



## Grow Aboriginal Talent Pools Using Proven-to-Work Programs

In the nationwide race to develop a deeper pipeline of Aboriginal talent, companies make faster strides forward using proven programming.

Growing Aboriginal talent within an organization is far more complex than simply committing to the concept. To make real strides forward, a company has to actively implement programs and practices that shift talent recruitment practices from their current status to a more inclusive and effective process. However, only recently have targeted studies and best practices reviews been able to give companies a good idea of what's really working to make a difference.

What works? It's a combination of funding, training and intentional actions. Here, four of the most effective programs and practices for growing and deepening the Aboriginal talent pipeline will be discussed and tips provided for fast implementation of proven-to-work options.

### Dedicate Resources to Aboriginal Hiring

One of the best ways to increase the amount of Aboriginal and First Nations talent in the pipeline and inside an organization is to dedicate specific resources to hiring from that population.

Exemplifying this approach is Ryerson University. After they created a dedicated staff position and hired an Aboriginal human resources consultant, the university has been able to triple the number of Aboriginal faculty and staff members.

This approach – making it someone's specific job to increase Aboriginal staff levels, rather than having diversity as mere "good intention" – has been proven to work around the country. Banks, newspaper groups, and even the Screen Office have seen strong results by bringing on dedicated staff.

To implement this approach, firms need to define what the role would be inside their firm, how the position would interact with HR and functional business leaders, and what specific metrics would be assigned to the position holder as goals to meet. From there, getting a hire in place ensures that someone is on top of Aboriginal staffing goals and ensuring that the company's best intentions are translated into job offers and increased staffing diversity.

### Create Experiential Learning Opportunities

A second proven-to-work practice for firms is to create experiential learning opportunities.



One major roadblock that has been identified when hiring from Aboriginal communities is that candidates lack skills or hands-on perspectives about specific types of work. Without having tried the work to know if it would suit them or to see, first-hand, what skills would be needed for success in the role, Aboriginal candidates (and particularly younger and student-type candidates) face a disadvantage.

The reality is that this lack of knowledge about modern work expectations and employer needs is not limited to indigenous candidates. Companies that invest in experiential learning opportunities for youth or rotational training programs for new hires benefit greatly from reduced turnover and increased loyalty. Both prospective and new hires gain skills, insights about expectations, and a better understanding of where and how they can fit into the company.

One company doing this well – on its own behalf and for others – is Lighthouse Labs, a technology firm with locations across Canada. They have built short-term tech training experiences, bootcamps, and coding challenges to give anyone interested in the tech space the chance to test out job tasks and build skills. They also partner with the First Nations Technology Council to create awareness of their “Bridges into Technology” program designed to recruit and train Aboriginal talent for success in tech. As a result, up to 100 per cent of their program graduates find paid work in-house or in the broader tech sector.

### Build Mentoring Programs

A third proven-to-work option for companies that want to increase their Aboriginal talent pipeline is building a mentoring program. The mechanics of doing so have been discussed in-depth elsewhere, but a difference maker here is in letting such programs be known to applicants as early as possible in the hiring process. In fact, for the best results, companies should make it clear mentoring exists in the pre-hire stage to attract greater numbers of applicants.

Two firms doing this well are Scotia Bank and Ryerson University. At Scotia Bank, the company offers Aboriginal applicants customized support from the moment they submit their application. These resumes are sent directly to the senior Aboriginal recruitment consultant, who helps with mentoring and placement as appropriate. At Ryerson, candidates are invited to ask questions directly to the dedicated hiring manager, whose email is included in position advertisements.

In this way, the firms signal to applicants that they will be supported throughout the hiring process. It also adds credibility to claims of support networks inside the organization and provides a chance for candidates to test-drive such networks before committing to the company, something applicants say they value as they make decisions about where to work.

### Advertise Positions Strategically

A final proven-to-work tactic for companies looking to increase their Aboriginal talent pipeline is to advertise positions more strategically. Though it should be obvious, it bears repeating, especially for



nationwide firms ... what works to bring in candidates in southern and coastal Canada does not work as well in northern and remote Canada, where many indigenous candidates live.

To successfully attract candidates in northern and remote regions, companies need to do more than advertise with national online jobs boards. They should supplement those efforts with targeted online and offline job posting systems.

For online efforts, making a point of advertising with regional and tribal job placement services will help candidates see relevant job openings. This can be done through local school and vocational training services, who often supplement online listings with verbal advertisements and referrals to locals who would be well-suited for the work.

Firms committed to Aboriginal hiring can also leverage this natural bridge between targeted online postings and offline “word spreading” about positions. Companies can mail out brochures or have printed materials for distribution, take out newspaper ads, and use local radio. In this way, firms can ensure that the maximum numbers of candidates see their listings and that their open opportunities are not “invisible” in their targeted groups.

By helping themselves be seen where it counts, firms are more likely to attract great talent that they can nurture with their other onboarding and training resources, growing their Aboriginal talent pipeline.