



Atlantic Policy Congress  
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## **Barriers to Aboriginal Employment Must be Overcome**

Dartmouth, NS (July, 2010) - Aboriginal youth are needed to fill the gaps in the aging Canadian workforce and to help provide an important and much needed labour pool. “In the first quarter of 2010, 40% of small firms told Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) they will struggle to find the people they need to put their products and services to market” says Dan Kelly, Senior Vice President of legislative affairs for the CFIB. Aboriginal people of working age will number close to one million, approximately 3.4% of the working age population in Canada by the end of 2017. In order for Aboriginal youth to fill labour market gaps, barriers to Aboriginal employment need to be overcome.

A First Nations driven research study looks at how well Aboriginal labour force participation strategies are working for Aboriginal people in the Atlantic region and how they can be improved. ***Assessing the Effectiveness of Labour Force Participation Strategies*** finds that while Aboriginal employment levels are slowly increasing, they still lag considerably behind those of the general Canadian populace. Employment equity was introduced over 20 years ago, but most employers in the region are not required to track Aboriginal employees or to have employment equity or similar programs in place. Only a minority of employers track Aboriginal employees and have implemented labour force participation strategies.

In terms of best practices used to increase Aboriginal employment, Michelin Tire is one company that has been very proactive in this regard. Since 2003, Michelin has implemented an Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative Partnership Agreement (AWPI) with the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, the Union of Nova Scotia Indians, the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia. Under this partnership, Michelin has an Aboriginal employment strategy, engages in Aboriginal procurement, recruitment and retention, identifies potential business development initiatives designed to meet Aboriginal community priorities, and collaborates with an advisory committee consisting of Aboriginal representatives.

***Assessing the Effectiveness of Labour Force Participation Strategies*** makes several policy recommendations concerning how successful Aboriginal labour force participation strategies can be improved. A multi-actor approach to deal with the range of challenges encountered is needed. As well, having an adequately prepared Aboriginal labour force and adequately

prepared employers is key. On the Aboriginal side, individual Aboriginal people must be proactive about getting the appropriate training or education and seeking employment. Employers need to provide regular cultural sensitivity and diversity training for all employees and be more open to Aboriginal employment by shifting conventional approaches to filling vacancies

In terms of government support for Aboriginal labour force participation strategies, the report suggests that the Federal government could expand employment equity policies to include companies with less than 100 employees while provincial governments could track and measure Aboriginal participation within their own departments, and enact policies and incentive programs that encourage employers to partner more proactively with Aboriginal communities.

“This important information can assist and support Aboriginal communities and government to increase Aboriginal employment,” says APC Co-Chair Chief Noah Augustine of Metepenagiag First Nation, N.B. APC Co-Chair Chief Lawrence Paul of Millbrook First Nation, N.S. adds that “We need to continue to build bridges between Aboriginal communities and non-Aboriginal employers. Also, we need to support our youth as they move from their home communities to pursue education and employment opportunities”.

***Assessing the Effectiveness of Labour Force Participation Strategies*** is one of five new research reports on Aboriginal economic development funded through the Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Program, AAEDIRP. The AAEDIRP is a unique research program that conducts research on Aboriginal economic development that is relevant to communities, builds Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal research capacity, holds workshops on Aboriginal economic development and is developing a database on Aboriginal economic development. It is one of the main pillars of the ***Atlantic Economy Building Strategy***. Endorsed by the Atlantic Chiefs, and launched in 2007, the ***Strategy*** sets a clear vision for success for Aboriginal economic development. The AAEDIRP is formed through partnerships between the 38 member communities of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs (APCFNC), plus the Inuit, 12 Atlantic universities and 4 government funders, both federal and provincial. The APCFNC is a policy research organization that analyzes and develops culturally relevant alternatives to federal policies that impact on the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy and Innu Aboriginal communities and peoples.

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