



OFIFC

Ontario Federation of
Indigenous Friendship Centres

Submission to the Forum of Labour Market
Ministers on the F-P/T Consultations on the
Labour Market Transfer Agreements

August 2016

Introduction

As an important employment and training service delivery partner, the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) is pleased to share our feedback on the Forum of Labour Market Ministers' (FLMM) June 2016 discussion paper on the future of labour market transfer agreements. Our submission is structured according to the nine specific questions within the three theme areas posed within the paper and our recommendations provide a roadmap for increased labour market participation for urban Indigenous people and better outcomes in our communities.

About the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) is a provincial Indigenous organisation representing the collective interests of 28 member Friendship Centres located in towns and cities throughout Ontario. The vision of the Indigenous Friendship Centre Movement is to improve the quality of life for Indigenous people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society and which respects Indigenous cultural distinctiveness.

When there were very few other options in urban communities, Friendship Centres provided a safe space for Indigenous culture to be shared and to thrive, for community members to be connected to supports and opportunities, and for Indigenous people to assume leadership roles and build meaningful careers. Today Friendship Centres are dynamic community hubs. They are idea incubators for young Indigenous people attaining their education and employment goals, they are sites of cultural resurgence for Indigenous families who want to raise their children to be proud of who they are, and they are safe havens for Indigenous community members requiring supports.

The OFIFC administers a number of wholistic, culture-based programs and initiatives which are delivered by local Friendship Centres in areas such as justice, children and youth, health, family support, long term care, healing and wellness, education, and employment and training. Friendship Centres respond to the needs of tens of thousands of community members requiring culture-based services every day.

The Friendship Centres represent the most significant off-reserve Indigenous service infrastructure in Ontario and are dedicated to achieving greater participation of all urban Indigenous peoples in all facets of society, inclusive of First Nation – Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit and all other people who identify as Indigenous. The OFIFC manages \$51.8 million in direct delivery funding across the province, not taking into account the direct resources procured by Friendship Centres at the community level.ⁱ

Friendship Centres have always been proactive sites of change and have fostered the growth of the Indigenous middle class through service delivery, employment, and leadership development. Our vision is to amplify this work.

The Potential for Urban Indigenous Labour Market Participation in Ontario

As the youngest and fastest growing population in Ontario, it is critical to consider the unique challenges faced by urban Indigenous people when considering responsive investments in employment and skills training programming through labour market transfer agreements.

Ontario has the largest Indigenous population in Canada and according to the 2011 National Household Survey, 84.1 percent of Indigenous people in Ontario now reside off-reserve in towns, cities and rural communities.

Indigenous people in Ontario have a significantly lower median age than the non-Indigenous population, 24.5 compared to 37.2.ⁱⁱ Further, more than 50 percent of Ontario's Indigenous population is under the age of twenty-sevenⁱⁱⁱ and the Indigenous population is growing at nearly double the rate of the non-Indigenous population, 1.8 percent compared to 1 percent.^{iv} As a result of the growing urban Indigenous population, it is estimated that more than 100,000 Indigenous youth will come of age to enter the labour market by 2026.^v

Recognizing the opportunities of the young and growing urban Indigenous population, there is tremendous potential for their contribution to the diverse needs of Canada's labour market and economy. Research on labour market trends in Ontario indicates that Ontario will be facing a labour and skills shortage, in large part due to an aging population.^{vi} Contrarily, the urban Indigenous population is growing exponentially and represents a critical population that, with the adequate investments in culturally-appropriate education and training, and tangential supports such as housing and mental health, can help to address the labour shortage.

However, current labour market outcomes for urban Indigenous people are well-below those of non-Indigenous people. In 2012, the

KEY FACTS:

- *84.1 percent of Indigenous people in Ontario live off-reserve.*

Source: Statistics Canada. (2011) *National Household Survey*.

- *Between 2006 and 2011, Ontario's Indigenous population grew five times faster than the non-Indigenous population, increasing 24.3 percent compared to 4.8 percent.*

Source: Ministry of Finance. (2013). *2011 National Household Survey Highlights: Factsheet 3*.

- *33.9 percent of Indigenous people in Ontario are under the age of 19, compared to 23.8 percent of the non-Indigenous population.*

Source: Statistics Canada. (2011). *National Household Survey*.

- *In 2012, the unemployment rate of off-reserve Indigenous youth in Ontario was 23.5 percent compared to 16.8 percent for the non-Indigenous youth population.*

Source: Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. (2013). *Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement, 2013-14 Annual Plan*.

- *In 2012, the unemployment rate of off-reserve Indigenous people (aged 25-54) was 9.2 percent compared to 6.3 percent for their non-Indigenous counterparts in Ontario.*

Source: Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. (2013). *Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement, 2013-14 Annual Plan*.

unemployment rate of off-reserve Indigenous youth in Ontario was 23.5 percent compared to 16.8 percent for non-Indigenous youth, while the unemployment rate for off-reserve Indigenous people, aged 35-54 was 9.2 percent compared to 6.3 percent for non-Indigenous people.^{vii} Clearly current training and employment-support programs are not meeting the needs of urban Indigenous people. Programs and services need to be more efficiently and rationally operated to increase the impact and effectiveness of transitioning urban Indigenous people into meaningful, long-term employment and secure, sustainable income.

For over forty years the OFIFC has worked towards advancing urban Indigenous social and economic issues with all levels of government. Friendship Centres play a crucial role in supporting urban Indigenous people through the provision of key services to improve outcomes and increase opportunities. It is in large part due to such efforts, and federal and provincial investments, that a proportion of urban Indigenous people are considered middle income earners in the province of Ontario,^{viii} a rather recent phenomenon that must be both sustained and increased.

While the upward socio-economic mobility of one segment of the urban Indigenous community represents an impressive milestone, a far larger proportion of urban Indigenous families continue to experience poor socio-economic standings. Urban Indigenous people continue to experience challenges transitioning along the education to employment continuum, which results in higher rates of precarious employment, lower earned incomes, lower rates of educational attainment, and an over representation in minimum wage employment for urban Indigenous people in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Strategic and Indigenous-specific resources and programs must be available to meet the needs of the young and growing urban Indigenous population. This will require effective collaboration from the different levels of government and coordination with urban Indigenous service providers, namely Friendship Centres, to support urban Indigenous people in improving their economic outcomes. With access to culturally-appropriate education and training, the urban Indigenous population can provide a sustainable solution to the anticipated skilled labour shortages. At the same time, increased economic agency among urban Indigenous people and communities will have a positive effect on the wellbeing of whole communities.

The OFIFC believes that a key priority of the FLMM should be closing the education and employment attainment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has also called on the federal government to develop a joint strategy with Indigenous groups to eliminate these gaps.^{ix}

OFIFC's Responses to Consultation Questions

Impact: what do we need to do now?

Q1. Given varied and changing labour market conditions, what should employment and skills training programs be trying to achieve and for whom?

In order to best prepare young people to enter the labour market and live independently, access to life skills training in primary and secondary schools must be made available through revamped home economics courses. These courses can support increased levels of self-sufficiency by teaching skills in food and nutrition, financial literacy, and budgeting. These are skills that all students should have access to, and primary and secondary schools are well-positioned to equip students with basic life skills that are required to achieve self-sufficiency throughout life. This is particularly relevant for Indigenous students, who often experience higher rates of poverty and child welfare involvement. As a result, Indigenous youth may not have other opportunities outside of school to gain these important and valuable skills.

Employment and skills development systems that support learners who are more comfortable in non-conventional settings or who have different learning methods have found success in other jurisdictions. These jurisdictions have extensive apprenticeship training systems that integrate workplace and classroom training on a weekly basis, extensively involve the private sector, and are promoted as a viable option for younger students. This type of work-integrated learning would likely better support Indigenous learners, who are often challenged to remain engaged in the conventional learning system for a variety of reasons including financial and family obligations and the daily challenges of poverty including a lack of transportation, food, and housing insecurities. These types of inclusive, work-integrated learning systems contrast against the current fractured apprenticeship and post-secondary education systems that are disconnected from labour market needs and elementary and secondary school systems.

Furthermore, the OFIFC believes that it is important to broaden the focus on demand-supply requirements to include and prioritise community needs. This means recognising and understanding the demographic realities in Canada: the opportunities of a young and growing urban Indigenous population coupled with the projected shortfall of needed workers, and applying this knowledge in a way that is cognizant of both community needs and industry demands.

As early as 2004, Indigenous youth have been referred to, and continue to be referred to, as an investment in economic growth.^x While accurate, it is important that it is consciously recognised that Indigenous youth are not simply tools to fill sector vacancies, but individuals with their own career aspirations and hopes for the future. It is important that education and training systems (from early childhood through to post-secondary and work-placed learning) support and nurture individual aspirations and career goals. The OFIFC believes that as the education and training systems, along with individual employers, become more culturally competent and responsive to the

needs and competencies of Indigenous youth, Indigenous youth will become increasingly better prepared to meet the needs of the labour market. Further, it is also imperative that opportunities are created for urban Indigenous youth to discover their own career aspirations through fostering imagination, creativity, and knowledge of individual strengths and various means of interacting with the future labour market.

Q2. Are current employment and skills training programs flexible enough to respond to the needs of a diverse workforce, e.g. vulnerable workers, youth, Indigenous Peoples, recent immigrants and others who need particular support? If yes, what in particular is working best, or how can these groups best be supported?

The OFIFC believes that the Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) and Canada Job Grant require significant altering to ensure that the most vulnerable populations including multi-barriered urban Indigenous people, Employment Insurance (EI)-eligible or not, are provided with equal opportunities to access training, pre-employment supports and job opportunities. As the federal government prepares for the next iteration of the LMDA, a retooled LMDA must consider impacts for multi-barriered urban Indigenous people requiring support to engage in the labour market.

We need labour market agreements to better reflect the provinces' labour market needs and respond to the needs of urban Indigenous people, specifically. Currently, 70 percent of federal funding for training is tied to current or recent EI recipients, while the majority of Ontarians who are unemployed do not fall into this category. In 2013, only 27.8 percent of unemployed Ontarians were EI-eligible compared with the rest of Canada at 45.2 percent. Furthermore, Ontario receives only 29 per cent of national funding through the Labour Market Development Agreement despite having 39 per cent of Canada's population. The OFIFC urges the FLMM to address these grave discrepancies.

With the end of targeted supports to vulnerable Canadians who are not EI-eligible provided through the former Labour Market Agreements (LMA), the OFIFC is hopeful that the federal government can find ways to balance eligibility for federally funded provincial labour market programming such as removing EI eligibility as a requirement for LMDA programs, or the reinstatement of a renewed LMA. The FLMM should relax existing EI program eligibility requirements immediately. Unless these changes are made to existing LMDA eligibility by 2017/2018, when the full funding requirements of the Canada-Ontario Job Grant are reached, the majority of transfer-funded programs will be geared to EI-eligible, employment ready clients. This is particularly problematic considering that Ontario has a lower share of unemployed people receiving EI benefits in comparison with the rest of Canada.

Furthermore, Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) has been in year-to-year contract extensions for the past several years, but it is vital to Indigenous labour market outcomes that the federal government commit to multi-year funding at

sufficient levels. The OFIFC believes that ensuring equitable access for urban Indigenous people to federally-supported skills training programs and an expanded successor to ASETS will support the federal government in meeting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, as it pertains to closing the education and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. ASETS, and all Indigenous labour market programming, needs to be broadened to support Indigenous community economic development aspirations rather than fit Indigenous community members into labour market gaps.

Q3. Are all Canadians, in particular jobseekers and potential jobseekers, aware of and able to access appropriate employment and training programs to find and/or keep a job? If yes, what in particular is working best? If not, who and why?

Research shows that the majority of urban Indigenous people prefer to obtain services from Indigenous organisations over mainstream agencies based on culturally-relevant program models and a perceived higher accountability to Indigenous communities. Without reliable community-based infrastructure the critical work done by Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous not-for-profit organisations may be jeopardised, certainly will not be optimised, and at the very least will be challenged to meet the needs of the growing urban Indigenous population. While the number of urban Indigenous organisations and services has grown significantly over the past 30 years, a lack of needed infrastructure and core funding has created challenges in the maintenance of Indigenous organisations.^{xi} The federal government eliminated evergreen core funding to Friendship Centres, but nevertheless, Friendship Centres continue to deliver multiple programs with limited support for administration and compounding issues of poor and inadequate infrastructure.

In many Friendship Centre communities, the Friendship Centre represents one of the largest local employers and an important meeting place for the community. As community hubs in cities and towns across the province, the Friendship Centres represent economic drivers for urban Indigenous people. Investments in Friendship Centres ensure the protection of meaningful employment for Indigenous people in their communities and increased opportunities for the Indigenous community members that Friendship Centre workers serve. Over the past four decades, Friendship Centres have played a vital role in mentoring Indigenous children and youth involved in culture-based children and youth programming to fulfil their full potential. Many members of our communities attribute their early involvement in the Friendship Centres to the development of their positive sense of self – a key driver for healthy and successful outcomes later in life.

Q4. What are the employment and skills training needs that employers see as critical to address their workforce and economic objectives? What is the role of employers versus government?

The lack of employer involvement in training is a significant barrier to skills training achievements and should be promoted as a key role for employers. It is important for employers to be champions of skills training and of fostering inclusive workplaces. When considering ways in which employers can support the creation of a highly skilled workforce, it is critical to consider the high rates of racism and discrimination that are experienced by Indigenous people in education and employment.^{xii} Increasingly, there should be an onus on employers to ensure safe and inclusive workplaces that are culturally competent.

Current federal programming targeting employer involvement in skill development is insufficient in meeting the needs of at-risk individuals, including urban Indigenous people. In 2013, the Government of Canada replaced the Labour Market Agreements (LMA) with the Canada-Ontario Job Fund Agreement. Recognising the lack of employer involvement in training, the primary program offered through this new agreement is the Canada Ontario Job Grant (COJG), an employer-driven program through which employers identify the short-term training needs and the recipients of this training. While both EI-eligible and non-EI eligible individuals are eligible for support through the COJG, as an employer-driven program, it will likely favour job-ready individuals and do little to address the systematic racism that urban Indigenous people face in seeking employment or employment preparedness. In addition, even with a job offer, without support for indirect costs, such as transportation and child care, some individuals, particularly single parents and youth, will face significant challenges in completing needed training, especially in cases of out-of-town training.

Government programs that increase employer engagement are valuable and needed, however it is concerning that the implementation of the COJG ended the consistent multi-year funding for the most vulnerable people on the education and employment continuum, including urban Indigenous people. In fact, as a result of this shift in programming, by 2017/2018, the majority of transfer-funded labour market programs will be geared to EI-eligible, employment ready clients. It will be important to establish an appropriate balance between upskilling the existing workforce, providing training for job-ready individuals, and facilitating extensive training and employment supports for those furthest from entering the workforce.

Research shows that the vast majority of Indigenous postsecondary graduates choose to work in positions that serve the Indigenous community.^{xiii} It is vital that Indigenous community organisations, such as Friendship Centres, are supported by government programs to provide training services that develop employees that are culturally competent and capable of serving the unique needs of the Indigenous community.

Innovate: future needs

Q5. What innovative approaches and partnerships could be used to address emerging issues and needs in the labour market?

The OFIFC believes that Indigenous labour market programming when coordinated with preventive and wrap-around support for families – such as those provided within Friendship Centres – are critical for increasing employment opportunities and outcomes for urban Indigenous people. By embedding employment and training services within Friendship Centres, access to programming will increase in urban Indigenous communities and labour force involvement will also increase. Culturally competent services require that not only frontline workers are competent but that the space where services are provided is also culturally competent, welcoming and safe. This approach is innovative and worth investing in as to date, there has been little success when urban Indigenous communities must access LMDA transfers through mainstream organisations. The OFIFC calls on the federal government to negotiate for the allocation of LMDA transfers specific to Indigenous programming that reflect the high number of urban Indigenous people in Ontario. Indigenous-specific programming should be delivered directly by, or in partnership with, urban Indigenous multi-service agencies, such as Friendship Centres.

Furthermore, supporting an increased role for Friendship Centres in community economic development is a major strategy toward increasing economic growth in urban Indigenous communities. Friendship Centres are community economic development drivers that employ local urban Indigenous community members, purchase local goods and services, and draw investments from government and other sources to build social service networks that meet local community needs. Through community economic development (CED) practices, the needs of local communities are placed at the forefront resulting in a more wholistic and sustainable approach to economic and labour force development. There is a need to build on the success of this model to expand labour force opportunities that engage the aspirations of community members while considering the demands of the local labour market.

Self-employment is a fast growing area of Indigenous employment. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of self-employed Indigenous people increased by 15.6% while the number for all self-employed Canadians declined by 4.4% during the same period.^{xiv} It is important that entrepreneurship is supported with related community initiatives and skills development programs. There is a need to ensure there are spaces in post-secondary business schools and other related programs for Indigenous students to increase their knowledge and skills as entrepreneurs in ways that respect their values and identities as Indigenous people.

The FLMM should also work to build an environment that creates space for recognising unconventional expertise. In practice, this would require shifting business culture and practices to acknowledge different ways of doing things, for example, recognising and valuing Indigenous approaches to biology and chemistry. Further, a highly skilled workforce will be culturally competent and will actively work to limit experiences of

racism and discrimination. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called on the private sector to ensure that Indigenous people have access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector while also providing skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism for management and staff.^{xv}

Q6. How could employment and skills training programs be more responsive? (e.g. changing nature of work, increasing entrepreneurship, diverse workforce)

The OFIFC is concerned for the proportion of national LMDA funding currently received by Ontario. The last Canada-Ontario LMDA transfers \$565 million annually to Ontario, accounting for 29 percent of national LMDA funding, yet Ontario has approximately 38 percent of all unemployed Canadians. The need for proportional funding is critical to support Ontario's unemployed population with a diverse range of needed supports and training in order to connect with the labour market.

Ontario's labour force is also extremely diverse. Ontario is home to approximately one-fifth of the Indigenous population in Canada. It is imperative that employment and skills training programs are responsive to Ontario's Indigenous people. Placing employment services in community hubs, such as Friendship Centres, is a key strategy to respond to the needs of Indigenous people.^{xvi}

At present, workers and learners are poorly trained and ill-prepared to meaningfully engage in the workforce. Too much emphasis is placed on teaching digital and technical skills, while not enough on critical thinking and analysis. Critical thinking and analysis skills enable individuals to use technology effectively and to envision and create new ways to use technology. Learners need to be trained in 'soft' skills, in addition to specific technological skills. Ongoing research by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) has indicated that employers are looking for employees with a skillset that includes "communicating, problem-solving, critical thinking, [and] teamwork".^{xvii} A recent survey has found that the majority of education providers (83 percent) in Canada believe that youth are adequately prepared for the workforce, while only 44 percent of youth and 34 percent of employers believe youth are prepared.^{xviii}

This lack of employment readiness is often attributed to insufficient 'soft' skills. In Ontario's current system, 'soft' skills are often developed outside of school through the involvement in extra-curricular activities, sport teams, and other fee-for-service activities. As such, it is important to consider learning methods that support the development of teamwork, communication, problem-solving and critical thinking for all students regardless of income levels or location. The cost of such activities, a lack of transportation, racism and discrimination, and the lack of opportunities in small communities limits urban Indigenous families from participating in these valuable activities. While Friendship Centres, and other urban Indigenous not-for-profit community organisations work to provide opportunities for children and youth to develop

these skills, they are often limited by insufficient funding, narrow program requirements and a lack of needed infrastructure. It is important that learners, post-secondary education institutions, not-for-profit organisations, and employers seek better alignment and understanding of labour market requirements and workforce expectations and commit to inclusive ways to develop these skills.

To support the creation of a highly skilled workforce, governments must coordinate employment supports with Friendship Centre services. In Ontario, the Provincial-Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review illustrates this need succinctly by highlighting the low levels of integration among Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), EO, and other employment support programs, namely ASETS.^{xix} As community hubs for urban Indigenous people, Friendship Centres are in a unique position to provide culturally appropriate employment supports in conjunction with Apatisiwin (ASETS employment and training program). In order for governments to leverage the work of Friendship Centres and to effectively deliver these services in combination with Apatisiwin, it will be necessary to address the infrastructure and capacity of individual Friendship Centres.

Inform: what do we know?

Q7. What kinds of labour market information are most valuable in supporting planning and informed decision making? This could include:

- **Information to support career planning for a jobseeker; or**
- **Information for employers to support workforce development needs.**

There are very serious barriers to career planning for urban Indigenous youth and Indigenous jobseekers of all ages. Students are often unaware of admission requirements to post-secondary academic and training programs, or the skills and education required for different career paths. As a result, students can be highly influenced by parents, teachers, and guidance counsellors. This influence is further exacerbated for Indigenous students as a result of streaming practices used by primary and secondary school systems. In some schools with high percentages of applied students, these students were 3.7 times more likely to be Indigenous.^{xx} This outdated practice limits urban Indigenous students from future employment opportunities, when you consider the importance of academic level Math and/or English courses for many university, college, and trades programs. Education, employment, and training sectors must recognize the lasting impacts that streaming can have on urban Indigenous students and it is critical for partners to end this outdated practice. Should Indigenous students continue to be overrepresented in applied level high school courses, the development of a highly skilled workforce will be stalled, and the need for responsive intervention services later in life will rise significantly.

Q8. What forms of engagement with stakeholders work best? What approaches to outreach might be considered to improve the sharing of information between labour market partners?

A wholistic approach to developing a highly skilled workforce will require extensive partnerships with urban Indigenous not-for-profit organisations such as the OFIFC, Friendship Centres, provincial governments, and the agencies and management boards that facilitate the delivery of employment and training programs. The FLMM should work to facilitate effective partnerships between sectors as well to include post-secondary education institutions, the broader non-profit, and culture sectors. Partnerships must ensure that there is accountability at all levels, agreed-upon forms of engagement that ensures every partner's voice is respected, and that community priorities are heard. Stakeholder engagement works best when partnerships are thoughtful and purposeful endeavours that are mutually beneficial with partners sharing a common goal.

An important approach to consider before stakeholder engagement efforts are planned, is a commitment to Indigenous cultural competency among partners. The OFIFC welcomed the recent announcement by the Government of Ontario for mandatory cultural competency training for all public servants. Culturally competent employment and training services, combined with tangential supports, will support an increased number of urban Indigenous people to transition along the education to employment continuum.

Q9. What information do Canadians need to better understand the outcomes of investments in employment and skills training programs?

Canadians require not only statistical information and data to illustrate the outcomes of investments in employment and skills training programs, but an accurate narrative that allows for a deeper understanding of how the current labour market and economic realities affect us all – as young people, students, job seekers, and people seeking new skills or careers. An important aspect of raising the awareness of the importance of investments in employment and skills training programs is to consider the empirical benefits of such investments. We know that the best way to support the middle class is to grow it by reducing inequalities in our communities and this evidence should be made a key component of national awareness efforts. Research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has found that closing socio-economic gaps and investing in social benefits will have the largest effect on boosting economic growth.^{xxi} The OFIFC firmly believes that this conversation must prioritize closing the socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – a key pillar of the Truth and Reconciliation's Calls to Action.

Recommendations:

The OFIFC calls on the FLMM:

- To negotiate for the allocation of LMDA transfers specific to Indigenous programming that reflect the high number of urban Indigenous people in Ontario. Indigenous-specific programming should be delivered directly by, or in partnership with, urban Indigenous multi-service agencies, such as Friendship Centres.
- To address the need for proportional funding transfers to provinces that is not tied to current or recent EI recipients. Proportional and responsive funding is critical to adequately support people who are unemployed and to respond to the diverse range of needed supports and training to connect them with the labour market.
- To support an appropriate balance between investments in upskilling the existing workforce, providing training for job-ready individuals, and facilitating extensive training and employment supports for those furthest from entering the workforce.
- To renew the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) over the long term, beyond 2017, and with an expansion of program reach.
- To expand government funded community based responses to labour market challenges, with a focus on increasing engagement of urban Indigenous people.
- To call for federal investment in community infrastructure such as Friendship Centres which meets the needs of large and growing urban Indigenous communities and supports the development of a highly skilled workforce that is inclusive.

Conclusion

The growing demographic of urban Indigenous people in Ontario, particularly children and youth, will remain challenged to join a highly skilled workforce when they continue to disproportionately experience higher rates of poverty. As such, it is imperative that the FLMM include specific strategies to improve the employment and training support system with a focus on closing socio-economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and leveraging the expertise of urban Indigenous service delivery agencies like Friendship Centres to create better outcomes in communities.

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- ^{xi} OFIFC, OMAA, ONWA, *Urban Aboriginal Task Force: Final Report* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Ontario Métis Aboriginal Association, Ontario Native Women's Association, 2007).
- ^{xii} According to the *Urban Aboriginal Task Force*, 24 percent of respondents reported experiencing racism in schools and 21 percent in the workplace.^{xii} According to a survey of Indspire award recipients, 84 percent of Indigenous respondents indicated a desire to work with Indigenous communities post-graduation and many noted a desire to address systemic barriers including racism in the workplace.^{xii} While not explicitly stated in the Indspire survey, Indigenous graduates are also likely influenced to join Indigenous-led organisations based on perceptions of workplace environments – seeking an environment of inclusiveness and a sense of belonging rather than workplace environments that continually challenge their cultural identity where experiences of continued racism and discrimination are ongoing. As such, it is important that mainstream employers consider the cultural competency of their workplace and take concrete steps to creating inclusive and non-discriminatory environments.
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