

Summary of Aboriginal Communities' Training Program Funding

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Information Clearinghouse

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Aboriginal Program Funding Data Summary

Introduction

This study follows earlier Clearinghouse reports on administrative training and general training needs in Aboriginal communities in northern Alberta. Those reports described the training needs as seen by administrators and educational personnel within the communities (as well as some outside experts). This study supplements them by looking at the short-term training programs that have actually been funded in the 1996-97 fiscal year by Aboriginal Communities through their Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). These Agreements place decision-making authority in the hands of First Nations, Métis Locals and Métis Settlements.

It should be noted as well that the programs funded under the RBAs represent only one portion of any community's training needs. The RBA funds are designated for employment-related programs of less than one year's duration, including work experience programs. The interpretation of the regulations appears to vary somewhat, but it is clear that two-year diplomas and university degrees cannot be funded completely through this program (although the final year can be, according to one source).

Methodology

Data for this report comes from a combination of HRDC personnel, programs funded under the RBAs comes from First Nations, Tribal/regional organizations, zone offices of the Métis Nation of Alberta and from the Métis Settlements General Council. Many of those contacted were unable to provide detailed information regarding program funding and some others did not wish to have their communities' figures quoted directly. As a result, the information in this report is general in nature.

Funding Arrangements

Under the "Pathways to Success" program (1992-1996), representatives of First Nations and Métis groups sat on boards which, with suggestions from HRDC staff, allocated training dollars primarily to the purchase of classroom space for Aboriginal students in appropriate courses. There were four Pathways Boards in northern Alberta. In some instances, Pathways boards were criticized as being "rubber stamps" for the decisions of the HRDC project officers.

In 1996, a series of Regional Bilateral Agreements replaced Pathways. Under the RBAs, Aboriginal groups were given greater control over the spending of training funds. In Alberta, the available money is divided between the First Nations, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) and the Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC). Among First Nations, the agreements are held by the Grand Councils of Treaty Eight, Treaty Seven and Treaty Six First Nations. The actual

decision-making takes place at the Band level, with tribal/regional organizations collecting data and reporting to HRDC. For the Métis Nation of Alberta the actual funding decisions are made by the various Zone administrations throughout the province. The individual Métis Settlements likewise decide on the use of training dollars and report their decisions to the MSGC.

In 1996-97 RBA funds for northern Alberta are estimated at \$7 million for Treaty Indians, \$2.2 million for MNA members and \$1.5 million for the MSGC (NADC estimate based on information from MNA and other sources).

Findings

The courses funded under the Regional Bilateral Agreements cover a wide range of subjects. In approximate order of popularity, the most frequently-mentioned subjects are:

- Safety (including H2S, WHMIS, First Aid, CPR, Chainsaw safety, Confined Space Entry, Bear Aware, and others). This was by far the most popular subject.
- Fire Fighting, particularly Initial Attack Crew training (those who listed this had many students taking it)
- Computer Training
- Apprenticeship Trades (including welding, carpentry, pipe-fitting and mechanical trades; as well as pre-trades upgrading)
- Life Skills
- Driver Training
- Academic Upgrading
- Heavy Equipment Operation
- Work Experience programs
- Forestry
- Drill Rig operation

Other subjects mentioned include: Adult Literacy, Business and Office Skills, Social Work, and Child Care.

The high ranking of safety and trades training agrees with the earlier report on the training needs of Aboriginal communities. The higher rankings of life skills, driver training and heavy equipment operation in the current report are likely due to the fact that these are short-term, employment-oriented programs, well suited to the RBA funding arrangements.

Outlook

For 1997-98, the role of tribal councils is being reduced, putting more responsibility in the hands of the individual First Nations. At the same time, people in Aboriginal Communities are looking beyond entry-level jobs in the forestry and oil and gas sectors. Rather than just working on slashing crews, more people want to be trained as rig hands or tradespeople.

As with earlier reports, many respondents commented on concerns about the cost of courses and the difficulty of accessing them in remote locations. Communities are “shopping around” more and more for their training and colleges will have to be continually aware of their clients’ needs if they are to compete effectively with the many private trainers in the region.

Implications

The market for safety programs is strong and will likely remain so as long as the resource sectors remain the major employers in the region. In the future however, there will be an increasing interest in training that will lead to jobs beyond the entry level. Trades training will likely become more popular, as will computer courses.

Aboriginal communities are taking increasing advantage of the competitive training market in Alberta. Colleges that wish to play a major role in this market will have to work with the communities in order to be aware of their needs and how best to serve them.

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