

BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners

EXTERNAL REVIEW PROJECT

Final Report

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, fifteen organizations including Aboriginal political organizations, BC provincial and federal governments, and post-secondary education institutions and organizations endorsed a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) to collectively work towards improving BC Aboriginal post-secondary participation and success rates. The MOU gave rise to the BC Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners (“PSE Partners”) who are generally charged with giving effect to the MOU. See Appendix 1 for terms of reference and current membership.

“PSE Partners meetings are an important but not effective use of my time”

The PSE Partners (“PSEP”) contemplated a review when the group formed and after five years of operations determined that it had reached a point where a review is needed. The review terms of reference includes the following areas of focus:

1. The PSEP work to date;
2. Levels of awareness of the existence of the PSEP;
3. The perceived and actual effectiveness of the PSEP; and,
4. Possibilities for enhancements to support the PSEP in pursuing its goals and objectives as effectively as possible.

PSE Partners (PSEP) contracted Human Capital Strategies and its principal, Kerry Jochen and Associate, Garry Merkel (“Reviewers”) to conduct this review under PSEP direction through a project working group. The Reviewers based the findings and recommendations in this review on analyses of the following three components, which were informed by their professional experiences and expertise:

1. Background Review of Documentation: A review of several PSEP documents that framed the overall review and derived some initial observations. See Appendix 2.
2. Interviews of PSE Partners and Stakeholders: Interviews (24 completed) of PSEP members and other key stakeholders as approved by the project working group. See Appendix 3.
3. Online Stakeholder Survey: A web-based survey (68 completed) for individuals and organizations mainly outside of the PSEP who wanted to provide input. See Appendix 4.

The rest of this report is organized according to key findings, recommendations, and next steps.

Key Findings

Thirty-eight key findings are provided which represent the Reviewers’ analysis and interpretation of themes that recurred in the background material review, online survey and interviews. These key findings have been grouped into four general areas: general; relationship; governance; and management. The Reviewers have tried to use as much original wording from review participants as possible however some editing was required for clarity, particularly when grouping similar comments.

Respondents provided the following general observations about the PSEP and its larger role in the BC Aboriginal post-secondary education framework:

- 1) While there are many concerns about how PSEP is operating, everyone indicated that it is an extremely important and invaluable initiative, and further that they are supportive and committed to helping improve effectiveness. Just the presence of PSEP alone is a valuable signal to the larger community that all of the key players are committed to this improving Aboriginal post-secondary participation and success rates in BC.
- 2) Everyone surveyed expressed excitement about this review and is very interested to see the PSEP improve its effectiveness as a result of the review.
- 3) Many respondents agree that the group has made a difference in the overall success of Aboriginal post-secondary learners. Key examples include PSEP’s role in developing the three-year Aboriginal Service Plans (ASPs) and securing additional focus and resources on Aboriginal post-secondary education.
- 4) There is a very high level of awareness about PSEP and its results among the partner organizations; however this awareness quickly drops once you move away from the central players. Most external respondents expressed a desire to provide what they believe is valuable input that could assist PSEP in its work.

- 5) There is a clear belief among groups external to PSEP and even within PSEP organizations that the group has not been successful in getting information out to and obtaining input from the broader network of stakeholders with an interest in Aboriginal post-secondary education including among practitioners in public post-secondary institutions, Band schools and other related organizations.
- 6) Post-secondary education is complex but when Aboriginal education is factored in the complexity increases significantly. Very few, including much of the mainstream post-secondary system, understand the players and their respective roles and responsibilities. In fact, because the overall field of Aboriginal post-secondary is relatively young: items such as players, roles and responsibilities are not yet fully sorted out.
- 7) Many PSEP members remarked about the benefit of learning about the system of Aboriginal-controlled institutes represented by the Indigenous Adult and Higher Education Association (IAHLA), and the scope, size, diversity and complexity of this system of higher learning, with its unique roles, programs and challenges of individual IAHLA institutes. These community-based, mostly rural front-line institutions strive to address the capacity gaps for both First Nations and off-reserve non-status Aboriginal populations.
- 8) Many PSEP members are concerned about the table's performance at both the strategic (lack of clear vision and direction) and tactical (lack of action and results) levels.

Specific key findings regarding relationship, governance, and management issues are provided in the main report.

Recommendations (more specific details included in the main body of this report)

- 1) **Governance:** The following recommendations are targeted to address factors related to governance that are limiting PSEP effectiveness:
 - a) Separate technical staff work from senior PSEP representatives and strategic/policy decisions.
 - b) Define each partner's roles and responsibilities to best utilize the strengths, resources and connections that they bring to the table.
 - i) This may fall out of a larger picture that needs to be created with respect to the relationship between post-secondary education and Aboriginal post-secondary education in BC (two parallel systems or one coordinated system).
 - c) Review PSEP membership (trades, federal government role, Ministry of Education (member but not active), Aboriginal youth, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, BC Aboriginal Coordinators Council, Métis Nation (needs a stronger presence). Another suggestion by some members was increasing the Aboriginal student perspective at the table and ensuring their voice is heard. Again this is within the context of clear roles and responsibilities (not everyone needs to be at every meeting).
 - d) Establish a clear protocol for PSEP to provide recommendations to strategic initiatives and for the entities responsible for addressing those recommendations to respond.
 - e) Ensure that each PSEP working group has a clear terms of reference that ensures that the substantive work remains at PSEP table.
 - f) Explore how to link PSEP's work to the work of the K-12 Partners. Note that this could begin with an initiative to create a standard set of measures for Aboriginal education success outlined later in the recommendations section of this review.
- 2) **Management:** The following recommendations are targeted to address factors related to management that are limiting PSEP effectiveness:
 - a) Enhance the secretariat support
 - i) Increase resources and/or move to Ministry's Deputy Minister's Office
 - ii) Provide resources for member travel
 - b) Review chair role and who fulfills it
 - c) Meeting procedures
 - i) Clearly differentiate decision versus information items
 - ii) Formal minutes
 - iii) Explore alternate venues (e.g., conference calls, video calls, email meetings, live meetings in regions) for meetings

- d) Planning and Performance Framework
 - i) Agree on a planning framework
 - ii) Develop a Strategic plan
 - (1) Establish long-term goals towards Aboriginal participation and success
 - (2) Take a step-wise incremental approach towards achieving long-term goals
 - iii) Identify annual priorities and develop an annual action (work) plan
 - iv) Monitor and report on progress in terms of results, outputs and outcomes
 - v) Utilize effective project management practices
- 3) **Working relationships:** The following recommendations are targeted to address factors related to working relationships that are limiting PSEP effectiveness:
 - a) Foster effective relationship-building activities
 - i) Dispute resolution, mediation, facilitation, etc.
 - b) Create ways for all members to be engaged
 - i) Consistent attendance
 - c) Develop a formal orientation package (including a short manual) and process
 - i) Repeat each year (re-orientation)
- 4) **Communication and Information-Sharing:** The following recommendations are targeted to address factors related to communication and information-sharing that are limiting PSEP effectiveness:
 - a) Develop a clear, consistent and reliable practice of disseminating information on PSEP activities and results on a quarterly basis to the broader network of Aboriginal post-secondary education stakeholders.
 - b) Develop a clear, consistent and reliable process for inviting regular input on PSEP priorities on a regular basis from the broader network of stakeholders.
 - c) Build accountability into the governance and reporting for PSEP members to regularly share PSEP information within their organizations and networks.
- 5) **Specific projects:** The following recommendations include specific projects that were raised as possible priorities once PSEP has addressed its governance, management and working relationship limitations, and gets to the point where it is ready to tackle its long-term direction and priorities. These are not ranked in any order of priority:
 - a) Create a map (including a visual component) to identify all the programs and service delivery entities across the province. This should identify where the gaps and overlaps are.
 - b) Create maps that illustrate population, employment and education data geographically (e.g. regional profiles). This could help target investments and illustrate how the collaboration is helping to narrow gaps.
 - c) Bring the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Institute Policy Framework and recommendations (FNESC and IAHLA) to PSEP for discussion.
 - d) Work on systems to track success in Aboriginal post-secondary education.
 - i) Include creating a common set of measures: should consider the possibility of including additional community based measures beyond those currently used by the post-secondary system.
 - e) Adopt a best practises approach to learn lessons that can inform PSEP work and decisions.

These recommendations contain a number of significant endeavours. However, the Reviewers' observation is that there are many capable individuals involved with the PSEP initiative but they collectively "can't see the forest for the trees." This is likely because the PSEP initiative that is added to already extremely full responsibilities therefore does not receive the attention that it deserves. This very real available time and effort limitation can be compensated for by increasing PSEP's efficiency and effectiveness. Addressing key governance, management and working relationship limitations has a very high likelihood of yielding good results in terms of PSEP effectiveness and ability to

achieve its larger goal. It is clear from review participants that there is a high degree of desire and commitment to revitalize the PSEP into what it was intended to be. However, based on a large number of respondents' comments, not addressing these could very well signal the end of the PSEP initiative as it exists today: something that almost all of the respondents felt was not an acceptable outcome.

Concluding Remarks

Based on their findings and the general tenor of discussions with various individual involved with PSEP the Reviewers believe that there continues to be broad commitment to the MOU and PSEP. Everyone interviewed expressed their commitment to supporting a revitalization of the initiative. Everyone also offered the additional comment that not addressing the concerns raised in this review could spell the end of PSEP as it currently exists and further that this is not an acceptable alternative.

Addendum

The Reviewers presented their findings to the PSEP group and the group agreed in principle and re-affirmed the key findings and the recommendations. PSEP members observed that it was very refreshing to have an open and frank discussion about PSEP's areas for improvement and again expressed their commitment to improve PSEP's effectiveness. PSEP members also agreed with the observation that PSEP needs to deal with key governance, management and working relationship needs before it can tackle strategic direction-setting. To this end the Reviewers facilitated an action planning session with PSEP to address priority recommendations related to governance and management. PSEP's prioritization of recommendations and PSEP's action plan to address priority recommendations are attached (Appendix 5).

