

SMARTICE 

in partnership with



Identifying Gaps and Opportunities

to Support the Identification, Recruitment, and
Retention of Northern and Indigenous Talent



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340 LeMarchant Road, St. John's, NL, Canada A1E1R2
Contact: **Carolann Harding** – Chief Executive Officer, charding@smartice.org

Introduction

Purpose of the Report

This research paper explores the critical issues surrounding the identification, recruitment, and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent within contemporary workforce environments. The significance of this study lies in addressing longstanding disparities and underrepresentation of Northern and Indigenous individuals in mainstream employment sectors, despite their rich cultural heritage and valuable contributions to society.

The literature review highlights various challenges faced by Northern and Indigenous talent, including geographic isolation, educational barriers, and cultural marginalization. Current recruitment and retention strategies are scrutinized, revealing significant gaps in effective implementation and inclusivity. Key findings indicate that while some organizations have made strides in creating inclusive workplaces, many struggle with cultural insensitivity and inadequate support systems. These findings emphasize the effectiveness of culturally responsive practices and targeted recruitment efforts.

This report proposes actionable recommendations to enhance identification, recruitment, and retention practices for Northern and Indigenous talent. These include fostering partnerships with Indigenous communities, integrating cultural competency training for employers, and implementing mentorship programs to support career progression.

Ultimately, addressing these gaps presents a significant opportunity to not only diversify the workforce but also to foster inclusive environments that celebrate and leverage the unique perspectives and contributions of Northern and Indigenous talent. By implementing these recommendations, organizations can cultivate a more equitable and sustainable approach to talent management, ensuring the full realization of potential across all sectors of society.



Scope and Objectives

This report undertook a thorough examination of internet resources and relevant publicly available documents pertaining to Indigenous employment, education, and policy. By utilizing keywords such as Aboriginal, Indigenous, recruitment, retention, diversity, Human Resources, and workforce development, the report identifies trends, gaps, and key strategies for effectively engaging, attracting, hiring, and retaining Indigenous individuals.

The information from this report will help SmartICE to design an Arctic Playbook project that is culturally responsive and meaningful that meets the needs of Northern and Indigenous talent in Canada and employers in the ocean technology sector. While a majority of information in this report will be applicable to all Indigenous Peoples, the main focus will be on Inuit and Northern Indigenous residents in Canada. Credit to Canada's Ocean Supercluster as a primary funder for this project.

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1. Overview of Northern and Indigenous Talent Landscape

1.1 Indigenous Talent

Indigenous Peoples, with their vibrant cultures and languages, have thrived on the land now known as Canada since time immemorial. The term “Indigenous Peoples” encompasses three distinct groups – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – each recognized in the Constitution Act. Yet, this designation only begins to capture their immense diversity. From the over 70 Indigenous languages reported in the 2021 Census to the more than 600 First Nations across the nation, the rich tapestry of Métis nationhood, and the 50 communities of Inuit Nunangat, each group brings its unique heritage and strength.¹

More than 1.8 million people in Canada (5.0% of the population of Canada) self-identified as an Indigenous person on Canada’s 2021 Census of Population. Over multiple decades, census data have revealed that the Indigenous population has grown quickly, at a pace far surpassing that of the non-Indigenous population.

Indigenous Peoples are actually the fastest growing population in Canada. Between 2016 and 2021, the Indigenous population grew by 8.0%, while the non-Indigenous population grew by 5.4%. The Indigenous population is also the youngest in Canada: in 2021, 41.2% of Indigenous People were under the age of 25, compared to 27.3% of the non-Indigenous population.²



The Indigenous population in Canada is one of the largest among countries that share a similar colonial history. In 2021, 1.8 million Indigenous Peoples were enumerated during the census. This was more than double the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia (812,728) in 2021, and the number of Maori in New Zealand (775,836) in 2018. In 2021, Indigenous Peoples accounted for 5.0% of the total population in Canada, a larger share than in Australia (3.2%) but lower than in New Zealand (16.5%).³

The cultural, economic, and political landscape of Canada has been profoundly shaped by the achievements of Indigenous Peoples. Across generations, Indigenous leaders, Elders, healers, educators, business leaders, artists, and activists have made extraordinary contributions, enriching every facet of Canadian life and forging a legacy of resilience and innovation.

¹ Statistics Canada, “Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed,” September 2022.
² Government of Canada, “An update on the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous Peoples and the non-Indigenous population in Canada: Highlights from the 2021 Census,” 2023.
³ Statistics Canada, “Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed,” September 2022.



The colonial history of Canada has deeply affected Indigenous Peoples, their governance, languages, and cultures. Yet, through remarkable resilience and determination, Indigenous communities have made significant strides toward reconciliation and the revival of their unique cultures and languages. Recent Federal initiatives, such as the Indigenous Languages Act, the Act respecting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, youth, and families, and modern treaty negotiations, reflect a commitment to honoring and strengthening the rich heritage of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. These efforts are paving the way for a renewed connection and a brighter future, built on respect and collaboration.

A recent Conference Board of Canada report highlights that despite the emergence of promising strategies and practices, many employers in northern Canada are still having a hard time finding new workers. At the same time, the Indigenous population in the North is younger and growing faster than the non-Indigenous population, and has an unemployment rate over 17 per cent higher. This means Indigenous populations could help to fill these labour gaps and benefit from the associated employment opportunities.⁴

At the heart of these challenges lies a complex interplay of factors still at play, including historical marginalization, discriminatory practices, inadequate support systems, and cultural mismatches in workplace environments. These issues manifest in lower employment rates, higher rates of poverty, and limited career advancement opportunities for Indigenous Peoples living in Northern communities. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges and respects Indigenous knowledge systems, fosters meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities, and promotes policies that support equitable access to employment opportunities.

Indigenous Peoples represent diverse cultural heritages and possess unique knowledge systems that contribute to the rich tapestry of global societies. However, despite their invaluable contributions, Indigenous populations often encounter profound disparities in access to employment opportunities, educational attainment, and economic advancement. These disparities are compounded in Northern regions, where geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and socio-economic factors create additional barriers to economic participation and growth.

⁴ Conference Board of Canada “Working Together. Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada,” 2019.

1.2 Importance of Identifying, Recruiting, and Retaining Northern and Indigenous Talent

In today's globalized and interconnected world, the recognition and inclusion of diverse perspectives and talents are increasingly recognized as critical drivers of innovation, sustainability, and societal progress. Central to this recognition is the vital importance of identifying, recruiting, and retaining Northern and Indigenous talent.

First and foremost, Northern and Indigenous communities possess unique knowledge systems, cultural insights, and traditional practices that have sustained them for generations in challenging environments. These knowledge systems often encompass deep understandings of local ecosystems, sustainable practices, and community resilience strategies that are increasingly relevant in addressing contemporary global challenges such as climate change and environmental sustainability. By integrating Northern and Indigenous perspectives into organizations and industries, we not only enrich decision-making processes but also ensure that development initiatives are rooted in local wisdom and respect for the natural environment.

The identification, recruitment, and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent are essential for fostering economic growth and development in Northern regions. Historically marginalized from mainstream economic activities, many Indigenous communities face disproportionate levels of unemployment, poverty, and social inequality. By creating pathways for meaningful employment and career development within these communities, organizations and governments can contribute to broader economic diversification and promote sustainable local economies.

Furthermore, the inclusion of Northern and Indigenous talent is integral to achieving genuine reconciliation and addressing historical injustices. For centuries, Indigenous Peoples have endured colonization, displacement, and systemic discrimination that have perpetuated socio-economic disparities. Meaningful engagement through employment opportunities not only acknowledges these historical injustices but also empowers individuals and communities to reclaim their identities, cultures, and rightful place within society.



From a corporate perspective, organizations that prioritize diversity and inclusivity, including the recruitment and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent, are proven to be more innovative, resilient, and competitive in today's rapidly evolving marketplaces. Diverse teams bring varied perspectives, problem-solving approaches, and creative solutions to complex challenges, ultimately driving organizational success and long-term sustainability.

From January to March 2012, the Conference Board of Canada conducted a survey of Canadian businesses regarding their strategies and challenges in hiring Indigenous workers. The results highlight several benefits of employing Indigenous staff for both businesses and communities. Nearly 60 percent of respondents reported that hiring Indigenous workers enhanced relationships and integration with the local community. This improved community connection is likely linked to increased economic benefits for Indigenous People and their communities.



In fact, 47 percent of employers believed that hiring Indigenous workers contributes to reduced local unemployment and higher income levels. Additional advantages for Indigenous communities include Indigenous workers serving as role models (58 percent) and fostering better equity and inclusion among employees (47 percent). The survey also revealed direct benefits experienced by companies as a result of employing Indigenous workers. These benefits include increased customer satisfaction or retention (27 percent), improved work quality (15 percent), reduced staff turnover (15 percent), and enhanced profitability or competitiveness (12 percent).⁵

Statistics show that Indigenous population growth in many parts of Canada exceeds that of the non-Indigenous population at least four-fold and is significantly younger. This is contrasted with an aging workforce in the non-Indigenous population who are anticipated to retire in the coming years, creating a shortage of skilled workers. Increasing the number of employed Indigenous People has the potential to spur economic growth not only in Northern communities, but in the Canadian economy in general.

One of the benefits of higher labour force participation in Canada is increased Gross Domestic Product (GDP). “A study by the Centre of the Study of Living Standards (2023) found that closing the educational attainment gap, the employment gap, and the employment income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People would lead to cumulative GDP gains of \$457 billion by 2041.⁶ In fact, the National Aboriginal Economic Development Board (NAEDB) reports that the full potential of the Indigenous workforce could be worth an additional \$27 billion dollars per year to the Canadian economy. More importantly, diversity is often cited by workers as something they look for and value in an employer and the lack of it is a reason why they leave, suggesting that greater diversity equals better recruitment and retention outcomes.⁷

Many organizations are grappling with this anticipated severe shortage of workers while simultaneously facing pressure to create more diverse workplaces that reflect the Canadian population. In response, a growing number of Canadian businesses, organizations, and institutions are committed to enhancing Indigenous engagement and recruitment as part of their reconciliation efforts. However, there is a notable lack of contemporary resources to guide these initiatives. Much of the existing research is outdated, does not align with current economic or social conditions, and is not specific to a sector or organization.

Many studies also fail to account for the aftermath of the 2008 recession and COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of automation and artificial intelligence (AI), or the evolving social and political landscape following the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. As organizations navigate the dual challenges of workforce shortages and the need for enhanced diversity, it is crucial to rethink and update recruitment and retention strategies to reflect these new realities and incorporate recent developments.

⁵ Conference Board of Canada “Working Together. Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada,” 2019.

⁶ The Contribution of Indigenous People to Future Labour Force Growth in Canada: AN UPDATE (June 2023), 29.

⁷ Canadian HR Reporter, “Diversity makes employers more attractive to candidates,” April 2009, 20.

2. Understanding the Challenges and Gaps

Northern Canada, with its vast landscapes and diverse Indigenous communities, presents unique challenges and opportunities in the identification, recruitment, and retention of talent. This paper explores the specific gaps that hinder these processes and identifies promising opportunities to enhance support for Northern and Indigenous individuals in accessing and thriving in employment opportunities within this region.

While Canada is ahead of many other regions when it comes to Indigenous inclusion there is still a gap between the satisfaction and retention of Indigenous employees versus non-Indigenous ones.

Until there are Indigenous employees present in all occupations and all levels of positions and until there is no harassment or discrimination against Indigenous employees then there are still many things that can be done in order for there to be a cultural change in workplaces as well as in structures, policies, and practices.

Employers often face significant challenges in recruiting Indigenous candidates, primarily due to perceived gaps in education, training, and job-related skills. Additionally, difficulties in identifying and attracting qualified Indigenous candidates further complicates recruitment efforts. Retention issues stem largely from a lack of understanding and cultural biases, which, even if unintentional, can discourage Indigenous employees and lead to higher turnover. Employers may find it more practical to hire workers from larger centers who possess the necessary skills, but this approach often results in short-term gains at the expense of a stable, local workforce. Investing in local Indigenous talent, while potentially yielding slower returns, provides access to a dedicated workforce with lower transportation costs and a greater commitment to staying close to their communities.

For Indigenous individuals in Northern and remote regions, the challenges of finding and retaining meaningful and relevant employment are compounded by historical mistreatment, inadequate infrastructure, and pervasive stereotypes and racism. These factors can undermine physical and emotional health, making it difficult to present oneself effectively in job interviews. Although many employers do not perceive current staff biases as significant barriers to recruitment, a common reason Indigenous employees leave is the lack of awareness about Indigenous culture among their colleagues. This disconnect between employer perceptions and employee experiences highlights the need for better cultural understanding and inclusivity within organizations.⁸

In addressing the challenges and gaps related to the identification, recruitment, and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent in Canada, it is crucial to examine a range of interconnected factors that impact these communities. This overview will delve into key areas such as geographic and infrastructure limitations, cultural and language barriers, and the specific challenges faced by women and youth in these regions. It will also explore issues related to educational and skill development, and the lack of visibility and recognition.

By understanding these complex and multifaceted issues, we can better appreciate the systemic barriers and gaps that hinder the full participation of Northern and Indigenous talent in the Canadian workforce. Each section will provide insight into how these challenges intersect and contribute to the broader difficulties faced by these communities, offering a comprehensive perspective on the necessary steps to improve opportunities and outcomes for Northern and Indigenous individuals.

⁸ Conference Board of Canada "Working Together. Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada, 2019"

2.1 Geography and Infrastructure

The geography of Northern and Indigenous communities in Canada often presents formidable challenges for both recruitment and retention. Many Indigenous communities in Northern Canada are situated in remote or isolated areas with few local job opportunities. The geographic isolation often means that there are fewer businesses and industries, which limits employment options for Peoples. This can force individuals to seek work outside their communities, which may lead to challenges in relocating and adapting to new environments.

The remote and vast distances between these communities and major urban centers can also lead to significant logistical hurdles. For instance, travel to and from these areas can be expensive and time-consuming, which may deter candidates from pursuing opportunities or participating in professional development programs. This is a significant barrier for Indigenous People seeking employment, as travel expenses to attend interviews or relocate for jobs can be prohibitive. Furthermore, frequent travel required for work may be impractical and financially burdensome. Given a lower number or no public transit options or people with a driver's license, a real stumbling block in remote communities can just getting to the nearest office to write the initial test.

In Canada, the Indigenous population grew by 9.4 percent from 2016 to 2021; however, the housing stock in Indigenous communities did not increase even close to the same rate. Indigenous People often live in overcrowded, deteriorating homes with poor ventilation, broken windows, leaky roofs, and water-damaged walls, fostering virus spread and mold growth. This can lead to asthma, respiratory issues, and mental health problems like stress, anxiety, and depression. Overcrowding also affects children's education, causing sleep issues, concentration difficulties, and behavioral problems that impact their school performance and future opportunities. The housing crisis may force some to relocate to urban areas, leaving them isolated from their community and culture. Additionally, inadequate housing contributes to higher rates of gender-based violence against Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals.⁹

Individuals who do pursue opportunities in larger centres are taken away from home without the supports that they once had, which can also be a major barrier. These challenges are thought to be more applicable to Indigenous



Peoples compared to the rest of the population as well, given the stronger connection to family, multigenerational households and responsibilities, community, culture, and nature.

Infrastructure in remote regions – such as roads, reliable internet connectivity, and public services – may be underdeveloped compared to urban areas. This lack of infrastructure can impact daily living and working conditions, making positions in these areas less attractive. Furthermore, businesses may struggle to establish or maintain operations in these remote locations due to high costs and logistical challenges, which can limit job opportunities and economic development in these communities. For job seekers, inadequate infrastructure means fewer resources for job searching, skills development, and professional networking.

⁹ Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. "Inadequate Housing and Crowded Living Conditions – #3 of 8 Key Issues."

Moreover, the seasonal nature of many Northern economies, such as those dependent on resource extraction or traditional livelihoods, can contribute to fluctuating employment opportunities and economic instability. This seasonal variability poses additional challenges for sustained career development and retention of talent within these communities.

The scarcity of educational institutions and vocational training centers in Northern Canada affects the ability of Indigenous individuals to gain the skills and qualifications needed for various employment opportunities. Without access to local or nearby training facilities, aspiring workers may have to relocate or travel long distances, which is often not feasible.

Retaining employees in the North can be particularly challenging due to the harsh climatic conditions and isolation. For Indigenous employees who may already face systemic barriers and socio-economic challenges, these factors can exacerbate difficulties in maintaining employment. The lack of amenities and support services can contribute to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover rates.

2.2 Language and Cultural Barriers

Language and cultural barriers significantly affect the ability of Northern and Indigenous talent to thrive in the workforce. Many Indigenous communities have distinct cultural values and practices that may not be well understood or respected by employers from outside these communities.

Most organizations' human resource policies are researched and developed for the masses and do not consider how they need to be customized for diverse cultural differences

This cultural disconnect can lead to misunderstandings and an environment where Indigenous employees feel undervalued or alienated.

Language and cultural barriers add significant complexities to identifying and developing Northern and Indigenous talent. Many Indigenous languages are endangered or not well-represented in formal education, limiting access to resources and affecting communication and learning. Moreover, the prevalence of English or French in most workplaces can marginalize individuals who speak Indigenous languages, contributing to communication challenges and a sense of exclusion. The homesickness that is often reported by Indigenous candidates in training institutions can be exacerbated by the view that they are forced to adapt to a workplace and post-secondary institution that “maybe is not reflecting who they are.”¹⁰

Cultural barriers further complicate integration. Indigenous cultures often emphasize collective well-being and connection to the environment over individual achievement, which may clash with Western corporate structures that focus on individual performance and competition. Historical injustices, including colonization and forced assimilation, have created trust deficits between Indigenous communities and external organizations, hindering effective collaboration. Misalignments in communication styles and perceptions of success can lead to misunderstandings and attrition if organizational practices do not align with Indigenous cultural values.

¹⁰ Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat, “Best Practices in Indigenous Recruitment and Retention: Challenges and Opportunities for the Canadian Coast Guard – Atlantic Region,” April 2018.

One report on Inuit life highlights how colonialism is still creating barriers in government, schools, and workplaces. One interviewee from this report indicated that Indigenous People typically must adapt to norms that favor non-Indigenous success, rather than having their needs considered.¹¹ The transition from traditional practices like hunting and trapping to hourly wage jobs has created challenges, as Indigenous populations often struggle to balance both. The reliance on transient non-Indigenous workers in remote areas reinforces Western norms, exacerbating this issue. Organizations need to better understand Indigenous culture and move beyond surface-level cultural incorporations, such as displaying Indigenous art. To make meaningful change, policies should support flexibility, like allowing time off for traditional activities or providing additional holidays for regional celebrations. Some organizations do understand these cultural differences and try to adapt their policies to enable Indigenous employees to take time off during hunting season or for cultural celebrations. Some companies and sectors are doing this exceptionally well. When discussing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)¹², one report praised mining sector companies as leaders. These companies lead with employment arrangements that respect cultural practices. When hunting season comes, they create flexibility where they do not expect people to work 12-hour shifts.¹³

Employers need to invest in cultural competency and awareness training and actively work to create an inclusive environment that honors and integrates Indigenous cultural practices and languages.



This approach can enhance mutual understanding and foster a more supportive workplace. Recent census data highlights socio-economic disparities and progress among Indigenous Peoples. Despite improvements in income and high school completion rates, challenges remain in education, housing, and representation in foster care. The decline in Indigenous language proficiency also underscores the impact of historical and ongoing discrimination.¹⁴

Adapting work schedules to align with seasons and traditional activities, and considering part-time or reduced workweeks during key times, can help improve recruitment and retention. The rapid shift to remote and hybrid work during the pandemic shows that organizations can quickly adapt, making such changes feasible and beneficial for Indigenous workers.

Cultural sensitivity and awareness are critical for successful recruitment and retention. Organizations often lack understanding of Indigenous cultures, leading to stereotypes and insensitivity. Implementing cultural awareness training, developing inclusive policies, and building genuine relationships with Indigenous communities can foster more supportive work environments. Establishing support systems and mentorship programs can also bridge gaps between recruitment and retention, enhancing the overall effectiveness of diversity initiatives.

¹¹ Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUN), "Strengthening Indigenous Hiring Initiatives – An Overview," July 2021".
¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada, "TRC: Calls to Action," 2015.
¹³ Conference Board of Canada, "Working Together. Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada," 2019, 80.
¹⁴ Statistics Canada, "Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report, Chapter 4: Indigenous Youth in Canada," December 2021

2.3 Women and Youth

WOMEN

Indigenous women face multifaceted challenges in the recruitment and retention of employment, stemming from systemic barriers and historical injustices. They often encounter discrimination and biases in hiring processes, which can hinder their access to job opportunities. Additionally, cultural insensitivity and lack of representation in the workplace can create unwelcoming environments that undermine their job satisfaction and career advancement. Compounded by socioeconomic disparities and limited access to educational and professional development resources, these obstacles make it difficult for Indigenous women to secure and maintain stable employment.

While Indigenous women often achieve equal or higher education levels compared to Indigenous men, they typically experience elevated unemployment rates (around 50 percent), lower earnings, and a higher likelihood of living below the poverty line compared to both Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women.



Research from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (now Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) indicates that improved educational outcomes lead to significantly higher incomes and greater participation in the labor force, yet disparities persist between education achievements and employment outcomes, particularly along gender lines.

Despite increasing educational attainment overall, women remain significantly underrepresented in professions, STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), construction, transportation, and technical trades. The reasons for this underrepresentation—whether due to personal preference, choice, or external constraints—are not entirely clear. However, recent studies by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) suggest that Indigenous women face challenges accessing employment information, lack required courses or training, and have less work experience compared to men.

Indigenous women encounter additional barriers that are often overlooked by employers and policymakers. Gender discrimination under the Indian Act means that many First Nations women living in urban areas are unregistered and thus unable to access on-reserve job and training programs. Furthermore, women without substantial work experience or those employed part-time may find it difficult to qualify for Employment Insurance benefits, potentially facing reductions in benefits when they do qualify. Single mothers and primary caregivers face additional challenges in finding affordable daycare services that would enable them to work or pursue educational opportunities. Childcare availability and affordability challenges limit the ability of women to participate in the workforce and are among the primary reasons students do not finish training programs. Limited childcare options are exacerbated by overcrowded housing.¹⁵

Indigenous women are disproportionately affected by issues such as violence and addiction, which can be exacerbated in predominantly male workplaces where shared living arrangements may further contribute to discomfort and safety concerns. Research done on Indigenous women's experiences in the mining industry found that many women did not know sexual harassment policies existed or that mental health services were available to help victims. In addition, very few women knew if territorial or provincial support services were available to them in the workplace. These environments also facilitate a culture of fear that reporting sexual harassment or assault in the workplace could result in job loss. The women who were interviewed for this report suggested that employers should offer more support to Indigenous women specifically by offering more culturally relevant supports. The Indigenous women interviewed suggested supports offered in a traditional language and to include things such as mental health and childcare on the job sites as well as expanding training programs to outside the specific scope of work in order to build self-esteem and additional skills.¹⁶

YOUTH

For example, gender discrimination Indigenous People represent one of the youngest populations in Canada, with an average age 8.8 years younger than the non-Indigenous population as of 2016.

Indigenous youth, aged 15 to 24, make up 16.9% of the Indigenous population, a larger proportion compared to 12% in the non-Indigenous population.

This youthful demographic is a significant factor in the anticipated rapid growth of the Indigenous population, which is projected to reach between 2.5 and 3.2 million by 2041.

Despite a faster aging rate, the Indigenous population is expected to remain younger overall, with youth continuing to make up a significant share of the population in the coming decades.¹⁷

Indigenous youth face several challenges in recruitment and retention of employment that reflect broader systemic issues and unique cultural barriers. They often encounter discrimination and stereotypes in hiring practices, which can limit their job opportunities. Additionally, there is frequently a lack of culturally relevant career guidance and support, leading to fewer pathways into meaningful employment. Limited access to education and professional development resources, compounded by socioeconomic disparities, can further hinder their ability to compete in the job market. Once employed, Indigenous youth may face workplace environments that lack cultural understanding or support, leading to higher turnover rates.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted strategies, including mentorship programs, inclusive workplace practices, and educational initiatives that align with their cultural contexts and provide equitable opportunities for growth and advancement.

¹⁵ SmartICE, "Northern Production Centre (Nunavut) Feasibility Study," 2024.

¹⁶ Turtle Island Consulting Services Inc., (Caverley, Natasha), "What Works: Effective Policies and Programs for Aboriginal Peoples of Canada," 2006.

¹⁷ Statistics Canada, "Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report, Chapter 4: Indigenous Youth in Canada," December 2021.

2.4 Education and Skills Development

One of the primary challenges in identifying Northern and Indigenous talent lies in educational disparities. Many Indigenous communities face lower rates of educational attainment compared to non-Indigenous populations, stemming from historical injustices, cultural biases in educational systems, and inadequate funding for Indigenous-specific educational programs. Remote and isolated Northern communities often have limited access to educational institutions, forcing many individuals to relocate to urban centers for higher education, which can disrupt familial and cultural ties.

Education levels are one of the more common barriers Indigenous People face in entering the workforce or pursuing their desired career. In one recent report, when asked to indicate minimum levels of education required for positions in their organizations, almost half of positions (47%) required high school as the minimum, and 22% required trade school certifications. College/university diplomas and degrees were required for 16% of positions, while only 15% of positions had no educational requirement.¹⁸

Moreover, curriculum content in mainstream educational systems may not adequately reflect Indigenous histories, knowledge systems, and cultural perspectives.

This can contribute to a sense of alienation and disengagement among Indigenous students, affecting their academic performance and aspirations for higher education and career pathways.

Skill development gaps represent another critical challenge in identifying Northern and Indigenous talent. Traditional economies in Northern regions, such as subsistence activities and natural resource extraction, may not align with contemporary job market demands requiring technical, digital, and managerial skills. Limited access to vocational training programs and professional development opportunities further exacerbates skill gaps among Indigenous populations, hindering their competitiveness in the job market.

Numerous studies advocate for the implementation of an educational strategy and outreach campaign designed to engage students and their families from K-12 through to post-secondary education. Relying solely on university and college graduates or focusing on post-secondary preparation is insufficient, as it is often too late to effectively meet hiring targets for Indigenous individuals. In the rapidly evolving knowledge economy, jobs are highly technical and specialized, necessitating targeted training and early engagement to adequately prepare students for these roles. Employers aiming to hire Indigenous talent must therefore invest in education and training initiatives from an earlier stage to ensure they meet their diversity and hiring objectives. Additionally the promotion of careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) needs to start with younger children, many of whom currently lack awareness of potential careers and the paths they need to follow to achieve them.¹⁹

Furthermore, the transient nature of some Northern economies, characterized by seasonal employment and economic fluctuations, can impede the long-term retention and utilization of acquired skills. This cyclic nature of employment opportunities often perpetuates dependency on government support programs rather than fostering sustainable economic independence through skills diversification and career advancement.

¹⁸ SmartICE, "Northern Production Centre (Nunavut) Feasibility Study," 2024.

¹⁹ Turtle Island Consulting Services Inc., (Caverley, Natasha), "What Works: Effective Policies and Programs for Aboriginal Peoples of Canada," 2006.

2.5 Lack of Visibility and Recognition

The lack of visibility and recognition of Northern and Indigenous talent is a major barrier to their full participation in the workforce. This issue often stems from systemic barriers such as discriminatory hiring practices, unequal access to career development, and workplace cultures that do not accommodate diverse cultural perspectives. These challenges contribute to underrepresentation and missed opportunities, perpetuating socio-economic disparities within Indigenous communities.

Historical injustices and ongoing discrimination have marginalized Indigenous Peoples within mainstream employment sectors. Many organizations wish to contribute to Truth and Reconciliation but lack direction. A 2017 survey by Indigenous Works revealed that 85% of medium and large Canadian companies had no relationship with local Indigenous communities, which hinders effective hiring and retention.²⁰

85% of medium and large Canadian companies had no relationship with local Indigenous communities, which hinders effective hiring and retention.²¹



Cultural biases and mismatched expectations between Indigenous communities and mainstream sectors can impede talent identification and career progression. Differences in cultural values and professional norms can lead to misunderstandings and disengagement. Organizations must address these gaps by integrating Indigenous perspectives and creating inclusive environments. Northern and Indigenous communities also face challenges such as limited networking opportunities and inadequate representation in industry associations. Geographic isolation and lack of targeted recruitment initiatives further hinder career advancement. Developing mentorship programs and leadership development tailored to Indigenous needs can help bridge these gaps.

According to Indigenous Works, “Some companies that are doing better with Indigenous inclusion cite that Indigenous People bring unique decision-making processes to their workplace, along with their traditional knowledge of lands and environmental stewardship, and other characteristics that make their contribution to workplaces especially valuable.” According to a Conference Board of Canada survey, many organizations that have achieved workplace diversity have determined that it has improved their reputation and makes them an employer of choice, which also helps them improve retention.²²

The mere presence and participation of Indigenous People is not enough. To improve visibility and recognition in recruitment and HR policies, organizations should proactively include Indigenous candidates in all their processes, implement cultural sensitivity training, and support and celebrate Indigenous cultural practices. By addressing these areas, businesses can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment, ultimately enhancing organizational performance and employee satisfaction.

²⁰ Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat, “Best Practices in Indigenous Recruitment and Retention: Challenges and Opportunities for the Canadian Coast Guard – Atlantic Region,” April 2018, 4.

²¹ IBID

²² Conference Board of Canada “Working Together. Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada,” 2019.

3. Opportunities for Better Indigenous Outcomes

3.1 Strategies for Enhancing Identification and Recruitment Practices

Making positive changes start with identification and recruitment practices.

BUILDING TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

Trust is foundational in Indigenous communities. Organizations should build genuine relationships by engaging with local leaders, community organizations, and educational institutions. This may take time and consistent representation on the ground in communities.

Active participation in community events and initiatives is vital for building trust and demonstrating a genuine commitment to the well-being of Indigenous communities. By engaging directly with local events and supporting community-driven projects, organizations can forge meaningful relationships and showcase their dedication to the community's needs and aspirations. This engagement not only helps to strengthen ties with Indigenous communities but also fosters mutual respect and understanding. It signals that the organization is not just a distant entity but a committed partner invested in the community's long-term success and prosperity.

Equally important is the development of partnerships with Indigenous organizations, councils, and educational institutions at both local and regional levels. These collaborations offer invaluable insights and foster connections that can enhance the effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives and recruitment strategies.

Working closely with Indigenous entities provides organizations with a deeper understanding of cultural nuances, community priorities, and effective engagement practices.

These partnerships also facilitate access to networks and resources that can aid in designing more inclusive policies and programs. By building and nurturing these relationships, organizations can better align their efforts with the needs of Indigenous communities and contribute to a more equitable and supportive environment for all.



CULTURALLY COMPETENT RECRUITMENT PRACTICES

Recruitment practices need to be culturally sensitive and inclusive. Providing comprehensive cultural training for HR personnel and recruiters is essential for fostering a more inclusive recruitment process. Training that covers Indigenous cultures, traditions, and values helps prevent misunderstandings and biases, ensuring that recruitment practices are respectful and equitable. By equipping HR teams with a deeper understanding of Indigenous perspectives, organizations can create a more welcoming environment for all candidates and enhance their ability to attract and engage Indigenous talent. Such training equips teams with the knowledge to understand and respect Indigenous cultures, reducing biases and misunderstandings. Commitment from management to Indigenous principles reinforces this effort, demonstrating a top-down dedication to diversity and inclusion.

In addition, crafting job descriptions that are clear, accessible, and reflective of Indigenous values is crucial for broadening the pool of potential candidates.

Inclusive job descriptions not only highlight the organization's commitment to diversity but also resonate with Indigenous applicants by aligning with their cultural values and traditions.



This approach not only attracts a wider range of candidates but also demonstrates an organization's dedication to creating a truly inclusive workplace.

Culturally competent recruitment practices are crucial for effectively hiring Indigenous talent and fostering an inclusive workplace. Indigenous-led organizations emphasize the importance of establishing robust relationships with Indigenous communities for collaborative position development. Best practices for Indigenous hiring include incorporating Indigenous representation on hiring committees and involving communities in the design and consideration of positions. This inclusion ensures that job roles and recruitment processes are aligned with Indigenous values and needs. Additionally, partnering with agencies experienced in working with Indigenous candidates and ensuring well-resourced Indigenous-specific positions can greatly enhance recruitment efforts.

During the advertising phase, engaging an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion professional knowledgeable in Indigenous principles can be beneficial. Acknowledging all Indigenous Peoples in job postings, possibly through land acknowledgments, and collaborating with Indigenous organizations for the design and distribution of postings, broadens reach and relevance. Circulating job advertisements via Indigenous-focused platforms and events, while profiling the specific benefits of working within your organization, helps attract Indigenous candidates by addressing their unique interests and needs. This means considering avenues beyond simply posting online, since not everyone will have access to the internet, including advertising where the Indigenous community may convene, including health centres, grocery and convenience stores, and also on local radio stations.

When searching for Indigenous candidates, it is crucial to include Indigenous representation on hiring committees, ensuring they are properly compensated and their workload balanced. Facilitating community collaboration and leveraging local recommendations can also enhance recruitment efforts.

Adapting interview processes to accommodate Indigenous applicants involves respecting cultural differences in self-promotion and communication styles. Recruitment efforts should include management or specialists knowledgeable in Indigenous history and cultures, offer flexible interview formats and locations, and include local Indigenous representatives when appropriate. This approach ensures that interview questions are culturally sensitive and that terminology is used correctly, avoiding biased criteria and educating committees on cultural variations.

Finally, evaluating applicants inclusively involves considering non-traditional qualifications and community-based experiences. Recognizing career gaps and valuing collaborative efforts and community endorsements align with the holistic evaluation of Indigenous candidates, promoting a fair and equitable hiring process.

By integrating these practices, organizations can strengthen their Indigenous hiring initiatives effectively.

ADDRESSING GEOGRAPHIC BARRIERS

To address the challenges posed by geographic isolation, organizations can adopt several effective strategies to ensure that talent from remote areas is not excluded from the workforce.

Offering remote work opportunities is a particularly impactful approach, allowing candidates from isolated communities to contribute their skills and expertise without the need for relocation. This flexibility not only opens doors for individuals who may otherwise face barriers to employment but also enables organizations to tap into a broader and more diverse talent pool. Remote work arrangements can bridge the gap between geographic distance and career opportunities, fostering inclusivity and expanding access to talent.



Additionally, providing travel support or relocation assistance is a crucial strategy for making job opportunities more accessible to candidates from distant communities. By covering travel expenses or offering relocation packages, organizations can reduce the financial and logistical barriers that might otherwise prevent qualified candidates from pursuing positions. This support demonstrates a commitment to overcoming the challenges of geographic isolation and ensures that all potential talent has the opportunity to participate in the workforce. Such measures not only enhance the organization's ability to attract and retain top talent but also reinforce its dedication to inclusivity and equitable access to career advancement.

LEVERAGING EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Establishing partnerships with educational institutions that serve Northern and Indigenous students can create pathways to employment. Developing internship and co-op programs specifically tailored to Indigenous students is a powerful strategy for fostering future talent and promoting career growth. These programs offer practical, hands-on experience that is invaluable for students as they transition from academia to the professional world. By providing Indigenous students with meaningful work experiences, organizations can not only help them build essential skills but also create a direct pathway to full-time positions within the company. This approach not only benefits the students but also allows organizations to cultivate a skilled, diverse talent pool that reflects their commitment to inclusion and diversity.

Supporting scholarships and funding for Indigenous students in relevant fields is equally crucial for building a robust future talent pipeline. Financial assistance can significantly alleviate the barriers that prevent Indigenous students from pursuing higher education and specialized careers. By investing in scholarship programs, organizations demonstrate a commitment to long-term diversity and inclusion efforts, empowering Indigenous students to excel in their chosen fields. This support not only helps individuals achieve their academic and professional goals but also strengthens the organization's future workforce by ensuring a continuous influx of well-trained, skilled Indigenous professionals.

3.2 Promoting Retention and Career Development

Replace with this: Retention strategies should be part of a broader strategic plan to engage Indigenous Peoples. Building an engagement strategy requires vision, a commitment to work together, getting to know each other, building capacity and building a healthy workplace.

“Businesses must commit to learning the culture, goals, history, and experiences of their Indigenous and Northern workforce.”

Regarding cultural awareness, the Conference Board of Canada has reported that “businesses must commit to learning the culture, goals, history, and experiences of their Indigenous and Northern workforce.” It further points out that “Northerners [and Indigenous people] must also learn the business culture of their employers and understand the organization's goals.” Achieving these goals requires a whole of organization approach steeped in relationship building.

Cultural competency and awareness training is a fundamental step in fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace environment. By providing all staff with comprehensive training on Indigenous cultures, histories, and protocols, organizations can build a foundation of understanding that goes beyond mere tolerance. This training helps to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions, ensuring that Indigenous employees feel genuinely valued and respected. Such an environment not only enhances interpersonal relationships but also supports a more harmonious and productive workplace, where every individual can contribute their best without facing cultural barriers.

Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into organizational policies, practices, and decision-making processes is equally crucial. By integrating Indigenous knowledge systems into the fabric of the organization, companies demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and respect for diverse viewpoints. This approach not only enriches organizational practices but also signals to Indigenous employees that their perspectives are integral to the company's success. It fosters an environment where diverse knowledge is leveraged, leading to more innovative solutions and a more equitable workplace.

Establishing mentorship programs is another key strategy for supporting Indigenous employees. These programs provide invaluable guidance and support from experienced colleagues, facilitating professional growth and development. By creating opportunities for Indigenous employees to receive mentorship, organizations can help them navigate their careers, build skills, and achieve their goals. A supportive work environment, characterized by continuous learning and development, reinforces the value of each employee and enhances overall job satisfaction and retention.

Furthermore, creating peer support networks for Indigenous employees helps build a sense of community within the workplace. These networks enable employees to connect, share experiences, and support one another, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity. By facilitating these connections, organizations can enhance the workplace culture, ensuring that Indigenous employees feel supported and integrated into the broader organizational community. This not only improves employee well-being but also contributes to a more cohesive and engaged workforce.

To enhance Indigenous recruitment and retention, organizations should conduct workplace assessments to understand their operational needs, identify opportunities, and address barriers. This involves evaluating power structures, skill gaps, technology needs, and the work environment. Effective assessments prevent superficial approaches and ensure that positions for Indigenous employees offer clear career paths. They also help identify roles that align with cultural interests and appeal to various demographic groups, such as youth or families. Additionally, assessments can reveal opportunities for mentoring, apprenticeships, and training.

The mining industry for example, employs a gap analyses model that estimates the number of employees, available positions, transitions (school to employment, immigration) and compares this with forecasts for key occupations so hiring managers can proactively plan to address gaps before they become critical.²³ This approach has seemingly worked since the mining industry continues to be one of the largest employers of Indigenous peoples in Canada, outperforming other industries in terms of Indigenous representation. In 2023, Indigenous workers average representation was about 12.8% of the mining and quarrying workforce, relatively higher than 3.9% across all industries. From 2007 to 2022, Indigenous representation in mining tripled, pointing to a favourable trend for Indigenous employment outcomes in the mining sector.²⁴

Providing access to professional development opportunities is essential for nurturing Indigenous employees' career growth and aligning their aspirations with organizational goals. By offering targeted training, workshops, and educational programs that resonate with Indigenous employees' professional objectives, organizations can empower these individuals to acquire new skills, enhance their expertise, and advance their careers. This investment in development not only helps Indigenous employees achieve their career goals but also strengthens the organization's talent pool, fostering a more skilled and motivated workforce. Moreover, aligning development opportunities with employees' aspirations ensures that they remain engaged and committed to their roles, ultimately contributing to the organization's long-term success.

Implementing policies that prioritize internal promotion and career advancement for Indigenous employees underscores a commitment to their sustained growth and success within the organization.



By focusing on promoting from within, companies demonstrate their dedication to nurturing and retaining Indigenous talent, providing clear career paths, and creating a culture of upward mobility. This approach not only enhances employee satisfaction and loyalty but also cultivates a diverse leadership pipeline that reflects the organization's values and commitment to equity. Prioritizing internal promotions ensures that Indigenous employees see tangible opportunities for advancement, reinforcing their investment in the organization and driving overall organizational excellence.

²³ MiHR, "Canadian Mining Labour Market Outlook, 2016, 14.

²⁴ MiHR, "Canadian Mining Workplace Profile," 2024, 22.

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS

Implementing flexible work arrangements is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive workplace, especially for Indigenous employees who may have unique cultural and family obligations. One example could be more time, possibly days or weeks, for medical appointments that require travel outside the community to a larger center.



Recognizing the importance of traditional cultural practices and family responsibilities by offering flexible work schedules or leave policies demonstrates respect and understanding of Indigenous values.

By accommodating these needs, organizations not only enhance employee satisfaction and retention but also signal a genuine commitment to inclusivity. This approach can significantly improve work-life balance, allowing Indigenous employees to honor their cultural practices while maintaining their professional responsibilities.

Additionally, offering remote work options can be transformative for Indigenous employees residing in remote or rural communities. Many Indigenous communities are located in areas with limited access to traditional workplaces, making remote work a viable solution that expands employment opportunities and reduces geographic barriers. By adopting flexible and remote work arrangements, organizations can tap into a broader talent pool, support diverse workforces, and ensure that all employees have equal opportunities to contribute and succeed, regardless of their location.

RECOGNITION AND APPRECIATION

Celebrating cultural milestones within the workplace is more than a gesture of goodwill; it is a powerful affirmation of respect and inclusion. By acknowledging and celebrating significant cultural events and milestones of Indigenous employees, organizations demonstrate a genuine appreciation for their diverse heritage. This practice not only honors the rich traditions and histories of Indigenous cultures but also strengthens employees' sense of belonging and connection to the organization. When cultural milestones are recognized, it creates an environment where Indigenous employees feel valued and their unique contributions are celebrated, enhancing overall workplace morale and inclusivity.

Culturally relevant spaces should be included in workplaces and at educational institutions to build a sense of belonging for Indigenous recruits. These could include: a place to practice spirituality, having Indigenous décor and artwork in prominent places, celebrating Indigenous histories through artifacts and photos.

Public recognition of Indigenous employees' contributions and achievements further amplifies this sense of belonging and pride. By highlighting their accomplishments and showcasing their impact on the organization, companies validate the importance of diverse perspectives and foster an environment of respect. Public acknowledgment not only motivates and inspires Indigenous employees but also sets a standard for all employees, reinforcing the organization's commitment to diversity and equity. This visibility helps to challenge stereotypes, promote mutual respect, and build a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.



3.4 Leveraging Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are pivotal in improving the identification, recruitment, and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent. These collaborations foster meaningful connections, provide valuable insights, and create tailored solutions that address the unique challenges faced by these communities.

Effective community partnerships are grounded in trust and mutual respect. By working closely with Indigenous organizations, community leaders, and local groups, employers can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and socio-economic factors that influence recruitment and retention. This relationship-building helps organizations tailor their approach to meet the specific needs and expectations of Northern and Indigenous talent, ensuring that recruitment strategies are both relevant and respectful.

Community partnerships can significantly enhance recruitment efforts. Indigenous organizations often have established networks and communication channels that can be leveraged to reach potential candidates. By collaborating with these organizations, employers can access job fairs, community events, and other platforms that effectively engage Indigenous job seekers. Additionally, these partnerships facilitate the development of culturally appropriate recruitment materials and practices, which can improve the attractiveness of job opportunities to Indigenous candidates.

Partnerships with community organizations allow employers to offer tailored support and resources that address the specific barriers faced by Northern and Indigenous talent. For example, community partners can help develop job readiness programs, offer mentorship and career counseling, and provide financial assistance for training and education. These targeted resources can help candidates overcome obstacles and better prepare them for successful careers within the organization.

Retention of Northern and Indigenous talent is enhanced through ongoing community engagement. By maintaining strong relationships with community partners, organizations can create a supportive work environment that acknowledges and values Indigenous culture. This includes implementing policies that accommodate cultural practices, providing flexible work arrangements, and fostering an inclusive workplace culture. Moreover, community partners can offer feedback and support to address any challenges Indigenous employees may face, helping to create a more supportive and inclusive work environment.

Leveraging community partnerships contributes to sustainable and long-term outcomes. By investing in and supporting community-driven initiatives, organizations can help build local capacity and create a pipeline of talent that is both skilled and connected to their communities. This long-term investment benefits both the organization and the community, leading to a more resilient and mutually beneficial relationship.

Community partnerships also foster shared learning and innovation. Through collaboration, organizations can gain insights into effective practices and strategies that have been successful in other contexts. This exchange of knowledge can lead to innovative approaches in recruitment and retention, ultimately benefiting the organization and the community alike.

Building strong partnerships with local Indigenous communities is essential for creating a recruitment strategy that is both effective and respectful. By collaborating with Indigenous communities, organizations can gain invaluable insights into local needs and priorities, which helps tailor recruitment efforts to align with these priorities. This partnership facilitates a smoother integration of Indigenous employees into the workplace, ensuring that their cultural needs are acknowledged and supported. Moreover, aligning organizational goals with community aspirations fosters a sense of mutual respect and shared purpose, strengthening the organization’s role as a responsible and engaged community partner.

Supporting Indigenous employees’ involvement in community initiatives further reinforces the organization’s commitment to cultural preservation and community development. By encouraging and facilitating their participation in local events and activities, organizations help employees maintain strong ties to their cultural roots while contributing to meaningful community advancement. This support not only enhances employees’ sense of belonging and engagement but also demonstrates the organization’s dedication to making a positive impact beyond the workplace. Such involvement creates a reciprocal relationship where both the organization and the community benefit, leading to a more inclusive and culturally enriched work environment.

In summary, leveraging community partnerships provides a strategic advantage in identifying, recruiting, and retaining Northern and Indigenous talent. These collaborations build trust, enhance recruitment efforts, offer tailored support, improve retention, and promote sustainable impact. By working together with community organizations, employers can create a more inclusive and effective approach to talent management that benefits both the organization and the communities it serves.



3.5 Policy Recommendations and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Governance

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) governance is crucial for creating equitable and inclusive policies and workplaces, but for organizations in Northern Canada, implementing effective DEI practices presents specific challenges, particularly in the recruitment and retention of Indigenous People.

Limited DEI Infrastructure: One of the primary challenges facing organizations in Northern Canada is the lack of developed or even existing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks. Many organizations in this region operate with minimal or superficial DEI structures, resulting in inconsistent efforts to address the needs of Indigenous employees. Without a comprehensive DEI strategy and policies, organizations struggle to create and sustain truly inclusive environments. This lack of structured governance prevents the effective support and recognition of Indigenous perspectives and contributions, leading to a gap between stated commitments and actual practices. For organizations to genuinely support Indigenous employees, they must invest in robust DEI infrastructure that aligns with their goals and the needs of their workforce.



Cultural Competency: Effective DEI governance demands a profound understanding of the diverse cultural backgrounds within the workforce. In Northern Canada, this necessitates recognizing and integrating the distinct cultural practices and values of various Indigenous groups. However, many organizations lack the cultural competency and training required to meet these needs. This deficit often results in policies that do not align with the realities of Indigenous employees, leading to insufficient support and engagement. To bridge this gap, organizations must prioritize cultural competency training and ensure that their DEI policies are genuinely reflective of Indigenous cultures and practices.

Representation and Leadership: DEI governance is most impactful when driven by leadership from the top. Yet, many organizations in Northern Canada face a significant challenge due to limited Indigenous representation in leadership and decision-making roles. This absence of Indigenous leaders can perpetuate a cycle of exclusion, making it difficult for Indigenous employees to envision themselves in positions of power and influence. Without Indigenous voices in leadership roles to advocate for and implement inclusive practices, driving systemic change becomes a daunting task. To address this, organizations must prioritize increasing Indigenous representation in leadership positions, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

Resource Constraints: Resource limitations present a significant obstacle for organizations in Northern Canada attempting to implement effective DEI strategies. Budget constraints and logistical challenges, particularly in remote areas, can impede the development and maintenance of comprehensive DEI programs. These limitations affect the ability to provide ongoing DEI training, support Indigenous employee networks, and ensure inclusive recruitment practices. To overcome these challenges, organizations need to explore creative solutions and seek external support to bolster their DEI efforts, ensuring that resource constraints do not hinder their commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Community Engagement: Effective DEI governance and inclusion policy development requires meaningful engagement with the communities organizations serve. In Northern Canada, this involves building strong relationships with Indigenous communities and incorporating their input into organizational policies and practices. Many organizations struggle with this due to geographical and logistical barriers, resulting in a lack of authentic engagement and understanding of Indigenous needs and priorities. To address this, organizations must actively work to overcome these barriers, invest in community relations, and ensure that their DEI strategies are informed by the voices and perspectives of Indigenous communities. This approach not only enhances the relevance and impact of DEI initiatives but also fosters trust and collaboration between organizations and the communities they serve.

The challenges associated with DEI governance have a direct impact on the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees. When organizations lack a clear and effective DEI strategy, with inclusive policies, they may fail to attract Indigenous talent, who are increasingly seeking employers that demonstrate a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, a lack of supportive and inclusive practices can lead to high turnover rates among Indigenous employees, as they may feel undervalued or isolated in the workplace.

To address these challenges, organizations in Northern Canada need to develop and implement comprehensive DEI governance frameworks that are tailored to the specific needs of Indigenous employees. This involves investing in cultural competency training, increasing Indigenous representation in leadership, and building strong relationships with Indigenous communities. By doing so, organizations can create more inclusive and supportive environments that not only attract but also retain Indigenous talent, ultimately benefiting from the diverse perspectives and contributions that Indigenous employees bring to the table.

4. In Conclusion

4.1 Summary of Findings

Addressing the gaps and seizing the opportunities to support Northern and Indigenous talent is both a strategic necessity and a fundamental commitment to equity and inclusivity. The challenges identified – including geographical and infrastructural barriers, cultural and language obstacles, and gaps in educational and career development –highlight the need for a concerted effort from all stakeholders. These gaps encompass issues such as limited access to education, inadequate visibility of Indigenous talent, and systemic barriers that hinder career advancement. By recognizing these challenges, stakeholders can better strategize to create impactful solutions.

Opportunities for enhancing Indigenous outcomes are substantial and require action from businesses, educational institutions, government bodies, and Indigenous organizations. Businesses can drive progress by engaging meaningfully with Indigenous communities, implementing inclusive recruitment practices, and fostering supportive workplace cultures. Educational institutions are crucial in bridging the gap between education and employment by enhancing access, strengthening industry partnerships, and integrating Indigenous perspectives into curricula. Government bodies play a vital role in developing supportive policies, facilitating resource access, and promoting research to understand and address barriers. Indigenous organizations can advocate for fair practices, provide essential support services, and celebrate successes to inspire and build a stronger talent pool. Collectively, these actions will not only address existing gaps but also harness the full potential of Northern and Indigenous talent, leading to a more inclusive, equitable, and innovative workforce.



4.2 Call to Action

Addressing the gaps and seizing the opportunities to support the identification, recruitment, and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent is not just a strategic imperative—it is a fundamental commitment to equity and inclusivity that benefits society as a whole. To drive meaningful change, all stakeholders—including businesses, educational institutions, government bodies, and Indigenous organizations—must actively engage in this collective effort.



1. BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYERS

Businesses play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of talent acquisition and retention. To support Northern and Indigenous talent effectively, employers should:

- **Community Engagement:** genuine community involvement, ensuring their strategies are aligned with the needs and values of Indigenous communities. This means co-creating opportunities around training programs, internships, and job opportunities tailored to the community's strengths and interests. Collaborate on developing training programs, internships, and job opportunities tailored to the community's strengths and interests.
- **Implement Inclusive Recruitment Practices:** Develop and adopt recruitment strategies that actively seek out Northern and Indigenous candidates. This includes creating job descriptions that are culturally sensitive, partnering with Indigenous organizations for talent sourcing, and ensuring that recruitment teams are trained in culturally competent practices.
- **Foster an Inclusive Workplace Culture:** Create a work environment where Northern and Indigenous employees feel valued and supported. This involves providing cultural competency training for all staff, establishing mentorship programs, and ensuring that policies are in place to address and prevent discrimination.
- **Support Career Development:** Invest in the professional growth of Northern and Indigenous employees through training programs, leadership development, creation of relevant jobs that value Indigenous and local knowledge, and opportunities for advancement. This not only helps in retention but also builds a more skilled and engaged workforce.

2. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Educational institutions ranging from formal colleges and universities to industry training are instrumental in preparing Northern and Indigenous youth for the workforce. To bridge the gap between education and employment, they should:

- **Enhance Access to Education:** Develop programs and scholarships specifically for Northern and Indigenous students to increase their access to higher education. This includes establishing virtual learning options, physical presence in remote communities, and other innovative solutions to give Indigenous People the opportunity to broaden their knowledge and skills while maintaining their support network and community culture. This includes creating pathways that facilitate entry into various fields, particularly those in high demand.
- **Strengthen Industry Partnerships:** Collaborate with businesses and organizations to create internships, apprenticeships, and job placement opportunities tailored to Northern and Indigenous students. Such partnerships help bridge the gap between academic training and real-world experience.
- **Integrate Indigenous Perspectives:** Ensure that curriculum reflects Indigenous perspectives and histories, and incorporates culturally relevant content. This requires collaboration and co-design with the Indigenous community, ensuring that impacts are measurable and adaptable for continuous improvement. This not only enriches the educational experience but also prepares students for diverse and inclusive workplaces.

3. GOVERNMENT BODIES

Governments at all levels have a critical role in shaping policies and providing support for Northern and Indigenous talent. They should:

- **Develop Supportive Policies:** Create and implement policies that promote the recruitment and retention of Northern and Indigenous talent. Supportive policies should be inclusive and accessible to all members of the workforce which takes collaboration, coordination, and codesign. These should also be measured and evaluated to ensure they meet the needs of Northern and Indigenous talent. This includes offering incentives for businesses that hire Indigenous employees, supporting educational programs, and investing in community-driven development initiatives.
- **Facilitate Access to Resources:** Provide funding and resources to organizations that work directly with Northern and Indigenous communities to build capacity and support talent development. This includes supporting initiatives that address systemic barriers to employment and career advancement and workforce development projects.
- **Promote Data Collection and Research:** Encourage and fund research on the barriers and opportunities related to Northern and Indigenous talent. Accurate data collection and analysis are essential for understanding the challenges and measuring the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Encourage Collaborative Partnerships:** Facilitate partnerships between governments, businesses, academia, and Indigenous communities to align goals, share best practices, and implement joint initiatives. This collaborative approach helps ensure that strategies are relevant and effectively address the needs of all and result in better outcomes.

4. INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Indigenous organizations are vital in advocating for and supporting Northern and Indigenous talent. They should:

- **Advocate for Fair Practices:** Work with businesses, educational institutions, and government bodies to advocate for fair and equitable practices that address the unique needs of Northern and Indigenous individuals.
- **Provide Support Services:** Offer career counseling, mentorship, and other support services that help Northern and Indigenous individuals navigate their career paths and overcome challenges.
- **Celebrate Successes:** Highlight and share success stories of Northern and Indigenous talent to inspire others and demonstrate the value of diverse perspectives in various sectors.
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** Forge and cultivate meaningful relationships with businesses, governments, and educational institutions to build a robust support network for Indigenous talent. By uniting these efforts, organizations can create culturally relevant initiatives and harness the power of collaboration to achieve far greater impact together than they could alone.

5. INDIGENOUS INDIVIDUALS

Indigenous individuals can take several proactive steps to seize opportunities for identification, recruitment, and retention in the workforce:

- **Leverage Networking and Community Connections:** Build a strong network within Indigenous communities to uncover job opportunities and gain insights into potential employers. Engage with local Indigenous organizations, attend community events, and join professional associations to access valuable connections and resources, including job openings, mentorship, and support systems.
- **Pursue Professional Development and Education:** Indigenous individuals can seek out training programs, workshops, and educational courses that align with their career goals and industry demands. Earning certifications or specializations can boost your qualifications and competitiveness, helping you stay current with industry trends.
- **Utilize Self-Identification Opportunities:** Self-identify as Indigenous on job applications and within professional networks to enhance recruitment and retention prospects. Many organizations have initiatives to increase Indigenous representation and offer tailored support. This approach helps secure opportunities and access resources that support your success and foster an inclusive work environment. This also includes highlighting unique existing Indigenous and local knowledge that are attributes to the workplace and goals of the organization.

By embracing these actions, stakeholders can collectively address the gaps and seize the opportunities to create a more inclusive and equitable workforce. In order to see real change, all stakeholders have a part to play. This is not only a moral and social responsibility but also a strategic advantage that drives innovation, resilience, and growth across communities and industries.



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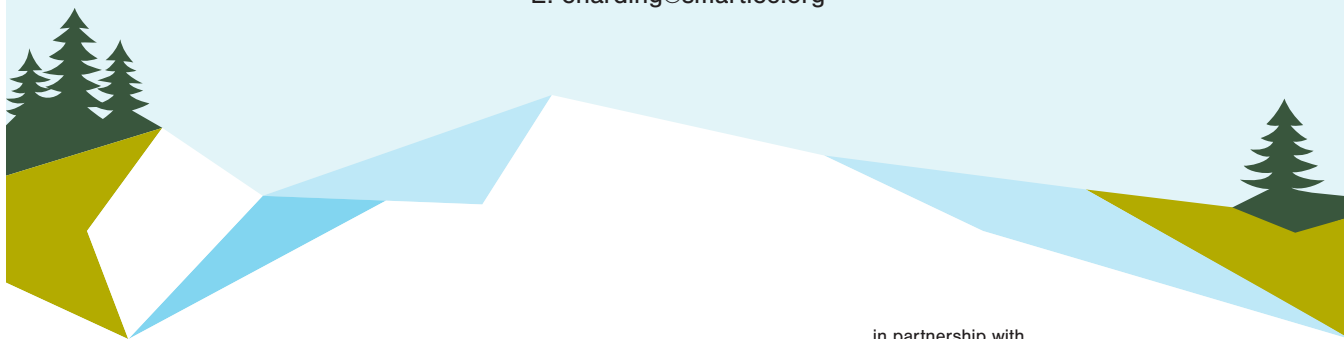
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**For More Information on
Business Development & Partnerships**

Contact: Carolann Harding

+1 (709) 725-0820

E: charding@smartice.org



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