

BUILDING SELF-SUFFICIENCY... TOGETHER

Establishing a Saskatchewan First Nations
Economic Development Network





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Saskatchewan First Nations make up an important and growing segment of the Saskatchewan economy, but historically have failed to benefit from the broader provincial prosperity. In order to build the capacity of Saskatchewan First Nations to grow and direct their own economic future, a forum for those involved in First Nations economic development was held in Saskatoon/Treaty Six territory on March 13-14, 2012. The event was a success, with the sold-out event attracting over 100 participants and featuring a number of prominent speakers in the field.

The forum was intended to provide relevant information and networking opportunities for the participants of the event. However it was also organized to gauge support for and gather feedback on the establishment of a Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network, through the use of breakout sessions and a written survey. The results are instructive, with three overarching priorities appearing in order to improve economic development for Saskatchewan First Nations:

- First Nations business must operate at arm's length from First Nations politics.
- Each First Nation should take a "snapshot" of their level and stage of development and develop appropriate strategic plans, land use plans, and comprehensive community-based plans to help achieve their goals and objectives.
- Training and educational opportunities should be developed and offered to suit the specific needs of Saskatchewan First Nations professionals in the economic development fields.

Overall, support for the development of a formal network is high. Based on participant feedback, it is recommended that a Saskatchewan First Nation Economic Development Network (SFNEDN) be established, beginning with the development of terms of reference, a governance structure, and business plan.

The primary roles and responsibilities for the network should be:

- To provide information on best practices, Saskatchewan-specific economic information, and funding opportunities.
- To organize more networking events.
- To provide professional development opportunities and strategic planning assistance.

All of this can and should be done in conjunction with existing networks and associations, such as the Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA), the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO), and the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB).

The establishment of a Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network is not a first step in building self-sufficiency for First Nations communities in this province. It is a culmination of years of activities, education, awareness, disappointments and successes. The very establishment of the Network – a volunteer, member-driven, civil society organization - is a statement on how far First Nations people in Saskatchewan have come in determining their own path towards economic well-being, and is an achievement worth celebrating in and of itself.