

Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium
Submission to the Ontario Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Development
2008 Pre-Budget Consultations - January 31, 2008

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium, established in 1994 is the coordinating organization and collective voice for eight Aboriginal owned and controlled post-secondary education and training institutions in Ontario. The Consortium is mandated by the Chiefs of Ontario to facilitate federal and provincial recognition and resources for Aboriginal institutions in Ontario.

Aboriginal institutions were created by Aboriginal communities to address the life long learning needs, human resource needs and the capacity development of First Nations communities. They are locally driven and supported by First Nations leaders, community organizations and students. Aboriginal institutions deliver a wide range of high quality programs locally and regionally in community based and culturally enriched learning environments. Program delivery includes literacy, alternative secondary programs, prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), adult education, apprenticeship, preparation programs, certificate, diploma, degree programs, language and culture programs, professional development, community awareness and community development programs.

Aboriginal institutions in Ontario consist of:

1. Anishinabek Educational Institute, North Bay, Thunder Bay, Muncey-Delaware
2. First Nations Technical Institute, Tyendinaga
3. Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute, M'Chigoneeg
4. Iohahi:io Akwesasne Adult Education and Training Centre, Akwesasne
5. Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre, Six Nations
6. Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute, Thunder Bay
7. Seven Generations Education Institute, Rainy Lake, Kenora
8. Six Nations Polytechnic, Six Nations

Aboriginal institutions deliver education and training programs to Aboriginal learners in locations both on and off reserve. Aboriginal institutions support all levels of education by providing: alternative secondary programs; school support services like school evaluations, professional development for educators; teacher education programs; supporting community research initiatives; curriculum development; role models; hosting science, math and technology camps, hosting career fairs; and more.

Aboriginal institutions are uniquely different from mainstream institutions. Aboriginal institutions deliver community-based programs in culturally relevant and supportive learning environments that address the learning styles of Aboriginal people. They are responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people and demonstrate success with Aboriginal learners that cannot be mirrored by colleges and universities.

Aboriginal institutions in Ontario:

- Train and educate 4,000 learners each year;
- Provide access to post-secondary programs in Aboriginal communities;
- Experienced a 92% increase in enrolment over five years;
- Increase the number of Aboriginal people participating and graduating from post-secondary;
- Demonstrate up to 98% success rates;
- Provide 400 jobs in Aboriginal communities;
- Delivered over 150 different programs and courses;
- Link with community agencies and organizations to ensure the provision of support services that lead to student success;
- Ensure education and training programs address workplace needs; and,
- Provide Aboriginal communities with a strong economic driver much like colleges and universities do for mainstream society.

Aboriginal institutions have successfully delivered provincially approved education and training programs to Aboriginal learners in Ontario since 1985. Ontario acknowledges and supports the success of Aboriginal institutions through the provision of grant funding since 1992. The funding mechanism used to support Aboriginal institutions began with the creation of the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (AETS). Strategy funding provides *incentives* to colleges and universities for the provision of programs and services to Aboriginal learners, whereas, Strategy funding provided to Aboriginal institutions is virtually *the only funding* received for program delivery.

Aboriginal owned and controlled, education and training institutions are not formally recognized like colleges and universities. As such, Aboriginal institutions are not eligible to receive general operating grants and the numerous other special purpose grants that are available to support program development and delivery, students, infrastructure, research, and other special needs.

Funding Challenges

There is no source of adequate and sustainable funding for Aboriginal institutions. The need to support Aboriginal education programs and services has been documented by Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, and is acknowledged by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. However, access to funding for Aboriginal institutions is limited to short term grants available through annual proposal processes.

Ontario deemed Aboriginal education one of their top priorities and provides \$17 million to support Aboriginal post-secondary education³. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities provided \$2.58 million in 2007/08 (AETS 'Start-Up and Development' Fund) for the delivery of provincially approved programs by eight Aboriginal institutions in partnership with mainstream colleges and universities. In 2007/08, the level of provincial funding available to Aboriginal institutions resulted in as little as \$1,527 per student or as little as \$11,000 for the delivery of a full-time university program. Aboriginal institutions obtain project grants through an annual proposal process. By comparison, AETS

³ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, News Release, July 24, 2007.

funding to colleges and universities is allocated by way of a predictable, fixed share fund without a competitive proposal process. In addition, in 2008/09, Ontario plans to support colleges and universities at \$9,669⁴ per student.

Indian Affairs and Northern Development (INAC) makes available \$3.3 million through the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) for program delivery for Aboriginal learners by some mainstream institutions and some Aboriginal institutions. In 1996, INAC developed historical allocations for some institutions. Federal funding levels have remained constant since that time which has in effect, resulted in an annual decrease in funding in relation to rising costs. This funding is not available to Aboriginal institutions that have emerged since 1996 nor does it provide any allowance for growth.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) does not fund Aboriginal institutions. HRSDC makes funding available for training via negotiated agreements with local Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreement (AHRDA) holders. The funding is provided to individuals rather than in support of program delivery.

Aboriginal institutions do not have access to research funding available to mainstream institutions which could support curriculum development and adaptation, program evaluations and other research projects.

The absence of secure, adequate and sustainable funding to support the stability and capacity development of Aboriginal post-secondary education and training institutions poses unnecessary challenges for Aboriginal institutions and their communities.

Capital and Infrastructure

Aboriginal institutions have no source of funding for capital and infrastructure. Some Aboriginal institutions operate out of facilities that were constructed for educational purposes while others operate from sub-standard buildings such as old residential schools and portables. Aboriginal institutions also pay high costs to rent facilities to deliver community-based programs in communities where there is no campus.

The federal government announced in its 2005 federal budget⁶, an allocation for post-secondary education infrastructure based on the authorities provided in Bill C-48 giving the Ministry of Finance the authority to ensure access to post-secondary infrastructure funding by Aboriginal controlled post-secondary institutions.⁷ None of the funding found its way to Aboriginal institutions operating in Ontario.

⁴ 2007 Ontario Budget

⁶ Bill C-48, an Act to Authorize the Finance Minister to Make Certain Payments, called for, among other things, payments “for supporting training programs and enhancing access to post-secondary education, to benefit, among others, Aboriginal Canadians, an amount not exceeding \$1.5 billion”.

⁷ Ministry of Finance, September 5, 2006 <http://www.fin.gc.ca/FEDPROV/C48e.html>. “The Government established five third-party trusts for the benefit of provinces and territories. Provinces and territories will have the flexibility to draw down funds as they require up to end of the lifetime of each individual trust. \$1 billion for post-secondary education infrastructure to support [investments](#) to promote innovation and accessibility, including [investments](#) in university and college infrastructure and equipment. Funding will be notionally allocated over two years (2006-07 and 2007-08) on an equal [per capita](#) basis among provinces and territories.”

Recognition Challenges

The lack of formal recognition affects Aboriginal institutions in a variety of ways. It blocks access to funding, prevents program recognition, and prevents institutional stability and growth.

The lack of formal recognition from government blocks access to funding that is available to colleges and universities. Aboriginal institutes are not eligible to receive core operational funding and the numerous special grants that are available to publicly recognized colleges and universities i.e. student support services, support for small and remote institutes, incentives, capital and infrastructure, facilities maintenance and expansion, geographic, special needs, research and development.

Limited provincial and federal grants are available to some Aboriginal institutions to support some program delivery. To access provincial or federal funding, Aboriginal institutions must secure partnership arrangements with provincially recognized colleges and universities. This situation places Aboriginal institutions in an unfair and disadvantaged position with respect to negotiating the required partnership arrangements.

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium raised the issue of these unfair partnerships with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities over and over again in the past fifteen years, yet the situation continues to occur. The most significant impacts of the partnership arrangements between colleges, universities and Aboriginal institutions yield these results:

- Students that attend Aboriginal institutions pay tuition fees to the partner college or university due to the need to register students using the Ontario Student Application Process. Tuition fees then become an item of negotiation between the Aboriginal institution and its partner institution when tuition fees should be paid directly to the institution where the student receives programs and services.
- Mainstream institutions receive operating grants for the students attending programs at Aboriginal institutions and have no obligation to forward any of this revenue to the Aboriginal institution to off set the costs of program delivery.

Aboriginal institutions should not be required to pay colleges and universities for the privilege of delivering Ministry approved programs. This is an unnecessary expense and a misuse of public funding.

Another way that the lack of recognition of Aboriginal institutions impedes operations is with respect to student support. Ontario prides itself on providing assistance to every eligible student that wants to attend post-secondary, but there continue to be many students who wish to attend post-secondary education that cannot get support⁸. One Aboriginal institution in Ontario researched the requirements to create a student

⁸ Provincial student funding grants do not support students who enroll in Aboriginal institutions. Federal funding falls short of addressing the number of students that wish to enroll in post-secondary education. For example, the annual report of Grand River Post-Secondary Education Office revealed a shortfall of \$4.8 million in 2006/2007.

endowment fund in an effort to increase funding support to its students. The Aboriginal institution learned that it was not eligible for matching funding from the government of Ontario as it is not a provincially recognized institution. Therefore, lack of recognition creates a number of barriers that impede the growth and development of Aboriginal institutions.

Responsibility for Aboriginal Institutions

Aboriginal institutions lack formal recognition by the province and as a result are not eligible for funding grants in the same manner as provincially recognized colleges and universities. In fact, there is no source of adequate and sustainable funding for Aboriginal institutions from any source.

Both the provincial and federal governments take the position that they are not responsible for post-secondary education for learners that attend Aboriginal institutions. The federal government contends post-secondary education is a provincial matter. The provincial government views Aboriginal post-secondary institutions as a federal responsibility. The end result is insufficient and unstable funding, but more importantly, missed opportunities. The end result is: students want to go to school; Aboriginal institutions that want to deliver education programs to them; and, students are denied the opportunity to attain post-secondary at Aboriginal institutions. Aboriginal institutions repeatedly demonstrate the need for funding, only to face the jurisdictional argument as to who has the responsibility to pay.

Recommendations

Ontario deemed Aboriginal education a top priority and strives to ensure that every eligible student has the support they require to obtain a post-secondary education. However, they have missed supporting the students that wish to attend Aboriginal institutions and this is truly a missed opportunity.

Aboriginal institutions are an integral segment of the public post-secondary system in Ontario, and their students do not enjoy the opportunities that are afforded colleges, universities and their students. Aboriginal institutions are placed in an unfair and unjust situation in relation to their mainstream counterparts. The lack of formal government recognition of Aboriginal institutions and the lack of equitable funding, results in valuing students that attend Aboriginal institutions much less than students that attend mainstream colleges and universities.

Inequitable access to funding for Aboriginal institutions will continue to perpetuate the significant educational attainment gap that exists between Aboriginal and mainstream learners. The lack of adequate and sustainable funding to support the capacity and infrastructure development of Aboriginal institutions risks quality! It places undue hardship and continuous strain on human resources, affects ability to attract and retain highly qualified faculty and staff, and impacts the provision of appropriate facilities and equipment. Insecure, year to year funding, results in the delivery of multi-year programs, occurring “on a hope and a prayer”.

Ontario must begin to treat Aboriginal institutions fairly and equitably in order to ensure all people in Ontario are supported in obtaining post-secondary education. Ontario repeatedly acknowledged the value of Aboriginal institutions through incremental funding increases over time.

The 2005 Ontario Budget and its Reaching Higher Plan supported increased funding for Aboriginal institutions. The Minister's¹⁰ Advisory Committee on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2006/07) articulated the need for increased funding to Aboriginal institutions. The review of the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy conducted by the Educational Policy Institute¹¹ in 2007 supports the creation of a road map for Aboriginal institutions to access provincial funding. It makes perfect economic sense to increase support to Aboriginal institutions to build upon the success they achieve.

The Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium recommends that the government of Ontario:

1. Immediately remove the cap on funding to Aboriginal institutions (Start-Up and Development Fund). Aboriginal institutions deliver Ministry approved programs like colleges and universities and therefore, should be eligible to receive funding that is equitable to colleges and universities.
2. Work with the Aboriginal Institutes' Consortium to "create a roadmap for Aboriginal institutions to access provincial funding" in a similar manner to the funding that is provided to provincially recognized colleges and universities (i.e. operating grants, special grants, training and apprenticeship funding, research grants, infrastructure support, student support). This is consistent with recommendation #2 in the 2007 evaluation of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Strategy.
3. Eliminate the unfair practices that continue to exist in the partnership agreements between Aboriginal institutions and Ontario's provincially recognized colleges and universities. This action supports the effective use of provincial funding and could provide assurances that student (tuition) funding is available to support the institution where the student is educated.
4. Take action immediately to end the jurisdictional dispute between the federal and provincial governments to garner the necessary support to Aboriginal institutions to ensure Aboriginal learners are provided the types of support they require to succeed in post-secondary.

¹⁰ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

¹¹ The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities engaged Educational Policy Institute to conduct a review of the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy that was released in 2007.