

Best Practices

# DOING **IT** RIGHT

A Best Practices Guide to  
Attracting, Training, Employing,  
and Retaining  
Aboriginal People in the Trades

## THE INDUSTRY TRAINING AUTHORITY

**Industry Training Authority** (ITA) leads and coordinates British Columbia's skilled trades system. ITA works with employers, employees, industry, labour, training providers and government to issue credentials, manage apprenticeships, set program standards, and increase opportunities in the trades. There are over 100 apprenticeable trades in BC that let aspiring trades people earn while they learn.

**Vision** – Highly skilled and productive people making British Columbia's industries prosperous and globally competitive.

**Mission** – To lead British Columbia's industry skills training and certification system through collaboration and innovation.

ITA is a provincial Crown agency governed by a Board of Directors, who have skills, experience and qualifications directly related to the trades. ITA was established in 2004.

ITA's Aboriginal Initiatives as outlined in the ITA Aboriginal Strategy helps fund Aboriginal trades training programs for unemployed or low-skilled Aboriginal people so that they can break through barriers to employment in the trades and meet the workforce demands of BC's growing economy. ITA Aboriginal Initiatives works with BC-based Aboriginal employment and training organizations that are well-established and connected to help Aboriginal people get into the trades, and support employers with hiring Aboriginal people.

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## DOING IT RIGHT

### Best Practices Guide for Attracting, Training, Employing and Retaining Aboriginal People in the Trades

There's never been a better time for Aboriginal people to enter the skilled trades. Certified skilled tradespeople are in high demand, and there are good skilled trades jobs in every corner of the province. Trades training and certification provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to work in the heart of the city, or work close to their First Nation community. And with Red Seal certification, tradespeople are qualified to work anywhere in Canada.

#### LMA Agreement

Since 2008/09, ITA has been delivering targeted programs designed to increase the representation of Aboriginal, women and immigrants in the skilled trades, through funding provided by the Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Agreement (LMA). The LMA transfers \$394.2 million over six years from the Canadian federal government to the BC provincial government to invest in labour market programs for individuals who are unemployed and not eligible for Employment Insurance or who are employed and low-skilled.

Between 2008/09 and 2013/14, ITA administered \$14 million in funding for service providers who offered training to Aboriginal people through a number of specific initiatives. This guide summarized the projects supported that targeted Aboriginal people, and the lessons learned and best practices of those projects.



- **Background**

This guide describes successful approaches to increasing the number of Aboriginal people in apprenticeable trades, focusing on ways to prepare, train and retain. It is a part of the ITA LMA program review that was intended to:

**PURPOSE**

- Assess the results of the ITA Aboriginal Initiatives LMA projects
- Determine how to better support Aboriginal apprentices and trades people – from entrance to transition to certification, and how to retain them in the trades
- Identify ways to improve the LMA program operations and administration
- Collect best practices in Aboriginal LMA programs

# “Doing It Right” – Lessons Learned

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Since 2008, the number of Aboriginal people entering apprenticeable trades has doubled. They represent over nine percent or about 1,100 Aboriginal students enrolled annually in registered post-secondary school trades program; and, are an increasing number of new trades apprentices in British Columbia.

Aboriginal employment agencies, First Nations, post-secondary schools, industry and trade unions have designed programs and services to attract and retain Aboriginal people into the trades with the support of ITA Aboriginal Initiatives, the LMA program funds, along with contributions from other funding sources and partners.

This guide shares the lessons learned by these organizations in how to design a program that will assist Aboriginal people with finding the trade that works for them and succeed in becoming a registered tradesperson.

## ABOUT ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN BC

As the original people of Canada, Aboriginal people often possess unparalleled knowledge of their traditional lands, which can help a construction or resource project with design, planning and operations; and in remote areas, provide a knowledgeable and local labour force. In British Columbia, Aboriginal people represent approximately five percent of the population; however, in some BC regions, the Aboriginal population is 35 percent, especially in northern and remote areas. Aboriginal people birth rate is four times higher than the average Canadian birthrate, with approximately half being under the age of 25 years. Aboriginal people are a growing labour force.

The challenge though, is that many Aboriginal people live in regions where employment opportunities are few, which provides little opportunity to develop the skills in demand when major resource and construction projects come their way.

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

An effective program that targets increasing Aboriginal participation in the skilled trades provides support that enables Aboriginal learners to prepare themselves to be a stronger candidate for the job, and successful in the workplace and classroom. While many of the challenges to attracting and retaining Aboriginal people in skilled

trades are the same as those of other population segments, some conditions in First Nation communities can make it more difficult for Aboriginal people to participate.

**Challenges:**

- High unemployment in the community resulting in less work experience, and higher competition for job opportunities
- More young parents and single parent households, requiring additional services and flexibility in work hours
- Low income, increasing dependency on outside financial resources for training, course supplies and materials, and work tools
- Low literacy and numeracy skills – are both essential skills needed to enter and be successful in the trades
- Commitment and responsibility to participate in cultural activities and ceremonies
- Remote and isolated communities have higher program delivery costs, and are secluded from networking with potential partners
- Finding enough suitable candidates that meet the program criteria
- Few financial resources, meaning they are unable to purchase the necessary equipment, tools or apparel, and have transportation
- An aggressive workplace that may not seem welcoming to Aboriginal people, or women
- No training facilities to deliver training in the home community
- Lack of access to opportunity to be exposed to trades introduction programs
- Difficulty in finding instructors who are knowledgeable and skilled in the trade and industry, and is an ITA approved instructor
- High school graduates, while they have completed Grade 12, they may not have the required level of competency of essential skills to enter a trades training program – literacy, comprehension, math/numeracy, etc.

## Designing a Program for Success

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A training program that is designed to assist Aboriginal people to begin a path to long-term employment in the trades has greater potential of success when it has the support and involvement of other programs and partners. An increasing number of the funding programs for training and skills development require the applicant to be innovative, clear and have partners; these partners though may either be an essential application component to qualify, or simply a necessity to develop a program that contains all the essential elements, such as additional resources and credibility. Typical partners include employers, education/training



institutes, industry and unions. These partners often provide – expertise, recognized and skilled instructors, access to on-the-job training, field trips, and insight into the industry and trends.

## Finding Candidates and Trainees

While there is a growing number of Aboriginal people interested in the trades, marketing and program promotion are still required to attract enough suitable and qualified candidates. Useful marketing activities include:

- **Print Promotional Materials** – flyers, posters and brochures, especially important in the first year when the program and organization may be unknown.
- **Advertise** – in publications and places that your target audience is around, like public transit, billboards, community signage, in community newsletters, newspapers and flyers.
- **Social Media** – promote programs and highlight participants who have successfully completed training or apprenticeships, utilize social media networks, and inform communities, friends and family of what one of their peers has accomplished.
- **Media Relations** – invite media to program graduations using media advisory notices, or send press releases and success stories about participants, partnerships and new programs.
- **Community Relations** – host community events, participate in career days, talk to schools and community leaders to promote new programs and inform community leaders and members of trades possibilities.
- **Word of Mouth** – a good reputation will facilitate promotion of programs by past participants and partners.
- **Aboriginal Employment Organizations** – utilize the existing Aboriginal employment organizations and First Nation employment and education officers to identify qualified candidates. A successful training program means chosen participants are prepared to be in a training program, and that post-training, the program and employment organizations are better assist the participant with securing employment.

Employers gain confidence in Aboriginal employment and training organizations when referred program participants demonstrate they are job-ready. Employers will be more likely to return to Aboriginal employment organizations to find new employees.

### TIPS FOR WORKING WITH LMA CLIENTS

- **Be Non-judgmental** – provide unrelenting support.
- **Have a long-term commitment to training** – be supportive and monitor program participants success through every stage of their training and even when they are employed.
- **Build a personal relationship with every student** –be there for students, but establish boundaries on the level of support – support must enable participants to be self-supporting, rather than dependent.
- **Be Flexible** – in development and delivery.

## THE TRAINING PROGRAM DESIGN

Experience of First Nations, Aboriginal organizations, educators, industry and employers confirm that successful employment counseling services and training programs include the following essential elements.

- Identifies the program purpose and the reason the program is proposed (e.g. industry opportunity, major project, etc.)
- Understands their area needs, industry market, and First Nations and community member's training and learning needs
- Is flexible and tailored to the learners
- Show how the program will be accountable to funding organizations
- Design a program that will be flexible and supportive of the Aboriginal participant
- Has partners for training, employment, and funding
- Is a training program that is industry recognized
- Provides workplace experience
- Connects trainees with potential employers
- Continues long after the program ends providing services such as support, counseling, and assistance with continued training

Your program must be designed to ensure your participants will be experienced and skilled to be competitive against others looking for work in the industry.

## Define Your Program Purpose

The program design is influenced by the primary focus of the program:

<p>1) Is it to prepare people for <b>building skills or knowledge</b> to enter a post-secondary or trades training program?</p>	<p><b>Participant Driven</b></p> <p>Programs that focus on preparing the participant typically focus on creating a comfortable environment for the learner. Its program elements are flexible, often including cultural activities, and additional living support, such as living allowance, meals and transportation. <b>Sharing circles</b> can be used to promote trust and confidence, and build camaraderie amongst the students.</p> <p>Students are often not-ready to enter the training program or job of their choice and require additional services. They may have been long-term unemployed, or lack essential skills, or have social or developmental issues, that are barriers to their success.</p>
<p>2) Is it to develop skills to <b>prepare for employment</b> on a project?</p>	<p><b>Industry Driven</b></p> <p>An <b>Industry Driven</b> program has specific targets and entrance requirements. These programs are based on employment opportunities associated with an industry demand often based on an aging labour force, or major project, that create the demand for skilled workers.</p> <p>These projects typically involve an employer or industry representative be involved in the program design and operations. They may also contribute field trips, workplace training, lecturers, instructors, etc.</p> <p>As skilled labour is required within a short time period, pre-assessments of interested participants are critical to ensuring they are ready to take on the demands of an intense training program; and that the resources (upgrading, tutoring, training dollars) are immediately available to aid in the learner's success. As there are jobs linked to the training, assessments are refined to match the participant with the job.</p> <p>Participants typically require little upgrading or additional support, and may have previous experience in the field.</p>

Accept that there will be people who will not complete trades training, regardless of the effort and support provided.

## Assess Readiness – Prepare the Participant for Success

Service and training programs include components that prepare the program participant for success in training and on-the-job. Prior to launching a program, applicants complete an assessment process. The assessments are provided to:

- 1) Assist with identifying the most suitable trade for the participant interest and skills
- 2) Identify the skill and readiness level of the participant, and any upgrading required

- 3) Determine whether the applicant should be referred to a job opening by pre-screening to establish if the job's initial qualifications are met

Assessments are typically performed in two parts – 1) an interview, and 2) testing. Employment/Career Counselor conducts interviews and administers testing. These assessment and testing tools are industry recognized grading systems that have effectively determined the skills needed to prepare individuals for success in learning and in the workplace. The most common tests are:

- **ITA Essential Skills** – was created to help people prepare for success in the first two levels of technical training during their apprenticeship.
- **Essential Skills 3G** – developed by Aboriginal Skills Group this program has been designed for trades specific assessment.
- **TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills)** – measures three essential skills needed in many occupations today – Reading Text, Document Use, and Numeracy. ([www.towes.com](http://www.towes.com))

<b>The Successful Participant</b>	
Confident	Responsible
Proud	Good health / Physically fit
Committed	Makes safety a priority
Takes work seriously	Sense of humor
Determined	Flexible
Right attitude	Willing to learn
Trustworthy	

Be positive. Encourage participants to say, "I'm going to be a ..." instead of, "I want to be a ..."

### **Provide Participant Support and Resources**

Many programs also provide resources that the candidate requires to be in the classroom or secure a job.

Stage	Training	Employment
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tuition</li> <li>• Books and supplies</li> <li>• Meals during training</li> <li>• Grocery cards</li> <li>• Shuttle service to/from the classroom or bus passes</li> <li>• Daycare</li> <li>• Living allowance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work gear</li> <li>• Safety equipment</li> <li>• Shuttle service to/from the workplace in the first month</li> </ul>
<b>Support Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment / Career Counselor</li> <li>• Instructors</li> <li>• Tutor (optional)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job Coach</li> </ul>

### TIPS FOR ALL DELIVERY AGENTS

Some clients may need:

- equipment and tools for the work site
- assistance with childcare, particularly single parents
- assistance with transportation, including a bus pass, if public transit is an option, or for rides
- assistance to obtain a BC Drivers License or regain one they've lost. ICBC does offer programs that assist workers with regaining their license lost due to excessive fines.

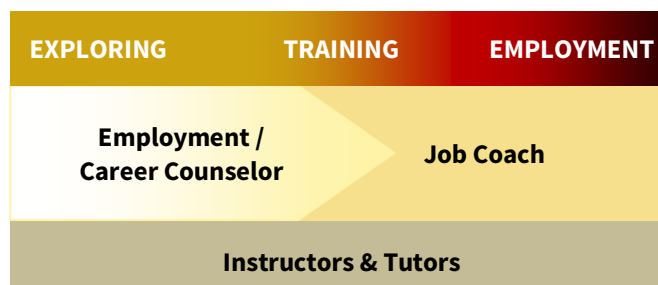
### Essential Program Components

Components that set out the framework for an effective Aboriginal trades program that are designed to attract Aboriginal people to the trades address include: Operations and Staffing, Partners, Program Design Elements, and Monitoring and Reporting. The following sections detail these components.

- **Operations and Staffing**

Projects supporting Aboriginal participation in the trades are structured to provide direct and tailored support for Aboriginal participants. Operations will have dedicated staff (i.e., Program Coordinators) that oversee the program and ensure program compliance with contract terms and monitor and support participants at various stages as they move along the career path. Throughout all support services, there are monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place to follow the participant progress and adjust services and content as needed.

## Career Path and Program Support



- **Employment / Career Counselors** – assist the candidate with understanding their career options, and assess their skills in preparation for training and job placement.
- **Job Coaches** – provide assistance with job search and are liaison for the employee and employer, as well as the employment services organization. Job coaches mediate disputes, ensure the apprentice hours are documented; most often they provide guidance and encouragement, and promote and coach on how to relate with supervisors, bosses and co-workers.
- **Instructors** – of the programs should have industry-recognized credentials, possess a teaching certificate, are certified in their field of instruction, and demonstrate high proficiency in their trade with hands-on experience. Aboriginal instructors can also increase the Aboriginal student’s comfort and success in the classroom, as they are seen as role models and can provide examples of situations that the Aboriginal learner is familiar with. Female instructors are role models for female students, and can provide personal workplace experience examples.
- **Tutors** – are assigned on an as need basis. The need may be identified during the initial assessment or by the Instructor while in the classroom training. Math is often where the greatest support is provided.

- **Partners**

Training and employment programs are finding a key element to their success is in partnerships. These partners provide expertise, credibility, industry knowledge and linkages, and resources whether in-kind or financial.

Typical contributions by various partners are:

Elements	First Nations / Aboriginal	Employment Agency	Educators / Post-Secondary	Industry	Unions
Instructors			✓	✓	✓
Classrooms/Training Facilities	✓		✓		✓
Course Content			✓		
Transferable Credits			✓		
Field trips	✓			✓	✓
Work experience	✓			✓	✓
Industry / Union recognized training			✓	✓	✓

Elements	First Nations / Aboriginal	Employment Agency	Educators / Post-Secondary	Industry	Unions
Access to employment	✓	✓		✓	✓
Cultural Content	✓				
Support Services	✓	✓			✓
Program Coordination	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Participant Assessments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Safety Certification			✓	✓	✓
Industry Certification			✓	✓	✓

Relationships with employers, trainers and industry organizations are crucial to success for the participants and the program overall. Establish strong and ongoing communications and reporting with your partners. Involve them in the design, operations and success.

### TIPS FOR NON-ABORIGINAL TRAINERS & EMPLOYERS

Aboriginal employment service agencies, including First Nations and local ASET holders, are good partners for:

- Recruiting students
- Screening students and identifying life skills and personal issues
- Linking to employers
- Support to clients through both the training and employment
- Partnerships with high schools can aid with recruiting
- Essential Skills assessments and upgrading can help overcome barriers such as not meeting academic pre-requisites, especially for math

### • Program Elements

- **Program Hours** – should reflect the industry the participant will be working in. Programs that are preparing students for construction work will set their hours to the typical worksite which starts at 7:00 am, thus introducing them to construction work. Training programs that have participants that are parents participating can accommodate their parenting needs by completing the program by 3:00 pm daily so children can be picked up from school or daycare.

- **Choose the Right Location** – the training environment sets the stage for learning. Often it is more affordable to bring the training program to a First Nation community that is isolated or remote, than to send the trainees out of town for training. Also, when a major project is proposed that has a high number of jobs, delivering training locally will attract more local people who will be able to connect training with the chance for employment.
- **Certified, Industry Recognized Training** – training components must be industry recognized and certified, and be developed specifically for the industry the person is training to enter. Partnering with an industry and ITA recognized trainer will ensure the components meet requirements.
  - **Safety Training** – for every trade occupation, safety training is essential. Ensure the safety training is designed for the occupation, and is industry recognized. Partnering with an industry and ITA recognized established trainer will ensure the components meet requirements.
  - **Basic Certified programs** – standard programs include drivers' licenses, first aid, and workplace safety.
- **Hands-on** – give students the chance to practice hands-on. Trades is a hands-on occupation; the greater opportunities the learner has to practice the lesson learned, the greater chance they have of mastering the lesson. Where possible, design the situation to simulate the work environment for that trade.
- **Creating the Right Environment** – means being realistic with expectations by promoting how the learner is expected to behave, such as attending and arriving on time, participating in the class. Program expectations of students may be outlined in a Student Participation Contract. For example, one participation requirement could be – two late arrivals or 'no shows' without just cause will mean expulsion. The 'right' environment also means creating an environment where there can feel comfortable to contribute, ask questions, share, and support others. This could be done using **Sharing Circles** and **Ice Breaker** exercises, and weekly **pot-luck lunches**.
- **Workplace Training** – connects trainees with potential employers, providing them on-site workplace based training during the training program, allowing the trainee to explore various aspects of the trade.
- **Testing** – prepare participants by measuring their skills and knowledge to determine their readiness to take on new course material, and prepare them for the workplace and apprenticeship. Apprenticeship requires annual in-class training and testing. Testing indicates if the student requires additional support such as tutoring, and if the program needs to be modified.
- **Life Skills** – are essential elements to be introduced in a program where the participants have been out of the workforce for a while. Life skills training for adults often includes – how to work at a job and be part of a team, manage money, manage time, live as part of a family and learning effective communication skills.
- **Job Search Skills** – a participant can be top of their class, and still be unable to find a job. Being job-ready also means having the abilities to search for jobs, know where to look, prepare a resume, complete an application, and be prepared for an interview.



- **Employer Referrals** – provide employer referrals of pre-selected candidates. If your organization is unable to offer this service directly, partner with an Aboriginal employment organization.

### **TIPS FOR TRAINING PROVIDERS**

- Providing lunches and even breakfasts is often essential, as many learners have insufficient nutrition at home. This can include purchasing groceries, or making communal lunches.
- Aboriginal students tend to respond better to Aboriginal instructors, and respect certified tradespeople who have worked in the business.
- Instructors need to share the expectations of the worksite with the students
- Instructors must understand that they could have a few or a large number of students that have not had much success with academic learning, and therefore, require need a different approach to teaching.
- Smaller classes have greater success and retention than big classes – ten to twelve students is optimum.
- Starting the class early and finishing by 3:00 allows parents to pick up children after school, reducing day care issues.
- Consider video recording of lessons and posting them online for students to review. This will help the student study and better comprehend difficult concepts.

The most fundamental element that every program should strive to be is **Industry recognized**.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

From the commencement of the project, tracking and monitoring the participant's progress is critical for all – the participant, the program, the organization, and its funding agents and partners. Tracking participant success during and after training, helps the Program Coordinators determine if the program has been successful, and helps inform program funders and partners. Tracking for some program funders is also a requirement. An organization's tracking tool may also provide needed support to an apprentice with gaining Red Seal or Journeyman status.

Aboriginal Employment Agencies discovered they also play an advocate role for Clients needing assistance with getting additional training or their apprenticeship hours reported by employers.

## On the Job and Retention

Once a training program is complete that is designed to build skills for a person to enter employment, various types of services can be offered to assist the prospective candidate to secure employment. Projects have discovered that these post-training programs and services have been the ingredient to retaining Aboriginal people on the work site, and moving them through to completing a trade.

### PREPARE THE CANDIDATE FOR JOB SEARCHING AND THE WORKPLACE

- Provide workshops on how to look for work, prepare a resume, and develop interviewing skills
- Offer Job Search clubs
- Provide employer referral and assessment services, along with upgrading or counseling services for candidates
- Make your organization and its team 'accessible' to participants after the training program has completed

### PROVIDE SUPPORT SERVICES WHILE ON THE JOB

- Have a Job Coach available to provide guidance to the Aboriginal person – they may advocate and assist employees with communicating with their employer
- Offer transportation to/from the worksite in the first month of employment
- Assist apprentices with tracking hours, and with the reporting of these hours to the ITA
- Continue offering employment and career counseling services, and as possible provide support for upgrading

Follow progress of the Aboriginal apprentice until they are certified Red Seal – show you are committed to helping, allow graduates to come back for more services... provide 'unrelenting support.

## Final Words

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- Conduct outreach to Aboriginal organizations that have not previously provided proposals
- Continue to provide high levels of service from ITA staff to the service providers to maximize flexibility and program effectiveness
- Continue the flexibility in the approach and program design to allow service providers meet local conditions and demand for labour
- Continue to allow for a range of projects – exploration, support, foundation, and apprenticeship – to reach the many needs of the client group
- Continue to allow a range of organizations as service providers – Aboriginal agencies, training providers, industry, and labour
- Encourage more involvement with employers
- Encourage partnerships between complementary organizations, such as Aboriginal agencies and training providers
- Continue to allow a wide range of trades – both concentrations in high demand, as well as services to smaller specialized trades
- Continue to encourage the assessment and upgrading of Essential Skills as key program components
- Link the service providers and clients to the new regional ITA Trades Advisors
- Continue to offer support, allowing the Aboriginal tradesperson to return for support as much as they feel is needed







**ita** ABORIGINAL  
INITIATIVES