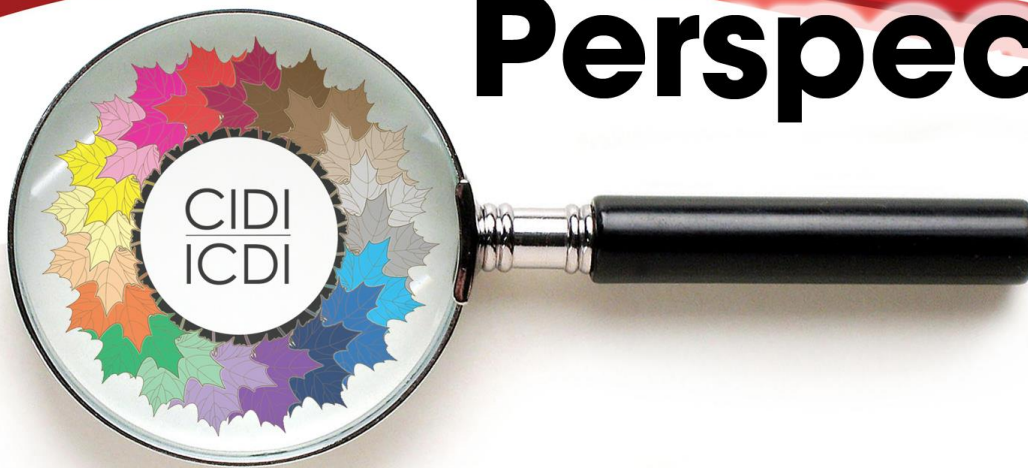




Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion  
Institut canadien de la diversité et de l'inclusion

# Diversity Perspectives



## Aboriginal Peoples:

Examining Current Practices in the Area of Aboriginal Employee Networks.

July 17, 2013

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# Acknowledgements:

The Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion would like to thank everyone who participated in our research survey on Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups. Their participation was instrumental in the creation of this report.



# About the Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion:

The Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion (“CIDI”) is a national non-profit organization that is quickly becoming the trusted advisor for all issues related to Diversity and Inclusion, and Human Rights and Equity within Canada’s workplaces.

Effectively managing diversity and inclusion (“D&I”) is a strategic imperative for all Canadian employers. In many organizations, D&I and HR practitioners are responsible for achieving substantial performance goals as well as transforming their organizations into inclusive work environments; however, they are often under-resourced creating challenges in achieving their organization’s strategy.

The CIDI helps employers, business leaders, human resources (“HR”) and D&I practitioners effectively address the full picture of diversity within the workplace by providing innovative and proven strategies, research, tools, and educational supports with the goal of helping improve the overall inclusivity of the Canadian workforce.

The CIDI’s seven key areas of focus include the following:

- » **Supporting our Members** (individual members and Employer Partners) on their D&I journey. This is done through our monthly webinars and Community of Practice events (held quarterly in major cities across Canada), providing engaging, productive networking and promising practice sharing where business, HR and D&I professionals come together to share and learn.
- » **Community Connector.** Bringing together diversity-related NGO’s and

non-profit organizations to share information and learn from one another. This also involves developing and maintaining a central database of community organizations to assist employers in better navigating this space.

- » **Education.** Providing employers with a library of practical, effective learning solutions for leaders, management teams, Diversity Councils, ERG leaders, HR and D&I professionals, and all people.
- » **Knowledge Repository.** A centralized online library of D&I research, data, and promising practice information, with a specific focus on Canada.
- » **Think Tank.** Cutting-edge exclusive research that will contribute to the Canadian conversation on diversity and inclusion.
- » **Legislative Support.** Providing practical experience to help employers with compliance related to current and future D&I related legislation (Employment Equity Act, AODA, etc.).
- » **Consultancy.** Practical, credible, and sustainable consulting services specific to D&I in Canada, provided by a team of subject matter experts with decades of experience delivering D&I work inside organizations.

To learn more about the CIDI, please visit our website at [www.cidi-icdi.ca](http://www.cidi-icdi.ca).



## Founding Partners:

The CIDI is a member-supported organization, providing services to both individual members and Employer Partners. We would like to acknowledge the exceptional support and dedication of our Founding Employer Partners.



For more information on becoming an Employer Partner with the CIDI, please [contact us](#) or visit [www.cidi-icdi.ca](http://www.cidi-icdi.ca).



## Advisory Board:

The commitment, drive and passion of our Advisory Board is critical to the success of the CIDI. We thank them for their continued support and dedication.

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### **Aboriginal Peoples:**

Examining Current Practices in the Area of Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups.

## Introduction:

It is with somewhat mixed emotions that we bring you the second issue of the Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion's *Diversity Perspectives* series. We're very excited to be able to produce our second report in this series. That said, we wish the results were more promising.

This report looks at the efforts made around Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups ("ERG") or Networks. Our goal was to uncover what is being done by organizations as it relates to ERGs, to engage with this potential talent source and bring more awareness to existing employees through company-wide initiatives and community participation.

This report came about because one of our employer partners was working to develop an Aboriginal Network, and was looking to pinpoint specific models and examples of successful networks of this nature. We decided to ask our membership and other organizations who were interested and engaged in these practices to share their experiences, tactics and learnings in this area.

What follows is a snapshot of what organizations across Canada are doing, and represents input from 16 different sectors and industries, from major retail outlets, academic institutions, financial services, oil and gas, law firms, accounting firms and more. We wanted to know how respondent organizations were using ERGs and Networks to engage employees on Aboriginal issues, and what they were doing to celebrate this vibrant culture.

The research shows there is still a great deal of work to be done when it comes to Aboriginal

ERGs as a whole, and specifically tapping into the Aboriginal population as a talent source, and creating a working environment that is supportive and inclusive. We reached out to our entire network of employer partners and diversity and inclusion ("D&I") practitioners (1000+ people) and received input from only 28 respondents. This is a relatively small sample size. Even more important to note is that of the 28 respondents, only seven come from organizations that actually have an Aboriginal ERG. Clearly there is a lot of room to grow.

Although this report is light on detail, we hope this information inspires you, and gives you a foundation to start building an Aboriginal ERG at your organization.



**Michael Bach, CCDP/AP**

Founder and CEO

Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion

July 10, 2013

For the purposes of this report, when we refer to "Aboriginal people" or the "Aboriginal population", we are referring to all of Canada's First Peoples: those who identify as Aboriginal, Indigenous, Inuit, Métis, or as a member of a First Nation.



# Case for Support:

## The Aboriginal Population.

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The Aboriginal population is one of, if not the single fastest growing demographic group in Canada today. According to the recently released National Household Survey (from Statistics Canada), between 2006 and 2011 the Aboriginal population increased by 20.1%, compared with 5.2% for the non-Aboriginal population, and is expected to continue with steady growth going forward. This is consistent with previous growth patterns identified in the 2006 census reporting.

According to the Aboriginal Human Resources Council (the "AHRC"), by 2020, over 400,000 young Aboriginal people will enter the workforce adding to the 652,000 Aboriginal people who are already of working age. The AHRC urges the private sector to develop new,

equitable, and innovative labour market strategies to meet challenges that will be presented in the future and suggests that "a partnership jointly led by employers and Aboriginal people must be established in order to develop innovative solutions to the current and medium-term labour market shortages, while dramatically increasing Aboriginal employment". **Labour Market Strategies: Increasing Return and Productivity.**

One highly effective method of attracting and engaging Aboriginal employees, and helping to create a more culturally competent and inclusive work environment, is to develop ERGs as a foundation for building awareness of Aboriginal culture and some of the challenges faced by Aboriginal employees.

## The Business Case for Employee Resource Groups.

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Employee Resource Groups (known by other names such as affinity groups, diversity networks, or business network groups) are groups of employees who join together in their workplace based on shared characteristics or life experiences. ERGs are generally based on providing support, enhancing career development, business development, and contributing to members' personal and professional development in the work environment.

Once a person is onboard within an organization, ERGs can help keep employees engaged. To be successful in this increasingly competitive marketplace, talent has to be developed and engaged, but also needs to be connected to an employer's strategic direction. ERGs can have first-hand knowledge about specific markets because they are aware of certain populations' needs. Organizations that leverage this intimate knowledge can help adapt

to change faster and make better-informed decisions.

ERGs traditionally were event-driven and specific to one internal group. However, many forward-thinking employers have realized the untapped potential and value of these groups, and have in recent years, learned to tie the goals of the ERG to the organization's overall strategic goals. These networks undoubtedly affect and shape future business models and in many organizations they are integral part of the organization.

ERGs can help identify up-and-coming talent, aid with recruitment strategies and employee retention, and if the overall purpose for ERGs is adjusted, the potential for growth is enormous. When managed well and leveraged, ERGs can provide input to every part of your organization: product and service development and delivery, human resources, professional development, policy development, community involvement,

vendor and government relationships, and marketing.

ERGs are an excellent source for finding and developing leadership talent. If employees are lacking the "right" credentials to move into upper management, through opportunities and visibility in ERGs, they could get a chance to shine, as well as learn new skills.

Building teams that reflect the demographics of the customer base can also help improve customer loyalty. Business examples of ERG contributions range from changing insurance coverage plans, helping military personnel transition skills into the workplace, finding solutions for groups with disabilities, marketing specific products to underserved groups, providing scholarships and using representative

teams in new global markets, or performing the research prior to moving into global markets.

#### **RBC**

The advancement and dedication of employees helps RBC pursue and achieve diversity goals. RBC Employee Resource Groups help bring together employees from a shared background and gives them a resource to help them develop both personally and professionally.

Within an Employee Resource Group, employees may provide and have access to peer support and recruitment opportunities through mentoring, coaching or networking initiatives while promoting avenues for education and awareness for other employees.

These groups are inclusive, cross-business and self-coordinating organizations for employees. Some have been around since the mid-1990s.

(<http://www.rbc.com/diversity/employee-resource-groups.html>)

## **Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups.**

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The following are some publicly available descriptions of various Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups from a selection of employers across Canada:

### **Government of Manitoba.**

#### **Touchstone.**

Touchstone is a group of Aboriginal employees that:

- provides a positive alternative method of support through which Aboriginal employees may meet their need for community while managing the challenges and stresses they face while carrying out their duties as civil servants;
- uses the abilities of more experienced Aboriginal employees as mentors and role models to support the development and sustainability of others as they progress through their careers in the civil service;
- broadens the network of support beyond the traditional centres so that those in more isolated areas can have a more consistent method of support;

- provides a forum that reinforces the positive contribution of Aboriginal employees to the workplace.

The Touchstone group remains neutral on political and spiritual matters.

### **Government of Saskatchewan.**

#### **Aboriginal Government Employees' Network.**

The Aboriginal Government Employees' Network (AGEN) is a unique organization dedicated to partnering, promoting and supporting workplace environments that are committed to the recruitment, retention and advancement of Aboriginal employees throughout the Government of Saskatchewan.

### **IBM.**

#### **Aboriginal Peoples Network Group.**

IBM Canada has achieved its first gold status in Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR). As a global leader in technology-enabled solutions, IBM recognizes the importance of increasing



personal and business opportunities for First Nations, Metis and Inuit through knowledge of and access to technology. With a focus on skills development and community relations, IBM's strategy is to expand participation through employment and growth in Aboriginal technology businesses. Progressive Aboriginal Relations is fundamental to IBM's diversity commitment and its success in business.

IBM, along with our industry partners and civic, provincial, federal and Aboriginal governments, continues to collaborate to improve accessibility, infrastructure and skills in Aboriginal communities. IBM sponsors Blue Prints for the Future Career Fair and the Aboriginal Human Resource Council Job Fair. Both are focused on providing opportunities for Aboriginals to explore a broad range of career possibilities.

#### **Imperial Oil.**

##### **Aboriginal Relations Network.**

We have created a centre of excellence in Community and Aboriginal Affairs based in Calgary to support the development, implementation and stewardship of our Aboriginal relations principles and guidelines. Along with this, we established an Aboriginal Relations Network of 24 employees to encourage the sharing of best practices in Aboriginal relations across the company. The network is integral to implementing and sustaining the company's Aboriginal relations strategy as embodied in our Aboriginal relations principles and guidelines.

In 2009, the team developed performance-based measures to track our company's progress on Aboriginal relations issues. These include:

- number of Aboriginal stakeholder interactions.
- effectiveness and consistency of stakeholder consultation.
- amount of contract spending with Aboriginal businesses.
- total investment in community programs that support Aboriginal people in Canada.

The network reports its goals and achievements to our company's senior vice president of resources.

#### **RBC.**

##### **Royal Eagles (Aboriginal Employees).**

Royal Eagles is an employee fellowship of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees who work together to raise awareness and support Aboriginal culture throughout RBC. Royal Eagles provides a support system for RBC employees and acts as a liaison between the bank, its employees and the Aboriginal community.

#### **Saskatchewan Government Insurance.**

##### **Internal network for Aboriginal employees.**

We champion the SGI Aboriginal Advisory Network, a supportive network for Aboriginal employees that aims to increase the understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and issues



## Research Methodology and Respondents:

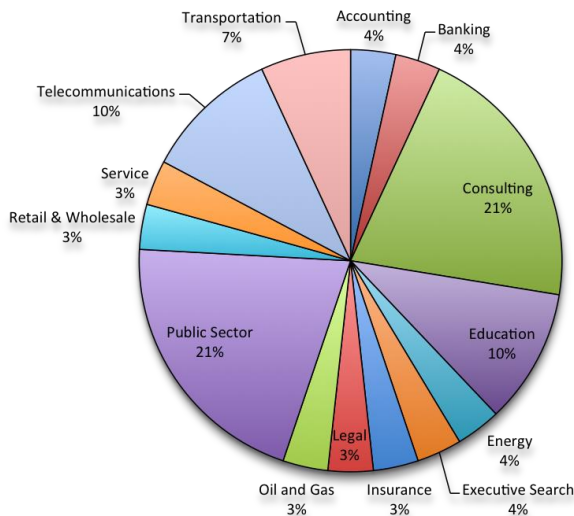
The research for this project was conducted through an online survey. We supplemented this with additional research of publicly available information from organizations' websites.

Survey respondents were asked a total of 15 questions, both multiple choice and free text. Respondents were encouraged to share specific experiences, organizational tools and learnings.

As with our first report in the series, **Diversity Staffing Structures: Examining Current Practices in the Area of Diversity Staffing**, we reached out to members of our Advisory Board, LinkedIn Group, Employer Partners and Community Partners to participate in the survey. We also reached respondents through our various social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.

Participants in the research included 28 respondents representing 16 different industries, from multiple provinces across Canada. Some of the industries represented included large retail, academia, financial

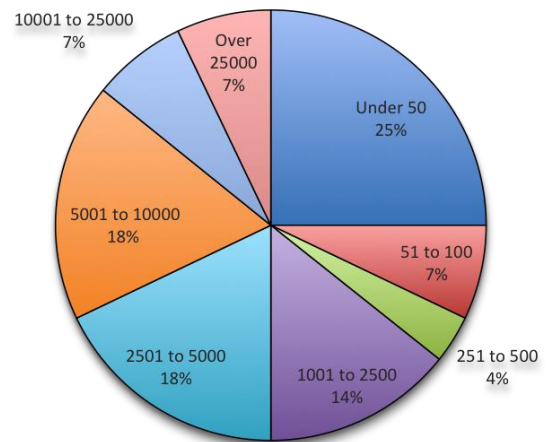
### Which type of organization you work for (what industry)?



services, oil and gas, law, accounting and more. Of these organizations, there was close to a 50% split between organizations that were subject to the Employment Equity Act and those that were not.

The size of organizations (by headcount) ranged from smaller organizations of under 100 employees (32.1%), to medium sized with 251-500 (3.6%), with the majority coming from larger organizations with over 1000 employees. This was not surprising as ERG's are more commonly found in larger organizations that have an HR and D&I infrastructure to support them.

### How large is your organization (by headcount)?



### Aboriginal Peoples:

Examining Current Practices in the Area of Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups.

## Our Findings:

The findings of our research do not point to one conclusive, consistent promising practice for Aboriginal Employee Networks. Instead, we have chosen to focus this report on the specific themes identified in our research.

### Strategies for Addressing the Aboriginal Employee Gap.

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While not specific to Aboriginal ERGs, it's worth mentioning that respondents to the survey identified that attracting, engaging and retaining Aboriginal employees presented a challenge for their organizations regardless of their size, industry or geography. When asked what strategies they were employing to address these challenges, we found a variety of approaches.

One large employer partnered with local Aboriginal businesses, created a preferred vendor program and engaged in community consultations.

Another medium-size public sector organization circulated dashboards to senior management with information on the gaps in representation and employee engagement for designated

groups, and developed an Aboriginal recruitment and retention strategy accordingly.

A tactic used by another large employer included targeted communications to local Aboriginal communities, as well as providing training for community members on how to apply their current experience to roles within the private sector.

Consistently, most respondents indicated that their organizations established partnerships with community groups and worked directly with the Aboriginal population in their respective jurisdiction to gain access to Aboriginal talent, including local bands, recruiting firms focused on Aboriginal peoples, as well as partnership with the AHRC.

### Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups.

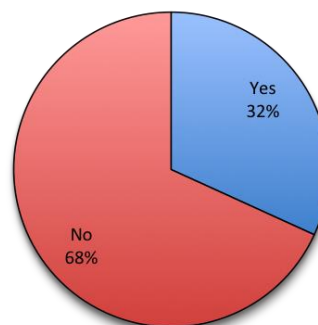
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Only 7 respondents (31.8%) to our survey indicated their organization had an internal Aboriginal ERG or Network. Of those seven organizations:

- All were from organizations of over 2500 employees;
- Five were from Federally Regulated employers or members of the Federal Contractor's Program;
- Five had Executive Sponsors (ranging from the President, Senior Vice President, Vice President, and the Diversity Committee Chair)

The structure of these ERGs varied across the respondent organizations. One public sector organization developed their structure by initially sending out an invitation to all employees across Canada asking them to join

Does your organization have an Aboriginal Network?



the Aboriginal Employee Network. Existing since 2012, members of this network were invited to discuss issues and participate in learning activities. This organization also convened a National Diversity & Employment Equity Advisory Committee that same year, which included Aboriginal representation.

Another mid-sized transportation company with an existing Aboriginal ERG developed their network by circulating a company memo asking for members to come together. With their first meeting in November 2012, this committee had 12 members, seven of which identify as being members of an Aboriginal community. The

group worked together to develop a mission statement, although the length of term and the role of individual members was left to each employee to decide. To raise awareness within the overall organization, the ERG ran a company-wide contest to select a logo for the group.

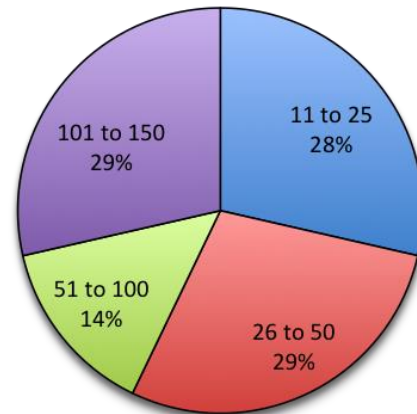
## Activities.

The activities undertaken by Aboriginal ERGs varied between organizations, however most had a strong focus on events, specifically related to National Aboriginal Day (June 21) and Aboriginal Awareness Week (primarily in the public sector and academia). The purpose of these events consistently focused on raising awareness about the ERG to the overall organization, and to increase organizational knowledge about Aboriginal culture and inclusion.

Examples of these initiatives included:

- Professional learning activities for ERG members;
- Internal awareness celebrations, including external community members as performers and presenters;
- Poster campaigns;
- Aboriginal conferences and symposia;
- High school outreach;
- Lunch and learns;
- Employee presentations; and

What is the average attendance at your network events?



- Participation in community events.

When asked about attendance at events, participation rates ranged from small (11 to 25) to large (101 to 150). This is often dependent on the size of the organization or the employee population at given sites where the events are held.

## Investment and Measurement.

The investment made by most organizations on their Aboriginal ERG is not significant. 71.4% spend less than \$5,000 annually. 14.3% have a budget between \$20,000 to \$30,000, and 14.3% have a budget over \$50,000.

Based on the respondent organizations in our sample, it can be assumed that those spending less than \$5,000 are not making a substantial investment in comparison to the organization's overall budget.

Although monies were invested, our research concluded that the majority of organizations had little to no formal methods of measuring success. In fact, the only measurement indicators listed by respondents were attendance at events and an increase in employment of Aboriginal people.



## Conclusion:

Our research points to two consistent themes as it relates to Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups. First, and most important, it is clear there are an *insignificant* number of Aboriginal ERGs in Canadian workplaces.

48.0% of respondents to our survey work for employers that are federally regulated or part of the Federal Contractors' Program. Of those, 68.2% indicated that their organization didn't have an Aboriginal ERG or Network.

This is a clear disconnect. ERGs are a simple and cost effective way to engage with existing Aboriginal employees and their allies, to help develop solutions to address the gaps related to unemployment and underemployment of Aboriginal peoples. Every employer that is federally regulated or part of the Federal Contractors' Program, that faces gaps related to the employment of Aboriginal people, **should** have an Aboriginal ERG.

The additional research we conducted on employers' websites showed a lack of Aboriginal ERGs overall. The information provided on existing networks (beginning on page 7 of this report) was difficult to locate, and primarily comes from public sector organizations, with the majority based in western Canada – where managing Aboriginal relations can be imperative to certain business activities.

The second theme that we identified is of existing ERGs, very few have a formal structure. Critical to success of an ERG is that they are formalized and directly connected to the organization. This can present in various ways depending on the organization's structure and processes. Here are a few of the most common methods of formalizing ERGs:

- An executive sponsor who is senior within the organization;

- A formal structure, including a mandate and vision that aligns with the organization's overall strategic goals;
- Governing documents, including committee structure, role portraits, and membership guidelines (including term lengths);
- An annual plan that outlines the ERGs actions for the year, which aligns with the organizations overall strategic goals;
- A budget that connects directly to their annual plan;
- A formal structure of accountability for ERG leaders, including performance measurement;
- Measurement practices to show results against the ERG's annual plan and to show *impact* on the organization's strategic goals; and
- A formal reporting process.

There is an opportunity for organizations with Aboriginal ERG's to further leverage these groups, or to measure other ways that the ERG impacts the organization. These might include: measuring employee perceptions of Aboriginal culture before and after events, monitoring the development of individual members of the ERG's, or monitoring the ERG's involvement in Aboriginal Community Relations issues where business activities impact on Aboriginal lands, as just a few examples.

Overall, our research found that organizations are inconsistent in their application and use of Aboriginal Employee Resource Groups. Organizations are missing the opportunity to do a better job of engaging with Aboriginal employees if they don't have an ERG. Furthermore, those that do have Aboriginal ERG's could do much more to leverage them and make them an important and essential aspect of their organization.

