

MANITOBA  
RESEARCH  
ALLIANCE

CED

IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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# Summary of Aboriginal Issues Related to CED in the New Economy

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# SUMMARY OF ABORIGINAL ISSUES RELATED TO CED IN THE NEW ECONOMY\*

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The Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy (referred to throughout this document as the Research Alliance or the MRA) is a three-year research project to examine how communities might overcome obstacles and share in the benefits created by the New Economy. We identified Community Economic Development (CED), a development strategy that emphasizes local self-sufficiency, local decision making and local ownership, as a strategic response to assist communities in taking up the opportunities and meeting the challenges created by the transition to a New Economy.

The Research Alliance brings together academic researchers from the universities of Manitoba, Winnipeg and Brandon; senior government policy makers; and practitioners active in Manitoba's dynamic CED community (and elsewhere). The lead organization is the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Manitoba, a community-based research institute uniquely positioned to make such community-university connections. The team's Principal Investigator is Dr. John Loxley, Professor of Economics at the University of Manitoba. The Research Alliance was launched in late 2002, and it funded and oversaw more than 40 individual research projects chosen to help meet the larger project's overall goals. This research was conducted by academics, students and community researchers, in many cases working in teams. These

projects have been successful, not only in their particular research findings, but also in providing opportunities for students and community researchers to receive practical research training. And they have bridged the gaps between academic disciplines, and between the university and the larger community. While focussing primarily on Manitoba, the composition of the Alliance has enabled it to draw on experiences from across Canada and beyond.

This publication is one of ten summary publications prepared by the Research Alliance. These publications, which we have come to call “kits,” describe the results of our research, and the kits are organized by audience or by theme. It should be emphasized that we are not — nor could we be — comprehensive in addressing these themes. Rather, we have identified a wide range of research results based on the specific research projects that we undertook. The themes and audiences for the kits arose out of the research, as we think these themes are the most effective way to organize the results.

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\* We are pleased to acknowledge the generous financial support of the Initiative on the New Economy of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; via the Manitoba Research Alliance on Community Economic Development in the New Economy. For further information please see: <http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca>.

The complete list of kits is as follows:

1. The impacts of the New Economy
2. The potential of Community Economic Development
3. Government policy regarding Community Economic Development and the New Economy
4. The role of gender in Community Economic Development and the New Economy
5. Aboriginal issues in Community Economic Development and the New Economy
6. Business issues in Community Economic Development and the New Economy
7. Education issues in Community Economic Development and the New Economy (aimed at educators)
8. Urban issues in Community Economic Development and the New Economy
9. Rural issues in Community Economic Development and the New Economy
10. Northern issues in Community Economic Development and the New Economy

These kits, along with the rest of the publications prepared by or for the Research Alliance, can be downloaded for free from [www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca](http://www.manitobaresearchallianceced.ca). Much of the research has also been published by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — Manitoba ([www.policyalternatives.ca/mb](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/mb)).

## A note on sources

This kit is informed by all the research carried out, but in particular the information here has been drawn from the following individual projects:

*Aboriginal Electoral Participation in Winnipeg's Inner City*, by Jim Silver, Cyril Keeper, and Michael MacKenzie

*Aboriginal Involvement in Community Development: The Case of Winnipeg's Spence Neighbourhood*, by Jim Silver, with Joan Hay and Peter Gorzen

*Aboriginal Learners in Selected Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba*, by Jim Silver, with Darlene Klyne and Freeman Simard

*Economics for CED Practitioners*, by John Loxley and Laura Lamb

*The Effect of Information Technologies on Aboriginal Employment in the Airlines and Banking Sectors*, by Kathleen Sexsmith and Aaron Pettman

"Government Policy Towards Community Economic Development in Manitoba," by Lynne P. Fernandez

*Identifying Employment Opportunities for Low-Income People within the Manitoba Innovation Framework*, by Garry Loewen, Jim Silver, Martine August, Patrick Bruning, Michael MacKenzie, and Shauna Meyerson

*In a Voice of Their Own: Urban Aboriginal Community Development*, by Jim Silver, Parvin Ghorayshi, Joan Han and Darlene Klyne

*New Partnerships in Hydro Development*, by David Hultin

"A Scan of Community Economic Development Organizations, Rural Communities and First Nations in Manitoba and their Participation in the New Economy," by Carly Duboff

*State Policies to Enhance the New Economy: A Comparative Analysis*, by Michael MacKenzie, Jim Silver, and Byron Sheldrick

*The Town that Lost Its Name: The Impact of Hydro-Electric Development on Grand Rapids, Manitoba*, by Peter Kulchyski and Ramona Neckoway

*Training Aboriginal Workers for Manitoba Call Centres: Public-Private Partnerships and the Public Good*, by Julie Guard

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# SUMMARY OF ABORIGINAL ISSUES RELATED TO CED IN THE NEW ECONOMY

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## What Do We Mean by Community Economic Development?<sup>1</sup>

Community Economic Development (CED) has been subject to an eclectic range of definitions. To some, CED covers any economic development initiative, be it private, public or community driven, taking place within some definition of 'community', usually a geographic one. According to this view, there is no necessary inconsistency between orthodox economics and CED. In view of the more demanding definitions of CED now coming to dominate the literature, more radical departures from the orthodoxy seem necessary.<sup>2</sup> These define CED as a social process in terms of decision making; they replace the individual 'consumer' with the collective community; they see the meeting of collective 'needs' taking precedence over the satisfaction of individual consumer 'demands'; they take a long view of economic activities as opposed to that of short-term profit maximization; and they see economic decisions as being inextricably linked to social, environmental, political and cultural considerations.

Within this more demanding view of CED, there are two schools of thought. The first, associated with a more radical, communal, tradition, sees

CED as a form of social organization alternative to capitalism. The second has a more limited vision, seeing CED as a desirable and workable approach to dealing with particular problems facing communities. These problems are a direct outcome of the way in which capitalism differentially and unevenly affects certain communities, and CED is seen as a way to help fix them. Adherents to the first school are often found working alongside those of the latter.

The most complete set of CED principles are those underlying the Neechi model of CED. Neechi Foods Co-op Ltd. is an Aboriginal worker-owned cooperative retail store in inner-city Winnipeg. The idea of this approach is to build a strong, inward-looking, self-reliant economy, which is based on goods and services consumed by people who live or work in the community. In theoretical terms, it is a "convergence" strategy of economic development.<sup>3</sup> It favours cooperative ownership, small-scale production and popular control over economic decision making. It is a holistic approach, in which the safety, health and self-respect of residents are of paramount importance.<sup>4</sup> The principles on which it operates are as follows: production of goods and services for local use; use of local goods and services; local re-investment of locally generated profits; long-term employment of local residents; local skill development; local decision making; improved public health; improved physical environment; neighbourhood stability;

human dignity and solidarity among communities and businesses following these principles.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debates about how to define CED, the Neechi Principles have been widely adopted as a benchmark in Winnipeg's large and active CED community, and as a theoretical starting point by the MRA and most of the individual researchers working on projects under the MRA. Several researchers attempted to refine or restate a definition of CED, but all these redefinitions remained broadly consistent with the Neechi Principles. For example, Friesen and Hudson extracted components from a number of

have demonstrated a willingness to engage nationally in promoting the philosophy and practice of CED; there is a strong institutional base for CED in Winnipeg, with the Community Education Development Agency, Assiniboine Credit Union and SEED Winnipeg, among many other institutions; government support for CED has improved markedly since 1999; charitable foundations have become more active in supporting CED; there is a supportive academic environment for CED.

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**“The Neechi Principles have been widely adopted as a benchmark in Winnipeg’s large and active CED community”**

works to define CED as “placing the community at the centre of economic development — such that the community is both the beneficiary and the prime mover. By matching local resources with local needs, community members are able to realize their higher-order non-economic needs, as well as their basic material needs.”<sup>5</sup> Fernandez adopts a definition prepared by the BC Working Group on CED, which takes CED to be “a community-based and community-directed process that explicitly combines social and economic development and is directed towards fostering the economic, social, ecological and cultural well-being of communities.”<sup>6</sup>

Many commentators have noted that Winnipeg is rapidly becoming a focal point in Canada for CED. In an address to the CED Gathering held in Winnipeg in 2003 on the theme of “Maintaining Momentum,” Loxley listed reasons for this: CED in Winnipeg is guided by a clear set of principles (the Neechi Principles); CED activists in Winnipeg



# Profile of Manitoba's Aboriginal Community<sup>7</sup>

Manitoba has a larger proportion of Aboriginal people than any other province in Canada. According to 2001 Census data, people who self-identify as Aboriginal make up 13.6% of the population of Manitoba. (Aboriginal people constitute 3.3% of Canada's total population.) Even before the advent of globalization, Canada's Aboriginal peoples were deliberately marginalized from the economic benefits most Canadians enjoyed. The Indian Act and federal government policy such as the reserve system and the Federal Department of Indian Affairs all removed Aboriginal people from mainstream economic development.<sup>8</sup>

Unemployment is a serious issue among the Aboriginal population. In 2001, the Aboriginal unemployment rate for Winnipeg was 14.3%, relative to 5.7% for the city overall. Province-wide, these statistics were 15.1% and 6.1%, respectively. With respect to Aboriginal identity of people living off-reserve, the unemployment rate of 11.6% (data for 2004–05) is somewhat less distressing. Nonetheless, it is alarming that Aboriginal unemployment is primarily a youth phenomenon. That is, 26.6% of Aboriginal status people in Manitoba aged 15 to 24 years, and 20.6% aged 25 to 34 years, are unemployed. Among Aboriginal people in Winnipeg, these figures are 21.0% and 14.4%, respectively.

The Aboriginal unemployment crisis may be related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the Aboriginal population. That is, 47.2% of Aboriginal adults in Winnipeg and 49.2% of Aboriginal adults across Manitoba did not finish high school. An additional 11% for each regional division completed high school through the High School Equivalency program (GED). With regards to post-secondary education, 31.5% of Aboriginal adults in Winnipeg and 30.1% of Aboriginal adults

in Manitoba who have taken some post-secondary schooling did not finish the program in which they were enrolled.

In terms of health status, 49.7% of Aboriginal adults in Winnipeg and 48.6% of Aboriginal adults across Manitoba have one or more long-term health conditions diagnosed by a professional. Only 55% of Aboriginal adults in each of these geographical divisions cite their personal health as excellent or very good.

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**“One theme that featured heavily in our research was that of the enormous damage caused by the process of colonialism”**

## **Aboriginal People and the Legacy of Colonialism<sup>9</sup>**

The demographic profile described in the paragraphs above must be seen within the context of Canada's colonial past, the effects of which carry on into the present day. Many of the reports that form the basis of this publication used interviews and focus group meetings with Aboriginal people. One theme that was ever-present in these exercises was that of the enormous damage caused by the process of colonialism, and the often crippling psychological and emotional pain that many Aboriginal people carry with them as a result. A report prepared by Ghorayshi et al. examined precisely this issue.\* The authors draw upon the experiences of 26 Aboriginal people who have been and are active in various forms of community development in Winnipeg's inner city. The study shows how Aboriginal people have been

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\* This paper is both an exceptionally rich source of information, and very difficult to summarize. Readers who are interested in hearing the voices and experiences of the 26 Aboriginal community leaders are encouraged to read the entire report.

constructed as the ‘other’ in Canadian society. Over and over, the 26 Aboriginal interviewees referred to the process of colonization as being at the root of Aboriginal people’s problems. In many cases, their personal testimonies were painful and moving. An understanding of colonization and its impacts is the starting point for Aboriginal people’s interpretation of the often harsh urban world in which they now live.

It is important to note that the 26 people interviewed were chosen because they are also skilled community development practitioners. They have all reflected deeply on their experiences, and have

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## “Aboriginal community development must be holistic”

developed a uniquely Aboriginal and very sophisticated approach to inner-city community development. As such, they are what Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci called “organic intellectuals.” They have developed the intellectual foundations of a workable model of inner-city community development by and for Aboriginal people. Many of the people interviewed emphasized that it is Aboriginal women who are, for the most part, the leaders in conceptualizing and putting into practice a distinctly Aboriginal form of community development.

It is clear from the results of our work that Aboriginal community development must be holistic. It starts at the level of the individual, and at the need to heal, a process that requires, among other things, a process of decolonization. This includes developing the understanding that their grief is less the product of personal failings than of a process that damaged all Aboriginal people similarly. It involves rebuilding Aboriginal people’s identity and creating a pride in their being Aboriginal. The process of people rebuilding themselves, recreating themselves, although it happens person by person, requires a strong

sense of community — a community in which Aboriginal culture flourishes — which, in turn, requires the creation of Aboriginal organizations. Just as Aboriginal people need to reclaim their identity as individuals, so do they need to reclaim their collective organizational identity via the creation of Aboriginal organizations — organizations run by and for Aboriginal people and organized in ways consistent with, and respectful of, Aboriginal culture. All this requires the development and promotion of an “ideology,” rooted in an understanding of the historical effects of colonization and the necessity for decolonization.

Winnipeg’s inner city and Manitoba’s northern First Nations communities are, by many measures, deeply troubled places, characterized by high rates of poverty, deeply rooted institutionalized racism, a growing fear of gangs, drugs and violence and a profound sense among many of hopelessness and despair. This is the view held by those who live in the dominant culture and is regularly fueled by the mainstream media. Yet MRA research also found a clearly articulated sense of hope in the voices of the Aboriginal people who contributed their ideas and experiences to the research. Out of their hardship, numerous Aboriginal people have fashioned a unique and holistic Aboriginal form of community development, characterized by a commitment to the traditional Aboriginal values of community and sharing. To the extent that this uniquely urban form of community development can be built upon and extended, the future is full of hope.

### **Aboriginal People in Northern Manitoba**

Today, northern Manitoba has a very high proportion of Aboriginal people — 68%, according to census data. (Remember that in the province as a whole, the proportion of Aboriginal people is just over 13%.)

The Assiniboine, Cree and Ojibway peoples were the first to come to what is now known as the province of Manitoba. Before 1670, a single way of life was known and understood by all who

lived in the North. The people were able to provide for their own needs directly from the natural resources of the region. The animals, fish, trees and plants provided the materials for food, clothing, shelter, tools and even health needs. Groups of people moved freely about the region, following seasonal patterns of fish and animals. The arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company marked the beginning of the extraction of resources for a profit and the first Aboriginal involvement in resource development. Furs and natural survival skills were traded for the supplies available from traders and explorers. As new tools were introduced and new ways of doing things were learned, many of the older survival skills were lost.

Around the time of Confederation in 1867, exploration and inland settlement continued, slowly affecting the skills and attitudes of the First Nations. Reliance on the trader for food and clothing increased while traditional methods of hunting, building and clothing of the family were no longer being passed on to the young. Dependence further increased with the signing of the numbered treaties, beginning in 1871. During this time, demands upon the natural resources increased sharply. It became very unusual for anyone to hunt and fish simply to meet the immediate needs of the settlement. A new century brought about the beginnings of the industrialization of the North. Families and communities were no longer able to move with seasonal resources. Permanent communities were established. For many Northerners, a reoccurring lifelong theme is that development and change often happen so fast that the people have little time to prepare for the decisions and actions necessary to maintain community stability and growth. Decisions that affect the future of communities are made in keeping with the needs of the industrial south rather than in consultation with the people at the local level, placing them outside the decision-making process.

### **Northern Aboriginal Communities and Hydro Development**

The modern period of natural resource development of northern Manitoba began in the late 1950s when the International Nickel Company (INCO) found a large ore body near what is now Thompson. In order to meet the electrical needs of the mine and rapidly growing townsite, the 223-megawatt (MW) Kelsey Hydroelectric Generating Station was constructed between 1957 and 1961 on the upper Nelson River. After Kelsey, four additional northern generating stations were constructed on the Nelson and Saskatchewan rivers. Grand

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### **“Manitoba Hydro remains a massive presence in northern Manitoba”**

Rapids (1968) (479 MW), Kettle (1974) (1220 MW), Long Spruce (1979) (1010 MW), Jenpeg (1979) (132 MW), and Limestone (1990) (1340 MW). Since these projects were completed, Manitobans have enjoyed some of the lowest electricity rates in North America, while many northern Aboriginal communities have endured hardships. Williams and Compton (1991) reported that for Aboriginal peoples living in the vicinity of these developments, the extensive impacts — ancient burial sites being washed away, shoreline impact due to soil erosion, abnormal water fluctuations and reversing of river flows, to name but just a few of the problems — continue to be felt to this day. Aboriginal people were not consulted in advance about the scope and magnitude of the projects, a process referred to by Grant as ex-poste decision making.

Manitoba Hydro remains a massive presence in northern Manitoba. The Crown corporation currently has a generating capacity of over 5000 MW, and it estimates that a further 5000 MW remain available in northern Manitoba for development.<sup>10</sup> There are numerous potential development projects in the works, including the Wuskwatim

generating station on the Burntwood River (200 MW); the Keeyask generating facility (650 MW), with associated transmission lines linking northern Manitoba to the south (possibly on the east side of Lake Winnipeg); and the Conawapa generating facility (1400 MW) with transmission lines linking the generating facility with Ontario's power grid. All these will directly affect, to varying degrees, northern Aboriginal communities.

A report prepared for the MRA by Kulchyski and Neckoway examines the impact of hydro electric development on Grand Rapids, which is a community divided into two parts, the Town of

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**“The mentality that characterizes dealings with First Nations over Hydro development has not fundamentally changed since the 1960s and 1970s”**

Grand Rapids and the Cree community known as Grand Rapids First Nation. The dam built at Grand Rapids was the last major piece of a first phase of hydroelectric development in Manitoba in the 1960s. The authors describe the social and economic destruction that the dam project has caused the Grand Rapids communities, and the province's mentality toward northern First Nations. This mentality pervades the new round of Hydro development proposals. The mentality treats local peoples, mostly First Nations and Metis, as an obstacle whose support should be purchased with the minimum possible expenditures. It treats the hunting and fishing economy as a residue from the past with no significant social or economic value in a contemporary context. The mentality is not concerned with the ultimate social or economic impacts on First Nations and other communities directly affected.

## **Aboriginal Communities and CED<sup>11</sup>**

Given the emphasis on community self-sufficiency, CED has particular appeal to Aboriginal communities. Today's Aboriginal people are caught in a power struggle with provincial and federal governments over land claims and rights of self-determination. As Aboriginal people gain more political power and say over their future, they must grapple with how CED will be administered in their communities. An integrated approach to CED theoretically gives them the ability to concentrate on cultural and social issues as well as economic, and therefore holds much appeal to those who wish to conserve their culture. But serious questions arise about the compatibility of Native values with successful private enterprise, perhaps narrowing the numbers of strategies from which an Aboriginal community can choose.

### **Aboriginal Culture and Tradition<sup>12</sup>**

Although deliberate institutional repression has diminished, Native tradition is still under assault by racism and the pervasive nature of the mass-consumption culture found in mainstream Canada. Given that the physical context in which Native culture evolved and existed has largely disappeared, many worry that revived traditions will be relegated to the status of historical curiosities. Traditional Native culture may only be able to survive intact in remote areas where the traditional economy persists. Certain CED strategies, however, are more compatible with traditional ways and can help communities regain self-sufficiency, dignity and a new place in the Canadian landscape. For those Aboriginal people who still maintain a traditional lifestyle, CED strategies that concentrate on activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, outfitting, and forestry work are compatible

with their attachment to the land and will help reinforce Native culture. Aboriginal social relations are organized along communal lines and emphasis is put on the opinions of the elders, who are held in high esteem. The private-enterprise system does not accommodate communal values, nor the participation of elders, and, therefore, it is highly doubtful that Native culture can survive using a business-only CED strategy, even if a close relationship to the land is included.

A convergence strategy probably has the best chance of preserving Native values and is, for this reason, the strategy that best works in Aboriginal communities. In fact, convergence principles have been found to be successful even in urban settings, as evidenced by Neechi Foods in Winnipeg.

### **Provincial Government Policy toward Aboriginal CED in Manitoba**

In the 1970s, the government of Manitoba developed a complex piece of policy aimed at fostering CED in northern Manitoba. This policy, known as the Northern Manitoba Development Strategy, or more commonly as the Great Northern Plan, represented a landmark in the evolution of CED theory. It was a tightly organized and coherent economic development strategy that provides one of the first examples of a CED approach that would look familiar to today's CED practitioners. The Great Northern Plan was based on convergence theory — very simply put, under this plan, northern Manitoba would, to the greatest extent possible, produce what it consumed and consume what it produced. The goal was to create greater linkages and fewer leakages in the northern economy. To take just one set of examples, the Plan envisaged creating 15 sawmills to provide lumber for local construction and mining. Thirty-two community lumber-harvesting operations would supply the sawmills and would replace workers from outside the area — once they quit or retired — with previously unemployed members of the local community. Forestry resources within 25 miles of the communities would be held for community use.

A particleboard plant would purchase most of the wood wasted by the sawmills, thereby establishing forward linkages to furniture and home construction. The home construction industry would, in turn, precipitate the need for factories producing windows, doors, etc. — thereby creating yet more linkages to forestry and other industries.

It was estimated that 2300 jobs would be created directly, with the 20% minimum employment of Aboriginal workers for existing industries adding an additional 3000 jobs for Native people by 1981.

The Plan was not implemented for various

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**“The Plan was not implemented but it influences the current wave of CED initiatives in Manitoba”**

reasons. The planners overestimated the political will of the governing party to invoke such changes, and underestimated the difficulty they faced in changing the northern bureaucratic machinery.<sup>13</sup> As well, the fiscal crisis faced by the federal government in 1976–77 meant that the province only received half the funds it had requested, and political support for the project dried up. Still, the Plan remains a touchstone for CED planning in Canada, and it influences the current wave of CED initiatives in Manitoba.

## What Is the New Economy?<sup>14</sup>

In recent years, a New Economy has emerged, one in which information and knowledge play a central role. The emergence of the New Economy has been credited with generating robust economic growth, new and challenging employment opportunities, new wealth-creation possibilities, and the promise of greatly enhancing the productivity, and, hence, incomes, of people in the rest of

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### “The extent and ‘newness’ of the New Economy should not be overstated”

the economy. Information technology also offers new opportunities for leisure, education, lifestyle and access to government services.

Some researchers have been quick to caution that the extent and “newness” of the New Economy should not be overstated. Historically, all capitalist economies have experienced cycles of upturn and recession, with the upturns often the result of technological innovations. Information technology is, no doubt, a major innovation, but the fundamental elements of the economy remain in place. Evidence suggests that the only sectors that have experienced extraordinary economic growth in the New Economy are the computer information technology-based sectors.<sup>15</sup> And since many businesses have already bought and incorporated the new technology, growth in these sectors will level off.<sup>16</sup>

There is also evidence that the benefits of New Economy growth have not been distributed evenly, and the New Economy may even have hurt the most vulnerable, creating permanent job insecurity. A “dual-segmented” labour force intensifies the split between high-paying, flexible jobs and

deskilled, low-wage, non-unionized, service-sector jobs.<sup>17</sup>

Not surprisingly, given that there is not even general agreement about whether and to what degree a “New Economy” actually exists, there is no foolproof, touchstone definition for the term. However, a number of authors see it as being underpinned by three major structural changes: a rise in general education levels; the development and availability of new information technology; and the increase in “invisible” trade in services, mergers and acquisitions, and the flow of information. This definition was adopted by the Manitoba Research Alliance as a starting point, and was used by many of the researchers on our team.

### Aboriginal Manitobans and Information Technology

Access to communication technology is imperfect among the Aboriginal community. Five percent of Aboriginal adults in Winnipeg live in homes without telephones, 27% have not used a computer in the last 12 months, and 39% have not used the internet in the last 12 months.<sup>18</sup>

In a report prepared for the MRA, Duboff conducted a scan of rural and northern Manitoba communities to determine the extent to which they are involved in the New Economy. She found that northern First Nations have the poorest participation in the New Economy of all respondents. The cost of computers and internet access, the unreliability of internet connections and lack of skills in the community have resulted in a cycle of non-participation in the New Economy by northern Manitoba First Nations.

While all urban and rural CED organizations and rural communities she surveyed are connected to the internet, 11% of northern Manitoba First Nations do not have any internet access. High-speed internet access, through a satellite modem, is only available in Garden Hill First Nation, Wasagamack First Nation and Manto Sipi Cree Nation. The rest of the First Nations use

dial-up connections, many through a community 1-800 number.

Even when northern First Nations do have access to computers and the internet, they experience many ongoing problems that limit their participation in the New Economy. Because of their dependence on dial-up connections, First Nations cannot receive a reliable connection to the internet, which is very limiting, based on the type of telephone service they receive. The 1-800 number that serves the whole community is often more a challenge than a benefit to users. Whether it is too many users slowing down the connection or a downed phone line (which is not uncommon in the North) cutting off the connection entirely, connecting to the internet through a 1-800 number is often very problematic. Unreliable Internet access is a prevalent issue for northern First Nations.

Only one quarter of First Nations governments have resources available on-line. These sites offer government information, including band council minutes and community meetings. Local organizations also tend not to post information on the internet for community or external use. A small percentage of communities, in which computer usage is higher and internet connections are better, have some local organizations on-line, including banks, school districts, nursing stations, libraries and tourism bureaus. Duboff found no indication that any First Nations organizations used GIS or conducted any type of natural resources management.

The number of household computers in First Nations is comparable to the rest of rural Manitoba, but much lower than in urban areas. Duboff found that only 17% of households have computers, and only 47% of those households are connected to the internet. Although there are computers in all the First Nations schools, only 88% have an internet connection, 44% of which are only connected in a computer lab, not in classrooms. As well, nearly half of schools do not integrate technology into the curriculum, choosing to focus on more traditional teaching methods and topics. There is a small amount of computer training in

First Nations schools, including software application (56% of schools), keyboarding, internet research and computer literacy (11% each). Students who have access to computers use them for word processing, internet research, e-mailing and educational games. Most northern Manitoba First Nations do not have the capacity to offer many public-access computers to their members.

Computers and the internet offer a multitude of educational opportunities for northern Manitoba First Nations, yet these are underutilized. In general, northern First Nations students are not taking distance education courses, and only a small

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**“If the federal Broadband Initiative had been successful, many of the problems facing northern First Nations would have been resolved”**

number are conducting internet research.

Simply put, the internet is not an inherent part of the lives of most northern First Nations people. These residents are not reliant on e-mail or internet research and they do not work on a computer. The dependence on computers found in southern, urban communities does not exist in northern First Nations. There is some connectivity, especially among the children at school, but not reliance. A large part of this lack of reliance is due to the poor service, as well as to a shortage of skills. There is a desire, though, to become connected.

Many of the problems in northern First Nations could have been resolved had the Broadband Initiative been a success. These First Nations are the communities that could benefit the most from this access, as it can improve education and training in the community, offer new services, provide links with other communities and create new economic opportunities. Unfortunately, most of these communities did not have the ability to ac-

cess the program and, therefore, could not receive the government grants to obtain broadband connection. It is this flaw in the Broadband Initiative that has contributed to the deprivation of reliable, affordable internet access for the people who need it the most. The service provided by MTS is another problem. Because of high costs, MTS is very slow to connect northern First Nations. One community resident stated that, rather than spending so much money on advertising in the south, MTS should funnel that money into providing better service to their customers in the north. There is hope, though, in the proposal by Nations Sphere

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**“As a collective voting block, Aboriginal people in Winnipeg have enormous potential political power, but they remain politically marginalized”**

to work with First Nations communities, not only to provide them with high-speed internet, but also with training, employment and economic development opportunities.

### **The Aboriginal Population in Winnipeg**

Almost 38% of Aboriginal people in Manitoba live in Winnipeg. It is by far the largest Aboriginal community in the province, and the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada. Aboriginal people make up 8.4% of the total population of Winnipeg. Two inner-city federal electoral districts, Winnipeg North and Winnipeg Centre, have greater than 16% Aboriginal populations. Nearly half of Winnipeg’s Aboriginal population lives in the inner city.<sup>19</sup>

The Aboriginal population is much younger than the population as a whole, with a median age of 24.7 years in 2001, notably younger than the median age of the general Winnipeg population, 37.1

years.<sup>20</sup> So, while Winnipeg’s general population begins to age, the growing Aboriginal population will slow that aging down and provide large numbers of young new entrants into the labour market in coming years. Although Aboriginal children represent “the economic future” of the province, the Aboriginal population in the past has been significantly under-represented in the labour market. A significantly high proportion of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg live in poverty — almost two-thirds, and that number rises to four out of five in the inner city.

### **Aboriginal Participation in Political Life**

In a report prepared for the MRA, Silver, Keeper, and MacKenzie surveyed the literature and conducted interviews with Aboriginal people in inner-city Winnipeg to try to determine whether Aboriginal people in Winnipeg’s inner city vote in mainstream elections, and, if not, why not. This is an important question because in Winnipeg the Aboriginal population is large and growing. As a collective voting block, Aboriginal people in Winnipeg have enormous potential political power, but they remain politically marginalized. To put it simply, the very high proportion of urban Aboriginal people who are economically disadvantaged or socially excluded need all the political power they can get.

The authors found that the Aboriginal people in inner-city Winnipeg are less likely to vote. This appears to be partly because there is a strong correlation, across society as a whole, between voting and age and educational attainment. Aboriginal people in inner-city Winnipeg tend to be younger and have lower levels of education, and thus, statistically speaking, it is no surprise that they are less likely to cast a ballot. However, the authors found strong evidence that the reason so many Aboriginal people do not vote is that they feel excluded from the political system, and, thus, choose not to vote in that system. Respondents to this study also made it very clear that the best way to get Aboriginal people involved in main-



stream politics is for politicians and party workers to make direct, face-to-face connections with Aboriginal people in Aboriginal neighbourhoods. Similarly, they would be much more likely to vote if Aboriginal candidates were running.

### **Aboriginal Participation in Urban CED Organizations<sup>21</sup>**

The focus communities for CED in Winnipeg are both geographic (most inner-city neighbourhoods) and cultural (such as Aboriginal), and when these two types of communities overlap, complications arise. A report prepared for the MRA by Silver, with Hay and Gorzen, used the Spence Neighbourhood Association as a case study to investigate how and why (or why not) Aboriginal people are participating in CED organizations. The Spence neighbourhood is in the inner city, and has a large and growing proportion of Aboriginal residents. The authors note, “Spence is, by almost any measurement, one of Winnipeg’s most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.” Its population has been in decline for three decades, average property values dropped by nearly one third in the 1990s, rates of residential mobility are double that of Winnipeg as a whole, and poverty levels (as measured by Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cutoff, LICO) are three times that of Winnipeg as a whole. At the same time, Spence is a site of great activity as residents work to rebuild their community. Houses are being renovated, youth centres and programs are springing up, and new lighting and fences are among the most vis-

ible signs of investment in community safety and comfort. The Spence Neighbourhood Association is playing a lead role in promoting such changes. As an organization, its main resource is the active participation of local residents.

The authors found that most Aboriginal people were not active in the organization — despite its efforts to attract them — because they do not feel fully a part of the community. Indeed, while the Aboriginal people interviewed think of themselves as a community, they do not act as a community. The authors recommend the establishment of a parallel Aboriginal residents’ group in Spence

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**“Aboriginal people were not active in the neighbourhood association in a community with a very high proportion of Aboriginal people”**

to achieve greater Aboriginal participation in CED and the process of capacity building in the Aboriginal community.

It should be emphasized that determining the best way to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in CED initiatives remains a source of debate and discussion within the CED community, and even those who strongly support the establishment of Aboriginal-only organizations believe that doing so is only part of a multi-faceted solution.

# Aboriginal Employment in Selected Manitoba Industries

Sexsmith and Pettman conducted numerous interviews with representatives of industry and education and training institutions. The interviewees were overwhelmingly in agreement that the increasing use of information technologies is not a primary impediment to Aboriginal employment in IT industries. The necessary skills for entry-level work can be taught relatively easily. However, the lack of experience with computers is, no doubt, intimidating for many Aboriginal people, and likely stands as an additional psychological barrier that must be overcome.

## Banking

Comparison of the number of financial institutions in Winnipeg neighbourhoods and Manitoba Census divisions to the percentage of residents who are Aboriginal reveals a consistent trend — areas with high concentrations of Aboriginal people have fewer traditional financial institutions per capita. (Fringe banking institutions, such as pay-day loan companies, are overrepresented.)

The industry made significant progress in the representation of Aboriginal peoples among employees between 1987 and 2003. The proportion of Aboriginal people employed in banking nearly doubled. Nonetheless, increases in Aboriginal employment levels have remained at a plateau in banking since 2001. The proportion of Aboriginal persons within the permanent full-time workforce in the banking sector in Manitoba ranges from 1.2% for CIBC to 5.6% for Royal Bank.

## Call Centres<sup>22</sup>

The Manitoba government has put in place initiatives to train disadvantaged Aboriginal people

for call-centre jobs. In a creative response to the restrictions imposed by federal employment and training policy, the province has used partnerships with employers as well as with community organizations to create opportunities for disadvantaged workers. In a report prepared for the MRA, Guard evaluates these initiatives. She concludes that, by providing training for Aboriginal people for entry-level jobs in a high-demand industry, the province has deployed its limited resources strategically to address one of the region's most urgent social and economic problems. Yet, the requirement that employment programs be provided in partnership with employers incurs significant costs. Partnerships sacrifice transparency, making public scrutiny of the project all but impossible.

The complexity created by a web of public/private partnerships is virtually inevitable under the terms of the federal-provincial agreement. But the exclusion of unions is not. The province's failure to include unions as partners points to a too-close identification with the perspective of employers. Many employers in this industry, including some in unionized call centres, are hostile to unions. But without unions, workers have no advocate with expertise in workers' rights and experience in protecting them. Unions are also an important part of the community and a vocal advocate of social justice. Manitoba unions have taken an active role in protecting and advancing the interests of Aboriginal people and other racialized workers, providing ant-racist education to their members, supporting self-organization among workers with particular interests and encouraging members of racialized and other equity-seeking groups to seek leadership positions. By refusing to involve unions, the province accommodates low-road employers and offers no incentive to others to maintain their higher standards. Recruiting Aboriginal and other workers for insecure, poorly paid jobs where workers are not treated with respect does not advance the interests of the community. Those interests can be advanced only by supporting workers through training and into employment in well-paid, secure jobs that build self-esteem.

# Education and Training<sup>23</sup>

In a report prepared for the MRA, Silver, with Klyne and Simard, investigated the nature and potential of Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba. They investigated closely five Adult Learning Centres, chosen specifically because they had a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal learners. The demographics of Manitoba are such that the education of Aboriginal adults will, in future, be a central concern for all educational institutions.

The authors conclude that Adult Learning Centres are a very exciting educational innovation and an important addition to the tools available to the province to build a better future for Manitobans, and, in particular, a better future for Aboriginal people. Given the demographics of Manitoba — which suggest a continued and significant growth of the Aboriginal population, both in absolute and relative terms, for quite some time into the future — such initiatives are particularly important. Their importance is accentuated by the fact that, generally, the regular school system has not yet made the changes needed to respond to Aboriginal educational needs, as documented in a recent study of Aboriginal education in Winnipeg inner-city high schools.<sup>24</sup> The importance for Aboriginal people of the work being done by ALCs is not just that individuals can transform their lives, as important as that is. It is that Aboriginal people as a whole, Aboriginal people collectively, can benefit from appropriate and effective forms of education so as to take charge of their lives.

The authors learned from their interviews that many Aboriginal learners carry with them a great deal of pain and often suffer from a lack of self-esteem or confidence. Given this reality, the authors conclude that the single most important explanation for the success of ALCs is the great lengths to which the institutions go to provide a friendly, helpful, relaxed atmosphere, free of racism.

Another, closely related, point is that ALCs use a holistic approach to adult education — this means that learners are not treated simply as students, but as whole people, whose (often difficult) lives outside the classroom are every bit as important to their prospects of completing grades as their facility with math or English. This means that the instructors are called on to be much more than “just” teachers.

Based on their research and interviews, the authors identified the following key themes that they believe characterize a successful ALC: group-based learning; rooting adult education in learners’

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**“Many Aboriginal learners carry with them a great deal of pain, and, as learners, should be treated not simply as students, but as whole people”**

experience and culture; efforts aimed at job-preparedness and a well-paid, secure job at the end of the process; the importance of community, as well as individual, transformation.

## **Manitoba Innovation Framework**

In 2004 the Province of Manitoba released An Innovation Framework for Manitoba, which outlined a strategy aimed at ensuring that Manitobans benefit from economic development in targeted industries expected to be future growth industries. Six clusters of industries were identified, with each supported by a coherent strategy for ensuring that Manitoba will become a player in these industries.

While the preamble to the document acknowledged the importance of drawing members of disadvantaged communities into the paid labour force of those industries, it did not lay out clear strategies for doing so. A report prepared for the

MRA by Loewen et al. argued that filling this gap should be an important priority for the province. The authors conclude that the government should partner with the business community, educational institutions, unions and community-based organizations to create a workforce intermediary for advanced manufacturing industries in Winnipeg. Such an organization would be charged with bringing together diverse stakeholders from across the region, organizing, supporting planning and overseeing multiple partners and funding streams toward common goals.<sup>25</sup> In particular, provincial government resources would be needed to enable the intermediary to become established, and then to perform the full range of employment development functions that are necessary.

## **Recommendations to Improve Aboriginal Education and Training**

### **Use personal contact to recruit**

#### **Aboriginal people into training programs**

We found strong evidence that direct personal contact is the most effective means of recruiting Aboriginal people into pre-employment programs. Schools and training centres should expand their recruitment efforts by focussing on direct engagement with the Aboriginal community. To take just one example, the Aboriginal U-Crew at the University of Manitoba, comprised of students from Manitoba and northwestern Ontario, attends university and high school events to share their own experiences and provide concrete advice to other Aboriginal students.

### **Improve retention by making**

#### **Aboriginal students more comfortable**

Retention of Aboriginal students is a serious issue for some vocational programs in Manitoba. It is, therefore, important to increase the ambient comfort of learning centres, both physically and non-physically, to foster high retention rates among Aboriginal learners. Sexsmith and Pettman quote the director of Aboriginal Focus Programs at the University of Manitoba, who observed, “In order to be able to learn, students need a place where they can feel comfortable. They need a place that’s pleasurable to be in and that says we believe in you.” A supportive, culturally appropriate environment is also instrumental in maximizing the retention rates of Aboriginal training programs. Discussion groups and personal attention were strategies used by the most successful programs, such as Urban Circle. Organizations that are concerned to retain a high proportion of entrants should ensure their facilities are comfortable and

that program administrators are personable, encouraging and compassionate.

### **Use strategic partnerships to increase Aboriginal employment in targeted industries**

The Manitoba government is already using partnerships to connect Aboriginal people with jobs in the call-centre industry. And there is significant potential to increase the number of work placements for Aboriginal people in several key industries, including banking and airlines, both of which were studied by the MRA. Such opportunities are more limited in the latter, due to an economic environment that has constrained hiring capacity. Nonetheless, the airline sector has much to learn from companies in the aerospace industry, which appears to be fairly proactive in its hiring of Aboriginal graduates. An organization such as the Manitoba Aerospace Human Resources Coordinating Committee (MAC), which works with both secondary and post-secondary institutions to create pathways into the industry, or the creation of a human resources branch of the MAC, could have a significant impact on the number of internships offered in the airline industry by relieving private companies and training centres from the responsibility of setting up partnerships themselves. With respect to banking, the number of financial institutions and training organizations operating in Manitoba renders the creation of a centralized Aboriginal human resources committee unrealistic. Even so, facilities such as the the Manitoba Association of Friendship Centers have significant potential to facilitate discussion between prospective Aboriginal employees and companies in the banking sector.

One notable example in the banking sector is Assiniboine Credit Union. The Credit Union's board of directors is committed to hiring Aboriginal people, and makes efforts to engrain this goal as a company-wide value. By sourcing Aboriginal employees from centres where people are devoted to making life changes, communicat-

ing skills requirements to training organizations, providing sensitivity training to all employees and striving to advance Aboriginal people through the organization, ACU has achieved an Aboriginal employee turnover rate of less than 1%, which is one-tenth the rate of similar organizations.<sup>26</sup>

### **Create a workforce intermediary<sup>27</sup>**

The provincial government should partner with the business community, educational institutions, unions and community-based organizations to create a workforce intermediary for advanced manufacturing industries in Winnipeg.

### **Make Adult Learning Centres even stronger**

The following recommendations apply specifically to Adult Learning Centres, which have emerged as an important tool in Aboriginal education in Manitoba. (They are taken from Silver, with Klyne and Simard. However, it is interesting to note that one of the most successful ALCs with a large proportion of Aboriginal students — Urban Circle Training Centre — also was singled out for praise by a number of respondents to a study on Aboriginal employment in the airlines and banking industries.)

- Direct additional funding at Adult Learning Centres, both to make greater resources available to existing ALCs, and to increase the number of ALCs operating in Manitoba.
- Promote Aboriginal culture at all ALCs, through the increased use of sharing circles, additional educational opportunities for staff and adult learners and hiring more Aboriginal staff.
- Promote group-based learning, including the use of orientation sessions for incoming learners, in ALCs where it is not now used.
- Develop job-specific programs in partnership with prospective employers in key industries.

- Encourage social service agencies to direct appropriate clients to the ALCs.
- Encourage faculties of education to use ALCs as teacher-training sites.
- Conduct research into what steps might be taken to bring more Aboriginal men into ALCs.

## Conclusion

This publication has collected research findings regarding Aboriginal people and CED from the MRA. It describes an holistic, long-term CED process for Aboriginal people in Manitoba, with the various components linked in a comprehensive flow of ideas. Such a process would begin with a recognition of the terrible and lasting effects of colonization, and, therefore, a process of “de-colonization” is a necessary first step. Following that would be increased and stronger Aboriginal participation in community life, using culturally appropriate training and learning centres. The next step in such a process would be a move into strategic economic sectors, especially those that provide needed social supports and enhance community development. This stage would be assisted by a range of financial, training and policy supports, leading to the building of human resource capacity and eventually the pursuit of convergence strategies of economic development.

## Notes

- 1 This section draws most on Loxley and Lamb, Friesen and Hudson, and Fernandez.
- 2 See, for instance, Canadian CED Network, 2004; Loxley, 1986.
- 3 Thomas, 1974, cited in Loxley and Lamb, p. 2.
- 4 Loxley, 2002, cited in Loxley and Lamb, p. 2.
- 5 P. 4.
- 6 P. 1.
- 7 This section is based primarily on Silver, Keeper, and McKenzie, and Loewen et al.
- 8 Loxley, 1986, p. 75, cited in Fernandez, p. 43.
- 9 Based primarily on Ghorayshi et al.
- 10 Manitoba Hydro, 1999, cited in Hultin, p. 5.
- 11 This section is based on Fernandez, pp. 43–44.
- 12 This section is based on Fernandez, pp. 43–44, and relies on the research of J. Loxley’s chapter 3: Strategies for the Economic Development of Native Communities, from his *The Economics of CED, A Report Prepared for the Native Economic Development Program*.
- 13 Loxley, 1981, p. 172, cited in Fernandez, p. 87.
- 14 This section draws most heavily on Graydon and Duboff.
- 15 Bobe, 2002; Tabb, 2001, cited in Graydon, p. 16.
- 16 Delong, 2002; Tabb, 2001, cited in Graydon, p. 17.
- 17 Hudson, 2001; Yates, 2001, cited in Graydon, p. 16.
- 18 Sexsmith and Pettman, p. 32.
- 19 Mendelson, 2004, p. 9.
- 20 Statistics Canada, 2003b, 2003c.
- 21 Silver, with Hay and Gorzen
- 22 This section is based on Guard.
- 23 This section is based on Silve, Klyne, and Simard, and Loewan et al.
- 24 Silver and Mallett, 2002, cited in Silver, Klyne and Simard.
- 25 For a longer discussion, see Loewen et al., p. 17.
- 26 Sexsmith and Pettman, p. 81.
- 27 See Loewen et al. for a full discussion of this issue.

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