continues in the workforce, once employment is obtained. This might include financial support to employers to cover replacement wages for workers attending the program. The program itself should include mentoring for retention, and mentoring for advancement.
- The role of Indigenous coaches and mentors extended the theme of cultural relevance in transition to employment. As one attributed their success: “We’re Aboriginal people delivering Aboriginal programs”.

## Frequent recognition of achievements

A significant proportion of Aboriginal labour market program clients lacks secondary education and may have training needs related to essential skills. For such clients, clearly delineated learning milestones with frequent recognition of progress or incremental certification can inspire retention and motivate efforts to succeed.<sup>98</sup> Shorter program modules within longer service plans can also help clients to accommodate family responsibilities or competing activities.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Workplace Education Manitoba.

<sup>99</sup> Bruce and Marlin.

Agreement holders spoke of the importance of recognizing steps along the way that are achieved by clients. These could mean completion of pre-employment training, a return to school, or overcoming a barrier; it could mean attending counselling or rehab.

One informant lamented the lack of funds available to make more recognition for reaching milestones, such as the annual testing for apprentices.

## Youth focus

Many studies highlight the relative youth of the Indigenous population and the disadvantages Indigenous youth face in terms of educational persistence and attainment and labour market attachment and outcomes.<sup>100</sup> Although many Indigenous labour market programs are geared to providing a “second chance” to younger Indigenous persons with low levels of education and essential skills, the literature is also pointing in the direction of programs that cross the labour market – educational program boundary. Such programs are intended to develop the motivation and skills to persist in secondary education and make a successful transition into the workforce or further education.

Key informants noted that youth need better education, not “social passing”. The Enhanced Service Delivery (ESD) part of FNJF helps clients on reserve between the ages of 18-24 to deal with barriers. However, it reportedly does not have delivery frameworks and service quality is highly variable. As well, although drug and alcohol addiction help is available on reserve through NNADAP, the service capacity varies. Several expressed concern that this leaves youth vulnerable to “falling through the cracks”.

## Career awareness and planning programs

Several studies reported a relative lack of career-related knowledge among Indigenous adolescents.<sup>101</sup> Many Indigenous youth have occupational aspirations that do not match their education plans nor fit with local labour markets. This points to a need for better career counselling and labour market information, particularly in the middle school and early secondary years when youth are making academic choices that will have a long-term impact on their education and employment prospects. An Australian multifaceted high school career development program showed a number of positive results, including lower absence and suspension rates, and greater effort, cultural pride and better social behaviour.<sup>102</sup>

## High school retention / early drop-out engagement

Since high school graduation opens doors to postsecondary education, employment and job-related training opportunities, high school persistence- and graduation-focused programs can provide a

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<sup>100</sup> Bruce and Marlin provide a recent review of the relevant levels and trends in labour market and educational indicators.

<sup>101</sup> Described in Bruce and Marlin.

<sup>102</sup> Australian Government study (2011) reported in Bruce and Marlin.

number of positive outcomes for Indigenous youth.<sup>103</sup> Such programs need to address the reality that formal schooling may have been a negative experience for many young Indigenous people or those in their immediate family.<sup>104</sup>

## Peer learning strategies

According to a number of key informants interviewed in an earlier ASTSIF evaluation, peer learning practices could be successfully applied in a number of situations. “Facilitating peer learning can help to produce desired results. According to a few project proponents and key partners, their projects were successful because project proponents were able to create a positive learning environment by facilitating group learning in which students supported each other and learned from each other's experience.”<sup>105</sup>

## Essential skills evaluation and upgrading

In addition to lower levels of high school persistence and graduation, some sources have also identified “social passing” — the passing of students based on their age rather than academic achievement — as an issue in some Indigenous communities.<sup>106</sup> All three phenomena contribute to issues of low essential and foundational skills among Indigenous youth.<sup>107</sup>

Promoting essential skills and career awareness programs at the high school level can help to prevent barriers to entering trade and technical programs.<sup>108</sup> Such essential skills training programs have been found to reduce educational barriers and were positively rated by participants.<sup>109</sup>

## High school trades programs

The implementation of high school trades programs in Indigenous communities corresponds to a number of the threads discussed throughout this paper. Many of the employment opportunities in the industries that operate in or near Indigenous communities — primarily resource industries like mining and forestry — are in trades occupations. Trades programs incorporate practices, like mentorship and experiential learning that are recommended practices for engaging Aboriginal learners. Trades programs also provide the opportunity to address essential skill development needs in very practical applications. Thus trade programs have been cited as contributing to

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<sup>103</sup> Guevara et al.; and, Calgary Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>104</sup> Klinga.

<sup>105</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

<sup>106</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009.

<sup>107</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

<sup>108</sup> Bruce and Marlin.

<sup>109</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2013.

persistence in schooling, better employment outcomes and better transitions to further education and training.<sup>110</sup>

## Employability and life skills development

Indigenous youth living in remote communities do not have the same opportunities to develop important employment and life skills as youth in larger centres. For example, part-time jobs, driver training, banking and public transportation use that are taken for granted by urban youth are foreign experiences to youth from small Indigenous communities. The lack of these skills and experiences contribute to lower rates of persistence in out-of-community education and jobs.<sup>111</sup>

Establishing culturally relevant employment opportunities in Indigenous communities can help to develop employability skills among youth.<sup>112</sup> A comprehensive high school program for at-risk Indigenous youth in Winnipeg addresses a much broader array of employability and life skills: summer jobs, driver education, First Aid, CPR, applying for identification, nutrition, budgeting and job search skills.<sup>113</sup> Participants are also expected to carry a full load of academically-oriented high school courses.

## Support the transition to postsecondary education

Educational attainment rates and employment rates are particularly low in the rural north. Youth who do leave these regions for further education have low persistence and completion rates in postsecondary and technical training programs. Transition programs to postsecondary education are recommended in a number of studies.<sup>114</sup> One approach is for secondary schools to provide dual credit courses with postsecondary institutions. Thompson Rivers University is one institution combining this approach with mentorship by senior Indigenous students.<sup>115</sup> In recent years, colleges and universities across Canada have introduced programs and on-campus services designed to support the access and retention of Indigenous students, including partnerships with Aboriginal educational institutions. Some interviewees described initiatives to introduce on-reserve students to post-secondary institutions and supports to encourage their transition, should they decide to move from their home communities for training. Although such initiatives are not employment programs per se, they do address the lack of educational credentials that hampers many young Indigenous people in the labour market.

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<sup>110</sup> Bruce and Marlin; ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009b; and, Nunavut Literacy Council.

<sup>111</sup> Industry Training Authority.

<sup>112</sup> Bruce and Marlin.

<sup>113</sup> Collegiate Model School program, described in Bruce and Marlin.

<sup>114</sup> Described in Bruce and Marlin.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

## Summary / extending the evidence base

### Current Indigenous labour market program environment

The overall structure and program elements embodied in the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Strategy, Skills and Partnership Fund, and the First Nations Job Fund generally align with principles identified in the Canadian and international literature as being prerequisites to successful labour market programming for Indigenous peoples. These include: Indigenous ownership and control of service delivery; recognition of the diversity of Indigenous organizations and communities; integration of Indigenous cultural practices and modes of learning into programs; incorporating elements of community development into programs; partnering with stakeholders in the business and education sectors to deliver effective outcomes for participants; and coordinating with other service delivery networks maximize efficiency and reduce overlap.

A geographical analysis based solely on ASETS data indicates that the Aboriginal identity populations in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island were more likely than average to be ASETS clients. The corresponding population of Nunavut had the lowest rate of ASETS participation.

Population indicators related to the demand for employment and training services — including high unemployment, low educational achievement, low literacy and numeracy scores, and housing stressors — were all highest in Nunavut, followed by the other territories in most cases. There were significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in almost all cases. Rates of low literacy were not significantly different between the two populations in Ontario and British Columbia. On the other hand, low numeracy skills were more prevalent among Indigenous populations in all jurisdictions and exceeded the rates of low literacy. Low numeracy skills present a barrier to many fields of study and employment in technical and professional occupations.

### Agreement holder feedback on the current program environment

Key informants were asked to identify the full range of barriers to participation in employment-related workforce development programs; accordingly a number identified systemic barriers related to the nature of the funding mechanisms and operations of the agreements.

Inconsistency of funding creates gaps in service delivery, negatively impacting clients. In some cases, delays for approval of funding have led to clients missing out on employment opportunities because employers who had committed to hiring Indigenous workers could not hold up their production schedules. Sporadic funding, repeated short-term extensions, and lengthy approval processes are associated with delays and service gaps. When funding is secured, agreement holders are pressed for time to hire staff and start delivery, with little planning for programs that will be the most effective.

While SPF projects are generally viewed as being well-funded, it was clearly noted that funding levels for ASETS have remained the same in current dollars for many years, resulting in declining service levels for a growing client base, and increased training costs particularly in trades

occupations. The presence of multiple funding streams can create stovepipes and inefficiencies that negatively impact the clients. Further, the formula does not adequately account for the time to develop programs nor to cultivate and maintain effective partnerships with employers and other stakeholders.

Agreement holders are supportive of program monitoring and accountability but describe a high administrative burden for many operational aspects of the program. They question whether the level of detail required in many reporting transactions contributes to useful assessments of their efficiency and effectiveness, and lament that the time required for reporting is time that is taken away from client service. Policies and processes themselves were viewed as posing additional barriers for clients.

Key informants expressed a range of views of their relationship with federal funders over the course of time. While appreciating the funding that supports their clients, and noting some positive relationships with individual Service Canada staff, many felt that as agreement holders they were not adequately included in program planning. Further, they described strained communications with the former government. One widely-shared perspective was renewed optimism and hope that the new federal government would yield better relations and ultimately better service for Indigenous people.

In terms of measuring the success of labour market programs, key informants felt that focusing on an “employment result” falls short of recognizing other important outcomes of training programs. These include greater self-esteem and sense of accomplishment, training that will benefit them and their families, and the achievement of milestones on their way to employment success, such as overcoming barriers, or specific steps on their individual action plans.

## Evidence on barriers to participation in Indigenous labour market programming

The literature identified a number of **health and social barriers** to participation in job-related training. In line with the data on educational attainment, the lack of a high school diploma was noted to limit opportunities for educational advancement and occupational training. Low essential skills went hand-in-hand with the lack of education and several sources noted that that even high school graduates may lack skills due to the phenomenon of “social passing”. Young people from remote communities may also lack life skills — like driving, banking and household maintenance — that would help them to persist in out-of-community education and training programs.

Health, disability and psychosocial issues are also reported to be more prevalent among Indigenous populations, particularly in remote regions. Sources relate such barriers to a history of cultural repression, the ill effects of residential schooling on previous generations and the long term effects of poverty and minimal health services. The presence of these issues points to the importance of the integration of employment services with community development programs. In terms of workforce development programs, providing mentors and other role models are suggested to help overcome mistrust of educational and other government institutions. A lack of programming for persons with physical and learning disabilities was also reported in several studies.

Several evaluations noted that program participants tend to be older than in other populations and more likely to have parental or other familial obligations. Such obligations increase the demand for child care to support program participation.

Overall, the presence of multiple barriers among potential participants increases the importance of outreach, application assistance, client assessment and case management functions.

The **lack of community infrastructure** creates barriers to employment program participation in many Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote settings. The barriers include the absence of training facilities, shortages of trainers, poor transportation links, insufficient communications to support e-learning and relevant, minimal health services and disability support, local labour market information and career counselling.

Wrap supports — child care, in particular — are not available in some communities. Self-funded daycare is associated with sporadic program participation. Funded childcare promotes longer, more consistent participation in employment programs, provides stable employment in the community and contributes to early childhood development. The lack of childcare funding for Métis communities was noted by the Métis National Council. Some sources also pointed out that community-based childcare services can act as a barrier to attending training programs in other communities since most programs have waiting lists and access may not be transferable among communities.

Similar to childcare surveys, the community residency-based housing model and the general scarcity of housing in Indigenous communities are cited as barriers to mobility to undertake training in other communities.<sup>116</sup>

Many communities were noted to have strong leadership networks and community service organizations that can contribute to the development of employment programs relevant to local conditions. In-community training, particularly programs that integrated local languages and customs, were valued by participants.

The literature on Indigenous **community housing-related barriers** to education and training programs is sparse. The data indicate that crowded and unsound housing is pervasive in many Indigenous communities, particularly across northern regions. A couple of reports noted that community residency-based housing is a barrier to mobility in that housing is in short supply in most communities and the resultant waiting lists make it difficult to find accommodation when training programs are in other communities. Difficulties in finding housing in larger centres can also be an issue for Indigenous people relocating for education and training programs.

One community chief argues that inadequate, unhealthy housing is the root cause of many of the health and social issues experienced in Indigenous communities. His proposed solution of training community members to build and maintain community housing is in line with a pilot project announced in the Liberal Government's 2016 budget.

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<sup>116</sup> ESDC, Strategic Policy and Research Branch. 2009a.

**Remoteness and lack of economic development** present complex barriers. In addition to community infrastructure issues, remote communities often lack market-based employment opportunities. Despite the lack of opportunities, attachment to place and family may lead to a reluctance to leave for education and training. Moreover, persistence and completion rates in out-of-community programs are generally low.

Supported community employment can provide a number of benefits related to personal and community development but has also been noted reinforce dependency on government programs and might crowd out education and training that could lead to sustainable market-based employment. Programs that integrate employment with traditional land-based skills — like the Canadian Junior Rangers — are well regarded in the literature.

Partnerships with employers, particularly in resource extraction industries, can lead to job opportunities and community development but require significant time and resources among all partners to maximize the benefits. Moreover, resource industries are often transitory in nature which can limit their contribution to long-term community development. Commercialization of traditional activities, such as fishing, can provide stable, seasonal employment where there is a demand for products and the means to get them to market.

## Recommended program practices

The literature on employment services for Indigenous populations includes very little empirical evidence on the types of programs and program features related to overcoming barriers to participation.<sup>117</sup> On the other hand, evaluators and other observers have noted a number of practices that contribute to the recruitment, assessment, training and outcomes of barrierred, Indigenous clients. These include:

- Intensive intake and assessment services that comprehensively identify clients' needs for education, development and training and enable the production of service plans that meet those needs.
- Having a full range of programming options available — from foundational skills to employability and job-related training to placement to employment retention — to meet clients' needs as identified in their service plans.
- Comprehensive, long-term case management services to keep clients' on track and make appropriate updates to their service plans.
- Providing “wrap supports” — such as transportation, child services and counselling — that are often necessary complements to job-related interventions.

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<sup>117</sup> Several ESDC evaluations do conduct econometric evaluations of participant outcomes at the program level.



- Two-way engagement with employers to maximize the opportunity for market-based job placements and ensure that employers and other employees are prepared to contribute to participants' workplace development.
- Maximize the use of experiential learning opportunities — like apprenticeships and on-the-job essential skill development — that mirror traditional learning methods.
- Provide mentoring and coaching relationships for multi-barriered clients, particularly in situations with high unemployment and few market-based opportunities.
- Create clear and frequent milestones in programs and recognize their achievement to positively reinforce clients' educational and training experiences.
- A number of studies suggest that barriers to labour market and program participation originate in the teenage years for many Indigenous youth. They suggest addressing these factors with a number of approaches that would involve cooperation among educational authorities and employment service providers.
  - Several studies note that knowledge of occupation-related education and training requirements is lacking among some Indigenous youth. They suggest that better career counseling and relevant labour market information could help youth to make more appropriate educational choices.
  - Since a high school education is the key step to further educational and work opportunities, high school retention and early drop-out engagement programs could help to avoid “lost years” among Indigenous youth.
  - Peer learning strategies are reported to have achieved some successes among young Indigenous adults and may have applications in the education environment.
  - The phenomenon of “social passing” was noted in the literature and reported by key informants. Essential skills testing and remediation could help high school students to identify skills gaps that they could address before graduation.
  - Since experiential learning fits with Indigenous cultural practices and trades opportunities predominate in the industries closest to most remote communities, high school trades programs could provide students the incentive and means to learn foundational and job-related skills.
  - Youth in remote communities do not have the same opportunities as others to develop job-related life skills. Key informants identified driver licensing as being particularly important since most resource industry sites are not served by public transportation and many occupations may require driving as a base skill — for example in heavy equipment operation.
  - Studies and key informants report that individuals leaving their home communities for education and training have low levels of persistence and completion. Informants noted that intensive supports during the first few days of out-of-community training can help individuals get over the initial barriers that might frustrate them on their own. Dual

credit courses and peer mentoring have been identified as promising practices for Indigenous students.

## Extending the evidence base

As noted at several points in the paper, the literature and empirical research related to several aspects of this study are quite sparse. For example, although the extent of poor and unsuitable housing and its relation to social issues in Indigenous communities is well known, the impact of housing issues on program participation and employment has not been well studied. Similarly, infrastructure issues directly related to training programs — like training facilities, high-speed internet and transportation connections — have received some attention, while the effects of other types of infrastructure — like water, power and sanitation have been largely ignored. There has also been very little study of the impacts of workforce development programs specifically related to communities in regions with very little market-based economic activity. These gaps in the evidence base could be filled by community-level case studies that take a comprehensive approach to the role of workforce development programs in remote communities, covering both the obstacles and assisting factors in program participation and the achievement of broadly defined program objectives.

Currently available secondary data sources do not support the timely analysis of indicators of potential client needs and barriers to program participation below the provincial / territorial level. Moreover, a comprehensive accounting of program participation among the Indigenous population would require the integration of program data from a range of provincial and federal workforce development programs, as well as ILMP programs. The lack of these two types of data impedes the assessment of the both the level of funding and the types of programming offered at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels.

The 2016 long-form census will provide a range of indicators of client needs and barriers at levels of geographic disaggregation appropriate for program planning and analysis. To provide corresponding program use data, a major data integration program would be required. While such an enterprise should be considered and its long-run feasibility studied, a more reasonable medium-term approach would be to explore the content planned for the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Surveys<sup>118</sup> Current documentation indicates that the surveys will include content relevant (and perhaps still adaptable) to program assessment: factors relating to economic participation; labour mobility; and, postsecondary education.<sup>119</sup> The survey planning organizations could be engaged to determine currently planned content and the prospect of making any changes that would assist in determining the needs, uses and benefits of participating in workforce development programs.

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<sup>118</sup> The program combines a survey of the off-reserve population by Statistics Canada and the on-reserve and Northern First Nations population led by the First Nations Information Governance Centre.

<sup>119</sup> See: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1321384019753/1322059098232>.

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## Data tables

**Table 1 ASETS client reported barriers by intervention outcomes**

	Incomplete	Complete	In progress	No Show <sup>1</sup>	Unknown Result	Total
<b>Interventions</b>	<b>9898</b>	<b>251700</b>	<b>15110</b>	<b>6285</b>	<b>12622</b>	<b>295615</b>
No reported barriers	5278	106181	4450	2374	4838	123121
Lack of Labour Force Attachment	1038	39373	2589	919	3008	46927
Lack of work experience	2264	65610	4254	1520	4496	78144
Lack of Transportation	1064	41295	3330	1050	3081	49820
Remoteness	501	28001	1195	322	1445	31464
Language	46	1710	163	25	121	2065
Education	2575	89185	6718	2153	6354	106985
Economic	947	49694	5155	1188	4026	61010
Dependent care	187	8743	1063	210	778	10981
Lack of marketable skills	910	41179	2994	1334	2878	49295
Physical or mental health	179	9027	793	261	711	10971
Other barrier not listed	791	22400	1249	711	1281	26432

1. Includes: failed to report; cancelled; and, rescheduled.

The ASETS data supplied by ESDC include almost 300,000 intervention records. Just over 250,000 of the interventions were completed in the past and 15,000 were in progress. The remainder includes almost 10,000 interventions that were started but not completed; just over 6000 “no shows” who registered but cancelled, failed to report or rescheduled; and 12,600 interventions with unknown results. The original intent of the data request was to assess whether “No shows” might be a proxy for multi-barriered non-participants. Given the relatively small size of the no-show result (less than 3% of interventions) and the similarity of the reported client barriers for no-show and completed results (see Table 2), this is not a recommended avenue for further investigation.

**Table 2 Incidence of client reported barriers by intervention outcome**

	Incomplete	Complete	In progress	No Show <sup>1</sup>	Unknown Result	Total
None	53.3%	42.2%	29.5%	37.8%	38.3%	41.6%
Lack of Labour Force Attachment	10.5%	15.6%	17.1%	14.6%	23.8%	15.9%
Lack of work experience	22.9%	26.1%	28.2%	24.2%	35.6%	26.4%
Lack of Transportation	10.7%	16.4%	22.0%	16.7%	24.4%	16.9%
Remoteness	5.1%	11.1%	7.9%	5.1%	11.4%	10.6%
Language	0.5%	0.7%	1.1%	0.4%	1.0%	0.7%
Education	26.0%	35.4%	44.5%	34.3%	50.3%	36.2%
Economic	9.6%	19.7%	34.1%	18.9%	31.9%	20.6%
Dependent care	1.9%	3.5%	7.0%	3.3%	6.2%	3.7%
Lack of marketable skills	9.2%	16.4%	19.8%	21.2%	22.8%	16.7%
Physical or mental health	1.8%	3.6%	5.2%	4.2%	5.6%	3.7%
Other barrier not listed	8.0%	8.9%	8.3%	11.3%	10.1%	8.9%

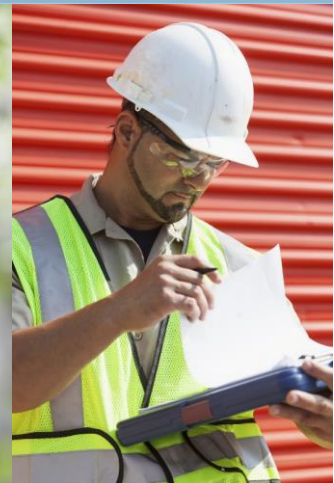
1. Includes: failed to report; cancelled; and, rescheduled.

Table 2 reports the incidence of client reports of barriers for each type of intervention outcome. Since more than one barrier can be reported, the columns sum to more than 100%. A minority of interventions (41.6%) were associated with clients reporting no barriers. Education was the most frequently reported barrier (36.2%) followed by lack of work experience (26.4%) and economic barriers (20.7%).

“No shows” interventions were somewhat more likely to be associated with clients reporting barriers than completed interventions but overall, the incidence of individual barriers was quite similar between the two groups. Given these relatively small differences, it is unlikely that further investigation would yield actionable insights regarding non-registrants.







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