

PREPARING FOR A POST-2015 ABORIGINAL LABOUR MARKET STRATEGY

AN ONTARIO ASETA HOLDER PERSPECTIVE

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Document Prepared by: Jennifer Whiteye, Director – LDCC ASETA

On Behalf of: The Ontario ASETA Technical Working Group

Executive Summary

In preparation for the next agreement, Ontario Agreement Holders have collaborated to bring forward some key messaging critical to the new strategy.¹ This paper represents Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) Agreement Holders including the three Constitutional Groups - Métis, Inuit and First Nation.

Devolution to Aboriginal peoples to design and deliver based upon the unique needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit is a proven model of success. In addition, a multi-year agreement with a sustained financial investment has contributed to effective planning and addressing of labour market needs.

However, it is well known that Aboriginal Employment and Training is in serious need of additional financial investment. Budgets have been frozen since the 1990's. While the Government of Canada continues to expect increased results, the realities ASEAs face are:

- Frozen budgets;
- Increased training costs;
- Increased costs of living;
- Increased minimum wage rates; and
- Struggle to build internal capacity with diminishing funds.

Recommendations supported within this document are:

- A focus on improved relationships between the three Constitutional Aboriginal groups and the Government of Canada.
- Negotiation of agreement terms and conditions from a political and administrative perspective well before the expiry of a previous agreement.
- Enhance the appreciation for Aboriginal Agreement holders by working with ASEAs to deliver quality Aboriginal Awareness and Sensitivity training for all staff working with ASEAs. Include the unique history of Aboriginal Employment & Training which is fundamental for understanding the current relationship.
- Recognize that “Aboriginal Labour Market Integration” is a positive step only with ASEAs at the forefront with their rich history and experience dealing with Aboriginal clientele.
- Eliminate competitive environments garnered through open calls for proposals that have little or no ASEA involvement. Project based approaches to funding are not efficient and funding should be integrated into the current Employment & Training agreement.
- Involve Aboriginal communities in the discussions with LMDAs. Being left out of the discussions fail to recognize the impact of such agreements on ASEAs and Aboriginal communities. This approach makes sense as it avoids duplication, is an inclusive process and recognizes the ASEA network as a valuable resource. The

¹ This paper is technical in nature and can be utilized for the purposes of gaining knowledge of the challenges of the current ASETS agreement and advocating for elements of the Post-2015 strategy.

conversation must occur with the three Constitutional groups - Inuit, Métis and First Nation on viable solutions to Aboriginal LMDA funding.

- Direct CSJ Federal government funding to Aboriginal communities in Ontario must be reinstated. Constituency priorities fall short of recognizing Aboriginal community priorities and therefore are a hindrance to Aboriginal applications. There must be adequate investment in the next strategy to deal with our youth population.
- Looking ahead at the next transition, the Government of Canada needs to ensure a smooth transition between fiscal years with particular analysis of how the common system will affect ASETAs.
- Elimination of unnecessary reporting is recommended. Include ASETAs in the development/revision of documents while allowing ASETAs to pilot the use of new documents from a technical standpoint.
- Identify new administrative money that can be allocated to the ASETAs to upkeep new data management systems beyond March 31st, 2015.
- Simplify the Annual Operational Plan to allow the diversity of quality work in the region to be captured. Give ASETAs ownership of documents created and eliminate a restrictive approach based on detailed templates.
- Coordinate a joint committee composed of ASETA and Service Canada staff that can review the Annual Operational Plan submissions in Ontario.
- Broaden the definition of partnership which currently focuses on the ability to leverage funds in a formal setting. A value added approach to partnership should be considered. Emphasis on the barriers to partnership should be highlighted, understanding how external factors can hinder/contribute to partnership development and how organizations have overcome barriers.
- Acknowledge the importance of capacity building initiatives within ASETAs. Remove capacity building from the administrative cap and enter into negotiations for the clarification of the definition of capacity building.
- Involve ASETAs in the design, delivery and compilation of results of the ASETS evaluation. Treasury Board submissions should reflect accurately the work being accomplished through the ASETAs.
- The Strategic Business Planning process should be eliminated as an evaluation tool since it does not accurately portray ASETA Holder strategies for the future.

Ontario ASETAs believe that the focus of Post-2015 should be the re-establishment of an employment strategy based on the achievement of parity.

First Nation ASETAs across the country have identified a National Action Plan which continues to be the goal of communities in Ontario. This document is entitled “Seeking First Nation Employment Parity” (attached as Appendix 2). Although this action plan was developed by First Nation ASETA Holders, all Aboriginal communities (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) will also benefit from Employment Parity. The rate at which this goal is achievable is dependant on the following variables:

1. Securing adequate resources;
2. Removing delivery barriers by resolving a number of perennial issues deemed adverse to the First Nation Employment and Training Strategy’s goals;
3. Enhancing relations with private sector employers and partners; and

4. Establishing clear jurisdictional relationships².

Ontario ASETAs are asking that the Government of Canada honour their commitment to fund research on how employment parity can be achieved.

The first step toward achieving employment parity involves the Ministers of Employment and Social Development Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada meeting with Métis, Inuit and First Nation leadership. Development of accords representative of the bilateral relationships with the three regionally recognized constitutional groups is a key outcome. Without this commitment, employment parity will never be achieved.

The three pillars that are essential to the overall success of an Aboriginal Employment & Training strategy are:

A. Relationship

- Strengthening the relationship with Métis, Inuit and First Nations

B. Employment Parity

- Recognizing the mutually beneficial goal of reaching Aboriginal employment parity

C. Increased Funding over a Multi-year Agreement

- Commit to additional resources that are required for an adequate investment in reaching employment parity
- Secure a multiyear Aboriginal Employment & Training Strategy that will allow our communities to continue to build capacity and achieve success.

² The Technical Working Group on First Nation Human Resources Development. (date unknown). Seeking First Nation Employment Parity. P.1.

Background

Government of Canada messaging has consistently indicated that there is a need to support the devolution of Aboriginal programs and services to Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal control over the design, implementation and delivery of quality programs and services tailored to the needs of their respective communities is fundamental. This devolution has resulted in a series of progressions and more recent regression in terms of Government program delivery to Aboriginal people in Ontario. In order to understand where we are today, one must understand the history of Aboriginal Employment & Training:

Pathways to Success Strategy - 1991-1996

There have been many changes in Aboriginal employment and training programs since the implementation of the five year \$1 billion dollar Pathways to Success strategy in 1989. This was a joint partnership between the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) and Aboriginal people across Canada. Prior to this, communities were required to apply for project dollars directly through their local CEIC offices. Pathways marked a radical change in the Government of Canada's approach to Aboriginal employment and training programming, placing a heavy emphasis on an all-inclusive, grass-roots style of management through Aboriginal organizations.

Under Pathways, HRSDC-Service Canada continued to be responsible for contracting and monitoring all projects, but employment projects were approved by Area Management Boards (AMBs) that represented all First Nation peoples within specific geographic area across Ontario.

The Pathways to Success Strategy concluded in 1996 but was successful in leading improvements in the delivery of programs to Aboriginal people, as follows:

- Services to Aboriginal people became a priority rather than a "target";
- Local needs influenced the planning and priorities of Aboriginal Management Boards;
- Aboriginal people became involved in the decision making on projects;
- There were increased levels of training activity for Aboriginal people

Challenges that arose from the Pathways to Success Strategy included the following:

- Board representation was greater for on-reserve populations which led to concerns about "fairness" of Board priorities and decision-making;
- There was the concern that some Aboriginal populations were being excluded from access to Employment and Training programs;
- There was a lack of adequate systems to collect qualitative and quantitative data
- No system existed for the evaluation of project results.³

Regional Bi-Lateral Agreements (RBAs) - 1996-1999

When the program ended in 1996, the Unemployment Insurance Act had become the Employment Insurance Act, and the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission

³ Ursine Management. (2002). Continuing Success: Understanding What Lies Ahead for Aboriginal Human Resource Development. p.9.

had become Human Resource Development Canada. We also saw the introduction of the Regional Bilateral Agreement process (1996-1999), which was the direct result of National Framework Agreements, signed between the federal government and the Assembly of Aboriginal, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada. This allowed for the development of fifty-four Regional Bilateral Agreements (RBAs) across Canada. A variety of agreements were used in Ontario including RBAs, Aboriginal Flexible Funding Arrangements and Contribution Agreements. All agreements were sufficiently similar and as such were referred to as RBAs. Regional Bilateral Agreement Holders were given the ability to deliver programs through secondary LDMs.

The new RBA agreements allowed for the transfer of responsibility for the design and delivery of HRDC programs and services to Aboriginal while providing \$640 million over a three-year period.

The following improvements had been implemented with the delivery of Aboriginal Human Resource Development programs through the Regional Bilateral Agreements:

- The Aboriginal communities had greater control over the administration, design and delivery of programs;
- RBA holders were able to focus on the local labour market needs of participants, communities and employers;
- There was less bureaucracy and a greater degree of decision making at the local level;
- Program delivery was inclusive of all Aboriginal populations.

Challenges pertaining to the development of Aboriginal human resources continued with the RBAs, such as:

- The lack of administrative capacity in some organizations led to problems implementing agreements;
- In many instances, the agreement did not lead to increased flexibility of programs because HRDC programs and guidelines were adopted;
- There were issues regarding results and accountability such as completeness of data and the validity of information and results data.⁴

Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy I & II (AHRDS) 1999-2010

HRSDC soon replaced National Framework Agreements with National Accords which outlined the principles and objectives of the AHRDS. These accords were signed with five national Aboriginal organizations - the Assembly of Aboriginal, the Métis National Council, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and Native Women's Association of Canada.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) called for a longer-term employment and training initiative than the three-year RBA model. In the 1999 the AHRDS was introduced as a national Aboriginal-specific employment and training

⁴ Ursine Management. (2002). Continuing Success: Understanding What Lies Ahead for Aboriginal Human Resource Development. p.10.

initiative that continued the practice of having National Framework Agreements as well as 79 Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreements across the country. The AHRDS launched in response to the Federal Government's commitment to Aboriginal communities through "Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan".

The AHRDS objective was to enable Aboriginal organizations to assist clients to prepare for, obtain and maintain employment with a fundamental focus to enable Aboriginal groups to deliver a wider range of human resource programming.

The AHRDS I Strategy was a five-year commitment which expanded on the successful RBA model, while also responding to the need to integrate all programming including urban/off-reserve Aboriginal; youth, disabilities and child care programs under one model.

AHRDS II followed the success of AHRDA I and expired March 31st, 2009. A one year extension and then an additional six month extension was approved which took the agreement until September 30th, 2010.

The following improvements have been made in the development of Aboriginal Human Resources as a result of the AHRDAs:

- Measures have been implemented to provide more reliable information to evaluate programs;
- The AHRDAs have developed significant technical and administrative capacity in the delivery of programs;
- The five-year commitment of funds has allowed organizations to plan more effectively.

Challenges that the AHRDAs encounter continue to affect their ability to develop their Aboriginal Human Resources. These challenges include:

- Limitations on program funds and result-based accountability hinder the flexibility needed to meet client's needs;
- Limitations on funding allocations result in a significant amount of program dollars being spent on program administration;
- The validity, accuracy and usefulness of results data are questionable.⁵

Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) 2010-2015

ASETS is HRSDC-Service Canada's partnership and results based successor strategy to the AHRDS. It is key component of the Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development. It is based on the following three strategic priorities:

- Demand-Driven Skills Development
- Fostering Partnerships with the Private Sector, Provinces and Territories
- Placing Emphasis on Accountability and Results

⁵ Ursine Management. (2002). Continuing Success: Understanding What Lies Ahead for Aboriginal Human Resource Development. p.11.

In Ontario there are 17 ASETA holders with approximately 75 Local Delivery Mechanisms (LDMs) that deliver Aboriginal labour market programs and service to their communities.

Learning from the history of Aboriginal Employment and Training is imperative to understanding the needs of subsequent agreements.

In 1998 the Government of Canada initiated "Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan", the Federal Government recognized the need within Aboriginal communities:

- For training and skills development;
- To work in partnership with Aboriginal people to develop solutions for their future; and
- For Aboriginal participation in the design and delivery of programs affecting their lives

With these goals still relevant, Ontario's Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy Agreement Holders strive to renew the relationship for future strategies.

Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy Agreement Holders across Ontario are preparing for their future in the next strategy. In preparation, Ontario Agreement Holders have collaborated to bring forward some key messaging critical to the new strategy.⁶ This paper represents Aboriginal ASETA holders including the three Constitutional Groups - Métis, Inuit and First Nation.

Reducing the Reporting Burden

There is no question that the ASETS is an administratively heavy program. The Reducing the Reporting Burden Working Group was a welcome addition with the expectation that many of the inadequacies of the program would be improved. Unfortunately, quality input and results continue to be in question. Therefore, the Ontario ASETAs have included throughout this document input on the reporting tools that occupy a majority of our time. Where applicable, recommendations on how to improve the tools and process in the next agreement have been included.

Agreement/ Guides

One of the most fundamental issues affecting this current strategy is the lack of relationship between the three Constitutional Aboriginal groups and the Government of Canada. It is clear that ASETS is not a strategy founded under a government to government philosophy. Rather, ASETS has been treated like a project. In other words,

⁶ This paper is technical in nature and can be utilized for the purposes of gaining knowledge of the challenges of the current ASETS agreement and advocating for elements of the Post-2015 strategy.

the Government of Canada is looking at ASETS from an administrative perspective and does not honor the relationships established with First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada.

Agreement terms and conditions should be negotiated from a political and administrative perspective well before the expiration of a previous agreement. The release of last minute agreements forcing organizations to sign in the eleventh hour is not acceptable.

While multi-year agreements are certainly one of the successes of this program, according to the parameters of the Risk Assessment Matrix, ASETS are scored unfairly high based on the length of agreement. This issue must be addressed as the reality of a high RAM score is a detrimental to an organization.

Also at the forefront of the problems with the ASETS agreements are the inclusion of operational guides. Forming a part of the main agreement, the:

- ASETS Manual of Instructions for the Completion of Annual Operational Plans;
- ASETS Guidelines on Eligible Expenditures;
- ASETS Recipient Financial and Activity Monitoring Guide; and
- ASETS Manual of Instruction for the Completion of Annual Reports

were introduced sporadically following ASETS implementation in October 2010.

Delayed release of these documents created unnecessary chaos at the grassroots level.

While intended to help standardize certain administrative processes, these cumbersome documents result in a very different truth. Not only do such guides micromanage program delivery but they are also so prescriptive that they do not suit the diversity of needs amongst ASETA holders. The result is a huge administrative burden and lost data/statistics. When processes are so defined, the result is that ASETS do not feel like they own the documents created.

Secondly, guides were introduced as “living documents” subject to change at any point during the agreement. ASETA holders question the legality of such practices. Additionally, there neglects to be a defined process for initiating revisions. Timeframes, ASETA involvement and approval processes have not been clarified. This equates to a document far removed from the realities of program and service delivery. Dialogue must occur with ASETAs prior to documents being developed and released.

As a result of the structure of agreements and accompanying guides, the environment leads to micromanagement. Back to an earlier point, ASETS continues to be treated like a project.

A key part of the solution is strengthening relationships. Regional relationships are important between Ontario ASETAs and Service Canada but there must also be strengthened relationships with the Federal Government. Fundamentally, there must be a mutual agreement on how to do business. This also means consistent messaging to all ASETA holders. In July 2011 during a meeting entitled “Revitalizing our Relationship”

– a gathering of Ontario Service Canada and ASETA Holders, the following quote was brought forward. It is still pertinent today:

“Working together to address challenges, rather than viewing each other as the challenge”

Another component of relationship building surfaces due to the uniqueness of Aboriginal organizations and communities versus the mainstream population. Being involved in Aboriginal Awareness and Sensitivity Training would be an excellent start to having Service Canada staff understand Aboriginal culture. Numerous times Ontario ASETA holders have offered to assist in this type of training for new and existing staff.

Structure of SC

The structure of Service Canada is indicative of the relationship with Aboriginal Agreement Holders. In 2011, a restructuring took place which concerned a lot of ASETAs. Under the new structure the Ontario Labour Market Service Delivery Branch was formed. Aboriginal Labour Market Programs were now housed under Community Based Delivery with the Homelessness Strategy and Temporary Foreign Workers. The message was clear, Aboriginal Employment and Training was not a priority and became meshed amongst other strategies. There was considerable concern that SDOs and POs would now hold portfolios that included Homelessness files.

In addition, the Policy and Operations Branch were also split which resulted in a much segregated approach to program delivery. Communication and alignment of positions were not clear. Some feel that the role of the Senior Development Officer has been minimized and that they took on a purely monitoring role. The imbalance between the roles has been noticeable as has the fact that each works in their own silo. The lack of a consistent approach has impacted the ability of ASETS to do their jobs with clients.

In addition to the segregation of program delivery, the continual turn over of staff must also be recognized as a hindrance to the ASETA's work. Not only is there a loss of corporate history, including the historical relationship established, but new staff lack the experience and understanding of Aboriginal culture. This reinforces the point made above that staff need to be educated and in some cases re-educated to Aboriginal culture – including the distinction between Inuit, Métis and First Nation members. Re-establishment of an Aboriginal Peoples Directorate or similar dedicated unit would begin to address the losses.

The structure of Service Canada is such that agreements are being interpreted by multiple players. Senior Development Officers (SDOs), Program Officers (POs) and more recently Business Expertise Consultants (BECs) have their own interpretations. Interpretation also occurs at different levels - regionally and nationally which adds to the confusion and delay in timely responses.

One must point out that the Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) are housed under the Strategic Services Branch. This is a specific branch that deals with

Provincial-Federal Relationships. ASETAs would be much better suited for this environment.

Aboriginal Labour Market Integration:

The terminology “Aboriginal Labour Market Integration” appears to be moving in a positive direction – streamlining Aboriginal funding. However, it is imperative that the Government of Canada recognize that ASETS have the history, experience and know how to deal with their Aboriginal clientele. The First Nation Job Fund utilization of the ASETS network is a positive step but in Ontario has yet to be realized. ASET Holders look forward to the successes of this fund which focuses on Income Assistant recipients between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age.

The Skills and Partnership Fund (SPF) on the other hand is illustrative of a very different approach. With a call for applications from any Aboriginal organization this leads to projects with little or no ASETA involvement. The Aboriginal Skill and Employment Partnership (ASEP) is another point in case. At the minimum, ASETA support should be acquired, however, ideally such funds should be integrated into the ASETA program. Not only do these programs garner a competitive environment but they create additional service providers which increase the complexity of the Aboriginal service network. Project based approaches to funding are certainly not the most efficient process. The Federal Government should continue to recognize the ASETA network as a viable and smart solution to Aboriginal Labour Market enhancements.

Labour Market Agreements (LMAs)

Included in the conversation of Aboriginal Labour Market Integration must be provincial Labour Market and Labour Market Development funds. Via the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement the province agreed to provide assistance to Aboriginal peoples.⁷ In addition, the agreement recognizes that Canada will continue to provide its own labour market programs for Aboriginal peoples. However, the next clause states that “Canada and Ontario agree, through the LMA Management Committee, to better coordinate the delivery of their respective programs for Aboriginal peoples.”⁸ Several times over the course of the AHRDA and ASETS agreement, Service Canada was asked to assist with coordinating similar horizontality initiatives. While there are varying degrees of relationships between ASETA holders and local LMA counterparts, there has certainly not been a coordination of Aboriginal programming from an Aboriginal - Provincial service delivery perspective.

There are two viable solutions: One is to create a carve out of Aboriginal funding that is streamlined through the ASETAs. Second is the facilitation of a formal partnership with Ontario for delivery of services. Aboriginal communities have been left out of the discussions with LMDAs which fails to recognize the impact of such agreements on

⁷ Employment and Social Development Canada. (2008). Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement. Retrieved September 10, 2013 from http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/training_agreements/lma/on_agreement.shtml#clients.

⁸ Employment and Social Development Canada. (2008). Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement. Retrieved September 10, 2013 from http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/training_agreements/lma/on_agreement.shtml#clients.

ASETAs and Aboriginal communities. This approach makes sense as it avoids duplication, is an inclusive process and recognizes the ASETA network as a valuable resource. The Conversation must occur with the three Constitutional groups - Inuit, Métis and First Nation on viable solutions to Aboriginal LMA funding.

It is well known that Aboriginal Employment and Training is in serious need of additional financial investment. With budgets frozen since the 1990s, Agreement Holders continue to service a growing population. According to Statistics Canada, between 1996 and 2006 the Aboriginal population grew at a rate of 45%. This is a rate of 5.5 times faster than the non-Aboriginal population.⁹ In addition, Ontario's diversity in geography also points to the special needs of our Northern communities. Isolation and extreme living conditions contribute to increasingly high costs that reduce the amount of work that can be accomplished with a stagnant budget. This issue is exasperated by the minimum wage rate level which is applied consistently across the region.

While the Government of Canada continues to expect increased results, the realities ASETAs face are:

- Frozen budgets;
- Increased training costs;
- Increased costs of living
- Increased minimum wage rates; and
- Struggle to build internal capacity with diminishing funds.

If resources were made available to ASETAs, research could be established to support the realities of what Aboriginal Agreement Holders face. The results would be clear; there must be a serious investment in Aboriginal Employment and Training.

CSJ

While ASETAs Holders are desperate for investment, the opposite has occurred with respect to youth summer employment. Under the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy from the period 1999 to 2010, Aboriginal communities in Ontario accessed an annual Canada Summer Jobs allocation in the amount of \$1.9 million. These dollars were added to Ontario's AHRDA budgets annually.

For the first time in 2011, Aboriginal communities were required to apply for these funds using the mainstream process. As a result, communities saw a dramatic reduction in funding. A recent analysis indicated that in 2012 - \$880,900 and 2013 - \$817,446 in funding was approved for "Aboriginal Organizations."¹⁰ The total amount of this funding resulting in Aboriginal summer student employment is still under question. The financial impacts are easy to see, a loss of more than one million dollars to support

⁹ Statistics Canada. (2010). Aboriginal Statistics at a Glance (catalogue no: 89-645-XWE). Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-645-x/2010001/growth-pop-croissance-eng.htm>.

¹⁰ Service Canada – Ontario Region. (2013). Canada Summer Jobs (2013); Analysis of Aboriginal Organizations. P.2.

Ontario Aboriginal youth as the result of a decision made unilaterally by the Government of Canada. This is despite statistics such as those reported by the 2011 National Household Survey, which found just over 46% of the Aboriginal population were aged 24 years and under.¹¹

Direct CSJ Federal government funding to Aboriginal communities in Ontario must be revisited. Revisiting the historical context and bilateral relationship are key. The youth of Aboriginal communities across the province continue to be negatively impacted by the riding constituency priorities process. Constituency priorities fall short of recognizing Aboriginal community priorities and therefore are a hindrance to Aboriginal applications.

It is incumbent on the Federal Government to honour its commitment to Aboriginal youth and their future by convening dialogue with Aboriginal communities. We request the reinstatement of the Canada Summer Jobs Aboriginal allocation. There must be an adequate investment in the next strategy to deal with our youth population.

Addressing Financial Issues

Hand in hand with budget concerns are the financial issues that have effected the current agreement. The transition between AHRDA and ASETS was plagued with serious cash flow issues that continued on into subsequent years. This was the result of the inflexibility of the common system. Moreover, it was the result of an agreement that was split in the middle of a fiscal year.

The Government of Canada must acknowledge the grassroots impact of delayed cash flow to organizations. Programs and services are hindered by the lack of resources. Looking ahead at the next transition, the Government of Canada needs to ensure a smoothly transition between fiscal years with particular analysis of how the common system will effect ASETAs.

Another serious financial concern was the AHRDA close out exercise. It appears that this close out was only done in Ontario. Not only did this exercise commence almost two years after the start of the ASETA, but there was also a strong unwillingness on the part of Service Canada to share information on the close out. Letters received by ASETAs were far from complete stories and ASETAs were left having to re-provide claims, General Ledgers and other documentation to prove the inadequacies of the close out information provided by Service Canada. Not only was this a huge administrative burden but it was also a duplication of work that ASETAs had completed over the life of the agreement.

The relevancy of an organizational audit is an additional financial issue that must be addressed. Organizations spend considerable administrative resources on having audits completed as part of sound financial management. However, these submissions do not

¹¹ 2011 National Household Survey: Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Aboriginal People, Métis and Inuit. (2013, May 8). The Daily. Retrieved from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130508/dq130508a-eng.htm?WT.mc_id=twB3794

translate into clear or timely reconciliations. The focus has been on quarterly claims which sometimes do not capture year end adjustments. Having a clear understanding of the relevancy and usefulness of financial reporting documents would be key to discussions in the next strategy. Eliminating unnecessary reporting is recommended. Improved systems training for Program Officers and other staff who consistently deal with ASETAs would harness some of the concerns. Also ensuring staff have strong financial backgrounds and a willingness to learn ASETA processes and protocols would be fundamental to any solution.

Accountability

Monitor and control are the key phrases of the Government of Canada when it comes to their philosophy and approach with ASETA Agreement Holders. Ontario Agreement Holders were told that there was a concern with Audits on file particularly for the Aboriginal and Homelessness files. First and foremost, ASETA Agreement Holders are accountable and to a standard held by no other. ASETA Holders are not rejecting accountability, rather they question the extent to which accountability has been implemented. Let's start with a simple question, what were the flaws in the previous strategy that resulted in this philosophy and introduction of this new pillar? Unknown to Agreement holders are the problems that were encountered.

One of the most frustrating pieces of the transition to ASETS was that the Government of Canada said there was not enough information on the work of AHRDAs. Unable to tell a comprehensive story of this work meant there was no support for increased budgets. Let the record stand clear that AHRDA Holders fulfilled all reporting requirements to Service Canada – HRDC and were not once asked to provide missing information that would have been valuable to Treasury Board.

Under the current strategy there are three main data sources utilized within the ASETA: the standard data file, mid-year dialogue and annual report. Each of these documents are addressed below.

Client Data/ Upload

The words Contact IV unleash a whirlwind of issues and concerns. Greatest amongst these issues is the unreliability of data received under the XML format. Further contributing to the lack of quality results is the fact that two of the largest ASETA holders in Ontario have statistics that are not included in the regional and national rollups. Grand River Employment and Training and the Akwesasne Area Management Board both manually send data to Service Canada/ HRSDC. This data never enters into the roll-up reports and despite asking Service Canada on numerous occasions to include a disclaimer about the missing data, it has not been done. Ensuring that full Ontario statistics are captured has to be a paramount concern for the Government of Canada.

The non-confidence in Contact IV is clearly being acknowledged as the system is being decommissioned effective November 2013. The monies provided to assist with the transition are temporary and a lot of ASETAs found that the provision of funds was not adequate to fully cover the conversion to other systems. It is a serious concern that the

responsibility of data upload will fundamentally shift from the Government of Canada to ASETA holders. As a result, there must be new administrative money allocated to the ASETAs to upkeep these systems beyond March 31st, 2015.

Within the standard data file there are two rules which cause a lot of issues for Agreement Holders. The first rule is that one Social Insurance Number (SIN) result per year is allowed. Not only does this create competition amongst holders to be the first to upload but it also discourages partnerships between ASETAs. The Government of Canada needs to revise the one SIN per year rule. The second rule under question is the 24-week rule. This rule states that a client's employed, self-employed or return-to-school result must be captured within 24 weeks of the end date of the last intervention to be counted as a result. No where is this rule for claiming results embedded in any agreement. Once again, the Government of Canada is asked to reconsider these rules taking into account their effects on ASETA Holder results.

When Agreement Holders flow such detailed information to Service Canada – HRSDC via uploads, reports and other reporting mechanisms, the expectation is that equivalent level of regional reporting comes back to the ASETA. In reality, the results on the website are not showing the results uploaded by Agreement holders. Accountability is a two way street and the Government of Canada must more closely align the flow of information in and out of their organization.

Mid-Year Dialogue

In general, the Mid-Year dialogue has been a good experience to share information on respective organizations. Service Canada staff are within communities/organizations and experience first hand First Nation, Inuit and Métis environments. However, there are certainly still limitations to this process. Aside from being another onerous monitoring session, written records like the highlights notes often do not capture the complete story of the positive work being done by ASETAs. As well, forms seem like they are becoming increasingly more inflexible and therefore limit the conversation. Since the Mid-Year Dialogue is still a relatively new concept, it can be increasingly improved to meet the needs of both partners.

Annual Operational Plan

To understand the Annual Report one has to start with the Annual Operational Plan (AOP). This is because the Annual Report is derived in large part from the components of the AOP.

The Annual Operational Plan like all other reporting tools are extremely prescriptive via the very nature of enforcing a template and accompanying guide. As a result of this approach, it is felt that many of the goals of the organization/program are not captured in the Annual Operation Plan. Problems are centered around the enormous amount of time to complete the AOP template, the need to use bureaucratic language, include information that is not relevant to particular activities, and using terminology as prescribed by regional staff. Submissions of community built documents are scrutinized by Regional staff including the SDOs, POs and then by the Regional Review

Committees. The AOP garners an inflexible approach in the management of program funding. An example is that changes to this document must follow a strict and long approval process.

Since the implementation of the ASETS, organizations have seen the Annual Operational Plan template change annually. Templates change without any ASETA input and are sent to ASETAs to implement prior to being tested. Terminology is continually changing which adds another layer to the confusion. Template changes are sent to Agreement Holders within an unrealistic timeframe and do not take into consideration the structure and complexity of organizations – especially those with several sub-agreement holders/ service providers.

The newest AOP template (for the fiscal 2013-2014) has a strong focus on annual target setting. Ontario ASETAs are very concerned with the level of detail in target setting which includes mapping targets to the 19 defined interventions.

Most importantly, Ontario is being held to different target setting standards. There were two fundamental differences in Ontario's AOP template when compared to the National template that was released. The first was the addition of mandatory target setting tables that corresponded to each work plan line item within the Funded Program Activities section of the AOP (Section C). The second difference was the addition of a summary chart that mapped mandatory target setting to the 19 defined interventions/ employability dimensions. This goes above and beyond the standard mandatory target setting chart that was provided in Section F which captured employed, self-employed and return to school results. Standards should be the same across the board for all ASETA holders in Canada and should be cognizant of the substantial amount of work involved in providing this level of target setting detail. Focus should be redirected on ASETA results eliminating the emphasis on a planning document (AOP) that is flexible to the needs of communities throughout the year and responsive to the labour market environment. If this level of detail is required from the results achieved by Agreement Holders, this is information that should be obtained from the standard data file. Alone, targets should not be considered benchmarks for success.

If one was to look at the ASETA Contribution Agreement there is no indication of an ASETS responsibility to establish targets. Under AHRDA, targets formed a part of the agreement and ASETAs were expected to go about their work while fulfilling these goals. In reality, should targets be changing without an increase in budgets? Logic says that increased costs and frozen budgets should result in lower target setting.

Service Canada's philosophy behind target setting also needs to be revisited. In 1999 the average cost per client was released by HRSDC. Some ASETAs have continued to base their targets on this information. More recently via a Service Canada working paper, targets were described as being set based upon historical information dating back to October 2010. Philosophies are not clear and this information has not been discussed openly with Agreement Holders.

In summary, the Annual Operational Plan needs to be simplified to capture the diversity of quality work being accomplished within the region. Terminology must remain consistent, ASETAs must have input into the changes of the guides and templates and duplicate information should be eliminated. When considering the review of the AOP, the ASETAs recommend the formation of a joint committee. Service Canada and ASETS would jointly assess the organization in terms of targets and finalizing the document for Government of Canada approval. Simplifying the AOP would very much depend on the end user - what information does Treasury Board require? This is a question that no one has been able to answer.

Accountability which was discussed above is only one component of “Performance Measurement”. In addition, there is a focus on partnership and capacity.

Partnerships

As a pillar of the strategy, the terminology “partnerships” has become synonymous to how much an ASETA has been able to leverage their funds. To ASETAs, the definition of partnership far outreaches this narrow definition. In fact, partnership starts with the Government of Canada. Recognizing that Aboriginal Agreement Holders are partners in the work of this strategy eliminates the concept that Government is simply a funder of a program. The Government of Canada should be more than a facilitator by actively marketing ASETS and encouraging horizontality initiatives across the whole of Government.

The reality of the situation is that ASETS have been creating partnerships long before the Government of Canada introduced the concept. However, partnerships should not be limited to formal contracts, agreements or memorandum of understandings. One must also consider the amount of resources – human and financial that go into creating and maintaining partnerships. Informal partnerships are just as valuable and partnerships at any stage and any form should be considered success.

Skepticism is created when ASETAs are required to have formal documents signed to document partnerships that existed for several years. Partner privacy is also a concern which is another element that negatively impacts the ability of ASET Holders to develop relationships. The focus on partnerships and leveraging funds also neglects the fact that ASETAs do not have the power to control what the employer does and to be able to influence the Labour Market to create opportunities where none exist. In principle the concept is too simple to reflect the complexity of ASETA holder partnerships.

The barriers to partnership are what need to be exposed. Informal partnerships bring value to ASETAs and they are not recognized based on the current templates. The Government of Canada should be looking at a value added approach versus financial leveraging. The Annual Report can be revised to broaden their approach to partnership reporting.

Capacity

Within the Performance Measurement Strategy, the Government of Canada has established a flow chart which illustrates the ASETS Program Theory (attached as Appendix 1). Each component has two to three indicators for each outcome which is assessed. The first time ASETAs in Ontario were aware of this model was in January of 2013 when it was presented and discussed with the Reducing the Reporting Burden Working Group. This information should have been shared with ASETA Holders from the beginning of the Agreement and even earlier during the planning stages to obtain input.

Firstly, there must be acknowledgement that this theory is not as linear as presented and that processes are on-going. Assessment of ASETAs based on this logic model is unmerited. Secondly, the driver of the theory is increased capacity of Aboriginal Agreement Holders. This is not relevant to many holders who exemplify the capacity to do their jobs with the Aboriginal Labour Market. Additionally, ASETAs are not aware of who is and is not having capacity issues, which would allow us to help each other achieve full success in these areas. During ASETA renewal we can look at the model for relevancy and create a model that better reflects the work of the ASETS.

A contradiction to this theory is that Capacity Building is actually a missing component of the ASETS. Financially it is not promoted. Currently, Capacity Building is part of the 15% administrative cap and prevents organizations that are trying to maintain or increase capacity from doing so. This approach is distinctly different than under the AHRDA as funding moved, based on a unilateral decision by the Government of Canada, from a stand alone budget to a component of administration. As a result, the definition of capacity building has changed over Agreements. In particular the shift of capacity building for non-administrative uses to now a component of the administrative budget is perplexing. Agreement Holders ask for the removal of capacity building from the Administrative cap and to enter into negotiations for the clarification of the definition of capacity building.

Looking ahead to the next strategy there are two very important elements that should be discussed. The first is the ASETA Evaluation and the second is the Strategic Business Plan.

ASETA Evaluation

Without hesitation, ASETAs should be involved in the design, delivery and compilation of results of the ASETS evaluation. Including ASETAs in this process encourages a comprehensive examination of all areas of the ASETS Agreement, it would strengthen the relationship between partners and would encourage a higher participation rate in the tools developed. The evaluation of the ASETS is particularly critical since HRSDC was not able to provide enough information on the AHRDA successes during the 2010 renewal. Treasury Board submissions should reflect accurately the work being accomplished through the ASETAs. With proper timing and involvement by ASETAs an accurate portrayal is still possible.

Strategic Business Plan

In short, the Strategic Business Plan template approach does not meet the needs of the diversity of ASETAs across Ontario. Late arriving templates, variation in the levels of details provided or accepted by SDOs and diminished ownership of the process are some of the issues faced. The Strategic Business Planning process should be eliminated as an evaluation tool since it does not accurately portray ASETA Holder strategies for the future.

Ontario ASETAs believe that the focus of Post-2015 should be the re-establishment of an employment strategy based on the achievement of parity.

Post-2015 Strategy: Parity

First Nation ASETAs across the country have identified a National Action Plan which continues to be the goal of communities in Ontario. This document is entitled “Seeking First Nation Employment Parity” (attached as Appendix 2). Although this action plan was developed by First Nation ASETA Holders, the terminology is synonymous with Aboriginal. First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities will also benefit from Employment Parity. Parity is multi-dimensional and targets First Nation employment rates to be on par with Canadian rates, wage parity and increased job opportunities in a diversity of occupations.¹² The rate at which this goal is achievable is dependant on the following variables:

- Securing adequate resources;
- Removing delivery barriers by resolving a number of perennial issues deemed adverse to the First Nation Employment and Training Strategy’s goals;
- Enhancing relations with private sector employers and partners; and
- Establishing clear jurisdictional relationships¹³.

Ontario ASETAs are asking that the Government of Canada honour their commitment to fund research on how employment parity can be achieved.

It should be clear that Ontario Aboriginal Agreement holders are passionate about the communities they service. The quest to improving the socio-economic status of Aboriginal communities is at the forefront of all work that is accomplished. Aboriginal ASETS have the experience, skills set and capacity to deliver quality results.

By way of this document, ASETAs have collaborated to bring forward key issues that require resolution in the next strategy. This paper encompasses topics which range from a rich history in Aboriginal Employment & Training to issues impacting renewal preparation. However, the common theme that echoes throughout this document is the need to elevate Government to Aboriginal relations to ensure meaningful engagement, decision making, and policy development authority.

¹² The Technical Working Group on First Nation Human Resources Development. (date unknown). Seeking First Nation Employment Parity. P.1.

¹³ The Technical Working Group on First Nation Human Resources Development. (date unknown). Seeking First Nation Employment Parity. P.1.

The first step toward achieving employment parity involves the Ministers of Employment and Social Development Canada and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada meeting with Métis, Inuit and First Nation leadership. Development of accords representative of the bilateral relationships with the three regionally recognized constitutional groups is a key outcome. Without this commitment, employment parity will never be achieved.

The three pillars that are essential to the overall success of an Aboriginal Employment & Training strategy are:

A. Relationship

- Strengthening the relationship with Métis, Inuit and First Nations

B. Employment Parity

- Recognizing the mutually beneficial goal of reaching Aboriginal employment parity

C. Increased Funding over a Multi-year Agreement

- Commit to additional resources that are required for an adequate investment in reaching employment parity
- Secure a multiyear Aboriginal Employment & Training Strategy that will allow our communities to continue to build capacity and achieve success.