

The Consultation on  
**Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes  
for First Nations and Metis Students  
in Southern Manitoba**

**Final Report**

**May 2007**



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The Planning Committee for the Consultation on Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and Metis Students in Southern Manitoba included representation from the following partners:

Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs

Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development

Government of Canada, through Indian & Northern Affairs Canada,  
Service Canada and Western Economic Diversification

Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre

Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin

Manitoba Metis Federation

Province of Manitoba, through Aboriginal and Northern Affairs and  
the Council on Post-Secondary Education

## **Acknowledgements**

This consultation has drawn upon the wisdom of many people, including:

Students and trainees attending or affiliated with Southeast College; the Louis Riel Institute; the Aboriginal Community Campus; the Transition Year Program at the Children of the Earth High School; the Boys and Girls Clubs' Youth Recreation Activity Worker Program; Urban Circle Training Centre; Neeginan Institute; Assiniboine Community College; Red River College; Yellowquill College; the University of Manitoba; and CAMPUS.

Staff and other representatives of education and training programs, including Southeast College, the Manitoba Indian Education Association's Student Services Office; the P.A.T.H. Centre; Mother of Red Nations; Ka Ni Kanichihk; Youth Recreation Activity Worker Program; the Aboriginal People's College; Neeginan Institute of Applied Technology; the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development; the Aboriginal Literacy foundation; the National Indigenous Literacy Association; Urban Circle Training Centre; Yellowquill College; Assiniboine Community College; Red River College; the Aboriginal Focus Program, ACCESS Program and Aboriginal Student Centre at the University of Manitoba; the University of Winnipeg's Aboriginal Student Services Centre; the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface; Brandon University; University College of the North; and the Aboriginal Circle of Educators.

Staff and other representatives of Aboriginal educational support services and advisory groups, including the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre; the Advisory Council of the Aboriginal Education Directorate; the Council on Post-Secondary Education; the Manitoba Metis Federation; and Education Counselors from First Nations throughout Manitoba.

Staff and other representatives of departments and projects of the provincial governments, including Competitiveness, Training & Trade; Education, Citizenship & Youth; and Advanced Education & Literacy.

***To each of you, thank you for your time, generosity and willingness to share your experiences with us. We are grateful for what you have taught us.***

***Meegwetch! Ekosi!***

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## **Executive Summary**

In December 2006, the Government of Canada and the Province of Manitoba initiated a consultation to identify ways to improve post-secondary participation and outcomes for First Nations and Metis students in Southern Manitoba.

The consultation was guided by a Steering Committee and Working Group that included representation from provincial (Aboriginal and Northern Affairs and Advanced Education and Training) and federal government departments (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Service Canada, and Western Economic Diversification). When developing this project, the Steering Committee and Working Group consulted with Aboriginal leaders, including representatives of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, Southern Chiefs Organization, Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin, the Manitoba Metis Federation, the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development, the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg and the Aboriginal Education Directorate of MB Advanced Education & Training. Bear Spirit Consulting was contracted to conduct the consultation.

The stakeholders involved in this project have long recognized the importance of optimizing post-secondary education and skills training opportunities for First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal people. First Nations and Metis people constitute a significant and growing proportion of the available work force in Manitoba. Currently, Aboriginal people constitute nearly 15% of Manitoba's population and by the year 2020, one out of every four new entrants into the work force will be Aboriginal. Ensuring that post-secondary education and skills training are accessible to First Nations and Metis people and providing effective supports for their retention in and graduation from education and training programs is a good investment for all Manitobans.

While the formal educational attainment rates of Aboriginal people in Manitoba are generally improving, they still do not match those of the general population. This is particularly true for First Nations people with Status who live on reserve. Research has shown that, while a similar proportion of Aboriginal people in Canada aspire to post-secondary education as do non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people face many significant educational barriers, including inadequate financial resources, inadequate academic preparation, post-secondary institutions' lack of understanding of Aboriginal cultures and lack of cultural safety for Aboriginal people at post-secondary institutions; and the historic legacy of assimilative education policies.

The goals of this consultation were to develop a composite picture of the post-secondary education and training experiences of First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in southern Manitoba; identify what is working well for First Nation and Metis students and trainees, the in-place supports and systems that support strong outcomes for them, along with the barriers and gaps that hamper successful outcomes for them; and to develop short and long-term recommendations for consideration by stakeholders. The consultation engaged with a broad sample of First Nations, Metis and Aboriginal students and trainees, as well as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, program administrators and other people who have helped to develop, deliver, manage and support post-secondary education and training programs.

Information was gathered using focus group discussions, group and individual interviews and survey questionnaires. To support comparison and analysis of responses gathered through the different research methods, similar questions were developed for each method. Participants were asked to draw upon their own direct experience to identify what contributes to students' and trainees' success, what challenges students and trainees face and what kinds of supports or resources need to be enhanced or developed to support students' and trainees' success.

When asked what supports, resources and services make the greatest contribution to First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students' and trainees' success, participants identified the following:

- Students' and trainees' own personal and inner resources
- Working with Aboriginal youth to create a vision and plan for their future
- Adequate academic and personal preparation for post-secondary programs
- Family and community supports
- A welcoming environment in educational or training institutions
- Cultural safety for Aboriginal people and the affirmation of Aboriginal cultures in educational or training institutions
- Peer support networks
- Academic supports
- Transition supports
- Adequate, accessible and stable funding for students and trainees
- Program design and delivery that meets the real-life needs of Aboriginal people and communities
- Programs that provide comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports to Aboriginal students and trainees.

When asked what the most significant challenges are for Aboriginal students and trainees, participants identified the following:

- Inadequacy of funding, in general, and particular issues relating to financial assistance to First Nation students and trainees; financial assistance to Metis students and trainees; student loans; and financial support provided through Employment & Income Assistance and Employment Insurance.
- Inadequate housing
- Childcare and other family needs
- Gaps in the K-12 education system
- Inadequate personal and academic preparation for post-secondary education and training
- Transition needs
- Cultural safety and cultural affirmation
- Lateral oppression and racism.

It should be noted that, overwhelmingly, students and trainees see funding as the most significant barrier to their success. The vast majority of students and trainees who participated in this consultation indicated that whatever financial aid they are receiving does not adequately support their needs. Inadequate funding, in turn, can make it very difficult for students and trainees to find adequate housing or childcare, to care for their family needs, manage their responsibilities as students and trainees or maintain their motivation and focus in their programs. One university student prefaced comments about funding with the statement, "It's a struggle for me to get here every single day."

Throughout this consultation, a number of programs were singled out for praise by participants as examples of programs that support successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees, including:

- Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary programs and institutions:
  - Urban Circle Training Centre, which designs and delivers adult education programs using a holistic model rooted in Aboriginal cultural teachings and practices. Urban Circle's programs are designed to attend to all aspects of students' real-life needs.
  - The Aboriginal Learning and Literacy Centre, Aboriginal Community Campus and the Neeginan Institute at the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), which, like Urban Circle, design programs to meet the real-life needs of students and trainees and provides them with opportunities to ladder between education and training programs
  - Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) Trades Training, which provides OCN community members with comprehensive supports in a training and practicum program that prepares participants to enter the trades.
- Programs designed to support the participation of Aboriginal people in mainstream post-secondary institutions:
  - ACCESS, ENGAP and ACCESS-model programs at the University of Manitoba, Red River College and the University of Winnipeg, which provide Aboriginal students in post-secondary programs with comprehensive and meaningful supports, including academic and personal counseling, financial guidance, tutorial assistance and supplementary or upgrading classes.
- Projects and programs that support Aboriginal children and youth to envision, plan and prepare for post-secondary education:
  - Making Education Work, which provides students with a comprehensive program of academic preparation and student and family supports to ready them for post-secondary education.
  - Career Trek, which provides opportunities for elementary-aged children, along with their families, to explore and envision educational and career options.
- Programs that seek guidance and direction from Aboriginal communities and people, citing University College of the North as a model for collaboration between a post-secondary institution and the Aboriginal communities and people it serves.

Consultation participants identified the following partnerships and working relationships that contribute to, support or enhance successful outcomes for post-secondary students and trainees:

- Between Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary training and education programs and institutions (such as Urban Circle, CAHRD, Yellowquill College and the Louis Riel Institute) and accredited mainstream post-secondary training and education institutions.
- Between community-based training and education programs (such as Urban Circle, CAHRD or the Boys and Girls Club) and accredited post-secondary training and education institutions
- Between training and education programs (such as Neeginan and Urban Circle) and employers

- Laddering relationships between training and education programs (such as those between the programs at CAHRD, Urban Circle's relationship with the Inner-City Campus, and Red River College's Southern Nursing program's links to the University of Manitoba's program).
- Between post-secondary programs and community-based resources (such as the working relationships that Yellowquill College has developed with other education, employment, cultural and community resources).
- Between First Nation and other Aboriginal communities and post-secondary programs (including programs at Assiniboine Community College, Red River College and the University of Manitoba)
- Cross-jurisdictional initiatives (such as the current collaboration between the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Indian and Northern Affairs and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training).

Participants offered ideas and recommendations for actions to support successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba in the following areas:

- Student funding, including recommendations to ensure that all Aboriginal people have meaningful access to education and training (from K-12 through graduate studies), regardless of their cultural identity, whether or not they are recognized as Status Indian or whether they live on-reserve or off. This includes improvements to financial assistance for First Nations students and trainees, improvements to financial assistance for Metis students, improvements to the student loan system and improvements to financial support provided through EIA and EI.
- Housing needs, including the development of housing units for First Nation, Metis and/or other Aboriginal students and trainees.
- Improved access to childcare for students and trainees
- Improvements to and enhanced accountability for K-12 systems
- Transition supports, delivered in partnerships between post-secondary institutions, high schools, and First Nations and other Aboriginal communities.
- Creation of and support for culturally safe and affirming, supportive and welcoming environments for Aboriginal students and trainees at mainstream education and training institutions, including recognition of the distinct history and identity of different Aboriginal peoples.
- Enhanced accountability for post-secondary institutions in their relationships with the Aboriginal students and communities they serve.
- Enhanced accountability for government, including the resolution of jurisdictional issues that constrain education and training opportunities for Aboriginal communities and people.
- Increased Aboriginal design, ownership and control of the delivery of post-secondary education and training to Aboriginal community members.
- Greater flexibility in the ways that training and education are delivered, to ensure that education and training programs are available that fit the needs of Aboriginal people and communities and incorporate proven effective practices.

The participants' recommendations are drawn from their own experiences in education and training and offer post-secondary institutions, First Nations, Metis and other leaders, government and other stakeholders practical suggestions and clear direction for actions that they feel will improve post-secondary outcomes for First Nations and Metis students and trainees.

In addition to the detailed recommendations provided by participants, the consultation team developed short- and long-term recommendations for post-secondary institutions; First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders; and government. Because the most pressing issues for students and trainees relate to the availability, accessibility and adequacy of financial aid or funding, some of these recommendations focus on improvements to financial aid and funding. Other recommendations address the need for partnerships and collaboration between education and training stakeholders. Collaborative and partnering relationships between educational stakeholders can strengthen their ability to recognize and understand the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees and build their capacity to address these needs. With this over-arching goal in mind, the recommendations were designed to help lay the groundwork for and support the development, maintenance and enhancement of mutually empowering and accountable relationships between students and trainees; post-secondary institutions; First Nations, Metis and Aboriginal communities and leadership; and government.

To address issues related to funding for Aboriginal students and trainees, the consultation team recommends that:

- Post-secondary institutions ensure that prospective students and trainees have access to information about the real costs of their participation in a program, potential sources of financial aid (including how to apply), and available community resources; that staff in their financial aid or awards office have the specialized knowledge they need to assist Aboriginal students and trainees; and that the institutions support the relationships between band-funded First Nation students and First Nation Education Counselors. Over the long-term, post-secondary institutions should advocate and lobby for enhanced financial aid for Aboriginal students and trainees. Post-secondary institutions that receive funding specifically to support the participation of Aboriginal students and trainees should be accountable with respect to that funding.
- First Nation leaders should continue to press for adequate funding to support the educational needs of their communities and band members (including those who live off-reserve; assess their own criteria and guidelines for awarding student funding; ensure that their Education Counselors have the appropriate training, qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge base to provide effective supports to students.
- Metis leaders should provide students and trainees with clear and comprehensive information about the funding it distributes and lobby the federal and provincial governments for adequate funding to support their community members' education and training needs.
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada should re-examine the educational funding agreements it has with First Nations to assess whether First Nations are being provided with adequate resources to meet the educational needs of all band members, including those who live off-reserve and, where this is not the case, renegotiate these agreements and work in partnership with First Nations to develop strategies that will enhance reciprocal accountability.
- The provincial and federal governments should enact legislation and develop policy that establishes the governments' commitments to education and training for First Nation and Aboriginal people.
- First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders should work with the federal and provincial governments to clarify jurisdictional and fiscal responsibilities with respect to education and training for Aboriginal people.

The consultation team recommends that post-secondary institutions; First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal organizations; and appropriate government departments should work in partnership to explore ways to meet the housing needs (including the possibility of developing affordable on-site or near-site housing units) and childcare needs (including the possibility of developing on-site or near-site affordable and accessible childcare) of Aboriginal students and trainees.

To address issues related to the cultural safety of Aboriginal students and trainees, the consultation team recommends that post-secondary institutions make a formal commitment to create a culturally safe and welcoming environment and demonstrate that commitment by actively recruiting Aboriginal participation in their governing bodies, by actively exploring partnerships with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal entities; by assessing and taking action to enhance the cultural safety of their institutions; and actively recruiting Aboriginal employees.

To better meet the post-secondary needs of current and potential Aboriginal students and trainees and Aboriginal communities, the consultation team recommends that:

- Post-secondary institutions establish guiding principles that affirm the importance of collaborating and partnering with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders; establish Aboriginal advisory committees and draw on the best and promising practices of programs that generate successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees.
- The federal and provincial governments should support more longitudinal research into what affects or contributes to long-term successful outcomes for Aboriginal people in post-secondary education and training.
- Post-secondary institutions, First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders and the federal and provincial governments should explore ways to increase Aboriginal design, ownership and control of post-secondary education and training, including the possibility of establishing a fully-accredited Aboriginal post-secondary institution in Manitoba that generates academic and employment outcomes for students and trainees equivalent to those generated by mainstream programs and institutions.

## **Introduction**

In December 2006, the Government of Canada and the Province of Manitoba initiated a consultation to identify ways to improve post-secondary participation and outcomes for First Nations and Metis students in Southern Manitoba. The consultation, which was undertaken by Bear Spirit Consulting, explored the following key questions:

- What supports and systems are in place to enable strong outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees?
- Are there factors that impact on the effectiveness of these supports and systems?
- What barriers exist to strong outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees?
- What can be done to mitigate the impact of or eliminate these barriers?
- Are there relationships across existing systems that can be strengthened to enable better outcomes for students and trainees?

The Steering Committee and Working Group guiding the consultation included representation from provincial (Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Advanced Education and Training, The Council on Post-Secondary Education) and federal government departments (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Service Canada, Western Economic Diversification). When developing this project, the Steering Committee and Working Group consulted with Aboriginal leaders, including representatives of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, Southern Chiefs Organization, Manitoba Keewatinook Ininew Okimowin, the Manitoba Metis Federation, the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development, the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg and the Aboriginal Education Directorate of MB Advanced Education & Training.

These stakeholders have long recognized the importance of optimizing post-secondary education and skills training opportunities for First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal people. First Nations and Metis people constitute a significant and growing proportion of the available work force in Manitoba. Ensuring that post-secondary education and skills training are accessible to First Nations and Metis people and providing effective supports for their retention in and graduation from education and training programs is a good investment for all Manitobans. This will support First Nations and Metis people's full participation in the work force; strengthen and support the self-sufficiency of their communities; and strengthen local, provincial and national economies.

## **Background**

In 2001, Aboriginal people constituted 13.6% of the population of Manitoba, the highest proportion of any province or territory in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Of the 150,040 Manitobans identified as Aboriginal by the 2001 Census, over 60% are Status Indians (over half of whom lived on reserve), roughly 35% identify as Metis (half of whom live in Winnipeg) and the remaining 5% are either Non-Status Indians or Inuit. The Aboriginal population is relatively young and growing at a rate of more than twice that of the non-Aboriginal population. Currently, almost one in four of the children aged 0-14 in Manitoba are Aboriginal and it follows that, by the year 2020, one in four persons reaching working age will be Aboriginal. The post-secondary education and training system must be ready to help these young Aboriginal people prepare for participation in the labour market.

The formal educational attainment rates of Aboriginal people in Manitoba are generally improving, but still do not match those of the general population. For example, nearly 9% of Aboriginal youth (aged 15-29) in Manitoba have not completed Grade 9. For non-Aboriginal youth, only 1.6% of population has less than a Grade 9 education. Similarly, only 37.1% of Aboriginal youth have completed high school, compared to 63.7% of non-Aboriginal youth. There are, however, some encouraging trends. A significant proportion of Aboriginal people who do complete high school go on to pursue post-secondary education or training. Aboriginal people also are more likely to participate in education and/or complete their schooling later in life than non-Aboriginal people are. Aboriginal people are almost twice as likely to select community colleges or other non-university education or training programs than university as their post-secondary path and in non-university post-secondary education, Aboriginal people's attendance and completion rates are similar to non-Aboriginal rates. Participation and completion rates for university, however, are much lower. For example, only 4% of Aboriginal people over the age of 15 have completed a university degree, as compared to 14.2% of the non-Aboriginal population. It should be noted that, in virtually all areas, the formal educational attainment rates of people who are Status Indian and living on-reserve in Manitoba are lower than those of Status people living off-reserve or of Metis people living in either rural or urban areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Service Canada (2006). Aboriginal People in Manitoba, <http://www1.servicecanada.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=en/mb/aboriginals.shtml&hs=mb0>

Considerable research has been conducted into how to improve the educational attainment of Aboriginal peoples. As the Millennium Scholarship Foundation has noted, “the educational aspirations of Aboriginal people are not very different from those of other Canadians... 70% of [First Nations people living on-reserve] between the ages of 16 and 24 hope to complete some form of post-secondary education” and “72% [of Aboriginal people between the ages of 16 and 24] say it is likely or very likely that they will obtain the level of education they desire.”<sup>2</sup> These researchers and others, however, recognize that, to achieve their educational aspirations, Aboriginal people must negotiate many significant educational barriers, including:

- **Inadequate financial resources:** Government funding and other financial aid available to Aboriginal students is often inadequate to meet any student’s needs. This is particularly challenging for several reasons. The average income of Aboriginal people is much lower than that of the non-Aboriginal Canadian population. Most Aboriginal people simply do not make enough money support themselves or their children in post-secondary education or training. Aboriginal post-secondary students are also, on average, older than traditionally-aged students and are far more likely to have dependent children than non-Aboriginal students. The financial aid available to Aboriginal students is typically not adequate to support the real-life needs of older students or students who are parents.<sup>3</sup>
- **Inadequate academic preparation:** As noted above, Aboriginal people in Manitoba have lower levels of educational attainment than the non-Aboriginal population. Those who do complete high school often have weak skill levels. For students from reserve and remote schools in particular, this is often attributed to poor quality of education. In addition to inadequate preparation in the K-12 system, that there are relatively few Aboriginal role models with post-secondary education experience means that many Aboriginal people do not have access to mentors or guides who can help them to envision and prepare for post-secondary education or training.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (September 2005). *Changing Course: Improving Aboriginal Access to Post-secondary Education in Canada*. Millennium Research Note #2. <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/mrn-changing-course-en.pdf>, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid; R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (May 2002). *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates*. Report prepared for The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/malatest.en.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (May 2002). *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates*. Report prepared for The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/malatest.en.pdf>.

- **Lack of understanding of Aboriginal cultures and experiences of racism on campus:** Many Aboriginal students find the university environment to be isolating and hostile, a place where their cultural experiences, values, knowledge, ways and identity are not affirmed. Instead, they are expected to conform to the culture, values, knowledge and ways of the institution. Aboriginal students also must often contend with cultural insensitivity, marginalization and racism from staff members and their fellow students. This lack of cultural safety negatively affects retention rates for Aboriginal students.<sup>5</sup>
- **Historic legacy of assimilative education policies:** The residential school system, in place through most of the twentieth century, attempted to force assimilation on the Aboriginal peoples of Canada and erase their cultures and languages. The negative experiences that many Aboriginal people had in residential schools have left a legacy of inter-generational trauma and, for many, deep distrust of educational institutions in general.<sup>6</sup>

## Consultation Strategy

The greatest experts on what contributes to (as well as what presents a barrier to) successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal post-secondary students and trainees are, of course, the students and trainees themselves. In addition to the real-life expertise students and trainees have accumulated, many post-secondary and skills training programs in Manitoba have developed strategies to enhance outcomes for First Nations and Metis students and the organizations and individuals involved in education and training for First Nations and Metis people have accumulated their own invaluable experience, knowledge and wisdom. This consultation was designed to draw upon the experience, knowledge and wisdom of all these parties.

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<sup>5</sup> Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation (September 2005). *Changing Course: Improving Aboriginal Access to Post-secondary Education in Canada*. Millennium Research Note #2. <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/images/Publications/mrm-changing-course-en.pdf>; R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (May 2002). *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates*. Report prepared for The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/malatest.en.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Mendelson, Michael (October 2006). *Improving Primary and Secondary Education on Reserves in Canada*. Caledon Institute of Social Policy Commentary. <http://www.caledoninst.org/Publications/PDF/608ENG%2Epdf>; R. A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. (May 2002). *Best Practices in Increasing Aboriginal Postsecondary Enrolment Rates*. Report prepared for The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/malatest.en.pdf>.

The goals of the consultation were to develop a composite picture of the post-secondary education and training experiences of First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in southern Manitoba; identify what is working well for First Nation and Metis students and trainees, the in-place supports and systems that support strong outcomes for them and barriers and gaps that hamper successful outcomes for them; and to develop short and long-term recommendations for consideration by stakeholders. Input was gathered from a broad sample of First Nations, Metis and Aboriginal students and trainees, as well as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators, program administrators and other people who have helped to develop, deliver, manage and support post-secondary education and training programs.

Consultation participants were recruited from a list of key participants developed by the consultation working group, along with other training and education-related sites identified by the consultation team. When identifying and recruiting potential participants for the consultation, the team tried to connect with participants who reflected the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and communities in Manitoba and the diversity of education, training and employment experiences available to members of those communities. The consultation team prepared a letter of introduction, which was forwarded to appropriate personnel at each site and then followed up with a phone call or email soliciting their support, assistance and participation in the consultation.

Information was gathered using focus group discussions, group and individual interviews and survey questionnaires. To support comparison and analysis of responses gathered through the different research methods, similar questions were developed for each method. Participants were asked to draw upon their own direct experience to identify what contributes to students' and trainees' success, what challenges students and trainees face and what kinds of supports or resources need to be enhanced or developed to support students' and trainees' success. Questions were modified, as appropriate, to draw out relevant information from each group.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

Focus group discussions are recognized as a particularly effective way to gather detailed and insightful information about people's real-life experiences. The relatively open-ended structure of a focus group discussion encourages participants to talk about what really matters to them and to reflect and build upon each others' experiences and ideas.

Guiding questions keep participants on topic and probing questions dig a little deeper when something important comes out in the discussion.

Focus group discussions were held with students and trainees at twelve training and education program sites. The focus group discussions opened with a welcome and introduction by the Bear Spirit team members that included a brief overview of the consultation project and guidelines for the focus group discussion. Following the introduction, participants were invited to read and complete consent forms (Appendix I). The consent forms included a project overview, clarified what would be done with the information gathered in the discussion and concluded with a statement of consent. In the statement, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they consented to each of the following items: that they had read and understood the overview and chose to participate in the study; that they agreed to be audio-recorded during the discussion; that they agreed to be photographed, with the understanding that photos might be included in reports generated from the consultation;<sup>7</sup> and that they could be identified in reports on the consultation. Once group members had completed their consent forms and any attendees who had declined participation had left, the focus group discussion formally began.<sup>8</sup>

At the start of the formal focus group discussion, group members were invited to introduce themselves. The rest of the focus group discussion followed the sequence of guiding and probing questions below:

1. What services and supports have been most helpful to you as a student or trainee? What has been most important to your success as a student or trainee?
  - Probing questions: How did this help you? How did you connect with these supports?
2. What have been the biggest challenges you've faced as a student or trainee?
  - Probing questions: Did you look for any help when you were struggling with this challenge? Did you get the help you needed?
3. What would have made it easier for you to succeed as a student or trainee?

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<sup>7</sup> Although the consultation team had initially considered recording the focus group discussions with photos, we recognized that, since some participants did not want to be identified, photos would not be appropriate.

<sup>8</sup> Only one person who had been invited to be part of the focus group discussions chose not to participate because they did not identify as Aboriginal.

- Probing questions: Are there any kinds of supports you wish had been there, but weren't? Are there any ways that the supports you could access could be made more useful to you? What would make a perfect world for you as a student or trainee?

The majority of the focus group discussions were facilitated by two Bear Spirit team members.<sup>9</sup> One team member assumed the role of lead facilitator. The other was responsible for recording the discussion and assisting and supporting the lead facilitator, as appropriate. Proceedings were recorded on flip charts during the groups. To ensure accurate recording, the notes were reviewed with the group, who were invited to provide feedback on the accuracy and completeness of the notes. Discussions were audio-recorded only if all group members had consented to audio-recording.

Focus group participants were offered a small honorarium in recognition of potential costs associated with participation in the discussion (such as childcare or transportation). An honorarium was provided to each participant in the focus groups, regardless of their level of participation or whether they were present throughout the entire discussion.

### **Survey Questionnaires**

Survey questionnaires were distributed through post-secondary programs and organizations to students and trainees who could not participate in the focus group discussions. Survey participants were recruited with assistance from Aboriginal student support services, counseling, teaching and administrative staff and staff at programs that serve a large number of Aboriginal students, such as the ACCESS program. Surveys were also distributed at The Conference on Post-Secondary Education for Metis: *Making the Connections* 2007.

The survey opens with a brief description of the consultation and survey, the value of the student's or trainee's participation in the project and a review of privacy/confidentiality issues, along with contact information for Bear Spirit Consulting (Appendix II). The first section of survey questions collects relevant information about participants, including:

- Identity, i.e., First Nation (Status or Non-Status), Metis, Inuit or other

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<sup>9</sup> Four of the student focus groups were facilitated by only one team member. One of these discussions was scheduled concurrently with a group interview at the same institution. Three of these discussions were added to the consultation after the initial information gathering phase had concluded.

- Participation in post-secondary education or training, i.e., program, institution, where located level of achievement, when participated, etc.
- Home community and whether or not participant's parent(s) took career training or attended college or university, to provide context for other information

The second section of the survey consists of open-ended questions that gather information about participants' personal experiences in post-secondary education and training and solicited their input on how education and training systems can be improved.

Although surveys were left at most of the post-secondary sites visited in this project, completed surveys were returned from only one of these sites. A significant number of completed surveys were received from participants in the CAMPUS conference.

### **Interviews**

Bear Spirit conducted individual and group interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal trainers and educators, program administrators and other people who have helped to develop, deliver, manage and support post-secondary education and training programs, as well as representatives of First Nations, Metis and Aboriginal organizations and various government departments and projects. The interviews opened with a welcome and introduction by the Bear Spirit team member(s) that included a brief overview of the consultation project. Participants were invited to complete consent forms (Appendix III) and once all interviewees had read and signed the consent forms, the interviews formally began. Guiding questions for the interviews explored what services and supports have been most helpful to students or trainees, what the biggest challenges faced by students or trainees are, what partnerships or working relationships are in place to support students' and trainees' success, and what would make it easier for students and trainees to succeed. Interviewees were asked to develop actionable recommendations in response to the last question.

The summary and analysis of key findings from the consultation are presented in the sections below. As noted earlier, regardless of how information was gathered in this consultation, inquiry focused on basic questions about what contributes to First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students' and trainees' success in post-secondary programs; what are the most significant challenges or barriers they face; and what can be done to

improve outcomes for students and trainees. This structure made it relatively easy to collate and compare results from all participants, including First Nation and Metis secondary and post-secondary students; educators, trainers, support staff members and administrators working with current and prospective students and trainees; people who, in varying capacities, provide support and guidance to education and training programs that serve Aboriginal people and communities; and people affiliated with departments and projects of the provincial government.

More detailed findings from each group of consultation participants are presented as Appendices to this document.

### **Contributions to Students' and Trainees' Success**

Consultation participants identified supports, resources and services in the areas below as important to First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students' and trainees' success:

- **Students' and trainees' inner resources.** Students and trainees bring the gifts of their own knowledge, skills and experience to their programs. Personal qualities, such as self-awareness, self-discipline, focus and talent, along with their motivation and commitment to educational and training goals are crucial to their own success. Having a good understanding of who they are; a strong cultural identity, spirituality and connection to family; and confidence in their strengths and abilities helps students to achieve their goals. This may be instilled by family, but many Aboriginal students and trainees are the first in their family to pursue post-secondary education or training. These students and trainees may have developed their motivation and commitment through supportive relationships with teachers, mentors and other key players who have encouraged them to believe in their own ability to succeed.
- **Working with Aboriginal youth to create a vision and plan for their future.** As noted above, students' and trainees' motivation and commitment to their goals are an important part of their ability to succeed. As several participants pointed out, it is important to provide our future post-secondary students and trainees with experiences that build their self-esteem and confidence and help them to see what they can contribute to our shared future. Many of the high school students who participated in this consultation had, with the help of teachers, counselors and other support staff at their schools, already identified career paths, set goals and made plans for post-secondary education and training following their graduation.

Acknowledging, honouring and rewarding students' accomplishments help to make learning a positive experience. For many students sponsored by First Nations, ongoing contact with their First Nations' education counselor makes them feel honoured and that their education is valuable to their community.

Participants felt that activities and supports that help Aboriginal youth envision and plan their future (starting at a young age) contribute to their success as adults. As one participant stated, "Kids who know what they want to do are the ones who succeed." Families that support and value their children's education play an important role in this process, as do educators who reach out to parents and welcome their involvement. Providing Aboriginal youth (and Aboriginal people more generally) with Aboriginal role models and mentors who engage in a broad range of career activities and exposure to the many career options available to them (through activities like career fairs or programs like Career Trek) can get them to start thinking about post-secondary education and training. Career awareness activities, one participant commented, should help Aboriginal students see that the career options available to them extend beyond health care or social work. It is equally important that potential students and trainees are provided with knowledge, experiences and guidance that will enable them to realistically assess whether or not a given career is right for them. This includes information about education and training opportunities, available financial support and other resources and structural supports available to Aboriginal people participating in education and training programs. As one participant pointed out, it is also important that post-secondary education and training programs lead to meaningful employment in well-paying jobs.

- **Adequate preparation for post-secondary programs.** Participants reported that Aboriginal students who are adequately prepared for post-secondary programs, i.e., who have received solid instruction from primary school levels on; been taught by well-qualified teachers whose lessons are presented in culturally supportive ways; completed the appropriate high school or other preparatory coursework for their chosen post-secondary program; and have developed academic and practical skills (including life skills) and habits (such as attendance and organization), are more likely to succeed in their programs.
- **Family and community supports.** For many students and trainees, family has played an important role in encouraging or motivating them to pursue post-secondary

education and training. Some found role models and mentors in parents, siblings or other relatives who had completed post-secondary education and training and established careers. Several students and trainees who are parents described how their decision to return to education or training had been motivated by their own desire to provide a better future for their children because, as one student pragmatically put it, you cannot support a family on minimum wage. As a group of Mature 12 students noted, their own success and ambition may motivate their partners, children, other family members and friends to pursue post-secondary education and training.

The support of family and friends are equally important to students and trainees while they are in their programs. Encouragement, interest, emotional support and, in particular, practical supports (such as child care, housing and financial support) provided by family and friends are crucial for many students and trainees. Some education and training institutions clearly recognize the importance of family (including extended family) in students' and trainees' lives and actively support this valuable relationship by, for example, connecting with families during intake, providing students and trainees with access to long-distance telephone lines and messaging services, inviting students' or trainees' families to join on-campus social events, or providing students and trainees with on-site childcare.

- **Feeling welcome within an education or training institution.** It is important that education and training institutions make Aboriginal students feel welcome and that they belong. This is, in part, about the physical environment, but (and perhaps more importantly) it is also about the culture of the institution, i.e., whether or not staff and other students and trainees behave in ways that are welcoming, whether or not students and trainees feel they can build relationships with staff and peers at the institutions, and whether or not students and trainees feel culturally safe. Some Aboriginal students and trainees prefer to attend smaller institutions and smaller classes, where they can connect easily with other students, instructors and other staff members. As one educator pointed out, "Students need opportunities to create relationships with each other, with staff and with the institution."

Connecting with instructors, counselors and staff who seem personally interested in their success and well-being helps students and trainees get and stay motivated, negotiate the challenges they face and believe in their own ability to succeed.

Students and trainees described instructors who go out of their way to be accessible, supportive, and helpful and provide positive feedback. As one student stated, the staff in her program “just want everyone to succeed.” Students and trainees offered stories that demonstrated staff members’ level of commitment to their individual success, in which staff reached out to them when they were struggling, made themselves available to them after hours or gave them room and support to recover when they faltered. As one Transition Year student stated, “Even if you mess up, they don’t kick you out – they find out what’s going on with you.” Students and trainees at Neeginan Institute identified the assistance they had received from staff to find and secure funding as a crucial support. For students who could not secure funding from outside sources, Neeginan had “covered” their tuition and/or other costs. Students and trainees also identified the importance of being able to connect with Aboriginal instructors and other staff at their institution. For some of the Metis students who completed surveys at the CAMPUS event, developing personal relationships with Metis professors at their post-secondary institution had been particularly valuable.

- **Supporting cultural safety and affirming Aboriginal cultures.** As many participants indicated, when Aboriginal students and trainees feel culturally safe, they are more likely to succeed academically and personally. Institutions’ commitment and ability to support Aboriginal people’s cultural safety is particularly important to retention. Aboriginal people’s participation in post-secondary planning can help organizations to achieve and enhance cultural safety for Aboriginal students and trainees. Curriculum and pedagogy that accept and embrace Aboriginal cultures, that “validate our way of life and our way of learning” and that affirm Aboriginal history, cultures, beliefs and teachings can empower students and trainees. For example, course materials written and produced by Aboriginal people can make it easier for Aboriginal students to connect with the materials and bring their own experiences into the process of learning. Participants also reported that students and trainees benefit when resources and materials are reviewed and modified, as appropriate, to make them meaningful and useful to Aboriginal people. Similarly, practices should be reviewed and modified to ensure that they are accessible and effective for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal students and trainees find support in instructors and other staff members who are knowledgeable about Aboriginal cultures and cultural differences. Cultural awareness, one participant pointed out, is not just about abstract ideas or theory; it is about being able to actually feel what Aboriginal people's experiences might be like. As another observed, an instructor "may not even be aware themselves that they have this knowledge, but students will recognize it." While participants acknowledged that non-Aboriginal people may have this awareness, they also noted that it is important that education and training institutions recruit Aboriginal people as instructors and in other staff positions. Offering Aboriginal students and trainees opportunities to participate in cultural activities, such as feasts, cultural days, drum groups and pow wows, affirms and celebrates their cultural identity. As one educator observed, in programs designed specifically for and by Aboriginal people, students and trainees are more likely to feel that their peers share and understand their life experiences and that the institution itself has a good grasp of their needs and is ready to meet them.

- **Peer support networks.** Students and trainees draw a lot of strength from the peer support networks they develop on campus. Peer networks strengthen students' and trainees' sense of community and provide them with opportunities to socialize, support and mentor each other, share their knowledge and experience, and negotiate the challenges they face. Many particularly appreciated being able to connect with other Aboriginal students and trainees, people who "come from the same place I do." Several students and trainees in programs and institutions that target or specifically serve Aboriginal people described the feeling of belonging, friendliness or family that they had found there. Participants singled out on-campus services and activities that encourage and enhance the development of peer support networks, such as organized group social activities or the provision of places such as Aboriginal student centres or lounges, where students and trainees can meet, relax, socialize and help each other out. For example, University of Manitoba students valued support they had received from on-site Elders and counselors at the Aboriginal Student Centre, as well as information the Centre had provided about funding. Participants also noted that institutional support for Aboriginal students' and trainees' self-organized groups (such as the CAMPUS group for Metis students) strengthens peer support networks.

- **Academic supports.** Good instructors help students and trainees to succeed. Good instruction, participants noted, includes acknowledging students' or trainees' different learning styles and then teaching to those styles. Effective education and training programs often link in-class learning with experiential learning, provided, for example, through practicum components. It is also important that institutions be ready to "meet students where they are" and work with them to achieve their goals. Access to supports that address both the content and process of learning (such as tutoring, writing skills, math skills and learning skills supports) help students and trainees to succeed. This is especially important for students and trainees whose skills do not match the grade level they have achieved.
- **Transition supports.** Students and trainees who have left their home communities to participate in an education or training program often benefit from practical and relevant supports during their transition into post-secondary programs. Some transition supports such as campus visits, (which can help students and trainees become more familiar with the cultures of the institution and community they will be joining and the personal and academic support systems they may be able to draw on), in-community college prep programs and transition year programs (which help students and trainees to develop the academic and practical skills they will need) begin before students and trainees start their post-secondary programs. As one educator stated, "Retention starts at the first point of contact with a prospective student or trainee." Providing new students and trainees with social and emotional supports, establishing a relationship with prospective students and trainees when they first contact an institution and sending the message that the institution is committed to their success can make the transition much easier.

Once students and trainees begin their programs, institutional supports (such as academic upgrading; support to develop life skills; orientation to their new community and assistance in finding housing or childcare) can also help them have a successful transition. Participants also noted that First Nation education counselors often make a valuable contribution to students' success, by maintaining active and supportive involvement with them throughout the course of their post-secondary program. One student pointed out that at the First Nation sub-offices in the city, students can access counselors, computer labs and social activities. Some students have also found supports in the larger Aboriginal community of Winnipeg. As one student

noted, access to a friendly and accepting community is important, particularly when people are separated from their family.

- **Adequate, accessible and stable funding.** Providing students and trainees with sufficient funding to cover tuition, living expenses and other costs associated with their participation in post-secondary programs makes it easier for them to focus on their education and training. Many students and trainees identified financial supports as crucial to their success. Several Metis students referred to the sponsorship, scholarships and bursaries they had received from the MMF. One student's comments are a reminder that the impacts of financial support go beyond financial relief: "The [Manitoba Metis Federation] helped me financially at a very critical crossroads. I was about to stop school after doing it for two years on my own, but their sponsorship helped me financially (tuition and books) and their belief in me by their actions gave me the push I needed to continue to believe I could do this." Several First Nation students cited funding from their First Nation as an important support and a few indicated that their Education Counselor or other band representatives actively supported them by checking in with them and encouraging them.
- **Program design and delivery that meet the real-life needs of Aboriginal people and communities.** Participants identified programs that use a holistic model or that provide comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports to Aboriginal students and trainees (such as accessible instructors and counselors, responsive curriculum and academic supports) as particularly valuable. Noting that integration into mainstream programs does not work for all Aboriginal people, participants singled out community-based programs (shaped by community-identified needs and/or under community control) and alternative education programs as program models that extend education and training opportunities to more Aboriginal people.
- **Comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports.** Many participants indicated that programs that provide comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports that address the needs of both students/trainees and their families make a crucial contribution to many Aboriginal students' and trainees' success. Recognizing, validating and attending to all aspects of students' daily lived experience and identity can empower students and trainees. In addition to providing academic supports and appropriate funding, this may include creating opportunities

for students and trainees to connect with their cultures and spirituality (by, for example, providing students and trainees with access to Elders, facilitating their participation in ceremonial activities or incorporating traditional teachings into program materials) and actively supporting the emotional and mental health and wellness of students and trainees (by, for example, providing effective counseling supports, helping students and trainees recognize and work through the impacts of inter-generational trauma or facilitating the development of peer support networks).

Many of the students and trainees who collaborated in this consultation are part of programs that provide comprehensive supports. For example, First Nation and Metis students in the Mature Grade 12 program at the Aboriginal Community Campus described the broad range of supports provided by their program as central to their success. Their instructors offer them both academic and personal support. In addition to their academic work, their classes help them to develop practical skills in areas such as internet research and resume writing. Students take two full courses in each eight-week period, with study time built into their daily schedule. They felt that this helped them both to focus on their academic work and to manage their family and other personal responsibilities. Other supports include tutoring (available each day, with no limit on how much a student uses the service), “power-up classes” (a study time scheduled after school once a week, where food, child care and activities for children are provided so that parents can study) and courses to upgrade students’ employment and practical skills (such as WHIMS training and computer tutorials). The school organizes off-campus activities (including volunteerism and social activities) that give students an opportunity to get involved with the larger community. Students also valued the very practical supports available to them through their program, such as on-campus child care, bus tickets, food donations, a clothes closet and assistance to purchase school supplies.

Urban Circle Training Centre offers students academic upgrading and pre-employment training in a culturally appropriate context. The Centre’s integration and affirmation of traditional culture and spirituality into its programming are invaluable to many Urban Circle students. Students described opening each day with a smudge ceremony and prayer, holding weekly sharing circles, the cultural and spiritual supports and teachings Elders have offered them, the guidance they have found in the Seven Teachings and the way that ceremonies have strengthened the bonds

between them. As one student commented, “This school feels like another home. It has opened my eyes to culture.” The relationships that Urban Circle students have developed on-campus are extremely important to them. Participants cited the friendships they had made and their daily interaction with staff and students (“not just in our own class, but throughout the whole Centre”, stated one student) as supports that are helping them to succeed, both academically and personally. One student referred to her struggle to juggle her many different responsibilities (school, home, her relationship with her partner and family tragedies), noting that the support she has received at school has helped her to resolve these competing responsibilities. Other students described how staff members had given them support and assistance to resolve problems, ranging from finding employment through applying for funding to “bring[ing] family on board.” Staff members are valuable mentors for students: “I look at staff here and wonder where they came from. They must have had their own struggles but they are succeeding!”

Comprehensive supports are also available to students in ACCESS model programs. An engineering student in the ENGAP program at the University of Manitoba described supports available to the approximately fifty students in the program. Students can access a four-person staff team (the ENGAP director, counselor, academic advisor and receptionist, identified as “a good information source”) that is capable of assisting them with a broad range of needs. Students’ first semester in the program is reserved for upgrading their skills in preparation for the University-level courses they begin in the second semester. For classes outside the Engineering faculty, such as Calculus, ACCESS staff reserve registration blocks, so that students can take these classes with a cohort group. Each student can access up to three hours of tutoring each week.

The ACCESS Southern Nursing Program at Red River College offers students similar resources. The program is structured to ladder students into the College’s Joint Baccalaureate Nursing Program. Students described their instructors and other staff attached to the program as “personally supportive”, working closely with them to develop the skills they need, regardless of the skill level they start at. Peer support networks, the students noted, develop naturally as part of the culture of the program. Students participate in a professional development course, which, among other

things, helps them to integrate traditional teachings from their Aboriginal cultures into their professional practice.

Many other students and trainees participate in programs that offer services and supports designed to meet their anticipated needs. Aboriginal high school students at the Louis Riel Institute appreciated the opportunity to work in small groups at their own pace. Students in the University of Manitoba's Aboriginal Focus Programs Transition Year program at Children of the Earth High School (COTE) start their academic year at COTE and take courses at the university over the summer. The students valued the personal support they found in the program. Teaching staff are accessible and take a personal interest in the students and the school offers a "supportive family environment". One student cited an instance in which, after her own housing fell through, she was able to temporarily stay with a COTE staff member. COTE staff have helped students identify and apply for funding and, when needed, advocated on their behalf.

Students at Yellowquill College described their instructors as people who "make you feel like you really belong there." Like other students at smaller institutions, the Yellowquill students valued their personal relationship with staff at the College, noting that they often reach out to students who are struggling. Yellowquill students can also access cultural and spiritual supports and activities through the College, including Elders and traditional outings.

Trainees in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg's Youth Recreation Activity Worker Program felt that the program's life skills component had helped them to better understand who their supports were, how to negotiate conflict and how to have healthy relationships. The program's relatively small size and its structure have helped them to develop strong and supportive relationships with their peers and staff. In addition to coursework accredited through Red River College and practicums at sites throughout Winnipeg, program trainees can access driver's education, CPR/First Aid and non-violent crisis intervention training, each of which enhance their employability.

## **Challenges Faced by Students and Trainees**

The participants in this consultation identified significant challenges for Aboriginal students and trainees in the following areas:

- **Funding.** In the focus group discussions held during this consultation, students' and trainees' most frequent response to the question, "What has been the biggest challenge you've faced as a student or trainee?" was "Funding." Although Aboriginal students and trainees may be able to access financial support through a number of options (including funding dispersed to First Nations students who are recognized as Status Indians through the federal government's Post-Secondary Student Support Program; funding dispersed to Metis students and trainees through the Manitoba Metis Federation; as well as Employment and Income Assistance or Employment Insurance programs, Canada Student Loans, and scholarship and bursary programs), the vast majority of students and trainees who participated in this consultation indicated that whatever financial aid they are receiving does not adequately support their needs. Participants repeatedly noted that most Aboriginal students and trainees struggle simply to get by on the living allowances available to them, which typically are well below the poverty line and do not adequately cover even their most basic needs. Even when students and trainees participate in programs (such as literacy programs) that are tuition-free, pointed out one participant, they still need money to support themselves. With respect to financial aid, most Aboriginal students' needs are different from those of mainstream students. As one participant noted, most Aboriginal parents cannot support their children through a post-secondary program or make a significant "parental contribution" to the costs of their children's education or training.

Inadequate financial aid contributes to additional stress in other areas of students' and trainees' lives. Many students and trainees revealed that it is difficult for them to meet even their most basic needs, including food, adequate housing and childcare. One student and parent who relies on a food bank related that financial stress has made it difficult to focus on academic work and generated "negative self esteem, loss of motivation, dignity – it makes you feel like you can't provide adequately for your own and your family's needs." Another university student prefaced comments about funding with the statement, "It's a struggle for me to get here every single day."

A few of the students and trainees who participated in this consultation seem to have fallen between the cracks of the financial aid system and are participating in programs with no financial assistance to cover their living costs. For example, one student attempted to secure financial assistance through their First Nation, Manitoba's Employment Training Services and Employment Insurance and was denied by all. Fortunately, the post-secondary institution the student attends has covered tuition costs, along with some costs incurred for materials and transportation. Through the course of the program, the student has been "couch-surfing", staying with various family members and friends, and borrowing money to cover other basic needs.

Participants pointed out that many prospective students and trainees do not have adequate information about the full range of funding options available to them or the basis on which funding is awarded.

- **Financial assistance to First Nation students and trainees:** The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP, delivered by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) provides financial assistance to First Nation and Inuit students who are pursuing post-secondary education. To be eligible for this financial aid, a student must be Status or Registered Indian or recognized Inuit. Virtually all PSSSP financial aid is disbursed through First Nations, who define their own funding criteria. The financial assistance available through PSSSP includes funds for tuition fees, as well as travel and living expenses.

As many participants' noted, PSSSP funding, when adjusted for inflation and population growth, has not kept pace with inflation, tuition increases and the cost of living and effectively has not increased for more than a decade. If the government's investment in education for First Nation people and communities has, in effect, declined, one educator asked, what does this tell students about the value of their education? Students reported that the living allowances their First Nations provide them with through PSSSP are not enough to cover their most basic needs. For example, one student with a family of four receives less than \$550 each month from their band. This student's rent alone is more than this and so, in addition to attending college as a full-time student, the student also works full-time. The student observed that, "[between] study, school, work, parenting, there is not enough time." Another full-time student who is a single parent of six children receives slightly over

\$550 each month from their band. This student pays a subsidized rent of \$150 and \$100 for childcare each month, which leaves the large family with approximately \$300 each month for all other living expenses. As another student bluntly stated, “[We] can’t make it on that, even when we apply for other awards or benefits.”

Students also reported that their PSSSP funding does not provide them with enough money for extra or unusual costs associated with their education. Examples of these include relocation and moving costs, damage deposits, the cost of setting up a household, educational supplies and materials and costs to return home for family matters (or, in some cases, to pick up their living allowance cheques). For students who have moved from their home community to attend school, this may mean that a substantial proportion of the financial resources that are expected to sustain them through their academic year is, in fact, used up front, as they make their transition to the city. Educators also noted that some students do not receive their funding or living allowance “on time”, which can keep them out of – or from returning to – their programs.

In addition to overarching concern about the (in)adequacy of PSSSP financial aid, participants also raised questions about how post-secondary funding is being distributed by First Nations. The funding that First Nations receive for education can be (and sometimes is) applied to areas other than education. Most First Nations do not have enough funding to support all current and prospective Nation students and trainees in their communities and, as a result, First Nation community members who approach their bands for funding often find out that no funding is available for them. Participants observed that some First Nations (particularly those in the north) must set priorities about who will receive funding. For example, some First Nations favour sequential students; others do not provide funding for upgrading. One participant observed that, while the living allowance for First Nation post-secondary students with dependent children is typically “topped up”, high school students with dependent children do not receive extra money.

Several students reported that they had been denied PSSSP financial aid (either in their current programs or in the past). They attributed these decisions to reasons such as that their band had run out of money, that they “had too many kids,” or that they lived off-reserve. Some students who are recognized as Status Indian and had lived off-reserve prior to their participation in their current program related that,

although they were now receiving funding from their band, it had been difficult to secure: “[We’re] last in line, leftovers, scraps... People drop out and then it’s like, ‘Oh, now we have funding for you.’” Other students related stories of initially being turned down for PSSSP funding and then later being informed that they would receive funding. For example, one student had completed upgrading with no band sponsorship, but had been given a verbal agreement that, once upgrading was completed, the student would be eligible for sponsorship in a post-secondary program. With this understanding, the student enrolled in a post-secondary program, contacted the band about funding and was informed that no financial aid would be provided. The student reported that they finally did receive sponsorship after a family member (who, the student noted, was related to a band council member) intervened on the student’s behalf.

Many students’ comments (including several of the comments above) suggest that they feel that decisions about who does or does not receive PSSSP do not make sense or are not entirely fair. One made the observation that “Some people get funding over and over, while others get none.” Another student reported that, as a parent with shared legal custody, they do not receive any additional aid for their dependent children. A student who had been denied funding noted that another band member had received funding to participate in the same program and then “disappeared after the first few days.” “The fair thing,” the student added, “would have been for the funding to be handed over to me – but it wasn’t.” Another student reported that their First Nation received funding for more than 25 post-secondary students and, in spite of the fact that (according to this student) no band member was actually sponsored in a post-secondary program, the funding was used up. Some students’ dissatisfaction with the distribution of PSSSP financial aid is directed at First Nations’ education administrators or counsellors. Students participating in one focus group developed the following statement: “The education administrators/counsellors in some First Nations do not have the education, experience, vocabulary or administrative skills to understand, meet or manage our needs as post-secondary students.”

- **Financial assistance to Metis students and trainees:** Metis students may be able to access financial aid through the Manitoba Metis Federation’s (MMF) Louis Riel Bursaries and Scholarships. Louis Riel Bursaries, which are awarded primarily on

the basis of financial need, are available to students at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Brandon University and College Universitaire de St. Boniface. Louis Riel Scholarships, which are awarded to students primarily on the basis of academic merit, are available to students at Brandon University and College Universitaire de St. Boniface. To successfully apply for either of these awards, students must be able to demonstrate that they are either currently members of or are eligible for membership in the MMF.

Many of the Metis students who participated in this consultation expressed frustration with the financial aid options available to them. Staff at education and training programs and other stakeholders also saw the limited financial aid available to Metis students as a significant challenge. The MMF currently provides up to two years of funding for students in college or diploma programs and only one year of funding to most university students (typically awarded in the last year of a student's program), so Metis post-secondary students seeking financial aid typically must rely on Canada Student Loans or other sources. One participant suggested that the MMF's current capacity to provide students with only one year of financial support during university may, in effect, push Metis people into trades training. Many Metis students are unsure of what criteria and eligibility policies are in place to award MMF funding. Students' frustration with their limited financial options occasionally emerged in criticisms of the MMF, with statements such as "The MMF only funds the last year because they want to take credit for the whole thing, makes them look good," or "It's not what you know – it's who you know." Some students also alleged that people are joining the MMF for no reason other than to access funding: "Their attitude is what the MMF can do for them, not what they can do for the MMF."

It must be noted that, for many people, the financial assistance available to Metis students and trainees is linked to issues of rights and identity for Metis people. Many of the Metis students who participated in this consultation believe that, as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, Metis people have "an Aboriginal right to educational funding" and should be able to access the same level of financial assistance as First Nation people currently can access. These issues, which are both profoundly political and profoundly personal, are unlikely to be resolved quickly or easily.

- **Student loans:** One participant spoke extensively about challenges that the student loan system may present to Aboriginal people. Some people may be intimidated by

the forms and paperwork involved in applying for a student loan. Given the history of relationships between Aboriginal people and bureaucratic systems, they pointed out, 'paperwork' may represent bureaucratic control over Aboriginal people to some. Some Aboriginal people (particularly those who speak English as a second language) run up against language barriers, both when filling out forms and when speaking to staff at the student loan offices. Historically, it has been very difficult for First Nation and other Aboriginal people to get loans, in part because they often lacked collateral. A residue of this historic experience is that many Aboriginal people either seem convinced that they won't get a loan (and so don't apply) or simply do not know how to apply for one. This seems particularly true for Aboriginal people who are the first generation in their home or community to attend a post-secondary program.

- **Financial support provided through Employment & Income Assistance (EIA) and Employment Insurance (EI):** Some of the trainees and mature Grade 12 students who participated in this consultation receive financial assistance from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA). These participants observed that it is extremely difficult to receive support through this program, unless you are a parent with dependent children. Some indicated that they felt that their EIA worker treated them disrespectfully. Students and trainees reported that EIA does not provide extra money for transportation and will only provide extra money for childcare if it is with a licensed provider. One student related that because they could not find licensed care close to home and because they could not afford to transport their child out of the neighbourhood, they had to settle for unlicensed childcare, which they could not get reimbursed for through EIA.

As one staff member at a post-secondary institution commented, EIA policies and practices do not effectively support the long-term education, training and employability needs of Aboriginal people. As evidence for this, the participant observed that whether or not a student can access financial support from EIA seems to be at individual workers' discretion and that people typically have to "fail repeatedly" before EIA will provide financial support for training or education.

Participants also pointed out that, while some federal funding for training is available through Employment Insurance (EI), many Aboriginal people do not have the employment history to access EI.

- **Inadequate housing.** Many participants identified lack of safe, affordable, comfortable and/or well-located housing as a significant barrier. As one participant noted, on-campus housing is too expensive for most Aboriginal students and trainees and off-campus housing may be difficult to secure, so many Aboriginal students and trainees live in shared accommodations in unsafe neighbourhoods. These environments typically do not support studying or other activities that will support their success. One student described this more bluntly, stating that many Aboriginal students and trainees are “stuck in low-income housing in a crappy part of town where you don’t want to raise your kids.” To get affordable housing, students and trainees must often live in neighbourhoods that are not geographically convenient. For example, one full-time student reported that, because they were unable to find adequate housing in Winnipeg, they had moved to Selkirk. Students’ and trainees’ struggles around housing are clearly linked to funding issues. As noted above, many students and trainees rely on financial aid that leaves them with very little money for housing costs. Participants also noted that most forms of financial aid do not provide adequate money to cover extra housing-related expenses like damage deposits, relocation and moving costs or household set-up costs.
- **Childcare and other family needs.** A significant proportion of the post-secondary students and trainees who collaborated in this consultation are parents. As one educator commented, “individual students have multiple and significant demands” and students and trainees sometimes get overwhelmed when trying to manage their personal responsibilities on top of the responsibilities attached to their education or training program. To succeed academically (and personally), they need to be able to balance their roles, responsibilities and schedules as students with those of being parents and family members. Students and trainees observed that it is often a struggle for them to get their children ready in the morning, transport them to childcare or get them off to school and then make it to their own post-secondary programs on time. As one student noted, instructors may be understanding, but “lateness and absences add up” and can set students or trainees behind in their programs.

Participants also noted that, due to inadequate funding and the limited availability of space in existing child care centre, it is very difficult for students and trainees to

access quality, licensed, culturally safe childcare. It is particularly hard for parents with infants (children under the age of two) and parents who need child care in the evening or on a drop-in basis (a necessity for many students and trainees) to find childcare. Many of those who attend post-secondary institutions with on-site childcare have had little luck in accessing that service because, as participants reported, there is usually a long waiting list. One student who will graduate this year reported that they have been on the waiting list of the on-campus childcare centre for two years without even receiving a phone call from the centre. Many students and trainees have settled for unlicensed childcare in private homes or rely on friends and family to care for their children. As noted earlier, students' and trainees' ability to access quality childcare is linked to their financial aid. As several observed, under most financial aid arrangements, students can receive a subsidy or be reimbursed only for licensed childcare.

- **Gaps in the K-12 education system.** Participants identified several ways in which they feel that Aboriginal students (particularly those in First Nation, northern and remote communities) are under-served by K-12 education systems. It should be noted that, as one participant commented, the quality of education in First Nation, northern and remote communities relates closely to other issues relating to funding (are schools receiving enough funding?) and accountability (are schools and communities getting a good return on the money they are spending?) for education systems.

One educator suggested out that some Aboriginal parents may not know how to most effectively support their children's academic success. Given that the residential school experience took responsibility for children's education away from parents, many parents now need support to rediscover how to engage in the process of their children's education. Short-term strategies such as parenting classes can help with this, but substantial change may take time. Participants suggested that education systems should do more to support Aboriginal students' identity and encourage their sense of belonging in school. Aboriginal history (including Aboriginal peoples' contributions to the formation and development of Canada, as well as historic experiences that continue to have intergenerational effects, such as residential schools and the Sixties Scoop) and Aboriginal cultures should be incorporated into all schools' curriculum.

Many Aboriginal students are “turned off” and do not succeed in the K-12 system. One participant, pointing out that in some Inner City and North End neighbourhoods of Winnipeg, high school completion rates for Aboriginal students may be as low as one in four or one in five, called for increased and ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of K-12 programming. Even those who do complete high school (especially students from First Nation, northern and/or remote communities) may not be getting the education they deserve. Participants observed that many Aboriginal students and trainees in post-secondary programs are inadequately prepared, both academically (particularly with respect to writing, literacy, numeracy and study skills) and personally. As one educator noted, this can often be addressed through tutoring, upgrading and other academic supports. However, others observed that some students and trainees who “start out behind” quickly lose confidence in their own ability to succeed.

- **Inadequate preparation for post-secondary education and training.** As one participant observed, many Aboriginal post-secondary students and trainees are “flying blind”. They may arrive at post-secondary institutions without a clear idea of what they want to do or take or how to get to where they want to be. Participants also reported that personal qualities, such as low self-esteem, lack of a strong identity or limited leadership skills, can get in the way of students’ or trainees’ success. Participants pointed out that many Aboriginal students and trainees (especially those who are the first in their families to get education or training) have had only limited access to role models and mentors. Participants called for enhanced access to career counseling for high school students, to help them to identify what they want to do and how they can do it.

Some students and trainees who participated in the consultation reported that when they began their post-secondary programs, they discovered that they were not adequately prepared. For example, some realized that their skill levels did not match their grade level and that they needed to take upgrading or access tutoring supports. Others realized that they had not completed all the high school courses they needed for their post-secondary program. Others recognized that they had not developed all the life skills they needed to support their participation in post-secondary education or training. These reports were confirmed by educational instructors, support staff and other stakeholders who noted that Aboriginal students and trainees frequently

arrive at post-secondary programs without having completed the courses they need to prepare them for their chosen program or without the literacy, numeracy or other essential skills they need to participate in the program.

- **Transition needs.** Participants reported that the transition into a post-secondary program, into the city and into living on their own is a significant challenge for many Aboriginal students and trainees. Students and trainees who must move from their home communities (where “people like them” are in the majority) and leave their established support networks behind to attend a post-secondary program often experience culture shock and feel lonely and isolated. In addition to providing transition supports from the time prospective students and trainees begin the process of applying to post-secondary programs, some participants advised that high school students need early exposure to the on-campus and urban cultures they will join, which can be provided, in part, by exchange programs between schools. Participants felt that more funding should be provided to programs that provide effective transition supports, such as ACCESS-model programs. One participant observed that post-secondary students and trainees may also need support through the transition out of their post-secondary programs into employment.

As many participants acknowledged, when students and trainees must leave their home communities to participate in post-secondary programs, there is less likelihood that they will succeed in those programs. In Manitoba, Aboriginal students and trainees typically leave their home communities because options for accessing quality education and training in First Nation, rural and remote communities are extremely limited and, as one participant noted, in-community options like distance-learning do not work for every student or trainee. Distance learning, this participant observed, works best for students who have relatively unrestricted computer and internet access, along with the confidence, discipline and structure to be self-guided learners.

- **Cultural safety and cultural affirmation.** As several participants noted, post-secondary institutions and programs may feel unsafe, hostile, isolating and intimidating for many Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students often must contend with systemic and individual racism (such as other students’ and staff members’ negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people), at the same time as they are negotiating the impacts of their own historic experiences as Aboriginal people and

communities (including the intergenerational effects of the Residential School experience and the Sixties Scoop). This is difficult for students and trainees to deal with, especially if these incidents occur in front of instructors or other staff members who do not intervene.

As institutions and as employees in an institution, one participant stated, “we need to learn how to be anti-racist.” Post-secondary institutions need to acknowledge and honour the distinct cultural and historic identities of First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal peoples. Participants felt that there are not enough Aboriginal-focused post-secondary education and training programs and that post-secondary programs need more input from Aboriginal community member on program design, content, curriculum and pedagogy. This includes ensuring that courses are “friendly” to Aboriginal people, that they incorporate Aboriginal content, and that they maintain their academic rigor. Participants pointed out that there are very few Aboriginal instructors or other Aboriginal staff members at most post-secondary institutions. Non-Aboriginal staff at post-secondary institutions, participants noted, need more education about Aboriginal issues. One participant observed that post-secondary programs are typically designed with very little consultation with Aboriginal people and communities and other participants advised that post-secondary institutions need to assess whether or not their programs actually meet the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees and whether or not the institution is offering them training or education that will ultimately be of value to them and their community. A few participants called on First Nation leaders to advocate more strongly for and take more control of their community members’ education.

Participants pointed out that Aboriginal students’ learning styles may differ than those of mainstream students and suggested that educators should work with students to understand their individual learning styles and then design appropriate opportunities for them to learn. Participants also reported that many institutions do not adequately accommodate the learning needs of Aboriginal students who speak English as a second language.

Students and trainees also pointed out that, while the mainstream media frequently reports negative stories about Aboriginal people, there is very little or no effort to present Aboriginal people positively. Students and trainees advised that Aboriginal people need more exposure to other Aboriginal people (and, one noted, men in

particular) who are leading healthy lives, who are successfully employed and/or moving forward on their chosen career path. These positive messages give Aboriginal people hope and inspiration. As one trainee commented, “There are a lot of good brains out there – we just need to change the way [both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal] people think.”

Metis students noted that their own distinct historic and cultural identity is often not acknowledged or is overshadowed by those of First Nation peoples. While services and supports that designed for Aboriginal students in general can help to create cultural safety for Metis students, Metis students and trainees also reported that their identity as Aboriginal people is sometimes challenged by other Aboriginal people. For example, one Metis student stated that they feel unwelcome and like an “outcast” at the Aboriginal students’ centre on their campus.

It should be noted that, while not all students and trainees identified or spoke at length about cultural safety as something they currently experienced as a significant barrier or challenge to their success (which may be, in large part, because many of the students and trainees are in programs or attending institutions that, to varying extents, draw upon and affirm Aboriginal students’ and trainees’ cultural identity and experiences), when participants were later asked what might enhance post-secondary outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees, virtually all groups presented recommendations for action to support and enhance the cultural safety and affirm the cultural identity of Aboriginal people.

- **Lateral oppression and racism.** Students and trainees acknowledged that they must sometimes contend with lateral oppression and racism within Aboriginal communities. One student noted that “Once you get an education, you’re not an Indian any more. You’re too good for the reserve” and another spoke of being called an “apple”. As one student observed, like “crabs in a bucket”, community members sometimes resist change, adding that it can be hard for Aboriginal people to break down or get beyond the stereotypes and racism that are instilled by mainstream culture. As discussed earlier, the personal support of family, friends and community members can make a crucial contribution to students’ and trainees’ success. When students and trainees cannot fully access or rely on these personal supports, the supports and resources they can access through their post-secondary programs become even more important to their success.

## **PROMISING PRACTICES, PARTNERSHIPS AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS**

Throughout this consultation, a number of programs were singled out for praise by participants as examples of programs that support successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees:

- **Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary programs and institutions:**
  - **Urban Circle Training Centre**, in Winnipeg's North End, designs and delivers adult education programs using a holistic model rooted in Aboriginal cultural teachings and practices. Participants suggested that Urban Circle's approach (looking at each student as a whole person) and practices (designing programs to attend to all aspects of students' needs) both contribute to students' and trainees' success. At Urban Circle, they noted, culture is inseparable from everything else. Participants also noted that Urban Circle uses a "rigorous" intake process, to ensure that students who are admitted to their programs are ready for them.
  - **The Aboriginal Learning and Literacy Centre, Aboriginal Community Campus and the Neeginan Institute of Applied Technology** are divisions of the **Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD)** in Winnipeg's North End. CAHRD has been designing and developing education, training, and employment programs for urban Aboriginal people for over thirty years. These programs are designed to meet the real-life needs of students and trainees and provide them with opportunities to participate in and ladder between education and training programs that range from literacy instruction through high school upgrading and academic programs through certified trades and technical training. Students and trainees can learn in a culturally safe environment where they are able to access a broad range of practical and meaningful on-site supports.
  - **Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) Trades Training**, a partnership between OCN, the Province of Manitoba and University College of the North, provides OCN community members with comprehensive supports in a training and practicum program that prepares participants to enter the trades. Trainees are assessed at the end of the training/practicum period and, if adequately

prepared, move on to their chosen trades training; if not, they receive additional programming to upgrade their job, life and academic skills, as appropriate. Regardless of the level of accomplishment or success that an individual has achieved, investment in the trainee continues. The program's flexibility (a willingness to modify practice to meet trainees on their individual real-life learning paths) and the partners' demonstrated mutual commitment to trainees' success are seen as valuable features of the program.

▪ **Programs designed to support the participation of Aboriginal people in mainstream post-secondary institutions:**

- **ACCESS, ENGAP and ACCESS-model programs at the University of Manitoba, Red River College and the University of Winnipeg** provide Aboriginal students in post-secondary programs with comprehensive and meaningful supports, such as academic and personal counseling, financial guidance, tutorial assistance and supplementary or upgrading classes. Engineering students in the ENGAP program at the University of Manitoba have access to staff members who can assist them with a broad range of needs. In their first semester, students complete appropriate upgrading to ensure that, regardless of the skills and competencies they begin with, they will be ready for university-level courses in the second semester. Red River College's ACCESS Southern Nursing is a one-year certificate program designed to prepare students to enter the Joint Baccalaureate Nursing program, offered in partnership with the University of Manitoba. Students take courses that help them to develop the skills and competencies they will need for the JBN program, along with courses that transfer to the JBN program. Students in the program reported that staff members are accessible and work closely with them to help them develop the skills they need to succeed and that their professional development class has provided them with effective strategies for integrating traditional cultural teachings into their professional practice. ACCESS programs at the University of Winnipeg<sup>10</sup> include the Education program at the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC-ED) and a new

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the consultation team was not able to complete the University of Winnipeg's ethics review process in time to interview Aboriginal students at the university. Information on the WEC-ED program is drawn from the WEC website (<http://uwec.uwinnipeg.ca>) and information on the CATEP program is drawn from the COPSE website (<http://www.copse.mb.ca>).

Community-Based Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP). The WEC-ED program, which targets Aboriginal people and other inner-city residents, offer students the flexibility and supports to complete a Bachelor of Education/Bachelor of Arts integrated degree. The CATEP program, which was developed in response to the need for Aboriginal teachers in Winnipeg schools, enables students to work as educational assistants at Winnipeg-area schools while completing a Bachelor of Education/Bachelor of Arts program at the University of Winnipeg. The program offers counseling, academic advising, tutoring and skills development. Program delivery is flexible and uses a cohort model.

- **The University of Manitoba’s Aboriginal Focus Programs’ Transition Year at Children of the Earth High School (COTE)** provides Aboriginal students with an opportunity to complete coursework that prepares them personally and academically for participation in post-secondary programs, as well as first-year university programs. Students in the COTE program valued the academic and personal supports that program staff members provide and indicated that the program has convinced them that they will be able to succeed in post-secondary education.
- **Making Education Work** is a pilot project of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. It provides students at Aboriginal high schools in Manitoba with a comprehensive program of academic preparation and student and family supports to ready them for post-secondary education.
- **Career Trek** is a Winnipeg-based program designed for young people with perceived barriers to entering post-secondary education. The program engages with elementary-aged children and their families and works with them to explore and envision possibilities for their future. The goal of the program is to educate students about the importance of staying in school, the value of post-secondary education and career options. While many participants felt that Career Trek makes a significant difference to Aboriginal children’s future post-secondary success, a few other participants expressed some reservations about the program. They pointed out that Career Trek’s current program design works only in communities that are relatively close to post-secondary institutions (which excludes most First Nation and Metis communities in Manitoba), that the program has very few Aboriginal staff members

(who might provide especially empowering role models and mentors to Aboriginal youth) and that, because the program has not been designed or delivered by Aboriginal people, it may not effectively meet the needs of Aboriginal people or communities. It should be noted that Career Trek has been delivering a project with Skownan First Nation since 2004. Evaluation results from this project may help to answer some of these questions.

More generally, consultation participants emphasized the importance of **seeking guidance and direction from Aboriginal communities and people**: “Mainstream” post-secondary programs that seek opportunities to partner with and get guidance from Aboriginal communities and leadership seem more capable of creating meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people to succeed in training and education. This can be effected by, for example, ensuring that Aboriginal people have significant representation in the institution’s governing bodies and that Aboriginal people have representation on institutional advisory bodies. Several participants cited the University College of the North (UCN) as a model for collaboration between a post-secondary institution and the Aboriginal communities and people it serves. UCN describes itself as “an institution devoted to community and northern development and reflects the Aboriginal reality and cultural diversity of northern Manitoba.” As part of its commitment to provide post-secondary education and training in a culturally sensitive and collaborative manner, UCN’s Governing Council includes Aboriginal representatives, along with representation from an advisory Council of Elders.

Consultation participants also identified the following partnerships and working relationships as contributing to, supporting or enhancing successful outcomes for post-secondary students and trainees:

- **Between Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary training and education programs and institutions and accredited mainstream post-secondary training and education institutions:** Aboriginal-controlled programs and institutions such as Yellowquill College, the Louis Riel Institute, Urban Circle and the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD) are uniquely positioned to understand and address the education and training needs of Aboriginal people and communities. By partnering with accredited post-secondary training and education institutions, these organizations enhance their capacity to provide programs that contribute to the career development and long-term success of Aboriginal community

members. As one participant point out, the accrediting institutions have a responsibility to maintain academic rigor in these partnerships so that programs, along with the students and communities they serve, can be confident that curriculum and content match or exceed those delivered in mainstream institutions.

- **Between community-based training and education programs and accredited post-secondary training and education institutions:** Community-based organizations such as Urban Circle, CAHRD or the Boys and Girls Club are well positioned to deliver education and training to the communities they serve. By partnering with accredited post-secondary training and education institutions, these organizations enhance their capacity to provide programs that contribute to the career development and long-term success of community members.
- **Between training and education programs and employers:** Post-secondary programs may establish partnerships with the private sector to develop and deliver training and education programs that prepare workers for employment in that sector (such as those established between northern First Nation communities, post-secondary institutions, Manitoba Hydro and others in the ATEC project). In Winnipeg, Neeginan partners with industry to provide training programs and connect students with potential employers. Urban Circle, which currently offers training for para-educators, also provides cross-cultural training to staff at the schools where trainees may eventually work. Urban Circle sees this as a way to develop the cultural safety of these schools as future workplaces for program graduates.
- **Laddering relationships between training and education programs:** At some organizations that offer post-secondary training (such as CAHRD), students and trainees can ladder through a broad range of on-site programs, ranging from literacy training through accredited post-secondary coursework to employment services. Other programs have established laddering relationships with other post-secondary institutions. For example, many Urban Circle students enter programs at the Inner-City Campus, a North End campus shared by the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba. Students who complete Red River College's Southern Nursing program are guaranteed entry into the Joint Baccalaureate Nursing program, a partnership between RRC and the U of M.
- **Between post-secondary programs and community-based resources:** Some post-secondary programs have developed good working relationships and

partnerships with local community resources, particularly those that can support or enrich their students' and trainees' lives. For example, Yellowquill College draws upon a broad range of community resources to deliver supports to students, including Manitoba Indian Education Association (counseling, academic and social supports), Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre (cultural teachings and referrals), Klinik (referrals), the University of Winnipeg (program partnerships), Employment and Income Assistance (liaison person on staff) and Aboriginal employment support services.

- **Between First Nation and other Aboriginal communities and post-secondary programs:** Post-secondary institutions such as Assiniboine Community College, Red River College and the University of Manitoba's Aboriginal Focus Programs have partnered with First Nations to develop and deliver post-secondary programs that meet the unique needs of their communities. For example, Assiniboine Community College has offered Mature Grade 12, Nursing and Early Childhood Education programs in First Nation communities. Delivering education and training programs in-community means that students and trainees do not have to negotiate many of the issues that are often associated with the transition into post-secondary programs.

Some First Nation education counsellors have worked hard to develop a close relationship with staff at the post-secondary institutions their students and trainees attend. Their collaborative relationships make it easier to assess and support students' and trainees' success.

Red River College, which has a relatively high number of Inuit students, regularly visits communities in Nunavut, where RRC staff meet with representatives of the Department of Education, Arctic College and high schools. RRC staff work closely with communities to identify the supports Inuit students need.

- **Cross-jurisdictional initiatives:** One participant noted that the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the province's Advanced Education and Training have begun to collaborate with respect to the training and education of First Nation peoples. The parties have developed (but not yet signed) a Memorandum of Understanding that will guide their partnership. They recognize the importance of going slowly and developing trust in their working relationships. At the same time, all partners recognize that they must

attend to the bottom line in education and training, that is, that students get what they need to learn.

## **IMPROVING POST-SECONDARY OUTCOMES FOR FIRST NATIONS AND METIS STUDENTS IN SOUTHERN MANITOBA**

The final questions posed to all consultation participants were designed to elicit their ideas and practical recommendations about what further actions could be taken to support successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba. Their ideas and recommendations are summarized below:

### **Student Funding:**

- All Aboriginal people should have meaningful access to education and training (from K-12 through graduate studies), regardless of their cultural identity, whether or not they are recognized as Status Indian or whether they live on-reserve or off.
- Aboriginal people should have more and meaningful access to funding to support their participation in education and training, including awards, loans, grants and bursaries designed specifically for Aboriginal and low income people.
- Financial aid should adequately cover the real costs that Aboriginal students and trainees incur while participating in post-secondary programs:
  - All funding sources should review the living allowances they provide and adjust these allowances, as appropriate, to ensure that they reflect the current cost of living.
  - All students and trainees should be provided with adequate financial aid to cover routine and predictable expenses (such as tuition, books and supplies, shelter, food, childcare and transportation) and have access to additional financial aid to cover incidental and unusual expenses (such as relocation and moving, household set-up, emergencies or attending conferences or meetings that relate to their area of study).
- Financial aid should support lifelong learning:

- Aboriginal students participating in transition year programs and mature students should be able to access financial support that meets their real life needs.
- Aboriginal students need more information about what financial aid may be available to them and how they can apply for it.
  - A centralized resource should be developed where Aboriginal students and trainees can gather information about available supports and resources and apply for funding. This information should be available in a variety of formats, including on-line as a searchable and/or interactive resource.
- Students and trainees should be informed about funding decisions and receive funding awarded to them in a timely manner.
- Funding bodies should hold students and trainees accountable for full participation in their education and training programs.

**Improvements to financial assistance for First Nations students & trainees:**

- All First Nation band members should be able to access financial assistance to participate in education and training programs, regardless of whether they live on-reserve or off.
  - Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) should re-examine First Nations' educational funding agreements to assess whether First Nations are provided with adequate resources to meet the education and training needs of all band members, including those who live off-reserve.
  - The provincial government should make a greater contribution to funding for the education and training of First Nation people.
- First Nation education authorities should be more transparent and accountable:
  - Education authorities should routinely report on how funding is allocated to students, including who has received funding and the criteria used to award that funding.
  - First Nations should evaluate the criteria and guidelines their education authorities use to award funding and assess whether they are fair and equitable (e.g., Are students declined funding because of age, gender, disabilities or the

number of dependant children they have? Are band members who live off-reserve able to access funding?).

- First Nations should routinely assess whether or not the money they receive and allocate for education and training is being spent well, i.e., whether or not their First Nation getting a 'good return' on its educational investment.
- First Nations should report on each of these activities and ensure that these reports are readily and freely available to all band members.
- First Nation education counselors should provide active, ongoing and meaningful supports to current and prospective students and trainees from their communities:
  - First Nation education authorities should ensure that their education counselors have the appropriate training, qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge base for their position. This includes: experience in post-secondary education or training; capacity to function in both administrative/management and counseling/support roles; and a thorough understanding of the policies and procedures that guide and direct their work, as well as the experiences of post-secondary students.
  - Education counselors should ensure that prospective and current students and trainees receive the career guidance they need to make the right choices about education or training; are properly prepared both academically and personally; and receive (in a timely manner) adequate funds to cover all costs associated with their participation in their program.
  - Education counselors should establish and maintain communication with staff at education and training institutions to gain a better understanding of students' and trainees' needs and collaborate with these institutions to work together to address students'/trainees' needs.
- First Nations should work towards enhanced collaboration across First Nation departments to support students' and trainees' success.

**Improvements to financial assistance for Metis students:**

- Metis university students should be able to access financial support (through the MMF) throughout the course of their post-secondary programs.

- The provincial and federal governments, along with the MMF, should invest more money in education for Metis people.
- The MMF should explore alternate ways of monitoring students' and trainees' participation in their programs, in place of the current requirement that students carry attendance sheets that must be signed by instructors.
- The MMF should provide students and trainees with clear and comprehensive information about the funding it distributes to students and trainees:
  - The MMF should make every effort to ensure that prospective and current students and trainees understand criteria and guidelines for making funding decisions;
  - The MMF should develop communication materials that explain the education and training funding agreements and arrangements they have with any government.
- Post-secondary institutions that receive funding from the MMF should be more accountable to the Metis community about how that funding is used.

**Improvements to the student loan system:**

- The process of applying for Canada Student Loans should be simplified:
  - Current and prospective students should be provided with more information about how to apply for student loans and what a student loan means. This information should be integrated into career preparation and recruitment materials for prospective students and trainees.
  - Forms used in the application process should be simplified and require applicants to provide less information than forms currently in use do.

**Improvements to financial support provided through Employment & Income Assistance (EIA) and Employment Insurance (EI)**

- EIA policies should be revised to support the long-term training needs of clients who are making progress towards employability or other forms of self-sufficiency.
  - Decisions about whether or not individual students receive support from EIA should be made in collaboration with education and training institutions, rather than being left to the sole discretion of individual workers.

- The financial support provided by EIA to trainees and students should meet the real costs of their needs, including shelter, food, transportation, childcare and materials and supplies.
- EIA caseworkers should, as needed, be provided with training to ensure that they are respectful in their interactions with students, trainees and other service users.
- EI policies should be revised to support the long-term training needs of clients who are making progress towards employability or other forms of self-sufficiency.
  - EI should provide more support to trainees and students.

**Housing needs:**

- To address Aboriginal students' and trainees' need for safe, affordable and adequate housing, the AMC, MMF and/or other Aboriginal organizations, in partnership with post-secondary institutions and appropriate government departments, should develop housing units for First Nation, Metis and/or other Aboriginal students and trainees that:
  - Are available to students and trainees regardless of the length of their program;
  - Provide accommodation to single people and families;
  - Include common areas for social and recreational activities, as well as study lounges;
  - Include on-site childcare; and
  - Offer on-site transition supports, Elders, counselors and other resources and services that support residents' well-being.

**Improved access to childcare for students and trainees:**

- Additional child care spaces should be created at locations close to or on-site at education and training institutions, with space reserved for Aboriginal students and trainees. At those sites, Aboriginal students and trainees should be able to access affordable regularly-scheduled or drop-in childcare on a 24-hour basis. Funding to support this could be coordinated between education and training institutions and the provincial and federal governments.

**Improvements to and enhanced accountability for K-12 systems:**

- K-12 systems should ensure that Aboriginal people have the same access to quality education as other Canadians. Instruction, teaching and learning processes should be strengthened to support the long-term success of Aboriginal students. Education should engage Aboriginal students and instill in them the value of life-long learning. More rewards and scholarships should be developed to acknowledge Aboriginal students' accomplishments in the K-12 system.
- All K-12 systems (including both provincial and First Nation schools) should develop and implement Aboriginal programming, content and activities that will meet the real and meaningful needs, wants and aspirations of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal content should be integrated into curriculum in all subject areas and at all grade levels. In particular, to support Aboriginal students' success in science, traditional knowledge and ways of learning and knowing should be incorporated into conventional science curriculum.
- K-12 systems should be held accountable for ensuring that Aboriginal students achieve skill and competency levels (in, for example, English, Math and Science) that match the grade level they have achieved.
  - All educators in the K-12 system should have some training in First Nation/Aboriginal education.
  - All educators should have an appropriate background for the subjects they are teaching.
  - First Nations should develop a coordinated system to monitor the quality of education students are receiving at on-reserve schools; to assess the qualifications and monitor the performance of teachers; and to establish quality assurance with respect to teaching and curriculum.
- K-12 systems should work harder to retain students by, for example, monitoring attendance, marks and other indicators of students' disengagement from school and then intervening with outreach, counseling and other supports before a student makes the decision to leave school.
- Schools should be open to the community and educators should reach out to bring Aboriginal family and community members into the school. K-12 systems should

work to increase Aboriginal parents' involvement with their children's education and sell the value of education to community members by developing communication materials and offering workshops that educate parents about expectations at all different levels of education.

- More effort and resources should be directed to developing career awareness in Aboriginal children and youth. Aboriginal youth should have a clear understanding of what they need (financially, socially, personally and academically) to prepare for and achieve the vision and goals they set for themselves. Activities to support this should start at an early age and involve parents, so that Aboriginal youth can see post-secondary education and training as part of their future and are motivated to work towards it. These activities may include programs modeled after Mini-university and Career Trek.

**Transition supports:**

- Post-secondary institutions should establish closer relationships and engage in more outreach with high schools in First Nations and other Aboriginal communities. Representatives of the institutions should:
  - Visit high schools and invite high school students to visit their campuses;
  - Arrange mentoring by post-secondary students and trainees for high school students;
  - Work with high schools to create opportunities for secondary students to complete post-secondary credits; and
  - Initiate relationships with prospective students and trainees that will support them in their transition to post-secondary programs.
- In-community supports (including adult upgrading) should be available to Aboriginal people who are preparing to enter post-secondary training or education.
- To address the culture shock that many new Aboriginal students and trainees experience, post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders should provide Aboriginal students and trainees with:
  - Comprehensive orientations to their new program, campus and community;
  - Positive social opportunities that promote their overall well-being.

- Regardless of the skills they arrive with, students should be able to access the upgrading and other academic supports (such as tutoring, writing workshops and literacy skills development) they need to succeed in their post-secondary programs.
- Post-secondary institutions, communities, funding bodies and, in particular, First Nation education authorities, should form active partnerships to develop transition year programs and provide long-term transition supports and skills development for Aboriginal students and trainees. In addition to academic supports, this should include assisting students and trainees to develop the skills they will need, e.g., to live independently, budget, manage stress and establish positive social and cultural connections.
- On-line resources should be developed to support students' and trainees' transition needs. This includes on-line courses for academic upgrading and skills development.
- A 'one-stop shop' to support the transition needs of Aboriginal students and trainees should be established in Winnipeg. This service would provide centralized resources to address prospective and current students' and trainees' needs, such as: information on career options and career guidance; academic preparation and upgrading for post-secondary programs; life skills training; cultural resources and supports; advocacy supports; orientation and adjustment to life in Winnipeg; tutoring supports; access to computers and the internet; and common areas for socializing and studying.

**Cultural safety and affirmation:**

- To create and support culturally safe, supportive and welcoming environments for Aboriginal students and trainees, mainstream education and training institutions should undertake activities such as:
  - Acknowledging the impact of their own institutional cultures and working to sensitize the university and larger community about the impacts of racism and discrimination;
  - Requiring instructors and other staff members to participate in cultural awareness training;
  - Establishing a compulsory Human Relations course for all students or trainees;

- Making a conscious effort to present positive images of Aboriginal people by, for example, organizing gatherings that honour Aboriginal students' and trainees' achievements;
  - Actively recruiting Aboriginal employees to fill positions at all levels of the organization, which, in turn, will help the institutions to increase their cultural capacity, provide Aboriginal students and trainees with valuable mentors and role models; and signal that the institution values Aboriginal people;
  - Establishing Aboriginal peoples' centres that have adequate resources to provide Aboriginal students and trainees with a place to study, develop peer support networks and access culturally appropriate supports (such as on-site Elders, ceremonial and cultural activities, counseling supports and resource libraries). Existing centres that currently do not have the capacity to offer this range of supports should be provided with the resources to deliver them.
- Education and training institutions should support the development of personal relationships between students and instructors by improving student/instructor ratios.
  - Education and training institutions should honor the knowledge, meaning systems and current and historic experiences of Aboriginal peoples in all subject areas. Aboriginal knowledge, meaning systems and ways of teaching and learning should be incorporated into curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum should enhance students' and trainees' awareness and understanding of the impacts of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples. Institutions should also identify and develop ways to accommodate the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees who speak English as a second language.
  - Aboriginal students and trainees (within both the K-12 and post-secondary systems) should have access to culturally appropriate support that will assist them to address the impacts and effects of intergenerational trauma and ongoing exposure to discrimination and racism. This includes access to Aboriginal Elders and counselors, who can draw upon their own life experiences to support Aboriginal students.
  - Post-secondary institutions need to seek and create opportunities to work in partnership with Aboriginal people by:
    - Sharing resources, knowledge and supports with the larger Aboriginal community

- Meeting with members of Aboriginal urban and rural communities to learn from them how they can better serve Aboriginal students and trainees.
- Establishing working relationships with appropriate Elders, who can provide guidance to the institution in appropriate areas
- Establishing codes of ethics to guide research collaborations with Aboriginal peoples.
- Establishing Traditional Peoples' Advisory Committees, to provide guidance on any new developments relating to Aboriginal cultures, research and/or programs at the institution. These advisory committees must be empowered to influence the direction of these developments.
- Ensuring that Aboriginal people are represented on their governing bodies.

**Recognition of the distinct history and identity of Metis people:**

- Metis people's unique history and identity as one of the founding Aboriginal peoples of Manitoba and Canada should be acknowledged and affirmed throughout the design and delivery of education and training.
- Post-secondary institutions should establish a greater "presence" for Metis people by actively recruiting Metis staff as instructors and in other positions where they will provide support to Aboriginal students.
- Metis-related content should be included in educational curriculum and universities and colleges should explore the possibilities of establishing a Department of Metis Studies.
- The development of Metis-specific resources for students and trainees (such as the Metis students' group, CAMPUS) should be supported by education stakeholders.

**Enhanced accountability for post-secondary institutions:**

- Post-secondary institutions that receive funding for Aboriginal education and training should be held accountable for recruiting *and* retaining Aboriginal students. This includes providing Aboriginal students with appropriate academic supports in an environment that welcomes them.
- Post-secondary programs that target Aboriginal people and/or are delivered in Aboriginal communities should meet the same academic standards as equivalent

mainstream programs; provide training that is accredited or certified (as appropriate) and recognized by industry; and generate outcomes that match those achieved by programs targeting mainstream community members.

- Post-secondary institutions should have a presence in the Aboriginal communities they serve. This can be achieved by engaging in outreach and collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal communities.
- Post-secondary institutions should establish working relationships with First Nation education counselors and provide counselors with more access to the institutions.
- Post-secondary institutions should reserve seats on their governing bodies for Aboriginal people.

**Enhanced accountability for government:**

- The provincial, federal and First Nations governments should address and resolve jurisdictional issues that constrain the delivery of education and training programs in Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people's participation in education and training.
- All levels of government should support and commit to addressing the long-term education and training needs of Aboriginal people and communities. This includes providing multi-year funding to training and education programs that generate successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees.
- Appropriate levels of government should establish funding (distinct from that allocated to First Nations) to support the education and training needs of Metis people.
- People who make and influence policy that affects the availability and accessibility of training and education for First Nation, Metis and Aboriginal people should be aware of and understand the distinct cultures and histories of Aboriginal peoples. In particular, policy makers should have a thorough understanding of the impacts of the Residential School experience on Aboriginal people's participation in education and training.
- The provincial government should create enabling legislation (an Aboriginal Peoples Education Act) and develop policy that establishes post-secondary education and training for Aboriginal people as a priority.

- Appropriate government departments should recognize and work with existing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions to establish their accreditation.
- Appropriate levels of government should improve research design and data collection with respect to Aboriginal people's participation in post-secondary education and training. Currently, there is a need for longitudinal research into what affects or contributes to long-term successful outcomes for Aboriginal people who are participating and/or have participated in post-secondary education and training.

**Aboriginal-controlled education and training institutions:**

- Aboriginal leadership should seek self-determination in all aspects of education and training, including control of all funding allocated for Aboriginal peoples' education and training needs.
- Every Aboriginal person should have the option to participate in education and training programs at fully-accredited institutions that are designed, owned and controlled by Aboriginal people:
  - First Nation people should be able to access education and training at accredited institutions that are designed, owned and controlled by First Nation people.
  - Metis people should be able to access education and training at accredited institutions that are designed, owned and controlled by Metis people.
- The AMC, MMF, other Aboriginal leaders, the federal and provincial governments and other stakeholders in the education and training of Aboriginal peoples should explore and initiate the process of establishing fully-accredited Aboriginal post-secondary institutions within Manitoba. As students, trainees and other participants have noted, these institutions should provide Aboriginal people with academic and employment-related credentials that are recognized as meaningful by employers, institutions and community members and that generate academic and employment outcomes that are equivalent to those generated by mainstream programs and institutions.
  - In collaboration with these partners, existing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions should identify and develop the resources they need to become fully accredited institutions.

- First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal communities should invest in developing their own community members as educators.
- Aboriginal leadership should continue and increase lobbying to increase students' living allowances.
- First Nations should pursue partnerships with the private sector to develop technical schools in First Nation communities.
- First Nations should assess and monitor the effectiveness of post-secondary programming for their community members.
- First Nations should explore ways to strengthen partnership between First Nation schools and the provincial government.
- Aboriginal leadership should study other jurisdictions (such as British Columbia, which has many First Nation-controlled education and training institutions) for best practices that increase successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees.

**Greater flexibility in the ways that training and education are delivered:**

- Education and training service providers should move toward a client-centered model, where the training and education needs of Aboriginal people and communities are heard, respected and understood.
- Post-secondary education and training service providers should develop and offer more programming that fits the needs of Aboriginal people and communities, incorporating effective practices such as cohort models, modular programs, distance education, in-community delivery and the provision of comprehensive supports to students and trainees as provided, for example, by Urban Circle and Opaskawayak Cree Nation's Trades Training programs.
- Education and training institutions can become more child- and family-friendly by, for example, offering on-site childcare or starting activities each day later in the morning so that parents have time to get their children to day care or school.
- Education and training programs should identify, accommodate and teach to the learning styles of Aboriginal students and trainees by, for example, embedding experiential learning opportunities in courses.

- Education and training programs should provide intergenerational learning opportunities that enable people to ladder through education, training and employment as they are ready.
- Education and training programs should be decentralized, with accredited programs delivered in communities where Aboriginal people live.

**Aboriginal role models and mentors:**

- Post-secondary institutions should engage in more active outreach and recruitment at high-schools and in the communities where Aboriginal people live.
- Aboriginal people who “make it” should share their stories with Aboriginal youth and other community members. For example, post-secondary students and trainees should find or create opportunities to meet and talk with Aboriginal youth.
- Initiatives to develop role models and mentors for Aboriginal people should seek to engage role models for everyone (“not just people in suits and ties”), ranging from children to grandparents.
- Aboriginal leadership and others should formally acknowledge students’ accomplishments.

**Strengthening links between education and training and employment:**

- All training programs should include components that familiarize trainees with corporate culture, employer expectations and what their particular line of work will be like. This will give trainees opportunities to assess whether or not they would actually enjoy the kind of work they are training for.
- Ongoing partnerships between post-secondary training and education providers and employers should be developed and enhanced, with a focus on creating practicum placements and summer and post-graduate employment opportunities for students and trainees.
- Post-secondary institutions, the private sector and business and commerce-related professional associations should develop partnerships with the goal of enhancing Aboriginal people’s participation in business and commerce careers.
- Education and training programs should reflect current industry needs. Private sector and other employers should keep post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal community members apprised of their training and employment needs.
- Industry and the private sector should work with post-secondary institutions to create opportunities for students and trainees to ladder into their careers, through, for example, activities such as apprenticeships, coops, internships and mentoring. Government should support this by offering incentives such as wage subsidies and tax breaks to employers who provide apprenticeship or internships.

## **DISCUSSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

An encouraging finding of this consultation was the concurrence between what Aboriginal post-secondary students and trainees saw as most important to their success and what other participants saw as most important to their success. For students and trainees, financial aid has a direct impact on their success, not simply because they need to cover costs directly related to their participation in post-secondary programs (such as tuition and books), but also because whether or not they receive stable and adequate funding (which covers not only tuition and books, but also provides them with an adequate living allowance and the ability to cover their unique and unusual financial needs) directly affects their day-to-day ability to fully participate in their programs. Stable and adequate funding for students and trainees makes it much easier for them to negotiate many of the other challenges they routinely face, such as finding adequate housing or childcare and other family needs (each of which, in turn, have impacts on their ability to manage their responsibilities as students or trainees) or simply maintaining their motivation and focus in their programs.

For Aboriginal post-secondary students and trainees, addressing other major challenges they must negotiate is very much about relationships: the relationships between students and trainees and the institutions they attend, their relationships to the staff and students at those institutions and their relationships to their family and community members. Within post-secondary institutions, issues relating to cultural safety and affirmation affect students' and trainees' ability to succeed. Students and trainees who feel they are a valued part of the institution they attend and who feel that the institution is capable and ready to meet them where they are (whatever their level of academic or personal preparation) and support them to achieve their academic and personal goals are more likely to succeed. Post-secondary institutions that work to create a welcoming environment for Aboriginal students and trainees, support cultural safety, affirm Aboriginal cultures and provide academic, transition and other meaningful supports contribute to successful outcomes for post-secondary students and trainees. The relationships between students and trainees and their peers and staff members at post-secondary institutions can also be crucial supports. Peer support networks, along with approachable and supportive instructors and other staff members, are an invaluable resource for students when, for example, they are trying to work through problems in their academic work, negotiate culture shock, manage their family and other personal

responsibilities, or secure financial aid. Students and trainees also find important support in their relationships with family and community members. Students appreciate when post-secondary programs, in turn, support these relationships by, for example, providing on-site childcare, by organizing activities that bring together students and trainees, family members and community members, or by connecting students and trainees with cultural resources in the community.

The educators, instructors, support staff members and administrators who participated in this consultation clearly recognize that financial aid, along with corollary issues such as housing and childcare, are crucial issues for Aboriginal students and trainees, as are lack of academic and personal preparation and the culture and practices of post-secondary institutions. Educators, institutions and other stakeholders in the post-secondary system have, to varying extents, developed personal, cultural and structural supports to address the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees. For example, mainstream post-secondary institutions in Southern Manitoba have designed and delivered programs that provide comprehensive supports to Aboriginal students, established Aboriginal student centres, and developed and delivered programs in-community with Aboriginal partners. Supports such as these were acknowledged by many of the students and trainees who participated in this consultation (in, for example, programs at or affiliated with the University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, Brandon University, Red River College, Assiniboine College and the Boys and Girls Club) as invaluable. At the same time, however, to create the culturally safe, welcoming and supportive environment that Aboriginal students at mainstream institutions need means more than setting up “oases” of cultural safety (such as Aboriginal centres or Aboriginal programs) within the institution. Cultural safety for Aboriginal students should become an integral part of the culture of all post-secondary institutions, embedded in the mundane and daily interactions between staff, students and trainees and the routine practices and policies of the institutions.

Mainstream post-secondary institutions work for many – but not all – Aboriginal students and trainees. Many of the post-secondary programs identified in this consultation as sites with best or promising practices (such as Urban Circle Training Centre, the Aboriginal Learning and Literacy Centre, the Aboriginal Community Campus, the Neeginan Institute of Applied Technology and the OCN Trades Training program) are Aboriginal-controlled. Aboriginal students and trainees participating in these programs

do not have to routinely struggle with issues of cultural safety. Each of these programs provides students and trainees with comprehensive and meaningful supports that address their daily needs. The success of these programs points to the value of increased design, ownership and control of educational systems by Aboriginal people, which includes the possibility of establishing a fully-accredited Aboriginal post-secondary institution in Manitoba. As students, trainees and other participants have noted, it is important that programs and institutions that target Aboriginal people provide them with academic and employment-related credentials that are recognized as meaningful by employers, institutions and community members and that generate academic and employment outcomes that are equivalent to those generated by mainstream programs and institutions. Aboriginal students and trainees are calling for greater accountability from Aboriginal leadership with respect to education and training funding. At the same time, many of the First Nation and Metis education counsellors who participated in this consultation recognize that they are not getting the best return on their educational investments and are also looking for ways to be more effective and accountable in these investments.

Government also has a role to play in improving successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees. As the vast majority of consultation participants pointed out, the federal government's current formulae for calculating educational funding for First Nation communities and First Nation students does not provide either communities or individual students with adequate funding to meet their educational needs. While various departments of both the federal and provincial governments are clearly committed to support successful outcomes for First Nation students and trainees, their ability to do so is constrained, to some extent, by issues relating to jurisdictional boundaries and fiscal responsibility. It is particularly encouraging, then, that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Manitoba Advanced Education and Training are collaborating with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to address training and education needs of First Nation peoples. It is also encouraging that various departments of the federal and provincial governments have partnered in this consultation.

The previous section of this report summarized consultation participants' ideas and recommendations about what further actions can be taken to improve post-secondary

outcomes for First Nations and Metis students and trainees in Southern Manitoba.<sup>11</sup> The participants' recommendations are drawn from their own experiences in education and training and offer post-secondary institutions, First Nations, Metis and other leaders, government and other stakeholders practical suggestions and clear direction for actions that they feel will improve post-secondary outcomes for First Nations and Metis students and trainees. In addition to suggestions about how financial aid and other funding can be improved, participants also provided recommendations to address other critical areas of need, such as housing and childcare; the K-12 system; role models and mentoring; program design and delivery; Aboriginal-controlled education and training institutions; enhanced accountability; cultural safety and affirmation; and transition supports.

In addition to the recommendations provided by consultation participants, the consultation team presents the recommendations below. We offer these recommendations with the confident understanding that, to varying extents, post-secondary institutions, First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders, government and other stakeholders are already making progress towards achieving them.

At the same time, the information shared by Aboriginal students and trainees makes it clear that there is still plenty of work to be done. Because the most pressing issues for students and trainees relate to the availability, accessibility and adequacy of financial aid or funding, some of the recommendations below focus on improvements to financial aid and funding. Other recommendations address the need for partnerships and collaboration between education and training stakeholders. As stated earlier, students' and trainees' ability to negotiate many of the challenges they face is very much about relationships. This is also true for institutions, leadership and government. Collaborative and partnering relationships between educational stakeholders can strengthen their ability to recognize and understand the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees and build their capacity to address these needs. With this over-arching goal in mind, the recommendations below were designed to help lay the groundwork for and support the development, maintenance and enhancement of mutually empowering and accountable relationships between students and trainees; post-secondary institutions; First Nations, Metis and Aboriginal communities and leadership; and government.

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to the summary of participants' recommendations referred to here, recommendations and other findings from each participant group's recommendations are presented in more detail in the Appendices attached to this document..

**For post-secondary institutions:**

**Short-term recommendations:**

1. To address issues related to funding for Aboriginal students and trainees, post-secondary institutions should:
  - Acknowledge and understand the practical impacts that inadequate funding has on Aboriginal students' and trainees' ability to succeed.
  - Ensure that prospective students and trainees are provided with or have access to (in a timely manner, i.e., on a schedule that will enable students or trainees to secure adequate funding to cover their education or training costs) comprehensive information that includes:
    - i. An accurate estimate of the real direct costs of their participation in the program (tuition, fees, books, materials and other costs), with a schedule of when these expenses will be incurred;
    - ii. A reasonably accurate estimate of the cost of living (including shelter, food, childcare, transportation and other routine needs) for individual students and their families in the immediate area and larger community in which the post-secondary institution is located;
    - iii. A centralized resource that describes potential sources of financial aid for Aboriginal students and trainees (whether they are First Nations people with status, living on- or off-reserve, First Nations people without status, Metis people or Inuit) and how to apply for them; and
    - iv. A centralized resource that describes community resources that Aboriginal students and trainees may want to draw on, including housing, childcare and other community services.
  - Ensure that personnel in their financial aid or awards office have a good understanding of the unique financial needs of many Aboriginal students and trainees (whether they are First Nations people with status, living on- or off-reserve, First Nations people without status, Metis people or Inuit); are aware of all financial aid opportunities available to Aboriginal students

(and how students or trainees can access this aid); and, where appropriate, are ready to advocate on financial aid-related matters for current and prospective Aboriginal students and trainees.

- Support First Nations students in their relationships with First Nations Education Counselors by sharing or providing relevant information to students and their Education Counselors in a timely manner and providing on-campus space, as appropriate, for meetings between Education Counselors and students.
2. To address issues related to the housing needs of Aboriginal students and trainees, post-secondary institutions should:
    - Develop partnerships with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal organizations and appropriate government departments to explore ways to meet the housing needs of First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees, including the possibility of developing affordable on-site or near-site housing units for these students and trainees.
  3. To address issues related to the childcare needs of Aboriginal students and trainees, post-secondary institutions should:
    - Develop partnerships with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal organizations and appropriate government departments to explore ways to meet the childcare needs of First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees, including the possibility of developing on-site or near-site affordable and accessible childcare for these students and trainees.
  4. To address issues related to the cultural safety of Aboriginal students and trainees, post-secondary institutions should:
    - Acknowledge the impacts of their own institutional culture and make a formal commitment to create a culturally safe and welcoming environment for Aboriginal students and trainees. This commitment should acknowledge the distinct identities, historic experiences and present-day realities of First Nations, Metis, Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples.

- Demonstrate their institutional commitment to cultural safety for Aboriginal students and trainees by actively recruiting First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal community members for membership in the governing body of their institution, with the goal of developing representation of these groups on their governing body that matches their representation in the communities the post-secondary institution serves.
- Explore other ways and areas in which they can work in partnership with First Nations (including First Nations people both with and without status, living both on- and off-reserve), Metis and other Aboriginal community members, political organizations (such as the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Tribal Councils, the Manitoba Metis Federation and MMF locals and the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg), community organizations and education and training institutions.

**Long-term recommendations:**

1. To address issues related to funding for Aboriginal students, post-secondary institutions should:
  - Advocate and lobby for enhanced financial aid for Aboriginal students and trainees to current funding bodies such as various departments of the federal, provincial and other governments and to potential new funding sources, such as industry and professional associations and private foundations or donors.
  - Ensure that, in the case of post-secondary institutions that receive funding specifically to support the participation of Aboriginal students and trainees, ensure that, they are being accountable with this funding, i.e., are an appropriate number of Aboriginal students and trainees participating in their programs and succeeding? Do their programs provide Aboriginal students and trainees with academic and employment-related credentials that are recognized as meaningful by mainstream institutions, employers and community members?
2. To address issues related to the cultural safety of Aboriginal students and trainees, post-secondary institutions should:

- Create and maintain an institutional culture that values Aboriginal people. This includes assessing, on an ongoing basis, the extent to which their institution supports the cultural safety of Aboriginal students and trainees and taking appropriate action to improve and preserve cultural safety and to acknowledge the distinct identities, histories and present day experiences of Aboriginal peoples.
  - On an ongoing basis, actively recruit Aboriginal people to fill positions at all levels and in all departments of the institution.
3. To better meet the post-secondary needs of current and potential Aboriginal students and trainees and Aboriginal communities, post-secondary institutions should:
- Establish guiding principles that affirm the importance of collaborating and partnering with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders in the design and delivery of education and training services to their communities and people.
  - Establish Aboriginal advisory committees, with membership that represents the First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal communities they serve. Institutions should look to these committees for guidance and direction about the post-secondary education and training needs of their communities and community members and how the institutions can design and deliver programs in ways that best meet those needs. The committees can also provide guidance to the institutions in areas (such as research activities) relating to Aboriginal cultures and peoples.
  - Draw on the best and promising practices of programs that generate successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees by acknowledging that most Aboriginal students and trainees are at a different place in their lives than non-Aboriginal students typically are and bring their own distinct experiences, skills and needs to the institution. These programs generally meet Aboriginal students and trainees 'where they are at'; offer them with education and training experiences that are meaningful to them and fit their lives; build upon their skills and strengths; and provide them with meaningful supports to reach their goals.

**For First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders:**

**Short-term recommendations:**

1. To address issues related to funding for First Nations students, First Nations leaders should:
  - Continue to lobby the federal government for adequate funding to support the education needs of their communities and band members (including those who live off-reserve).
  - Evaluate the criteria and guidelines their educational authorities use to award funding and assess whether they are fair, equitable and support successful outcomes for students and their communities.
  - Ensure that the Education Counselors serving their community members have the appropriate training, qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge base to provide effective supports to students. First Nation Education counselors should ensure that prospective and current students receive the career guidance they need to make the right choices about education or training; are properly prepared both academically and personally; and receive adequate funds in a timely manner to cover all costs associated with their participation in their program.
2. To address issues related to funding for Metis students and trainees, Metis leaders should:
  - Provide students and trainees with clear and comprehensive information about the funding it distributes to students and trainees, including the criteria and guidelines used in funding decisions and a description of the education and training funding agreements and arrangements they have in place with any levels of government.
  - Lobby the federal and provincial governments for adequate funding to support the education and training needs of their communities and community members.

**Long-term recommendations:**

1. To address issues relating to funding for all Aboriginal students and trainees, First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders should:

- Work with the federal and provincial governments to clarify jurisdictional and fiscal responsibilities with respect to education and training for Aboriginal people.
2. To better meet the post-secondary needs of current and potential Aboriginal students and trainees and Aboriginal communities, First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders should:
- Working in partnership with the federal and provincial governments, existing post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders in the education and training of Aboriginal peoples, explore ways to increase Aboriginal design, ownership<sup>12</sup> and control of post-secondary education and training, including the possibility of establishing a fully-accredited Aboriginal post-secondary institution in Manitoba that generates academic and employment outcomes for students and trainees that are equivalent to those generated by mainstream programs and institutions.

**For government:**

**Short-term recommendations:**

1. To address issues related to funding for First Nations students, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) should:
- Re-examine the educational funding agreements it has with First Nations to assess whether First Nations are being provided with adequate resources to:
    - i. Meet the educational needs of all band members, including those who live off-reserve.
    - ii. Ensure that band members can access K-12 education that is of equivalent quality to that available at comparable provincial schools and that generates equivalent academic outcomes (in both grade level and skills attained) for students.

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<sup>12</sup> Ownership, in this sense, does not necessarily refer to a legal title to ownership. Rather, it refers to cultural title, that is, that an institution would be rooted in and shaped by an Aboriginal world-view and that this would be reflected in the structures, policies and practices of the institution.

- iii. Provide post-secondary students with financial aid that includes an adequate basic living allowance and covers the real costs that are directly related to their participation in a post-secondary program (tuition, fees, textbooks and supplies), along with associated costs (such as relocation and moving costs, child care and transportation).
  - Where First Nations are not receiving adequate resources, renegotiate funding agreements.
  - Work in partnership with First Nations to develop strategies that will enhance reciprocal accountability for INAC, First Nations, students and post-secondary institutions and ensure that INAC and First Nations get an optimal return on their educational investments.
2. To address issues related to the housing needs of Aboriginal students and trainees, appropriate federal and provincial government departments should:
  - Work in partnership with post-secondary institutions and First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal organizations to explore ways to meet the housing needs of students and trainees, including the possibility of developing affordable on-campus or near-campus housing units.
3. To address issues related to the childcare needs of Aboriginal students and trainees, appropriate federal and provincial government departments should:
  - Work in partnership with post-secondary institutions and First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal organizations to explore ways to meet the childcare needs of students and trainees, including the possibility of developing on-campus or near-campus affordable and accessible child care.

**Long-term recommendations:**

1. To address issues relating to funding for all Aboriginal students and trainees, the federal and provincial governments should:
  - Meet with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders to address and resolve jurisdictional and accompanying fiscal responsibilities with respect to the education and training of Aboriginal people.

- Enact enabling legislation and develop policy that, in the case of the federal government, establishes the education of First Nations people as a priority and that, in the case of the provincial government, establishes post-secondary education and training for Aboriginal people as a priority.
2. To better meet the post-secondary needs of current and potential Aboriginal students and trainees and Aboriginal communities, appropriate departments of the federal and provincial governments should:
- Working in partnership with First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal leaders, existing post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders in the education and training of Aboriginal peoples, explore ways to increase Aboriginal design, ownership<sup>13</sup> and control of post-secondary education and training, including the possibility of establishing a fully-accredited Aboriginal post-secondary institution in Manitoba that generates academic and employment outcomes for students and trainees that are equivalent to those generated by mainstream programs and institutions.
3. To improve accountability for education and training systems, the federal and provincial governments should:
- Support more longitudinal research into what affects or contributes to long-term successful outcomes for Aboriginal people in post-secondary education and training.

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<sup>13</sup> Ownership, in this sense, does not necessarily refer to a legal title to ownership. Rather, it refers to cultural title, that is, that an institution would be rooted in and shaped by an Aboriginal world-view and that this would be reflected in the structures, policies and practices of the institution.

**Consultation on Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and  
Metis Students in Southern Manitoba  
SURVEY FOR STUDENTS AND TRAINEES**

**Appendix I**

**Focus Group Consent Form**

***SURVEY CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE***

**Consultation on Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and Metis Students in Southern Manitoba**  
**SURVEY FOR STUDENTS AND TRAINEES**

This focus group discussion is part of the consultation on *Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and Metis Students in Southern Manitoba*. The consultation is a joint project, with key partners including the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Metis Federation, and the federal and provincial governments. Bear Spirit Consulting has been hired to conduct the consultation. The project is now underway and will be completed in March 2007.

The working group guiding this project wants to learn what is working well for First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members, trainees and students; what challenges, barriers and gaps students and trainees must negotiate to gain access to and succeed in their programs; and what kinds of supports, services, delivery mechanisms and other resources should be developed or enhanced to support their success.

The consultation will involve a broad cross-section of stakeholder groups, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members, students, educators, program administrators and other recipients, developers, deliverers and program managers of post-secondary education and training. Information will be gathered using interviews, focus group discussions and survey questionnaires.

In this focus group, we will ask you to share your personal experiences and knowledge as a First Nations, Metis or Inuit person involved or interested in post-secondary education or training. By participating in this focus group, you can help to improve education and training.

This focus group will last about two hours. We will take notes during the focus group. With your consent, we may also audio-record or photograph the focus group discussion. Any notes or audio-recordings that we make will be held securely by Bear Spirit Consulting. Once the consultation is finished, these records will be destroyed. Photographs taken during the focus group may be included in reports generated from this consultation.

We will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. If you do not want to be identifiable in any reports about this consultation, we will generalize any information that we gather from this focus group, using pseudonyms for names and places. Bear Spirit Consulting will present the findings of this consultation in interim and final reports, which will be submitted to the consultation working group. The report will also include recommendations for short- and long-term actions to improve post-secondary outcomes for First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this focus group will not affect your current or future relations with members of the working group or with the consultation team members, Noreen Demeria, Janet Sarson and Alex Wilson of Bear Spirit Consulting. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the consultation, you can ask questions now. You can also contact Bear Spirit by telephone (Janet Sarson, (204) 794 9649; Noreen Demeria, (204) 479 2333) or email ([bearspiritconsulting@shaw.ca](mailto:bearspiritconsulting@shaw.ca)).

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the information above and give my consent to participate in this study.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audio-recorded during this focus group discussion.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be photographed during this focus group discussion and my photo may be included in reports generated from this consultation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I can be identified in reports on this consultation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**SURVEY CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE**

**Consultation on Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and  
Metis Students in Southern Manitoba  
SURVEY FOR STUDENTS AND TRAINEES**

**Appendix II**

**Survey Questionnaire**

***SURVEY CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE***

**Consultation on Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and Metis Students in Southern Manitoba**  
**SURVEY FOR STUDENTS AND TRAINEES**

This survey is part of a consultation with current, potential and former First Nations, Metis and Inuit students and trainees in southern Manitoba. The consultation is a joint project, with key partners including the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Metis Federation, and the federal and provincial governments. The working group guiding this project wants to find out both what might prevent people from participating in post-secondary education and training programs and what helps them to participate and succeed in these programs and gather recommendations about how education and training can be improved.

This survey gathers information about your experiences in training programs, school, college and university. It includes questions about your cultural identity, personal background and your participation in education and training programs. Your answers to these questions will help us to understand more about what helps trainees and students to succeed. By telling us about the challenges you've faced as a trainee or student and how you dealt with these challenges, you can help to improve post-secondary education and training for you and other trainees and students.

This survey is voluntary. If you are not comfortable answering a question, just leave it blank. You do not need to put your name anywhere on this survey. Bear Spirit Consulting, the company that has been hired to do this consultation, will collect and analyze the surveys and then report their findings to the working group. When we report the findings, we may include comments that you have written on this survey. If we do use your comments, we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality and remove any identifying information by, for example, using pseudonyms or general terms for places and names.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the consultation, you can email Janet Sarson or Noreen Demeria at [bearspiritconsulting@shaw.ca](mailto:bearspiritconsulting@shaw.ca).

**1: What is your cultural identity?**

- Status First Nations                       Inuit
- Non-status First Nations                   Other (Please describe) \_\_\_\_\_
- Metis

**2: What community did you live in before you started your current training or education program? \_\_\_\_\_**

**3: Please tell us about the training or education you're doing right now:**

Name of institution: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Level completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dates of attendance: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
How old are you?     Under 17     17 – 24     25 – 30     Over 30

**4: Please tell us about any other training or education you've done in the past:**

Name of institution: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Program: \_\_\_\_\_ Level completed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dates of attendance: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
How old were you?     Under 17     17 – 24     25 – 30     Over 30

**5: Did your parents take any career training?**

- Yes     No

**6: Did your parents attend college or university?**

- Yes     No

***SURVEY CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE***

**7: Have any of the things listed below ever made it hard for you to succeed as a student or trainee (please check all that apply)?**

- Costs of tuition, fees, books & supplies
- Needed to work
- Cost of living
- Child care
- Housing
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_
- Needed more academic preparation \_\_\_\_\_

**8: What are the two biggest challenges that you've faced as a student or trainee (please list most important first)?**

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**9: What are the two things that have helped you most to deal with the challenges you've faced as a student or trainee (please list most important first)?**

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**10: Are there any supports or resources you wish had been there – but weren't – to help you deal with the challenges you faced as a student or trainee?**

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**11: What do you think government and/or institutions could do to improve post-secondary outcomes for First Nations, Metis & Inuit students in southern Manitoba?**

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**Appendix III**  
**Interview Consent Form**

This interview is part of the consultation on *Improving Post-Secondary Outcomes for First Nations and Metis Students in Southern Manitoba*. The consultation is a joint project, with key partners including the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Metis Federation, and the federal and provincial governments. Bear Spirit Consulting has been hired to conduct the consultation. The project is now underway and will be completed in March 2007.

The working group guiding this project wants to learn what is working well for First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members, trainees and students; what challenges, barriers and gaps students and trainees must negotiate to gain access to and succeed in their programs; and what kinds of supports, services, delivery mechanisms and other resources should be developed or enhanced to support their success.

The consultation will involve a broad cross-section of stakeholder groups, including First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members, students, educators, program administrators and other recipients, developers, deliverers and program managers of post-secondary education and training. Information will be gathered using interviews, focus groups and survey questionnaires.

In this interview, we will ask you to share your personal and professional insights and knowledge about First Nations, Metis and Inuit people and post-secondary education and training programs. By participating in this interview, you can help to improve these programs.

This interview will last about one hour. We will take notes during the interview. With your consent, we may also audio-record the interview. Any notes or audio-recordings that we make will be held securely by Bear Spirit Consulting. Once the consultation is finished, the records will be destroyed.

We will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. If you do not want to be identifiable in any reports about this consultation, we will generalize any information that we gather from this interview, using pseudonyms for names and places. Bear Spirit Consulting will present the findings of this consultation in interim and final reports, which will be submitted to the consultation working group. The report will also include recommendations for short- and long-term actions to improve post-secondary outcomes for First Nations, Metis and Inuit community members.

Your decision whether or not to participate in this interview will not affect your current or future relations with members of the working group or with the consultation team members, Noreen Demeria, Janet Sarson and Alex Wilson. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

If you have any questions or would like to know more about the consultation, you can ask questions now. You can also contact Bear Spirit by telephone (Janet Sarson, (204) 794 9649; Noreen Demeria, (204) 479 2333) or email ([bearspiritconsulting@shaw.ca](mailto:bearspiritconsulting@shaw.ca)).

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the information above and give my consent to participate in this study.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be audio-recorded during this interview.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I can be identified in reports on this consultation.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix IV**

### **Summary and Analysis of Finding from Students and Trainees**

## FINDINGS FROM STUDENTS AND TRAINEES

Focus group discussions were held with students and trainees at twelve sites throughout southern Manitoba, including:

- Ten traditionally aged Aboriginal students (nine of whom identified as First Nation) enrolled in Grades 10 to 12 at Southeast College in Winnipeg;
- Nine Metis students enrolled in high school programs at the Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg;
- Six Aboriginal students (three of whom identified as First Nation) enrolled in mature and academic Grade 12 programs at the Aboriginal Community Campus in Winnipeg;
- Three Aboriginal students (all of whom identified as First Nation and one who also identified as Metis) enrolled in the Transition Year Program at Children of the Earth High School in Winnipeg (a joint program with the University of Manitoba's Aboriginal Focus Programs);
- Four Aboriginal trainees participating in the Youth Recreation Activity Worker Program, a joint initiative of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg and Red River College;
- Six Aboriginal students (three of whom identified as First Nation) at Urban Circle Training Centre in Winnipeg
- Six Aboriginal students and trainees (five of whom identified as First Nation and one as Metis) enrolled in programs at Neeginan Institute in Winnipeg;
- Five Aboriginal students (three of whom identified as Metis and two as First Nation) enrolled in programs at Assiniboine Community College in Brandon;
- Nine Aboriginal students (seven of whom identified as First Nation and one who identified as Metis) enrolled in ACCESS-model programs at Red River College in Winnipeg;
- Ten Aboriginal students (nine of whom identified as First Nation) enrolled in mature Grade 12 and college programs at Yellowquill College in Winnipeg;
- Five Aboriginal students (three of whom identified as First Nation and two as Metis) enrolled in degree programs at the University of Manitoba
- Four First Nation students Brandon University; and
- Five students and graduates affiliated with CAMPUS, a Metis post-secondary students' group.

In addition to these focus groups, a survey was distributed to students at the Manitoba Metis Federation's *Making the Connections* Conference on Post-Secondary Education for Métis, held at the University of Winnipeg, January 11-13, 2007. Twenty-two completed surveys were returned. Surveys were also provided to staff at post-secondary sites for distribution to students who could not participate in focus groups. Ten completed surveys were returned from nine First Nation students and one Metis student at Assiniboine Community College.

This consultation was designed to reach as broad a sample as possible of Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba. It should be noted, however, that the students who collaborated in the consultation do not form either a random or representative sample of all Aboriginal students participating in education and training in Southern Manitoba. The consultation was constrained by several conditions. Focus group discussions could only be held at institutions that responded positively to the invitation to participate in the consultation and that granted or facilitated access to their students. Students and trainees who participated in the focus group discussions were recruited primarily by instructional or support staff at the institutions they attend and so it can reasonably be assumed that the majority of focus group participants were students and trainees who were connected in some way to the staff at their institution.

In both the focus groups and the surveys, students and trainees were invited to identify what has been most important to their success as students or trainees or what has helped them to succeed (to identify what supports and services are having an impact on their success); what were the biggest challenges they've faced as students or trainees (to identify challenges, barriers and gaps in service delivery); and if there were any kinds of supports they wish had been there, but weren't or what they thought could be done to make it easier for them to succeed as students or trainees (to elicit recommendations that might improve post-secondary training and education outcomes for Aboriginal students).

### **Contributions to Students' and Trainees' Success**

Students and trainees recognize the role that their personal supports have had in their success. For many students and trainees, their families have played important roles in encouraging or motivating them to pursue post-secondary education and training. Some had found role models and mentors in parents, siblings or other relatives who had

completed post-secondary education and training and established careers. Several students and trainees who are parents described how their decision to return to education or training had been motivated by their own desire to provide a better future for their children. One student stated practically that you cannot support a family on minimum wage. As a group of Mature 12 students noted, their own success and ambition may motivate their partners, children, other family members and friends to participate in training or education.

The support of family and friends are equally important to students and trainees while they are in their programs. The encouragement, interest, emotional support and, in particular, practical supports (such as child care, housing and financial support) that family and friends provide are crucial supports for many students and trainees. Students and trainees also recognize that their own internal resources, such as self-discipline, focus, motivation and talent, strengthen their success.

Students and trainees have also found important supports in the relationships they have developed with individuals at the institutions they attend. Many of the high school students who participated in this consultation had, with the help of teachers, counselors and other support staff at their schools, already identified career paths, set goals and made plans for post-secondary education and training following their graduation. Connecting with instructors, counselors and staff who seem personally interested in their success and well-being helps students and trainees get and stay motivated, negotiate the challenges they face and believe in their own ability to succeed. Students and trainees described instructors who go out of their way to be accessible, supportive, and helpful and provide positive feedback. As one student stated, the staff in her program “just want everyone to succeed.” Students and trainees offered stories that demonstrated staff members’ level of commitment to their individual success, in which staff reached out to them when they were struggling, made themselves available to them after hours or gave them room and support to recover when they faltered. As one Transition Year student stated, “Even if you mess up, they don’t kick you out – they find out what’s going on with you.” Students and trainees at Neeginan Institute identified the assistance they had received from staff to find and secure funding as a crucial support. For students who could not secure funding from outside sources, Neeginan had “covered” their tuition and/or other costs. Students and trainees also identified the importance of being able to connect with Aboriginal instructors and other staff at their

institution. For some of the Metis students who completed surveys at the CAMPUS event, developing personal relationships with Metis professors at their post-secondary institution had been particularly valuable.

Students and trainees draw a lot of strength from the peer support networks they develop on campus. Many of them particularly appreciated being able to connect with other Aboriginal students and trainees, people who “come from the same place I do.” Several students and trainees in programs and institutions that target or specifically serve Aboriginal people described the feeling of belonging, friendliness or family that they had found there. Students singled out on-campus services and activities that encourage and enhance the development of peer support networks, including those available through Aboriginal student centres at mainstream post-secondary institutions. For example, University of Manitoba students valued support they had received from on-site Elders and counselors at the Aboriginal Student Centre, as well as information the Centre had provided about funding.

Many of the students and trainees who collaborated in this consultation are part of programs that provide comprehensive supports. For example, First Nation and Metis students in the Mature Grade 12 program at the Aboriginal Community Campus described the broad range of supports provided by their program as central to their success. Their instructors offer them both academic and personal support. In addition to their academic work, their classes help them to develop practical skills in areas such as internet research and resume writing. Students take two full courses in each eight-week period, with study time built into their daily schedule. They felt that this helped them both to focus on their academic work and to manage their family and other personal responsibilities. Other supports include tutoring (available each day, with no limit on how much a student uses the service), “power-up classes” (a study time scheduled after school once a week, where food, child care and activities for children are provided so that parents can study) and courses to upgrade students’ employment and practical skills (such as WHIMS training or computer tutorials). The school organizes off-campus activities (including volunteerism and social activities) that give students an opportunity to get involved with the larger community. Students also valued the very practical supports available to them through their program, such as on-campus child care, bus tickets, food donations, a clothes closet and assistance to purchase school supplies.

Urban Circle Training Centre offers students academic upgrading and pre-employment training in a culturally appropriate context. The Centre's integration and affirmation of traditional culture and spirituality into its programming are invaluable to many Urban Circle students. Students described opening each day with a smudge ceremony and prayer, holding weekly sharing circles, the cultural and spiritual supports and teachings Elders have offered them, the guidance they have found in the Seven Teachings and the way that ceremonies have strengthened the bonds between them. As one student commented, "This school feels like another home. It has opened my eyes to culture." The relationships that Urban Circle students have developed on-campus are extremely important to them. Participants cited the friendships they had made and their daily interaction with staff and students ("not just in our own class, but throughout the whole Centre", stated one student) as supports that are helping them to succeed, both academically and personally. One student referred to her struggle to juggle her many different responsibilities (school, home, her relationship with her partner and family tragedies), noting that the support she has received at school has helped her to resolve these competing responsibilities. Other students described how staff members had given them support and assistance to resolve problems, ranging from finding employment through applying for funding to "bring[ing] family on board." Staff members are valuable mentors for students: "I look at staff here and wonder where they came from. They must have had their own struggles but they are succeeding!"

Comprehensive supports are also available to students in ACCESS model programs. An engineering student in the ENGAP program at the University of Manitoba described supports available to the approximately fifty students in the program. Students can access a four-person staff team (the ENGAP director, counselor, academic advisor and receptionist, identified as a good information source), capable of assisting them with a broad range of needs. Students' first semester in the program is reserved for upgrading their skills in preparation for the University-level courses they begin in the second semester. For classes outside the Engineering faculty, such as Calculus, ACCESS staff reserve registration blocks, so that students can take these classes with a cohort group. Each student can access up to three hours of tutoring each week.

The ACCESS Southern Nursing Program at Red River College offers students similar resources. The program is structured to ladder students into the College's Joint Baccalaureate Nursing Program. Students described their instructors and other staff

attached to the program as “personally supportive”, working closely with them to develop the skills they need, regardless of the skill level they start at. Peer support networks, the students noted, develop naturally as part of the culture of the program. Students participate in a professional development course, which, among other things, helps them to integrate traditional teachings from their Aboriginal cultures into their professional practice.

Many other students and trainees participate in programs that offer services and supports designed to meet their anticipated needs. Aboriginal high school students at the Louis Riel Institute appreciated the opportunity to work in small groups at their own pace. Students in the University of Manitoba’s Aboriginal Focus Programs Transition Year program at Children of the Earth High School (COTE) start their academic year at COTE and take courses at the university over the summer. The students valued the personal support they found in the program. Teaching staff are accessible and take a personal interest in the students and the school offers a “supportive family environment”. One student cited an instance in which, after her own housing fell through, she was able to temporarily stay with a COTE staff member. COTE staff have helped students identify and apply for funding and, when needed, advocated on their behalf.

Students at Yellowquill College described their instructors as people who “make you feel like you really belong there.” Like other students at smaller institutions, the Yellowquill students valued their personal relationship with staff at the College, noting that they often reach out to students who are struggling. Yellowquill students can also access cultural and spiritual supports and activities through the College, including Elders and traditional outings. Trainees in the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg’s Youth Recreation Activity Worker Program felt that the program’s life skills component had helped them to better understand who their supports were, how to negotiate conflict and how to have healthy relationships. The program’s relatively small size and its structure have helped them to develop strong and supportive relationships with their peers and staff. In addition to coursework accredited through Red River College and practicums at sites throughout Winnipeg, program trainees can access driver’s education, CPR/First Aid and non-violent crisis intervention training, each of which enhance their employability.

Many students and trainees identified financial supports as crucial to their success. Several Metis students referred to the sponsorship, scholarships and bursaries they had received from the MMF. One student’s comments are a reminder that the impacts of

financial support go beyond financial relief: “The [Manitoba Metis Federation] helped me financially at a very critical crossroads. I was about to stop school after doing it for two years on my own, but their sponsorship helped me financially (tuition and books) and their belief in me by their actions gave me the push I needed to continue to believe I could do this.” Several First Nation students cited funding from their First Nation as an important support and a few indicated that their Education Counselor or other band representatives actively supported them by checking in with them and encouraging them. One student pointed out that at the First Nation sub-offices in the city, students can access counselors, computer labs and social activities. Some students have also found supports in the larger Aboriginal community of Winnipeg. As one student noted, access to a friendly and accepting community is important, particularly when people are separated from their family.

### **Challenges Faced by Students and Trainees**

**Funding.** In the focus group discussions held during this consultation, the most frequent response to the question, “What has been the biggest challenge you’ve faced as a student or trainee?” was “Funding.” Although Aboriginal students and trainees may be able to access financial support through a number of options (including funding dispersed to First Nations students who are recognized as Status Indians through the federal government’s Post-Secondary Student Support Program; funding dispersed to Metis students and trainees through the Manitoba Metis Federation; as well as Employment and Income Assistance or Employment Insurance programs, Canada Student Loans, and scholarship and bursary programs), the vast majority of students and trainees who participated in this consultation indicated that whatever financial aid they are receiving does not adequately support their needs.

Inadequate financial aid contributes to additional stress in other areas of students’ and trainees’ lives. Many students and trainees revealed that it is difficult for them to meet even their most basic needs, including food, adequate housing and childcare. One Metis student commented that their biggest challenge is that they have no money for housing, adding, “I only get money for food, nothing else.” Another student (a parent who relies on a food bank) related that financial stress has made it difficult to focus on academic work and generated “negative self esteem, loss of motivation, dignity – it makes you feel like you can’t provide adequately for your own and your family’s needs.”

Another university student prefaced comments about funding with the statement, "It's a struggle for me to get here every single day."

The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP, delivered by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) provides **financial assistance to First Nation and Inuit students** who are pursuing post-secondary education. To be eligible for this financial aid, a student must be Status or Registered Indian or recognized Inuit. The majority of PSSSP funding is disbursed through First Nations, who may in turn establish additional criteria. The financial assistance available through PSSSP includes funds for tuition fees and books, as well as travel and living expenses.

PSSSP funding, when adjusted for inflation and population growth, has not increased since the mid-1990s. Students reported that the living allowances their First Nations provide them with through PSSSP are not enough to cover their most basic needs. One student reported that "all of the money I get goes to rent and bills, [with] nothing left over." Another student with a family of four receives less than \$550 each month from their band. This student's rent alone is more than this and so, in addition to attending college as a full-time student, the student also works full-time. The student observed that, "[between] study, school, work, parenting, there is not enough time." Another full-time student who is a single parent of six children receives slightly over \$550 each month from their band. This student pays a subsidized rent of \$150 and \$100 for childcare each month, which leaves the large family with approximately \$300 each month for all other living expenses. As another student bluntly stated, "[We] can't make it on that, even when we apply for other awards or benefits."

Students also reported that their PSSSP funding does not provide them with enough money for extra or unusual costs associated with their education. Examples of these include relocation and moving costs, damage deposits, the cost of setting up a household, educational supplies and materials and costs to return home for family matters (or, in some cases, to pick up their living allowance cheques). For students who have moved from their home community to attend school, this may mean that a substantial proportion of the financial resources that are expected to sustain them through their academic year is, in fact, used up front, as they make their transition to the city.

In addition to their overarching concern about the (in)adequacy of PSSSP financial aid, students also raised questions about how post-secondary funding is being distributed by

First Nations. Several students had been denied PSSSP financial aid (either in their current programs or in the past), which they understood had happened for reasons such as that their band had run out of money, that they “had too many kids,” or that they lived off-reserve. Some students who are recognized as Status Indian and had been living off-reserve related that, although they were now receiving funding from their band, it had been difficult to secure: “[We’re] last in line, leftovers, scraps... People drop out and then it’s like, ‘Oh, now we have funding for you.’” Other students related stories of initially being turned down for PSSSP funding and then later being informed that they would receive funding. For example, one student had completed upgrading with no band sponsorship, but had been given a verbal agreement that, once upgrading was completed, the student would be eligible for sponsorship in a post-secondary program. With this understanding, the student enrolled in a post-secondary program, contacted the band about funding and was informed that no financial aid would be provided. The student reported that they finally did receive sponsorship after a family member (who, the student noted, was related to a band council member) intervened on the student’s behalf.

Many students’ comments (including several of the comments above) suggest that they feel that decisions about who does or does not receive PSSSP either do not make sense or are not entirely fair. One made the observation that “Some people get funding over and over, while others get none.” Another student reported that, as a parent with shared legal custody, they do not receive any additional aid for their dependent children. A student who had been denied funding noted that another band member had received funding to participate in the same program and then “disappeared after the first few days.” “The fair thing,” the student added, “would have been for the funding to be handed over to me – but it wasn’t.” Another student reported that their First Nation receives funding for more than 25 post-secondary students and, in spite of the fact that (according to this student) no band member is actually participating in a post-secondary program, the funding has been used up. Some students’ dissatisfaction with the distribution of PSSSP financial aid is directed at First Nations’ education administrators or counsellors. Students participating in one focus group developed the following statement: “The education administrators/counsellors in some First Nations do not have the education, experience, vocabulary or administrative skills to understand, meet or manage our needs as post-secondary students.”

**Metis students** may be able to access **financial aid** through the Manitoba Metis Federation's (MMF) Louis Riel Bursaries and Scholarships. Louis Riel Bursaries, which are awarded primarily on the basis of financial need, are available to students at the University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, Brandon University and College Universitaire de St. Boniface. Louis Riel Scholarships, which are awarded to students primarily on the basis of academic merit, are available to students at Brandon University and College Universitaire de St. Boniface. To successfully apply for either of these awards, students must be able to demonstrate that they are either currently members of or eligible for membership in the MMF.

Many of the Metis students who participated in this consultation expressed frustration with the financial aid options available to them. The MMF currently provides up to two years of funding for students in college or diploma programs and only one year of funding to most university students (typically awarded in the last year of a student's program), so many Metis students must rely on Canada Student Loans or other sources. Many Metis students are unsure of what criteria and eligibility policies are in place to award MMF funding. Students' frustration with their limited financial options occasionally emerged in criticisms of the MMF, with statements such as "The MMF only funds the last year because they want to take credit for the whole thing, makes them look good," or "It's not what you know – it's who you know." Some students also alleged that people are joining the MMF for no reason other than to access funding: "Their attitude is what the MMF can do for them, not what they can do for the MMF."

It must be noted that, for many people, the financial assistance available to Metis students and trainees is linked to issues of rights and identity for Metis people. Many of the Metis students who participated in this consultation believe that, as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, Metis people should be able to access the same level of financial assistance as First Nation people currently can access. These issues, which are both profoundly political and profoundly personal, are unlikely to be resolved quickly or easily.

Some of the trainees and mature Grade 12 students who participated in this consultation receive financial assistance from **Employment and Income Assistance (EIA)**. These participants observed that it is extremely difficult to receive support through this program, unless you are a parent with dependent children. Some indicated that they felt that their EIA worker treated them disrespectfully. Students reported that EIA does not provide

extra money for transportation and will only provide extra money for childcare if it is with a licensed provider. One student related that because they could not find licensed care close to home and because they could not afford to transport their child out of the neighbourhood, they had to settle for unlicensed childcare, which they could not get reimbursed for through EIA.

A few of the students and trainees who participated in this consultation seem to have fallen between the cracks of the financial aid system and are participating in programs with no financial assistance to cover their living costs. For example, one student attempted to secure financial assistance through their First Nation, Manitoba's Employment Training Services and **Employment Insurance** and was denied by all. Fortunately, the post-secondary institution the student attends has covered tuition costs, along with some costs incurred for materials and transportation. Through the course of the program, the student has been "couch-surfing", staying with various family members and friends, and borrowing money to cover other basic needs.

**Inadequate housing.** Many students and trainees identified lack of safe, affordable and comfortable housing as a significant barrier. As one participant observed, many students and trainees are "stuck in low-income housing in a crappy part of town where you don't want to raise your kids." To get affordable housing, students must often live in neighbourhoods that are not geographically convenient. For example, one full-time student reported that they could not find adequate housing in Winnipeg and so had moved to Selkirk. Students' and trainees' struggles around housing are clearly linked to funding issues. As noted above, many students and trainees rely on financial aid that leaves them with very little money for housing costs. Participants also noted that most forms of financial aid do not provide adequate extra money for housing-related costs like damage deposits, relocation and moving costs or household set-up costs.

**Childcare and other family needs.** A significant proportion of the post-secondary students and trainees who collaborated in this consultation are parents. As one parent observed, to succeed as a student, they need to be able to balance their roles, responsibilities and schedules as students with those of being parents and family members. Students and trainees observed that it is often a struggle for them to get their children ready in the morning, transport them to childcare or get them off to school and then make it to their own post-secondary programs on time. As one student noted, instructors may be understanding, but "lateness and absences add up" and can set

students or trainees behind in their programs. Students and trainees related that they have found it very difficult to access quality, licensed, culturally safe childcare, particularly for infants (children under the age of two). Many of those who attend post-secondary institutions with on-site childcare have had little luck in accessing that service because, as participants reported, there is usually a long waiting list. One student who will graduate this year reported that they have been on the waiting list of the on-campus childcare centre for two years without even receiving a phone call from the centre. Many students and trainees have settled for unlicensed childcare in private homes or rely on friends and family to care for their children. As noted earlier, students' and trainees' ability to access quality childcare is linked to their financial aid. As several observed, under most financial aid arrangements, students can receive a subsidy or be reimbursed only for licensed childcare.

**Cultural safety and cultural affirmation.** As several participants noted, post-secondary institutions and programs may feel unsafe, hostile, isolating and intimidating for many Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students must often contend with individual and systemic racism (such as other students' and staff members' negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people) and, at the same time, negotiate the impacts of their own historic experiences as Aboriginal people and communities, which includes the intergenerational effects of the Residential School experience and the Sixties Scoop.

Metis students noted that their own distinct historic and cultural identity is often not acknowledged or overshadowed by those of First Nation peoples. While services and supports that designed for Aboriginal students in general may help to create cultural safety for Metis students, Metis students and trainees also reported that their identity as Aboriginal people is sometimes challenged by other Aboriginal people. For example, one Metis student stated that they feel unwelcome and like an "outcast" at the Aboriginal students' centre on their campus.

Students and trainees also pointed out that, while the mainstream media frequently reports negative stories about Aboriginal people, there is very little or no effort to present Aboriginal people positively. Students and trainees advised that Aboriginal people need more exposure to other Aboriginal people (and, one noted, men in particular) who are leading healthy lives, who are successfully employed and/or moving forward on their chosen career path. These positive messages give Aboriginal people hope and

inspiration. As one trainee commented, “There are a lot of good brains out there – we just need to change the way people, [both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal], think.”

Students and trainees appreciate the enhanced cultural safety and affirmation they can access at Aboriginal-controlled post-secondary programs and institutions or at programs that target Aboriginal students and trainees. Cultural safety and affirmation are very important to most students and trainees who participated in this consultation. However, as some noted, it is also important that students and trainees participate in programs that provide them with academic and employment-related credentials that are recognized as meaningful by mainstream employers, institutions and community members. These comments underscore the importance of ensuring that education and training programs and institutions that are controlled by and/or designed for Aboriginal people generate academic and employment outcomes that are equivalent to those generated by mainstream programs and institutions.

It should also be noted that, while not all students and trainees identified or spoke at length about a lack of cultural safety as something they currently experienced as a significant barrier or challenge to their success (which may be, in large part, because many of the students and trainees are in programs or attending institutions that draw on and affirm Aboriginal students’ and trainees’ cultural identity), when participants were later asked what might enhance post-secondary outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees, virtually all groups presented recommendations for action to support and enhance the cultural safety and affirm the cultural identity of Aboriginal people.

**Lateral oppression and racism.** Students and trainees acknowledged that they must sometimes contend with lateral oppression and racism within Aboriginal communities. One student noted that “Once you get an education, you’re not an Indian any more. You’re too good for the reserve” and another spoke of being called an “apple”. As one student observed, like “crabs in a bucket”, community members sometimes resist change, adding that it can be hard for Aboriginal people to resist, break down or get beyond the stereotypes and racism that are instilled by mainstream culture. As discussed earlier, the personal support of family, friends and community members can make a crucial contribution to students’ and trainees’ success. When students and trainees cannot fully access or rely on these personal supports, the supports and resources they can access through their post-secondary programs become even more important to their success.

**Inadequate preparation for post-secondary education and training.** Some of the students and trainees reported that when they began their post-secondary programs, they discovered that they were not adequately prepared. For example, some realized that their skill levels did not match their grade level and that they needed to take upgrading or access tutoring supports. Others realized that they had not completed all the high school courses they needed for their post-secondary program. Others recognized that they had not developed all the life skills they needed to support their participation in post-secondary education or training. Students and trainees called for enhanced access to career counseling for high school students, to help them to identify what they want to do and how they can do it.

## **Improving Supports to Aboriginal Students**

The final questions posed to students and trainees in the focus group discussions were designed to elicit their ideas and practical recommendations about what further actions could be taken to support successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba. Their ideas and recommendations are summarized below:

### **Student Funding:**

- Education and training, participants observed, are an investment in our communities' future and should be accessible to all Aboriginal people, regardless of their cultural identity (First Nation, Metis or Inuit), whether or not they are recognized as Status and whether they live on or off reserve.
- Financial aid should adequately cover the real costs that students and trainees incur while participating in post-secondary programs. Living allowances should be adjusted, as appropriate, to reflect the current cost of living. Students and trainees should be provided with adequate financial aid to cover routine and predictable expenses (such as tuition, books and supplies, shelter, food, childcare and transportation), as well as incidental expenses (such as relocation and moving, household set-up and travel).
- Financial aid should support lifelong learning so that, for example, students participating in transition year programs can access funding or mature students can access financial support that meets their real life needs.

- Aboriginal students need more information about what financial aid may be available to them and how they can apply for it.
- Students and trainees should be informed about funding decisions and receive the funding awarded to them in a timely manner.

**Improvements to financial assistance for First Nations students:**

- All First Nation band members should be able to access financial assistance to participate in education and training programs, regardless of whether they live on-reserve or off.
- First Nation education authorities should be more transparent and accountable with respect to:
  - How funding is allocated to students, including who receives funding and whether or not criteria and guidelines for awarding funding are fair and equitable (e.g., are students declined funding because of age, gender, disabilities or the number of dependant children they have?).
  - Whether or not education money is being spent well, i.e., is the First Nation getting a 'good return' on its educational investments?
- First Nation education counsellors should provide active and ongoing support to students and trainees from their communities. Education counsellors should have a clear understanding of what students' and trainees' experiences in post-secondary programs are like, a thorough understanding of the policies and procedures that guide and direct their work, and the experience and skills to handle the administrative, managerial and counseling responsibilities attached to their positions. Education counsellors should build on the best practices of communities like Norway House, whose education counsellors have ongoing contact with students in Winnipeg and Brandon and offer students practical supports, counseling and advice.

**Improvements to financial assistance for Metis students:**

- Metis people should be recognized as a distinct founding nation of this country, with historic rights.
- The provincial and federal governments, along with the MMF, should invest more money in education for Metis people.

- Metis university students should be able to access financial support (through the MMF) throughout the course of their post-secondary program.
- The MMF should be more transparent in its interactions with students, i.e., provide students with “straight information” about funding.
- Post-secondary institutions that receive funding from the MMF should be more accountable to the Metis community about how that funding is used.
- Metis students who receive funding from the MMF should demonstrate reciprocal accountability by fully participating in their programs and contributing to the larger Metis community through volunteerism.

**Improvements to financial support provided through Employment & Income Assistance (EIA) and Employment Insurance (EI)**

- The financial support provided by EIA to trainees and students should meet the real costs of their needs, including shelter, food, transportation, childcare and materials and supplies.
- EIA caseworkers should, as needed, be provided with training to ensure that they are respectful in their interactions with students, trainees and other service users.
- EI should provide more support to trainees and students, with the understanding that post-secondary training and education increase people’s employability.

**Housing needs:**

- Aboriginal students need safe, comfortable and affordable housing.
- Housing complexes should be developed specifically for Aboriginal students. These complexes should include long-term housing for both singles and families, as well as short-term emergency housing. The complexes should be designed to support all aspects of students’ health and wellness, with on-site childcare and common space for social and recreational activities.
- Consideration should also be given to developing housing specifically for Metis students.
- Manitoba Housing, when allocating subsidized housing units, should give priority to students and trainees.

**Improved access to childcare for students:**

- Aboriginal students need access to quality, culturally safe care for their children.
- Childcare centres should be developed on-campus or near-campus for students engaged in both post-secondary programs and programs that prepare students for post-secondary training and education, such as transition year programs and mature Grade 12 programs. These centres should offer both standard childcare services and drop-in services, which parents can access at any time.

**Cultural safety and affirmation:**

- Education and training institutions should provide a culturally safe and welcoming environment to Aboriginal students.
- Instructors and other staff members at education and training institutions should participate, as appropriate, in cultural awareness training.
- Education and training institutions should support the development of personal relationships between students and instructors by improving student/ instructor ratios and recruiting Aboriginal faculty and other staff members.
- Aboriginal knowledge, meaning systems and ways of teaching and learning should be incorporated into curriculum and pedagogy.
- Aboriginal students and trainees (within both the K-12 and post-secondary systems) should have access to culturally appropriate supports that will assist them to address the impacts and effects of intergenerational trauma and ongoing exposure to discrimination and racism. This includes access to Aboriginal Elders and counselors, who can draw upon their own life experiences to support Aboriginal students.
- Mainstream post-secondary institutions should include Aboriginal students' centres that have adequate resources to provide Aboriginal students with a place to study and develop peer support networks, and culturally appropriate student supports (such as on-site Elders, ceremonial and cultural activities, counseling supports and resource libraries). Existing centres that currently do not have the capacity to offer this range of supports should be provided, as appropriate, with the resources to deliver them.

**Recognition of the distinct history and identity of Metis people:**

- Metis people's unique history and identity as one of the founding Aboriginal peoples of Canada should be acknowledged and affirmed throughout the design and delivery of education and training.
- Post-secondary institutions should establish a greater "presence" for Metis people by actively recruiting Metis staff as instructors and in other positions where they will provide support to Aboriginal students.
- Metis-related content should be included in educational curriculum and universities and colleges should explore the possibilities of establishing a Department of Metis Studies.
- The development of Metis-specific resources for students and trainees, such as the CAMPUS group, should be supported by education stakeholders.

**Aboriginal-controlled education and training institutions:**

- Every Aboriginal person should have the opportunity to participate in education and training programs at institutions that:
  1. Belong to and/or are controlled by Aboriginal people; *and*
  2. Provide education and training programs that are accredited and certified (as appropriate), and recognized as valid by other education and training programs, professional and trade associations and potential employers.
- Existing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions should be provided with the financial support and other resources they need to become fully accredited institutions.
- First Nations, the MMF, the federal and provincial governments and other stakeholders in the education and training of Aboriginal peoples should explore the possibility of establishing new fully-accredited Aboriginal post-secondary institutions within Manitoba.

**Greater flexibility in the ways that training and education are delivered:**

- Education and training programs should offer options that are structured to fit the real-life needs of Aboriginal students and trainees. In particular, programs should be more child- and family-friendly by, for example, starting activities each day later in the morning so that parents have time to get their children to day care or school.

- Education and training programs should be decentralized, with accredited programs delivered in communities where Aboriginal people live.
- Education and training programs should acknowledge and teach to different learning styles.

**Aboriginal role models and mentors:**

- Aboriginal people who “make it” should share their stories with Aboriginal youth and other community members. For example, post-secondary students and trainees should find or create opportunities to meet and talk with Aboriginal youth.
- Initiatives to develop role models and mentors for Aboriginal people should seek to engage role models for all community (“not just people in suits and ties”), from children to grandparents.
- Post-secondary institutions should engage in more active outreach and recruitment at high-schools and in the communities where Aboriginal people live.
- Aboriginal leadership and others should formally acknowledge students’ accomplishments.

**Transition supports:**

- To address the culture shock that many new Aboriginal students and trainees experience, post-secondary institutions and other stakeholders should provide Aboriginal students and trainees with positive social opportunities that promote their overall well-being.
- Regardless of the skills they arrive with, students should be able to access upgrading and other academic supports (such as tutoring, writing workshops and literacy skills development) that they need to succeed in their post-secondary programs.
- Students and trainees should also have access to opportunities to develop practical skills (including life skills such as budgeting and stress management) that will help them to succeed in their programs.
- A resource centre or hub should be developed for current and prospective Aboriginal students, where they can access centralized education- and training-related resources, support and information, including information for newcomers to the community.

**Strengthening links between education and training and employment:**

- Ongoing partnerships between post-secondary training and education providers and employers should be developed and enhanced, with a focus on creating practicum and summer and post-graduate employment opportunities for students and trainees.

## **Appendix V**

### **Summary and Analysis of Finding from Staff Affiliated with Education and Training Programs**

## **FINDINGS FROM STAFF AFFILIATED WITH EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAMS**

Group and individual interviews were held with people who work directly with students, with trainees or with individuals who are seeking or may need education and training to enhance their employability. These interviewees are affiliated with a broad range of education, training and employment institutions, programs and services, including:

- Three representatives of Southeast College in Winnipeg;
- Two representatives of the Manitoba Indian Education Association's Student Services Office, which provides support services to high school and post-secondary First Nation students in the Winnipeg area;
- A representative of the P.A.T.H. Centre, a Winnipeg community-based organization that helps individuals to access community resources and move towards employment;
- Four representatives of Mother of Red Nations, a Winnipeg community-based organization that offers training and other employment supports through the federal government's Aboriginal Human Resource Development Program;
- A representative of Ka Ni Kanichihk, a Winnipeg community-based organization that offers training programs in partnership with the Aboriginal Peoples College and Red River College;
- A representative of The Youth Recreation Activity Worker Program, a joint initiative of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg and Red River College;
- Two representatives of the Aboriginal People's College and the Neeginan Institute of Applied Technology in Winnipeg;
- A representative of the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development in Winnipeg;
- A representative of the Aboriginal Literacy Foundation in Winnipeg;
- A representative of the National Indigenous Literacy Association in Winnipeg;
- Seven representatives of the Urban Circle Training Centre in Winnipeg;
- Four representatives of Yellowquill College in Winnipeg;
- Seven representatives of Assiniboine Community College in Brandon;
- Four representatives of Red River College in Winnipeg;
- Two representatives of the University of Manitoba's Aboriginal Focus Program;

- Four representatives of the University of Manitoba's ACCESS Programs;
- Two representatives of the University of Manitoba's Aboriginal Student Centre;
- Three representatives of the University of Winnipeg's Aboriginal Student Services Centre;
- A representative of the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface in Winnipeg
- Two representatives of Brandon University; and
- Two representatives of University College of the North, in The Pas, Manitoba

In addition to these focus groups, a survey questionnaire was distributed to participants at the Aboriginal Circle of Educators' (ACE) conference, held in Winnipeg on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007. ACE is a network of Aboriginal educators, many of whom work in Winnipeg's public school system. Eleven completed surveys were returned.

In these interviews and survey questionnaires, participants were asked what services and supports are most helpful to Aboriginal students and trainees; what are the biggest challenges students or trainees face; whether their organization had any partnerships or working relationships that contribute to successful outcomes for students or trainees; and what would make it easier for students or trainees to succeed.

### **Contributions to Students' and Trainees' Success**

The educators, trainers, support staff members and administrators working with current and prospective students and trainees identified supports and services in the following areas as most important to the success of Aboriginal students and trainees:

- **Students' and trainees' inner resources.** Students and trainees bring the gifts of their own knowledge, skills and experience to their programs. Students' and trainees' motivation and commitment to their educational and training goals are crucial to their own success. This may be instilled by family, but many Aboriginal students and trainees are the first in their family to pursue post-secondary education or training. These students and trainees have often developed their motivation and commitment through supportive relationships with teachers, mentors and other key players who have encouraged them to believe in their own ability to succeed.
- **Working with Aboriginal youth to create a vision and plan for their future.** As noted above, students' and trainees' motivation and commitment to their goals are an important part of their ability to succeed. As several interviewees pointed out, it is important to provide our future post-secondary students and trainees with

experiences that build their self-esteem and confidence and help them to see what they can contribute to our shared future. Acknowledging, honouring and rewarding students' accomplishments help to make learning a positive experience. For many students sponsored by First Nations, ongoing contact with their First Nations' education counselor makes them feel honoured and that their education is valuable to their community. Providing Aboriginal youth (and Aboriginal people more generally) with Aboriginal role models and mentors and exposure to the range of career options available to them (through activities like career fairs) can get them to start thinking about post-secondary education and training. It is equally important that potential students and trainees are provided with knowledge, experiences and guidance that will enable them to realistically assess whether or not a given career is right for them. This includes information about education and training opportunities, available financial support and other resources and structural supports available to Aboriginal people participating in education and training programs. As one interviewee pointed out, it is also important that post-secondary programs that target Aboriginal trainees and students lead to meaningful employment in well-paying jobs.

- **Adequate preparation for post-secondary programs.** Participants reported that Aboriginal students who are adequately prepared for post-secondary programs, i.e., who have completed the appropriate high school or other preparatory coursework for their chosen program and have developed academic and practical skills (including life skills) and habits (such as attendance and organization), are more likely to succeed in their programs.
- **Family and community supports.** Support and encouragement from parents and other family members has a significant impact on students' and trainees' success. As noted above, family members are often important mentors. Some education and training institutions acknowledge the importance of family (including extended family) in students' and trainees' lives and actively support this valuable relationship by, for example, providing students and trainees with on-site childcare, connecting with families during intake, providing students and trainees with access to long-distance telephone lines and messaging services or inviting students' or trainees' families to join on-campus social events.
- **Feeling welcome within an education or training institution.** It is important that education and training institutions make Aboriginal students feel welcome and that

they belong. This is, in part, about the physical environment, but (and perhaps more importantly) it is also about the culture of the institution, i.e., whether or not staff and other students and trainees behave in ways that are welcoming, whether or not students and trainees feel they can build relationships with staff and peers at the institutions, and whether or not students and trainees feel culturally safe. Interviewees observed that some Aboriginal students and trainees prefer to attend smaller institutions and smaller classes, where they can connect easily with other students, instructors and other staff members. As one educator pointed out, “Students need opportunities to create relationships with each other, with staff and with the institution.”

- **Supporting cultural safety and affirming Aboriginal cultures.** As many interviewees indicated, when Aboriginal students and trainees feel culturally safe, they are more likely to succeed academically and personally. Curriculum and pedagogy that “validate our way of life and our way of learning” and that affirm Aboriginal history, cultures, beliefs and teachings can empower students and trainees. For example, course materials written and produced by Aboriginal people can make it easier for Aboriginal students to connect with the materials and bring their own experiences into the process of learning. Aboriginal students and trainees find support in instructors and other staff members who are knowledgeable about Aboriginal cultures and cultural differences. As one educator observed, an instructor “may not even be aware themselves that they have this knowledge, but students will recognize it.” While interviewees recognized that non-Aboriginal people may have this awareness, they also noted that it is important that education and training institutions recruit Aboriginal people as instructors and in other staff positions. Offering Aboriginal students and trainees opportunities to participate in cultural activities, such as feasts, cultural days, drum groups and pow wows, affirms and celebrates their cultural identity. As one educator observed, in programs designed specifically for and by Aboriginal people, students and trainees are more likely to feel that others in their program share and understand their life experiences and that the institution itself will have a good grasp of their needs and be ready to meet them.
- **Peer support networks.** Interviewees felt that the support of on-campus peers helps students and trainees to succeed. Peer networks give students and trainees a sense of community and enable them to rely on each other for personal and

academic support. Education and training institutions may facilitate the development of peer support networks by organizing group social activities and providing students and trainees with places such as Aboriginal student centres or lounges, where they can meet, relax, socialize and help each other out.

- **Academic supports.** Good instructors help students and trainees to succeed. Good instruction, participants noted, includes acknowledging students' or trainees' different learning styles and then teaching to those styles. Effective education and training programs often link in-class learning with experiential learning, provided, for example, through practicum components. It is also important that institutions be ready to "meet students where they are" and work with them to achieve their goals. Access to supports that address both the content and process of learning (such as tutoring, writing skills, math skills and learning skills supports) help students and trainees to succeed. This is especially important for students and trainees whose skills do not match the grade level they have achieved.
- **Transition supports.** Students and trainees who have left their home communities to participate in an education or training program often benefit from transition supports, including orientation to their new community and assistance in finding housing or childcare. As one educator stated, "Retention starts at the first point of contact with a prospective student or trainee." Providing new students and trainees with social and emotional supports, establishing a relationship with prospective students and trainees when they first contact an institution and sending the message that the institution is committed to their success can make the transition much easier.
- **Adequate, accessible and stable funding.** Providing students and trainees with sufficient funding to cover tuition, living expenses and other costs associated with their participation in post-secondary programs makes it easier for them to focus on their education and training.
- **Comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports.** Many participants indicated that programs that provide comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports that address the needs of both students/trainees and their families make a crucial contribution to many Aboriginal students' and trainees' success. Recognizing, validating and attending to all aspects of students' daily lived experience and identity can empower students and trainees. In addition to providing academic supports and appropriate funding, this may include creating opportunities

for students and trainees to connect with their cultures and spirituality (by, for example, providing students and trainees with access to Elders, facilitating their participation in ceremonial activities or incorporating traditional teachings into program materials), actively supporting the emotional and mental health and wellness of students and trainees (by, for example, providing effective counseling supports, helping students and trainees to recognize and work through the impacts of inter-generational trauma or facilitating the development of peer support networks). Participants cited Urban Circle and ACCESS as examples of programs that effectively deliver this level of support to Aboriginal students and trainees.

## **Challenges Faced by Students and Trainees**

The educators, trainers, support staff members and administrators working with current and prospective students and trainees identified significant challenges for Aboriginal students and trainees in the following areas:

- **Financial aid to students.** Interviewees echoed many of the students' and trainees' comments about financial aid to students. They noted that the federal government's contribution to **educational funding for First Nations** has not kept pace with inflation and the cost of living. If the government's investment in education for First Nation people and communities has, in effect, declined, one educator asked, what does this tell students about the value of their education? Compounding this, a few interviewees pointed out, is the fact that the funding that First Nations receive for education can be (and sometimes is) applied to areas other than education. Most First Nations do not have enough funding to support all current and prospective Nation students and trainees in their communities and, as a result, First Nation community members who approach their bands for funding often find out that no funding is available for them. Interviewees observed that some First Nations (particularly those in the north) must set priorities about who will receive funding. For example, some First Nations favour sequential students; others do not provide funding for upgrading. One interviewee reported that, while the living allowance for First Nation post-secondary students with dependent children is typically "topped up", high school students with dependent children do not receive extra money. Most First Nation students' living allowances do not cover their most basic expenses, let alone emergencies. Educators also noted that some students do not receive their funding or living allowance "on time", which can keep them out of – or from returning to –

their programs. Interviewees saw the fact that **Metis students** are only eligible for one year of financial aid through the MMF as a particular challenge for these students. One interviewee stated that **Employment and Income Assistance (EIA)** policies and practices do not support the long-term education, training and employability needs of Aboriginal people. As evidence for this, the participant observed that whether or not a student can access financial support from EIA seems to be at individual workers' discretion and that people typically have to "fail repeatedly" before EIA will provide financial support for training or education.

- **Inadequate housing.** Interviewees pointed out that, because most Aboriginal students and trainees have inadequate living allowances, it is difficult for them to find safe, affordable and well-located housing.
- **Childcare and other family needs.** As one educator commented, "individual students have multiple and significant demands" and students and trainees sometimes get overwhelmed when trying to manage their personal responsibilities on top of the responsibilities attached to their education or training program. Interviewees noted that, due to both inadequate funding and the limited availability of space in existing child care centres, it is very difficult for students and trainees to find quality childcare. Parents with infants and parents who need child care in the evening (a necessity for some students and trainees) find this particularly challenging.
- **Gaps in the K-12 education system.** Interviewees identified several ways in which they feel that K-12 education systems are underserving Aboriginal students. One educator pointed out that some Aboriginal parents may not know how to effectively support their children's academic success. Given that the residential school experience took responsibility for children's education away from parents, many parents now need support to rediscover how to engage in the process of their children's education. Short-term strategies such as parenting classes can help with this, but substantial change may take time. Participants suggested that education systems should do more to support Aboriginal students' identity and encourage their sense of belonging in school. Aboriginal history (including Aboriginal peoples' contributions to the formation and development of Canada, as well as historic experiences that continue to have intergenerational effects, such as residential schools and the Sixties Scoop) and Aboriginal cultures should be incorporated into

all schools' curriculum. As one participant noted, many Aboriginal students are "turned off" and do not succeed in the K-12 system. One interviewee, pointing out that in some Inner City and North End neighbourhoods of Winnipeg, high school completion rates for Aboriginal students are as low as one in four or one five, called for increased and ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of K-12 programming. Even those who do complete high school (especially students from First Nation, northern and/or remote communities) may not be getting the education they deserve. Interviewees observed that many Aboriginal students and trainees in post-secondary programs are inadequately prepared, both academically (particularly with respect to writing, literacy, numeracy and study skills) and personally. One educator noted that this can often be addressed through tutoring, upgrading and other academic supports. However, as others observed, students and trainees who "start out behind" in their program may lose confidence in their own ability to succeed.

- **Transition needs.** Interviewees reported that the transition into a post-secondary program, into the city and into living on their own is a significant challenge for many Aboriginal students and trainees. Students and trainees who must move from their home communities (where "people like them" are in the majority) and leave their established support networks behind to attend a post-secondary program often experience culture shock and feel lonely and isolated.
- **Culture and practices of post-secondary institutions.** Interviewees reported that Aboriginal students and trainees at mainstream post-secondary institutions often must contend with racism, stereotypes and ignorance about Aboriginal peoples and cultures. This is difficult for students and trainees to deal with, especially if these incidents occur in front of instructors or other staff members who do not intervene. As institutions and as employees in an institution, one participant stated, "we need to learn how to be anti-racist." This includes ensuring that courses are "friendly" to Aboriginal people – and that they maintain their academic rigor. Interviewees pointed out that there are very few Aboriginal instructors or other Aboriginal staff members at most post-secondary institutions. One interviewee observed that post-secondary programs are typically designed with very little consultation with Aboriginal people and communities. Another advised that post-secondary institutions need to assess whether or not their programs actually meet the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees and whether or not the institution is offering them

training or education that will ultimately be of value to them and their community. Participants pointed out that Aboriginal students' learning styles may differ than those of mainstream students and suggested that educators should work with students to understand their individual learning styles and then design appropriate opportunities for them to learn. Interviewees also reported that many institutions do not adequately accommodate the learning needs of Aboriginal students who speak English as a second language.

## **Improving Supports to Aboriginal Students**

When asked what further actions could be taken to support successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba, educators, trainers, support staff members and administrators working with current and prospective students and trainees offered a broad range of ideas and recommendations, summarized below:

### **Student Funding:**

- All Aboriginal people should have meaningful access to funding for education and training, through K-12 to graduate studies.
- The provincial government should make a greater contribution to funding for the education of First Nation people.
- Aboriginal students and trainees should be provided with living allowances that reflect today's cost of living and with access to funding for additional and unusual expenses such as materials and equipment required for their program, relocation and moving and household start-up costs, childcare, attending conferences or meetings that relate to their area of study, and emergencies.
- The process of applying for Canada Student Loans should be simplified and current and prospective students should be provided with more information about how to apply for student loans and what a student loan means.
- A centralized resource should be developed where Aboriginal students and trainees can gather information about available supports and resources and apply for funding.

### **Improvements to financial assistance for First Nations students:**

- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada should re-examine First Nations' educational funding agreements to assess whether adequate resources are being provided to First Nations.
- First Nation education authorities should ensure that their education counselors have the appropriate training, qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge base for their position. This includes: experience in post-secondary education; capacity to function in both administrative/management and counseling/support roles; and a good understanding of the experiences of post-secondary students.
- First Nation education counselors should ensure that students receive the career guidance they need to make the right choices about education or training; are properly prepared both academically and personally; and receive in a timely manner adequate funds to cover all costs associated with their participation in their program. Education counselors should actively monitor and support students and establish and maintain communication with education and training institutions to ensure that they have all the information they need to attend to their students' needs.

**Improvements to financial assistance for Metis students:**

- Metis students in post-secondary programs should have access to more than one year of funding.
- Rather than require students to carry attendance sheets for instructors to sign, the MMF should explore other ways to monitor students' participation in their program.

**Improvements to financial support provided through Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) and Employment Insurance (EI):**

- EIA and EI policies should be revised to support the long-term training needs of clients who are making progress towards employability or other forms of self-sufficiency.
- Decisions about whether or not individual students receive support from EIA should be made in collaboration with education and training institutions, rather than being left to the sole discretion of individual workers.

**Housing needs:**

- To address Aboriginal students' and trainees' need for safe, affordable and adequate housing, housing units should be developed that provide accommodation to single

people and families; are available students and trainees regardless of the length of their program; include common areas; and that offer access to on-site transition supports, Elders and counselors. Such a housing project could be funded through the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the MMF or other Aboriginal organizations, in partnership with post-secondary institutions and appropriate government departments.

**Improved access to childcare for students:**

- Additional child care spaces should be created at locations close to or on-site at education and training institutions, with space reserved for Aboriginal students and trainees. At these sites, Aboriginal students and trainees should be able to access affordable childcare, regularly scheduled or as drop-in, available on a 24-hour basis. Funding to support this could be coordinated between education and training institutions and the provincial and federal governments.

**Cultural safety and affirmation:**

- Mainstream education and training institutions should acknowledge the impact of their own institutional cultures and work to sensitize the university and larger community about the impacts of racism and discrimination through activities such as workshops on cultural awareness or a compulsory Human Relations course for all students or trainees.
- Education and training institutions should make a conscious effort to present positive images of Aboriginal people by, for example, organizing gatherings that honour Aboriginal students' and trainees' achievements.
- Education and training institutions should actively recruit Aboriginal employees to fill positions at all levels of the organization. This can help institutions to increase their cultural capacity, provide Aboriginal students and trainees with valuable mentors and role models and signal that the institution values Aboriginal people.
- Mainstream education and training institutions should establish and/or appropriately resource on-campus Aboriginal peoples' centres that provide supports and services to Aboriginal students and trainees.
- Education and training institutions should honor the knowledge, meaning systems and current and historic experiences of Aboriginal peoples in all subject areas.

- Post-secondary institutions need to seek and create opportunities to work in partnership with Aboriginal people by:
  - Establishing Traditional Peoples' Advisory Committees, to provide guidance to any new developments relating to Aboriginal cultures, research and/or programs at the institution. These advisory committees must be empowered to influence the direction of these developments.
  - Ensuring that Aboriginal people are represented on their governing bodies.

**Improvements to and enhanced accountability for K-12 systems:**

- K-12 systems should ensure that Aboriginal people have the same access to quality education as other Canadians.
- K-12 systems should work to increase parental involvement with their children's education and sell the value of education to community members by developing communication materials and offering workshops that educate parents about expectations at all different levels of education.
- Aboriginal content should be integrated into curriculum in all subject areas and at all grade levels.
- K-12 systems should be held accountable for ensuring that Aboriginal students achieve skill and competency levels (in, for example, English, Math and Science) that match the grade level they have achieved.
- All educators in the K-12 system should have some training in First Nation/Aboriginal education.
- All educators should have an appropriate background for the subjects they are teaching.
- More effort and resources should be directed to developing career awareness in Aboriginal children and youth. Aboriginal youth should have a clear understanding of what they need (financially, socially, personally and academically) to prepare for and achieve the vision and goals they set for themselves.
- First Nations should develop a coordinated system to monitor the quality of education students are receiving at on-reserve schools, to assess the qualifications and monitor the performance of teachers and to establish quality assurance with respect to teaching and curriculum.

**Enhanced accountability for post-secondary institutions:**

- Post-secondary institutions that receive funding for Aboriginal education and training should be held accountable for retaining Aboriginal students.
- Post-secondary programs that target Aboriginal people should meet the same academic standards of other equivalent programs, provide training that is valid, recognized by industry and certifiable and generate outcomes that match those achieved by programs targeting mainstream community members.

**Enhanced accountability for government:**

- The provincial, federal and First Nations governments should address and resolve jurisdictional issues that constrain the delivery of education and training programs in Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people's participation in education and training.
- All levels of government should support and commit to addressing the long-term education and training needs of Aboriginal people and communities. This includes providing multi-year funding to training and education programs that generate successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees.
- The provincial government should create enabling legislation (a First Nations Education Act) and develop policy that establish post-secondary education and training for Aboriginal people as a priority.
- Appropriate government departments should recognize and work with existing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions to establish their accreditation.
- Appropriate government departments should support long-term research that measures the impact of programs and/or approaches designed to support successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees.

**Aboriginal-controlled education and training:**

- Education systems for Aboriginal people should be designed, owned and controlled by Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal leadership should seek self-determination in all aspects of education and training, including control of all funding allocated for Aboriginal peoples' education and training needs.

- Aboriginal leadership should begin the process of developing an accredited First Nation post-secondary institution.
- First Nations should invest in developing their own community members as educators.

**Greater flexibility in the ways that training and education are delivered:**

- Education and training service providers should move toward a client-centered model, where the training and education needs of Aboriginal people and communities are heard, respected and understood and then design innovative program delivery models (such as programs that provide comprehensive supports, modular programs or in-community programming) to meet those needs.
- Education and training programs should identify, accommodate and teach to the learning styles of Aboriginal students and trainees by, for example, embedding experiential learning opportunities in courses.
- Education and training programs should provide intergenerational learning opportunities that enable people to ladder through education, training and employment as they are ready.

**Transition supports:**

- Post-secondary institutions should establish closer relationships and engage in more outreach with high schools in First Nations and other Aboriginal communities. Representatives of the institutions should visit the high schools and invite high school students to visit their campuses; arrange mentoring by post-secondary students and trainees for high school students; work with high schools to create opportunities for secondary students to complete post-secondary credits; and initiate relationships with prospective students and trainees that will support them in their transition to post-secondary programs.
- In-community supports (including adult upgrading) should be available to Aboriginal people who are preparing to enter post-secondary training or education.
- Post-secondary institutions should develop comprehensive orientation programs for Aboriginal students and trainees entering their programs.
- Post-secondary institutions, communities and funding bodies should form active partnerships to provide long-term transition supports and skills development for

Aboriginal students and trainees. In addition to academic supports, this should include supporting students to develop the skills they need to live independently, manage their money and establish positive social and cultural connections.

**Strengthening links between education, training and employment:**

- Training programs should expose people to work. All training programs should include components that familiarize trainees with corporate culture, employer expectations and what their particular line of work will be like. This will give trainees opportunities to assess whether or not they would actually enjoy the kind of work they are training for.
- Education and training programs should reflect current industry needs. Private sector and other employers should keep post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal community members apprised of their training and employment needs.
- Industry and the private sector should work with post-secondary institutions to create opportunities for students and trainees to ladder into their careers, through, for example, activities such as apprenticeships, coops, internships and mentoring. Government should support this by offering incentives such as wage subsidies and tax breaks to employers who provide apprenticeship or internships.

## **Appendix VI**

### **Summary and Analysis of Findings from Aboriginal Educational Support Services and Advisory Groups**

## FINDINGS FROM ABORIGINAL EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND ADVISORY GROUPS

Group and individual interviews were held with people who, in varying capacities, provide support and guidance to education and training programs that serve Aboriginal people and communities. Interviewees included:

- Six representatives of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre;
- Seven representatives of the Advisory Council of the Aboriginal Education Directorate;
- Seven representatives of the Council on Post-Secondary Education;
- A representative of the Manitoba Metis Federation; and
- Education counselors from First Nations throughout Manitoba.

In these interviews, participants were asked what services and supports are most helpful to Aboriginal students and trainees; what the biggest challenges are that students or trainees face; whether they were aware of any partnerships or working relationships that contribute to successful outcomes for students or trainees; and what would make it easier for students or trainees to succeed.

### Contributions to Students' and Trainees' Success

These participants identified supports and resources in the following areas as most important to the success of Aboriginal students and trainees:

- **Students' and trainees' inner resources.** Interviewees noted that students' and trainees' own inner resources contribute to their ability to succeed. They emphasized the importance of self-awareness and cultural identity. Having a good understanding of who they are; a strong cultural identity, spirituality and connection to family; and confidence in their strengths and abilities helps students to achieve their goals.
- **Working with Aboriginal youth to create a vision and plan for their future.** Interviewees felt that activities and supports that help Aboriginal youth envision and plan their future (starting at a young age) contribute to their success as adults. Families that support and value their children's education play an important role in this process, as do educators who reach out to parents and welcome their

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involvement. Role models (who engage in a broad range of career activities) are invaluable. Career awareness activities, one participant commented, should help Aboriginal students see that the career options available to them extend beyond health care or social work.

- **Adequate preparation for post-secondary programs.** Participants observed that when Aboriginal students receive solid instruction from primary school levels on, when they are taught by well-qualified teachers and when lessons are presented to them in culturally supportive ways, their chances of succeeding increase.
- **Family and community supports.** Family support, both prior to and during post-secondary participation, contributes to post-secondary students' and trainees' success.
- **Feeling welcome within an education or training institution.** Students and trainees benefit from feeling a sense of belonging and ownership in the educational and training institutions they attend.
- **Supporting cultural safety and affirming Aboriginal cultures.** Several participants noted that incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into curriculum (or, as one put it, of curriculum that accepts and embraces Aboriginal cultures) helps Aboriginal students and trainees to succeed. Participants also felt that Aboriginal student centres and services are important to the success of students and trainees.
- **Peer support networks.** Interviewees emphasized the importance of peer support networks to students' and trainees' success. These networks, they noted, provide peers with opportunities to socialize, support and mentor each other, share their knowledge and experience and negotiate the challenges they face. Providing students and trainees with a place on campus to meet (such as Aboriginal centres) and supporting groups for Aboriginal students and trainees (such as the CAMPUS group for Metis students) helps to facilitate the development of peer support networks.
- **Academic supports.** Interviewees noted that post-secondary institutions need to support and encourage the individual goals of trainees and students. Instructors and other support people need to acknowledge where individual students and trainees are at and help them to determine what they need to move forward. Instructors

should be capable and willing to teach to the range of learning styles and needs of their students.

- **Transition supports.** Interviewees observed that providing students and trainees with practical and relevant supports during their transition into post-secondary programs enhances their success. Some transition supports, such as campus visits (which can help students and trainees become more familiar with the cultures of the institution and community they will be joining and the personal and academic support systems they may be able to draw on), in-community college prep programs and transition year programs (which help students and trainees to develop the academic and practical skills they will need), begin before students and trainees start their post-secondary programs. Once students and trainees begin their programs, institutional supports (such as academic upgrading and support to develop life skills) can also help them have a successful transition. Participants also noted that First Nation education counselors often make a valuable contribution to students' success, by maintaining active and supportive involvement with them throughout the course of their post-secondary program.
- **Adequate, accessible and stable funding.** Interviewees emphasized the importance of adequate, accessible and stable funding to students' and trainees' success. As noted by other groups, students' and trainees' need funding that covers all the costs associated with their participation in post-secondary programs, including sufficient funds to enable them to access quality housing and childcare.
- **Program design and delivery that meet the real-life needs of Aboriginal people and communities.** Interviewees identified programs that use a holistic model or that provide comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports to Aboriginal students and trainees (such as accessible instructors and counselors, responsive curriculum and academic supports) as particularly valuable. Noting that integration into mainstream programs does not work for all Aboriginal people, participants singled out community-based programs (shaped by community-identified needs and/or under community control) and alternative education programs as program models that extend education and training opportunities to more Aboriginal people.

## **Challenges Faced by Students and Trainees**

Representatives of Aboriginal educational support services and advisory groups who participated in this consultation identified significant challenges for Aboriginal students and trainees in the following areas:

- **Financial aid to students.** As one interviewee observed, the fundamental challenge for Aboriginal students and trainees is how to pay for their education and training. Participants again noted that most Aboriginal students and trainees struggle simply to get by on the living allowances available to them, which typically are well below the poverty line and do not adequately cover even their most basic needs. Interviewees pointed out that many prospective students and trainees do not have adequate information about the full range of funding options available to them or the basis on which funding is awarded. One participant related that many **Metis students** feel that they have “an Aboriginal right to educational funding” and do not understand why only limited funding is available to them. Several participants commented on the inadequacy of INAC funding to **First Nation students**. Interviewees also indicated that, more generally, INAC does not provide most First Nation communities with adequate funding to support all of their communities’ educational needs, including the need to establish or maintain effective community-based programming.
- **Inadequate housing.** Like other groups, these participants reported that inadequate funding leaves students and trainees with inadequate housing. As one participant noted, currently available on-campus housing is too expensive for most Aboriginal students and trainees and off-campus housing may be difficult to secure, so many Aboriginal students and trainees live in shared accommodations in unsafe neighbourhoods. In many ways, these environments typically do not support study or other activities that support students’ and trainees’ success.
- **Childcare.** Participants noted that students and trainees often find it difficult to access adequate childcare.
- **Gaps in the K12 education system.** Participants felt that successful outcomes for Aboriginal people in post-secondary programs are negatively affected by the poor quality of K-12 education that many Aboriginal people (particularly those in Northern and remote communities) receive.

- **Inadequate preparation for post-secondary programs.** As one participant observed, many Aboriginal post-secondary students and trainees are “flying blind”. They may arrive at post-secondary institutions without a clear idea of what they want to do or take or how to get to where they want to be. Interviewees also noted that Aboriginal students and trainees are often not adequately prepared academically or socially for participation in post-secondary programs. New students and trainees may find it difficult to handle their work load in post-secondary programs and the new life in which they are suddenly immersed.
- **Transition needs.** Like other groups involved in this consultation, this group of participants commented on the challenges that many students and trainees must negotiate when making the transition from high school and/or their home communities to post-secondary programs and an urban community. In addition to providing transition supports from the time prospective students and trainees begin the process of applying to post-secondary programs, some participants advised that high school students need early exposure to the cultures they will join, which can be provided, in part, by exchange programs between schools. Participants felt that more funding should be provided to programs that provide effective transition supports, such as ACCESS-model programs. One participant observed that post-secondary students and trainees may also need support through the transition out of post-secondary education or training into employment.
- **Culture and practices of post-secondary institutions.** Acknowledging that as part of their daily lived experience, many post-secondary students and trainees are faced with individual, systemic and institutional racism and discrimination, participants called on post-secondary institutions to address these issues. As other groups have noted, participants felt that there need to be more Aboriginal instructors and staff members in post-secondary programs, that non-Aboriginal staff need more education about Aboriginal issues and that Aboriginal content should be incorporated into curriculum. Participants indicated that, in these activities, post-secondary institutions need to acknowledge and honour the distinct cultural and historic identities of First Nation, Metis, Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples. They pointed out that there are not enough Aboriginal-focused post-secondary education and training programs and that post-secondary programs need more input from Aboriginal community members on program design, including content, curriculum and

pedagogy. A few participants called for First Nation leaders to advocate more strongly for and take more control of their community members' education.

## **Improving Supports to Aboriginal Students**

When asked what further actions could be taken to support successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba, representatives of Aboriginal educational support services and advisory groups offered a broad range of ideas and recommendations. Their ideas and recommendations (many of which parallel those of other groups) are summarized below:

### **Student Funding:**

- All Aboriginal people should have meaningful access to funding for education and training, through K-12 to graduate studies.
- Aboriginal students and trainees should be provided with living allowances that reflect today's cost of living and with access to funding for additional and unusual expenses such as materials and equipment required for their program, relocation and moving and household start-up costs, childcare, attending conferences or meetings that relate to their area of study, and emergencies.
- The process of applying for Canada Student Loans should be simplified and current and prospective students should be provided with more information about how to apply for student loans and what a student loan means. This information should be integrated into career preparation and recruitment materials for prospective students and trainees.
- A centralized resource should be developed where Aboriginal students and trainees can gather information about available supports and resources and apply for funding. This information should also be available on-line.
- Funding bodies should hold students and trainees accountable for full participation in their education and training programs.

### **Improvements to financial assistance for First Nations students:**

- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada should calculate the educational funding it provides to First Nations taking into account changes in the costs of living and tuition and ensure that First Nations' education funding agreements provide adequate resources to support the education needs of the community, including adequate

living allowances for First Nation students and their dependent family members, as well as additional funding for things that support students' success, such as computers, other materials and travel to home community.

- First Nation education authorities should ensure that their education counselors have the appropriate training, qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge base for their position.
- First Nation education counselors should actively monitor and support students. This includes collaborating with staff at post-secondary programs to gain a better understanding of students' needs and find ways to work together to meet them and meeting regularly on-campus with students and program staff.
- First Nations should work towards enhanced collaboration across First Nation departments to support students' and trainees' success.

**Improvements to financial assistance for Metis students:**

- MMF leadership should work towards developing its own education system that includes a Metis post-secondary institution and that is appropriately funded and resourced to support the educational needs of the Metis community.

**Housing Needs:**

- To address Aboriginal students' and trainees' need for safe, affordable and adequate housing, housing units should be developed that provide accommodation to single people and families; include common areas such as study lounges; feature on-site childcare and offer access to on-site transition supports, such as Elders and counselors. Such a housing project should be owned and operated by Aboriginal people.
- Post-secondary institutions should establish coordinating bodies to develop housing for Aboriginal students.

**Improved access to childcare for students:**

- Additional subsidized and licensed child care spaces should be created at locations close to or on-site at education and training institutions that serve Aboriginal people.

**Developing and enhancing effective transition supports**

- A 'one-stop shop' to support the transition needs of Aboriginal students and trainees should be established in Winnipeg. This service would provide centralized resources to address prospective and current students' and trainees' needs, such as: information on career options and career guidance; academic preparation and upgrading for post-secondary programs; life skills training; cultural resources and supports; advocacy supports; orientation and adjustment to life in Winnipeg; tutoring supports; access to computers and the internet; and common areas for socializing and studying.
- Transition year programs that offer comprehensive and effective supports and resources (as above) should be developed to support a broad range of post-secondary programs.
- On-line resources should be developed to support students' and trainees' transition needs. This includes on-line courses for academic upgrading and skills development.
- Post-secondary institutions should provide prospective students and trainees with enhanced opportunities to assess whether or not their programs fit their needs (such as opportunities to sit in on classes) and more comprehensive recruitment materials.

**Cultural safety and affirmation:**

- Education and training institutions should actively recruit Aboriginal employees to fill positions at all levels of the organization. This can help institutions to increase their cultural capacity, provide Aboriginal students and trainees with valuable mentors and role models and signal that the institution values Aboriginal people.
- Education and training institutions should honor the world view, knowledge, meaning systems and current and historic experiences of Aboriginal peoples in all subject areas and provide programming that focuses on Aboriginal cultures and languages. Curriculum should enhance students' and trainees' awareness and understanding of the impacts of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples. Institutions should also identify ways to accommodate the needs of Aboriginal students and trainees who speak English as a second language.
- Education and training institutions should require all instructors to complete cross-cultural awareness training.

- Post-secondary institutions need to seek and create opportunities to work in partnership with Aboriginal people by:
  - Sharing resources, knowledge and supports with the larger Aboriginal community
  - Meeting with Aboriginal urban and rural communities members to learn from them how they can better serve Aboriginal students and trainees.
  - Establishing working relationships with appropriate Elders, who can provide guidance to the institution in appropriate areas
  - Establishing codes of ethics to guide research collaborations with Aboriginal peoples.

**Improvements to and enhanced accountability for K-12 systems:**

- More effort and resources should be directed to developing career awareness in Aboriginal children and youth. Activities to support this should start at an early age and involve parents, so that Aboriginal youth can see post-secondary education and training as part of their future and are motivated to work towards it. These activities may include programs modeled after Mini-University and Career Trek.
- K-12 systems should ensure that Aboriginal people have the same access to quality education as other Canadians. Instruction, teaching and learning processes should be strengthened to support the long-term success of Aboriginal students. Education should engage Aboriginal students and instill in them the value of life-long learning.
- K-12 systems should work to increase parental involvement with their children's education and sell the value of education to community members by developing communication materials and offering workshops that educate parents about expectations at all different levels of education.
- To support community wellness, schools should be open to the community and educators should reach out to bring Aboriginal family and community members into the school.
- To support Aboriginal students' success in science, traditional way and ways of learning and knowing should be incorporated into conventional science curriculum.

**Enhanced accountability for post-secondary institutions:**

- Post-secondary institutions that receive funding for Aboriginal education and training should be held accountable for retaining Aboriginal students. This includes providing Aboriginal students with appropriate academic supports in an environment that welcomes them.
- Post-secondary institutions should have a presence in the Aboriginal communities they serve. This can be achieved by engaging in outreach and collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal communities.
- Post-secondary institutions should establish working relationships with First Nation education counselors and provide counselors with more access to the institutions.
- Post-secondary institutions should reserve seats on their governing bodies for Aboriginal people.
- Post-secondary institutions should set and meet targets for Aboriginal people's participation in their programs.

**Enhanced accountability for government:**

- The provincial, federal and First Nations governments should address and resolve jurisdictional issues that constrain the delivery of education and training programs in Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people's participation in education and training.
- Appropriate levels of government should establish funding (distinct from that allocated to First Nations) to support the education and training needs of Metis people.

**Aboriginal-controlled education and training:**

- Education systems for First Nation people should be designed, owned and controlled by First Nation people.
- Education systems for Metis people should be designed, owned and controlled by Metis people.
- Aboriginal leadership should seek self-determination in all aspects of education and training, including control of all funding allocated for their peoples' education and training needs.

- Aboriginal leadership should begin the process of developing an accredited First Nation post-secondary institution and an accredited Metis post-secondary institution.
- Aboriginal leadership should continue and increase lobbying to increase students' living allowances.
- First Nations and Metis communities should invest in developing their own community members as educators.
- First Nations should pursue partnerships with the private sector to develop technical schools in First Nation communities.
- First Nations should assess and monitor the effectiveness of post-secondary programming for their community members.
- First Nations should explore ways to strengthen partnership between First Nation schools and the provincial government.
- Aboriginal leadership should study other jurisdictions (such as British Columbia, which has many First Nation-controlled education and training institutions) for best practices that increase successful outcomes for Aboriginal students and trainees.

**Greater flexibility in the ways that training and education are delivered:**

- Post-secondary education and training service providers should develop and offer more programming that fits the needs of Aboriginal people and communities, incorporating effective practices such as cohort models, distance education, in-community delivery and the provision of comprehensive supports to students and trainees as provided, for example, by Urban Circle and Opaskawayak Cree Nation's Trades Training programs.

**Strengthening links between education, training and employment:**

- Aboriginal people's participation in business and commerce careers should be enhanced through partnerships between post-secondary institutions, the private sector and professional business and commerce associations.

**Appendix VII**  
**Summary and Analysis of Findings from Government**  
**Representatives**

## FINDINGS FROM GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

Individual and group interviews were held with people affiliated with departments and projects of the provincial government, including two representatives of Competitiveness, Training & Trade; two representatives of Education, Citizenship & Youth (*Making Education Work* and *Future to Discover* Projects); and two representatives of Advanced Education & Literacy.

In these interviews, participants were asked what services and supports are most helpful to Aboriginal students and trainees; what the biggest challenges are that students or trainees face; whether they were aware of any partnerships or working relationships that contribute to successful outcomes for students or trainees; and what would make it easier for students or trainees to succeed.

### Contributions to Students' and Trainees' Success

These participants identified supports and resources in the following areas as most important to the success of Aboriginal students and trainees:

- **Students' and trainees' inner resources.** Like other interviewees, participants in this group noted that qualities like self-awareness, self-acceptance and cultural identity make a significant contribution to students' and trainees' success. A "strong student", observed one participant, "knows who they are and where they come from."
- **Working with Aboriginal youth to create a vision and plan for their future.** Interviewees in this group also felt that it was important to support Aboriginal youth to envision and plan their future. Access to role models and mentors, they suggested, can make a significant contribution to Aboriginal students' and trainees' success and career awareness activities should start at an early age. As one participant stated, "Kids who know what they want to do are the ones who succeed."
- **Supporting cultural safety and affirming Aboriginal cultures.** Participants noted the impact that institutions' commitment and ability to support Aboriginal people's cultural safety can have on students' and trainees' success (particularly with respect to retention). Cultural awareness, one participant pointed out, is not just about abstract ideas or theory; it is about being able to actually feel what Aboriginal people's experiences might be like. Participants also reported that students and trainees benefit when resources and materials are reviewed and modified, as

appropriate, to make them meaningful and useful to Aboriginal people. Similarly, practices should be reviewed and modified to ensure that they are accessible and effective for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people's participation in post-secondary planning can help organizations to achieve and enhance cultural safety for Aboriginal students and trainees.

- **Adequate, accessible and stable funding.** Interviewees pointed out that predictable and sustainable financial supports during education and training make an important contribution to successful outcomes for all students' and trainees'.
- **Program design and delivery that meet the real-life needs of Aboriginal people and communities.** Interviewees again identified programs that use a holistic model or that provide comprehensive, accessible and meaningful supports to Aboriginal students and trainees (such as accessible instructors and counselors, responsive curriculum and academic supports) as particularly valuable.

## Challenges Faced by Students and Trainees

Group members identified significant challenges for Aboriginal students and trainees in the following areas:

- **Financial aid to students.** Once again, participants in this group observed that finding a way to pay for the real costs of education and training is a major challenge for most Aboriginal students and trainees. Even when students and trainees participate in programs (such as literacy programs) that are tuition-free, pointed out one participant, they still need money to support themselves. With respect to financial aid, most Aboriginal students' needs are different from those of mainstream students. As one participant noted, most Aboriginal parents cannot support their children through a post-secondary program or make a significant "parental contribution" to the costs of their children's education or training. Many **First Nation students** (especially mature students) are not eligible for or do not receive band funding. Participants also felt that **Metis students** do not have access to sufficient educational funding. One participant suggested that the MMF's current capacity to provide students with only one year of financial support during university may, in effect, push Metis people into trades training. Participants also pointed out that, while some federal funding for training is available through **Employment Insurance (EI)**, many Aboriginal people do not have the employment history to access EI. One

participant spoke extensively about challenges that the student loan system may present to Aboriginal people. Some people may be intimidated by the forms and paperwork involved in applying for a student loan. Given the history of relationships between Aboriginal people and bureaucratic systems, he pointed out, 'paperwork' may represent bureaucratic control over Aboriginal people to some. Some Aboriginal people (particularly those who speak English as a second language) run up against language barriers, both when filling out forms and when speaking to staff at the student loan offices. Historically, it has been very difficult for First Nation and other Aboriginal people to get loans, in part because they often lacked collateral. A residue of this historic experience is that many Aboriginal people either seem convinced that they won't get a loan (so don't apply) or simply do not know how to apply for one. This seems particularly true for Aboriginal people who are the first generation in their family or home community to attend a post-secondary program.

- **Inadequate housing.** Like other groups, these participants noted that inadequate funding often means that students and trainees cannot afford adequate housing. As one participant observed, this happens regardless of whether students and trainees live on-reserve or off.
- **Gaps in the K12 education system.** Participants felt that the poor quality of K-12 education that many Aboriginal students receive (particularly in Northern and remote communities) can negatively affect their potential for successful outcomes in post-secondary programs. One participant pointed out that the quality of education in First Nation, northern and remote communities relates closely to other issues relating to funding (are schools receiving enough funding?) and accountability (are schools and communities getting a good return on the money they are spending?) for education systems.
- **Inadequate preparation for post-secondary programs.** Participants noted that, too often, Aboriginal students and trainees are inadequately prepared for post-secondary programs. Academically, students and trainees may arrive at post-secondary programs without having completed the courses they need to prepare them for their chosen program or without the literacy, numeracy or other essential skills they need to participate in the program. Participants also reported that personal qualities, such as low self-esteem, lack of a strong identity or limited leadership skills, can get in the way of students' or trainees' success. Participants

pointed out that many Aboriginal students and trainees (especially those who are the first in their families to get education or training) have had only limited access to role models and mentors – or none.

- **Limited options for accessing education and training in First Nation, rural and remote communities.** Participants related that when students and trainees must leave home to participate in post-secondary programs, there is less likelihood that they will succeed in those programs. One participant added that distance-learning does not work for every student or trainee. Distance learning works best for students who have relatively unrestricted computer and internet access, along with the confidence, discipline and structure to be self-guided learners.

## **Improving Supports to Aboriginal Students**

When asked what further actions could be take to support successful outcomes for First Nation, Metis and other Aboriginal students and trainees in Southern Manitoba, the representatives of provincial government departments and projects offered a broad range of ideas and recommendations. Their ideas and recommendations (many of which parallel those of other groups) are summarized below:

### **Student Funding:**

- Aboriginal people should have more and meaningful access to funding for education and training, including awards, loans, grants and bursaries designed specifically for Aboriginal and low income people.
- The process of applying for Canada Student Loans should be made easier. For example, the forms used in the application process could be simplified and require applicants to provide less information than the current forms do.
- Students participating in transition year programs should be able to access funding.

### **Improvements to and enhanced accountability for K-12 systems:**

- All K-12 systems (including both provincial and First Nation schools) should develop and implement Aboriginal programming, content and activities that will meet the real and meaningful needs, wants and aspirations of Aboriginal students.
- More rewards and scholarships should be developed to acknowledge Aboriginal students' accomplishments in the K-12 system.

- K-12 systems should work harder on retaining students, i.e., monitor attendance and marks and intervene with outreach, counseling, etc., before a student makes the decision to leave the school.
- More effort and resources should be directed to developing career awareness in Aboriginal children and youth. In-community activities that provide career exposure, experiences and skills development should start at an early age and involve parents, with the goal of encouraging Aboriginal youth to see post-secondary education and training as part of their future and work towards it. These activities should include more Aboriginal mentoring programs.

**Enhanced accountability for education and training personnel:**

- Individuals, institutions and organizations involved in the education and training of Aboriginal people need to enhance their cultural capacity. In particular, people need to have a better understanding of the impacts of the Residential School experience. It is especially important that people who make and influence policy that affect the availability and accessibility of training and education increase their awareness and understanding of Aboriginal people, history and cultures.

**Enhanced accountability for government:**

- Appropriate levels of government should improve research design and data collection with respect to Aboriginal people's participation in post-secondary education and training. Currently, there is a need for longitudinal research into what affects or contributes over the long-term to successful outcomes for Aboriginal people participating in post-secondary education and training.