

# ACR Aboriginal Programs Project Program Template

<b>Program Area:</b>	3.0	Business Development
<b>Sub Program:</b>	3.3	Programs Sponsored by Government and Non-Profit Agencies
<b>Template:</b>	3.3.2	Aboriginal Business Development Centre
<b>Sponsor(s):</b>	<i>Western Economic Diversification and British Columbia's Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation</i>	

## 1. Objective

To assist individual Aboriginal people to gain business experience and skills, through an Aboriginal-led non-profit centre.

## 2. Description

The Aboriginal Business Development Centre is an Aboriginal-led program that provides business counselling and advice to Aboriginal people.

The idea for the centre was generated nine years ago by a group of Aboriginal leaders in the Prince George area of British Columbia. The office was established in July of 1997 and set up as a non-profit organization. It has been funded since then mainly through fee-for-service contracts from government and industry. The office operates on limited resources, with six full-time staff. As of 2005, the centre receives core funding under a WEPA agreement between the provincial Ministry of Aboriginal Relations & Reconciliation and Western Economic Diversification.

The Aboriginal Business Development Centre provides direct service to Aboriginal people through individual business counselling. When a client comes forward with an idea, the counsellor will assist the client to develop a business plan. The approach is to get to know the client first. It takes about 35-40 hours to work with each client through the various stages of the business plan. This service is free to the client, however the client is responsible for doing most of the work to develop the plan. The centre provides only advice and support.

The centre also presents workshops and organizes conferences in Aboriginal business development. The centre has also been working with industry partners to develop a longer-term relationship as a liaison between companies and Aboriginal businesses.

The centre is guided by a board of directors that includes representatives from the local community, Métis association, tribal council and friendship centre. It hires Aboriginals to work for them, as much as possible. The centre focuses on small businesses and projects, and does not get involved in larger projects.

The centre's president has co-authored a manual: *Minding Our Own Businesses: how to create support in First Nations communities for Aboriginal Business*, by John McBride with Ray Gerow.

There has been demand from other areas for similar centres. Two other offices have been

established - one in the Kootneys and one in Fort St. John. The president of the Prince George centre was responsible for managing the process to set up the new offices. The president is now working with various organizations from the Carrier Chilcotin region to establish a similar centre in the Williams Lake area.

There is an opportunity for resource companies to get involved in working with this type of centre. Companies can contract with the centre to provide business counselling services, or to put on workshops for cross-cultural awareness or business development. Companies can also provide direct support to this type of centre, as part of their Aboriginal relations strategies.

### **3. Implementation**

Some of the key elements for implementation and management of this program are:

- In establishing a centre, find ways to keep politics out. For example, the centre should be on neutral territory. It is best if it is not on a reserve. If it is on a reserve, it should not be connected to the band office.
- It is best to have the centre serve a reasonably large population, to allow development of diverse business interests and maintain neutrality. It should serve all Aboriginal peoples, not just one band or group.
- It is most important that local Aboriginal people be responsible for establishing and governing the centre. For example, in establishing the Fort St. John office, open community meetings were held inviting all interested people. A steering committee was established to develop the protocol for the board of directors.
- A general recommendation for companies working with the centre or similar organizations is to allow flexibility in supporting different types of ideas that come forward, in different ways. Requiring potential Aboriginal businesses to support any one sector, or implementing programs with a lot of restrictions and criteria, discourages potential businesses.
- Another general recommendation for companies working in the area of Aboriginal relations is to develop long-term, supportive but low-key relationships with the Aboriginal communities. Actions that appear to be taking advantage of Aboriginal communities or using them for publicity, or ones that have hidden agendas, will be regarded negatively by the communities.
- The centre is working with companies and government to explore new ways of supporting Aboriginal employment and overcoming some of the barriers to successful employment. For example:
  - Work with unions so that a certain number of Aboriginal positions on a job site are protected - even if some individuals don't work out, other Aboriginals will still be employed.
  - In setting up a new operation, such as a sawmill, establish Aboriginal training and hiring practices before the operation is underway, so that Aboriginal employees become part of the initial operations.
  - In giving out contracts for services, such as for chip trucks, if no qualified Aboriginal contactor is available, give a contract to a non-Aboriginal on the understanding that an Aboriginal person will be trained to take over the position.

#### **4. Timeframe for Results**

Working with individual clients can be time-consuming and immediate results are not expected.

#### **5. Measurable Criteria**

For the individual Aboriginal client, the centre's objective is to assist them to increase their business and employment skills, and to establish a business. However, even if the client decides not to go ahead with the project, it is still considered a success. It is better to stop before wasting time and resources on unrealistic projects, and the experience of developing the plan provides valuable skills. It has also been proven that without the assistance provided by the centre, some clients would have gone into business, and in all likelihood would have failed.

#### **6. Budget**

The office operates on limited resources, but still manages to employ six full time staff. The budget is about \$400,000 per year.

#### **7. Partners and Sponsors**

In the past, the centre operated on a multitude of fee-for-service contracts, but now has core funding of \$225,000 a year. Western Economic Diversification and British Columbia's Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation fund approximately two-thirds of the centre's core operating budget.

#### **8. Experience with the Program**

The program has been operating for eight years, and is considered very successful. The centre has received several national and provincial awards for Aboriginal business, as well as becoming the model for similar organizations throughout Canada.

#### **9. General Applicability**

This model could be used to provide support for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and businesses at a regional level.

#### **10. Additional Information or Support**

Ray Gerow, President, Aboriginal Business Development Centre, 3845 - 15th Avenue Prince George, BC V2N

Telephone: (250) 562-6325

Email: [gerow@bcgroup.net](mailto:gerow@bcgroup.net)

Date Entered or Updated: August 4, 2005