



A Case Study of the Métis Nation of Ontario's Pre-employment Program - Navigating Employment Pathways

Background

In 1996 the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) began delivering employment and training programs and services to Métis people in accordance with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS). In 2010 this strategy came to an end and a new multi-year labour market strategy was put in place; the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS). This new Strategy identified three (3) key priority areas including a focus on demand-driven skills development, partnerships with the private and public sector, and accountability for improved results.

The MNO made a seamless transition into this new strategy through the launch of a variety of Labour Market Projects (LMP). Over the last three years, the MNO has successfully delivered Labour Market Projects in apprenticeships, tourism and

hospitality, energy, housing and mining. Through LMPs the MNO has the opportunity to provide focused training in specific areas, and sectors, where employment opportunities are available or will be available in the near future.

"Personal challenges that had previously prevented participants from succeeding in the workplace were overcome in the program; this led to significant growth in embracing change, finding a healthy work life balance, effective job search, and educational pursuits and employment opportunities."

*- Rae-Anna Gardner,
NEP Project Coordinator, MNO*

The LMP in tourism and hospitality was the MNO's first foray into delivering its own pre-employment training program and was the beginning of OTEC's longstanding partnership with the MNO. Beginning with

the pilot of the Ready-to-Work: Tourism Careers for Aboriginal People program in 2010, OTEC assisted the MNO in launching a networked skills-based training program in 4 communities across the province. Building on the successes of the pilot, OTEC worked with the MNO to further refine the training curriculum and methodologies to launch the Navigating Employment Pathways (NEP) program in the fall of 2011.

Navigating Employment Pathways: Program Overview

Funded in part by the Government of Canada, the NEP program was delivered by the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) in partnership with OTEC, as a sub-contractor providing training curriculum, industry certifications and facilitator support. The NEP program was designed to provide industry specific training to Aboriginal people looking for a career in the tourism and hospitality sector, and was offered in four communities including: Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay and Midland.



Photo caption: The first North Bay cohort, enjoying a complimentary lunch at the Farina Restaurant located within the Best Western North Bay, during their site visit.

The first 10 weeks were comprised of classroom training where participants received certifications in emerit Workplace Essentials, OTEC Service Excellence, In Good Hands Food Safety, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) and Smart Serve. Along with these certifications, participants also received occupation specific training in one of 16

tourism and hospitality occupations. After 10 weeks of in-class training, participants completed a 12 week paid work placement. During the work placement, participants began logging their work hours towards the experience verification component of the National emerit Professional Certification process.

"The NEP is set aside from other training programs in that it consciously sets clients up for success, when other's have failed them. The NEP program approach considers whether the client has lost their house that week or other serious barriers that the client may need to deal with."

*- Scott Carpenter, Manager,
Projects & Partnerships*

Throughout the program, participants worked closely with MNO staff to develop Individual Skills Development Plans, ensuring that individual skills, experiences, knowledge and career goals were matched with their chosen occupation. Guest speakers, field trips and expanding cultural knowledge components were also built into the program.

Project Design

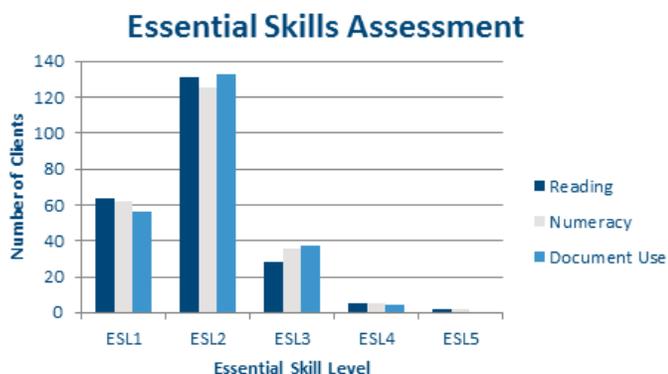
The program curriculum was developed by OTEC and adapted from pre-employment training curriculum previously used for a bridging program for internationally-trained individuals delivered in partnership with a network of 5 immigrant-serving agencies across the province from 2005-2011. Based on the emerit Workplace Essentials and Canadian Workplace Essentials training program, the curriculum was further customized to the aboriginal client group, to include a module on Opportunities in Tourism: An Aboriginal Perspective. Using a Train-the-Trainer model, OTEC equipped Program Facilitators with the tools, knowledge and

skills to deliver the 10-week in-class program incorporating weekly facilitator support conference calls with the OTEC team. Facilitators were able to share lesson plans, best practices, activities and study tools with their colleagues through a Collaboration Portal. These calls proved to be invaluable touch points for quality assurance of the training curriculum.

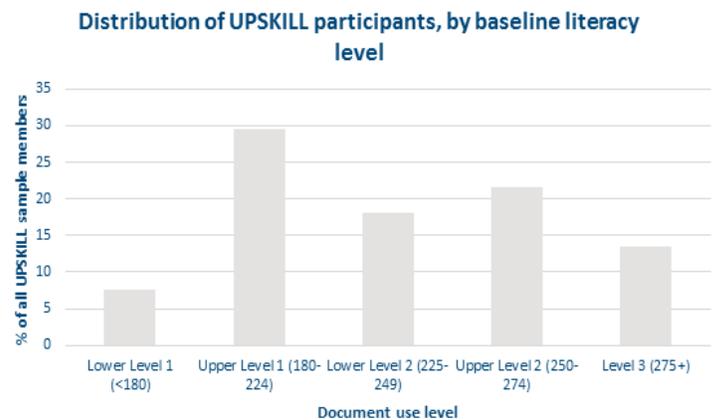
A unique component of the NEP project design was the capacity building model. At the beginning of the project, the MNO was responsible for the training delivery at one of the four training locations. The MNO took on one additional location each year of the project, until the delivery process was completely operationalized. At the end of the 3 year project, the MNO had 3 highly proficient Program Facilitators.

Client Group

The target client group for the Navigating Employment Pathways program was Aboriginal learners with skills gaps and barriers to employment, including lack of experience. One of the innovative initiatives of this project was the partnership with Bow Valley College to pilot their new online Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES). This assessment enabled the NEP Project team to assess clients' essential skills levels upon acceptance to the program, to ensure that they were able to complete program material, without setting them up for failure. A summary of the NEP clients' essential skills levels is provided below.



Interestingly, these essential skills levels are comparable with the results of the recently released UPSKILL: A Credible Test of Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills Training research project, which measured the essential skills levels of front-line hospitality workers pre and post workplace literacy and essential skills training. As identified by the report, the average baseline scores for document use and numeracy were both in the lower Level 2 range. Over 85% of participants scored below Level 3 on document use, with more than half in the upper Level 1 to lower Level 2 range (UPSKILL: A Credible Test of Workplace Literacy and Essentials Skills Training, SRDC, 2014, p. 8).



This interesting comparison demonstrates that upon acceptance to the program, NEP clients' essential skills levels were on par with employed front-line hospitality workers, reinforcing the importance of addressing the life skills, employability skills and general barriers in addition to skills gaps, where identified. The NEP program clientele had numerous socio economic and personal issues including child care, transportation, peer pressure, housing, mental health, addictions, life skills, employment skills and work experience. Specific employment barriers faced by NEP clients are outlined in the graph on the next page.

Community Engagement

As outlined within the program successes above, through community engagement and employer networking, the NEP program staff developed a database of over 200 employers. These employers participated in a number of ways including guest speakers, hosting site visits at their workplace, hosting job shadows with NEP participants, and providing job placements. One of the NEP program's champion employers stated:

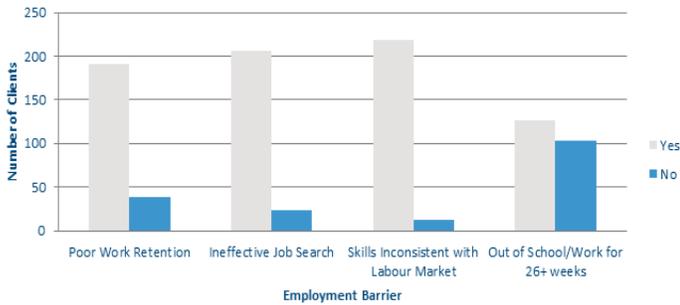
"We know that the program is working, as an employer, it allows us to have flexibility of people stepping into the workforce, it allows us to have a joint experience with them and we both grow from the experience"
-Angela Johnson, General Manager,
Best Western North Bay

Like any new project, the success of this program didn't happen overnight. According to Scott Carpenter, the MNO's Manager, Projects & Partnerships, it's taken 3 years to refine the marketing, client selection process and partnership development continuum with employers. Over the course of the project, communication with employers was refined and emphasis was placed on the importance of communicating to employers that the intention of the placement for the participants is to "get them ready to work", and that there shouldn't be an expectation that they are "ready to work" as soon as they start the placement.

Program Legacy

Since the launch of the Navigating Employment Pathways program, the MNO has successfully expanded their Education and Training services to include a Metis Mining Strategy which provides support for

Employment Barriers Faced by NEP Clients



The above summary demonstrates that the target client group was in fact being served through the NEP program. However, over the course of the project, it became clear that the intangible life barriers were just as important as the skills gaps, and delivery evolved to address these gaps along with the skills gaps. One of the key lessons learned from the NEP program is summed up below.

Program Successes

The NEP program's success is evident in both the program statistics below as well as clients' and employers' testimonials. Throughout the course of the 3 year project, the NEP program realized the following accomplishments:

- 230 students have enrolled over 6 project intakes.
- 196 completed in-class training
- 104 completed work placements
- 172 participants employed
- A database of over 200 employers was created
- A training partnership has been formed with Bow Valley College – TOWES to provide Essential Skills Assessments for applicants
- Successful operationalization of pre-employment service delivery in MNO service locations

short-term education, training and work placements for Aboriginal students who are interested in a career in mining. Prior to the NEP program, the MNO had not delivered in-house pre-employment training to Metis clients and have now identified a continued need for “entry-level” workplace training programs to prepare clients for employment.

The network of employers that has been developed through the NEP program will continue to benefit MNO clients for years to come. Relationships have strengthened throughout the project to the point that several small to medium employers have begun seeking out participants to fill positions prior to the completion of the in class portion of the NEP program.

In 2015, the MNO launched the new Navigating Employment Pathways- Youth Project (NEPYP) in North Bay and Sault Ste. Marie.



The Delta Sault Ste. Marie Waterfront hosted a professional group of NEP clients at their property for a full day of tours, job shadowing and career advice from the Delta team.

This program, which was specially adapted to the needs of unemployed Aboriginal Youth, is the latest offering in the MNO's growing portfolio of hospitality focused employment training services.

A leader in Hospitality and Customer Service Training and Community Workforce Development, OTEC is an independent, not-for-profit Training, Consulting, and Workforce Development organization that delivers innovative, high quality solutions for the development and growth of a professional, skilled workforce.

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