



governance toolkit

best practices

Principle: Financial Management Capacity

Initiative: Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative

OPPORTUNITY

First Nations need qualified financial managers to be successful. In most communities the senior financial managers are not community members. Responding to this challenge, a pilot project was launched in Fort Frances, Ontario in 2008 designed to encourage aboriginal youth to complete high school and pursue careers in accounting. The intent is to increase financial knowledge and capacity in First Nations communities.

The pilot project is a unique mentoring program which is a partnership between the Martin Aboriginal Institute – a project of the former prime minister, the Right Honourable Paul Martin – and the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants. The partnership isn't seeking any government funding and will be largely supported by the Martin Aboriginal Initiative as well as by the participating accounting firms, BDO Dunwoody in Fort Frances and KPMG in Brantford. The pilot projects will begin with the Grand Erie District School Board and the Rainy River District School Board. The projects have the support of Six

NCFNG

is a national, independent, First Nations-controlled organization dedicated to supporting First Nations as they work to implement their inherent right to self-governance. The development of a set of shared principles that clearly articulate our approach to effective governance is one way in which we support that work. This NCFNG Effective Governance Case Study profiles a best practice in the principle "Financial Management Capacity".

To learn more about this case study, contact:
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Nations of Grand River, Mississaugas of New Credit and Treaty Three.

"I feel that the financial training offered through this initiative will be valuable and beneficial to First Nations members." said Chief Gary Allan of the Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation.

PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

The three participating schools are located in Ontario - two in Brantford and one in Fort Frances. Aboriginal secondary school students will be identified by their teachers and, with their parents' permission, will be mentored and supported in the program. Staff from the participating accounting firms will work with these young people over several years in various activities including job shadowing, co-operative education placements, summer employment, scholarships, bursaries and opportunities for articling.

While the initiative has just begun, the roles of the lead partners are clearly defined enhancing the opportunities for project success.

Roles of the Martin Aboriginal Institute in this mentoring program include:

- Provide advice, guidance and assistance to the school boards as the programs are established
- Monitor the program and share best practices
- Collaborate with participating First Nations and aboriginal organizations
- Liaise with the Ministry of Education and post-secondary institutions

Roles of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants in this mentoring program include:

- Liaise with the participating accounting firms and arrange for more firms to participate
- Share information about the project
- Support participating aboriginal students as they continue their studies

- Liaise with post-secondary business, commerce and/or accounting programs to help strengthen their outreach to aboriginal students

SUCCESS FACTORS

The key to success in this project is the shared vision that investing in youth will result in increased human and financial capacity for the First Nations communities in which those youth will work and live. Not only the partners, but the parents and the learners are also highly committed to the program. There is shared good will and high hopes for the youth involved in the project.

This is first and foremost a mentoring program and research identifies a positive correlation between the increase of mentorship opportunities and an increase of leadership skills and abilities in emergent leaders. First Nations people have a proud history of effectively using mentoring as a valuable and culturally relevant experience. Complementary to their work with schools and post-secondary institutions, mentoring remains a traditional tool that First Nations still see as relevant to their cultures.

Also aligned with cultural norms, the determination of whether this program succeeds will not be solely through a formal evaluation but will be more anecdotal and consider a broad set of outcomes, i.e. not only did the youth stay in school or pursue accounting, but whether there is an increase in youth confidence.

CHALLENGES

The project is new, well financed, high profile and not surprisingly filled with optimism. However, there are a few challenges that participants are aware of.

- **Sustainability:** This is a very long-term project – students will be 10 years in the program if they

In my community, in terms of economic development..., we're looking partnerships. One key component of all this is finance – demographics, forecasting and economic benefits. We need to develop the capacity at an early level, because our students are not picking up these trades

— Sliammon Chief Walter Paul

choose to become chartered accountants. It may be hard to sustain enthusiasm.

- **Communication:** As organizations outside the First Nation community, the partners did not and do not always recognize who they need to speak with. In some cases they relied on the school board and ended up speaking to a number of people before they got to the right person.
- **Collaboration:** A set of negotiated and shared protocols is needed not only with the First Nation but also for working with the off-reserve peoples, particularly when there is no clear representative organization.

NEXT STEPS

While the project is still in its infancy the intent is for a new cohort of students to be identified and begin the program every year. The expectation is that the program will be a success and that that success will be replicated in other parts of Canada. The fact that both the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants and the Martin Aboriginal Institute are national in their activities increases this likelihood.

NCFNG GOVERNANCE LESSONS LEARNED

First Nations can only achieve effective governance with the right human and financial capacity in place.

Financial Management Capacity ensures that good work is not derailed by an inability to plan for, monitor, and account for financial resources. Financial capacity permits long-term, multi-year planning and proactive decision making. Effective financial management permits communities to plan beyond the arbitrary end of a fiscal year or a federal funding cycle and instead to plan for generations.

This project demonstrates the type of strategic partnership necessary to bring about an improvement to the social and economic strength of aboriginal people and communities to a level enjoyed by other Canadians.

LINKS AND MORE INFORMATION

Canadian Business: Martin Aboriginal Initiative
www.canadianbusiness.com

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