

# FORWARD TOGETHER

*Key learnings from*  
**FORWARD  
SUMMIT**

*on empowering*  
**INDIGENOUS  
ECONOMIES**

**CANADAWEST  
FOUNDATION**



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and Sarah Pittman

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We would like to acknowledge the people of the Treaty 7 region, on whose traditional territory Forward Summit took place. This includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

We would also like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their hard work and dedication in putting together Forward Summit and preparing this report.

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This report summarizes the main themes that emerged during Forward Summit – an Indigenous-led, multiday conference dedicated to advancing economic partnerships, discovering opportunities for change and supporting relationships between Canada's industry leaders and Indigenous communities.

Forward Summit was held in Calgary from February 26-28, 2019.

This report was prepared by Marla Orenstein and Sarah Pittman of the Canada West Foundation.



**JP Gladu**

Thank you for your interest in the *Forward Together* report. This document is a result of many hours and input from key members of Forward Summit community. The words written represent the thoughts, opinions and values from speakers and participants at Forward Summit – the three-day conversation in a professional environment between thought leaders, Indigenous community trailblazers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal business leads and government officials. We encourage you to continue learning, asking questions and looking for opportunities to build relationships with Indigenous communities and businesses.

Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) and participants at Forward Summit believe in Economic Reconciliation and we are working toward closing the gap in our economy by increasing Aboriginal participation in corporate and government supply chains; the benefits for our country, our peoples, all Canadians – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – would be monumental. CCAB’s Aboriginal Procurement strategy, Supply Change, is the key to moving forward to improve economic self-reliance of Indigenous communities while assisting corporate business. Supply Change is an unprecedented, national approach to Aboriginal procurement through the development of the largest membership of corporations committed to increasing Aboriginal participation in corporate supply chains. Supply Chains, Supply Change!

The Indigenous economy has the potential to reach \$100 billion, but we need companies, government and our communities to contribute towards it. Economic development and investment in the Indigenous economy is a permanent and long-term solution, which could resolve the numerous problems that Indigenous communities face.

**JP Gladu**

Co-Chair, Forward Summit



**Chief Charles Weaselhead**

On behalf of the Nations of Treaty 7, which includes the Tsuut’ina Nation, Stoney Nations (Bears paw, Chiniki, and Wesley), and the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika Nation, Piikani Nation, and the Kainai Nation), we welcome you to our majestic territory and sacred lands.

As Co-Chair of Forward Summit, I take great pride in participating as a leader in creating opportunities for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Peoples. At Forward Summit 2019, we welcomed over 100 speakers and over 500 attendees, to advance economic reconciliation, for the betterment of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all Canadians.

The first annual Forward Summit success depends on each and everyone participating at our conference by contributing their knowledge and business acumen in creating a healthy economy. When Indigenous communities thrive, Canadians thrive. We must journey this path forward together as good business partners, colleagues, and neighbours.

The *Forward Together* report highlights the impactful conversations had during the inaugural event, through panels, roundtables and workshops. This document is an accurate and unbiased representation of expertise and opinions shared at Forward Summit.

**Chief Charles Weaselhead**

Co-Chair, Forward Summit

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# OVERVIEW

This report summarizes the main themes that emerged during Forward Summit – an Indigenous-led, multiday conference dedicated to advancing economic partnerships, discovering opportunities for change and supporting relationships between Canada’s industry leaders and Indigenous communities.

Many Indigenous communities are striving for economic independence – and have made significant gains in recent decades. These advances are critical. Economic development supports self-determination, strong social programs and healthy families. It advances reconciliation by closing the economic gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples across the country. It benefits not only Indigenous communities, but all of Canada.

While the path to success is not easy, there are numerous individuals, businesses and communities who are interested in sharing what they have learned.

Forward Summit was held in Calgary from February 26-28, 2019. It brought together community leaders, influencers and business professionals for an exchange of knowledge that was intended to lead to strengthened relationships, economic development and economic reconciliation. Forward Summit featured 29 sessions, 101 speakers and 535 participants.

This report on Forward Summit is divided into two parts. The first part presents the high-level messages that emerged from the various speakers and participants. The second part of the report presents a short description of each of the sessions that took place.

The report is not intended to be a comprehensive study of economic participation and reconciliation in Canada. Rather, it adheres to the stories and learnings that were shared at the event. Wherever possible, quotes have been included (without naming the speaker) to showcase the powerful wording that was used. The box on page 04 shows the main themes that emerged at Forward Summit; the first part of this report explores them in more detail.

**SUMMARY OF THE MAIN THEMES THAT EMERGED FROM FORWARD SUMMIT**

**PEOPLE, RESOURCES & SKILLS**

- It starts with identifying your resources
- Skills need to be refreshed and updated
- Youth need to be included
- Technology is a bridge between location, innovation and success

**SUPPORTING PEOPLE & THE LAND**

- Managing environmental impacts remains critical
- Indigenous businesses create an ecosystem of prosperity
- Community wealth can be used for social development
- Trusts are a flexible vehicle for distributing wealth for community benefit

**THE CHALLENGE OF FINANCING**

- Financing is a challenge for business of all sizes
- Relationships with banks are improving
- Equity participation can be used to build wealth

**SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS, SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS**

- It's not about "us" versus "them"
- Relationships don't start in a vacuum. They fit into a historical legacy
- Trust is crucial
- Industry needs to lead with its values, not with a risk mindset
- There's a long life to relationships
- Dealing with disagreement
- Government is not always a helpful partner

**INCLUSIVITY & AN INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE**

- Being inclusive is more than just being diverse
- Communities also need to recognize constraints
- Companies often lack Indigenous people at senior levels

**PROCUREMENT & THE BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP**

- Procurement is king
- Structure procurement opportunities to encourage Indigenous bidding
- Indigenous doesn't mean lesser quality
- Ensuring the authenticity of Indigenous businesses



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“Canada’s future relies on the ability to unlock the Indigenous economy, and to make every effort to provide nations with the tools and advice to unlock a portion of the wealth on their territories. First Nations need to be in their rightful place of contributors to Canada’s mainstream economy.”

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“Gone are the days when Aboriginals are told what businesses they will work with and what benefits they will receive.”

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“We have always been resourceful as Aboriginal people, and we will continue to do so. Partnerships and success are in our DNA. Now is the time to use our land and resources – including human resources – to reach our own economic reconciliation.”

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“In the future, Indigenous participation will not have to be required, it will just be a regular part of doing business.”

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“A positive mindset is essential. Possibly more than business acumen alone.”

# MAIN THEMES

*that emerged from Forward Summit*



## PEOPLE, RESOURCES & SKILLS

**FOR INDIVIDUALS, BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES**, there is a lot of work that goes into preparing to take advantage of opportunities. Launching a successful economic venture is never easy, and in today's rapidly changing world, even the knowledge of what to do is evolving quickly. Some of the key themes emphasized by speakers included the need to understand what competencies are in place and where there are gaps; ensuring that skills stay up-to-date; and how new technologies can enable successful businesses to be based in remote locations.

"I am always thinking outside the box. There's lots of opportunities out there. The sky's the limit. Alberta First Nations and Métis Nations should be an economic powerhouse today. But it's not too late. The country needs to prosper."

### It starts with identifying your resources

People starting a business need to identify what they can do, and where they need help – and not be shy about asking for that help.

Communities need to know what capabilities their members have that can be an asset. One way to do this is to build a "skills bank" that records what education, experience and skills members have, and who can do what kind of work. Where a community does not have particular capabilities, these can be built through further training and education; or by partnering with organizations that have these capabilities already established.

"Not everyone can just pull the trigger and you're in business."

## Skills need to be refreshed and updated

The skills needed for work are a moving target. What is needed today is not necessarily what is going to be needed tomorrow. How should businesses and communities respond?

The first step is to become armed with information by identifying what jobs are going to be in demand in the future, and what skills are going to be needed to take on those jobs. There are different ways to learn about this: through partnering with government, through talking with companies about the trends in occupations they are hiring for, or through observing innovations that are taking place.

The second step is to create opportunities for lifelong learning to update the skills that community members have. This also needs to take into account the different learning approaches of different people. Someone who has family trauma from a residential school may have different learning needs than someone who has not. People who have access to online learning opportunities may prefer that convenience.

Finally, communities need to connect their learners with people who apply those skills in the real world – entrepreneurs and people who work in different organizations. This will help learners to see how those skills can be used – and why learning them is relevant.

“Skills are the new equalizer. They are going to be the most valuable commodity you can have. And skills need to be evergreen as well – they need to be updated constantly.”

## Youth need to be included

The growth of skills is important for everyone, but for youth most of all. It is a big challenge to set youth up for success. Part of the legacy of residential schools is that kids are not always encouraged to be part of the system. An additional challenge is that youth in high school often are not focusing on those subjects that are going to advance them into the careers of tomorrow – such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

“The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing in the country, and they’re eager to learn.”

## Technology is a bridge between location, innovation and success

Technology can provide the ability to leapfrog traditional hurdles that come with being in a remote location. In the past, a successful business needed to be in a big city. Now, innovation is shrinking this distance. It is possible to live in the community and deliver top quality work remotely. Connectivity is key to learning skills or delivering services without having to leave home.

However, there are discrepancies when it comes to connectivity – but here, too, innovation is helping. For example, Loon.co brings internet to remote communities through a balloon that floats above the Earth.

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE & THE LAND

### THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ECONOMIC

**DEVELOPMENT** for Indigenous communities is not the money itself; it is the associated benefits that the wealth can enable. Entrepreneurs and band-owned businesses create an ecosystem of prosperity that benefit individuals and the community.

The resulting wealth can be invested in social, health, education and elder programs. Using economic success to leverage social wealth creation is how Indigenous communities will create a prosperity that is sustainable over generations.

### Managing environmental impacts remains critical

Economics are important, but will never override concern about the environment. Although many Indigenous communities are strong supporters of development, they also remain deeply attached to the land – and environmental impacts remain second-to-none in importance. Balance needs to be sought, mitigations need to be identified, and ways to replenish what is being depleted need to be found.

“It is our tradition to not only take what is there, but to give back. How do we give back and replenish Mother Earth while she is sustaining us? How do we replenish for the seventh generation yet to be born? We have to look at these things as well. That is the mandate of our community.”

### Indigenous businesses create an ecosystem of prosperity

Many successful Indigenous businesses become pathways to prosperity throughout the community – by mentoring, employing other community members, providing training and opportunities to youth, or donating a portion of their profits to community causes. What starts small – as an entrepreneur-driven business – grows to become an ecosystem: creating jobs, generating wealth, and leveraging the effect of bringing capital back to the community. Prosperity starts with one business, and then it spreads.

“My why is ‘how can I help people through employment?’ My company is an avenue to create opportunity to help people. Seeing the impact drives me every single day.”

“You only ever become an entrepreneur to impact your community and your family. All entrepreneurs are social entrepreneurs.”

### Community wealth can be used for social development

The revenue generated by communities from economic development often leads to social development as well, as communities fund social programs out of the revenue they have generated.

For example, the Fort McKay First Nation is able to spend \$4 million on education every year while receiving only \$33,000 from the government. The elders and members of the Gitxaala Nation have chosen to give their royalty cheques to the legacy fund, which is run mainly by the youth council. The Cold Lake First Nations are considering how to use their successful business ventures to help not only their own members, but those of other First Nations they are partnering with.

“We are leaders in economic development opportunities, developing our institutions so we can take care of our people, take care of elders, and being self-sufficient in doing this with our partners from the industry sector.”

### **Trusts are a flexible vehicle for distributing wealth for community benefit**

Indigenous trusts are taking off. A trust is a financial vehicle that sets aside money for a specific use. Because it takes community funds out from under the *Indian Act* and puts them under trust law, it provides flexibility as well as accountability, and allows a community to use its wealth consistent with traditional values. The proceeds of a trust can be assigned to specific uses, such as the welfare of children and elders, health, post-secondary needs or the building of infrastructure. It can also be used to develop smart own-source revenue.

Despite their complexity, trusts represent a promising way for communities to reinvest their profits and wealth. While all trusts must follow Canadian law, each is designed to be consistent with the goals of the Nation using it.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF FINANCING**

### **FINANCING IS A CRITICAL ASPECT FOR GROWTH**

– for start-up entrepreneurs, established businesses and community ventures alike. It is also an area that has been changing rapidly in the last decade, with new opportunities emerging for Indigenous businesses. Speakers at the Forward Summit focused on how to find financing, opportunities for building wealth through equity participation in major projects, and how to use profits to generate long-term wealth for the community.

“Economic inequality has been addressed through income redistribution – taxes. This does not work well. A better way to do this is through redistributing the tools of wealth creation. How do we get the tools of wealth creation to Indigenous peoples? Income redistribution was the 19<sup>th</sup> century way, tools of wealth is the 21<sup>st</sup> century way.”

### **Financing is a challenge for business of all sizes**

Financing is critical for growth; but in the past, many Indigenous communities and businesses were shut out of financing opportunities, which led to being shut out of economic development opportunities.

There are a range of financing sources available now to Indigenous entrepreneurs and communities. These include bank loans – but also grants (federal or provincial), crowdsourcing, angel investors (particularly for clean energy projects), institutional investors such as pension plans, and partnerships.

“The number one problem is access to capital.”

## Relationships with banks are improving

There has been a lot of improvement over the last 10 years in banks' willingness to finance Indigenous businesses. Progress has been made on both sides – many banks better understand Indigenous business models, and many more Indigenous entrepreneurs understand the security the banks need. But it is important to remember that banks are primarily set up to invest in material and equipment, not in ideas.

“We’re always working with the banks – without them we can’t grow as a business.”

## Equity participation can be used to build wealth

Increasingly, many communities are in the position of becoming equity investors in major projects. While this opportunity has the potential to be game-changing in terms of economic returns, equity investment also involves risk.

The First Nations Major Projects Coalition is an example of a smart way for Indigenous communities to make informed decisions about financing and equity participation. The Coalition helps First Nations communities evaluate sources of equity for investments, as well as equity investment opportunities. At the same time, it helps build business capacity. The Coalition does not make any decisions; rather, it presents a range of options for communities to consider. An indication of its usefulness is that the Coalition started with 11 Nations in 2014, and is now up to 50.

“Together, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous investors can build capital markets that integrate and better align with Indigenous values.”

# SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIPS, SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

**RELATIONSHIPS ARE CENTRAL TO BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS.** Over the last 20 or so years, a real culture shift has started to take place across industry – and within Nations as well – that has enabled healthy relationships to flourish. The Truth and Reconciliation report in 2015 represented a turning point, both for the country and for industry. The report's Call to Action #92 gave a strong push to the business community to recognize Indigenous communities and build meaningful relationships. This section highlights elements of those relationships that are relevant for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses, as well as for communities.

“I’ve seen that you can really create a better project when Indigenous people are truly involved. And it leaves a different kind of legacy. The project is more robust overall, and will leave more positive legacies.”

“Engagement between resource industries and Indigenous communities is a pathway forward to prosperity.”

## It's not about 'us' versus 'them'

Increasingly, the relationship between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous industry is respectful, profitable and mutually beneficial.

In the past, many Indigenous communities acted as intervenors against projects on traditional lands. But over the past few decades, a lot of learning has gone on. Industry has learned the importance of engaging and creating positive impacts; it has also learned how to operate in a way that better respects (less harms) the environment. And Indigenous communities have come to better understand the utility and benefit of working with industry, and how they can use that relationship to further their own priorities without having to resort to funding from Ottawa.

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“If it is the right thing to do, how do we do it together?”

## Relationships don't start in a vacuum, they fit into a historical legacy

It can be difficult for many non-Indigenous businesses to understand that their relationships with Indigenous communities do not start as a blank slate, but rather are built on the impacts of the past. Indigenous communities live with the legacy of hundreds of years of relationships – many of them harmful and hurtful. While new businesses are not responsible for those past harms, they need to understand that this is part of the package of what they are walking into.

## Trust is crucial

Trust is central to any healthy relationship – personal or business. How do communities and businesses build trust? The first thing needed is to approach the relationship with genuine curiosity and respect. Neither side is expected to know everything about the other: recognize what you do not know, be interested in learning and ask questions.

Second, both sides need to demonstrate responsiveness. Listen to concerns; acknowledge your shortcomings. While those conversations are not always the most comfortable, they are important and provide an opportunity to learn. The final thing needed is time. The development of trust is something that cannot be rushed. Each relationship is unique; there is no cookie-cutter method that can be applied and there are no short cuts.

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“With trust and understanding, even controversial projects benefit.”

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“Trust can take years to build and can be lost in a finger snap – the same as reputation. It can take years to get to an authentic partnership.”

## Industry needs to lead with its values, not with a risk mindset

While some businesses approach Indigenous consultation as a risk-management exercise, others build a business case for engagement based on positive values. Engagement provides an opportunity to showcase a company's commitment to responsible development: minimizing environmental impacts, consulting with communities, and developing positive mutually beneficial relationships. The question that should be asked is “What happens if we do,” not “What happens if we do not.”

What are the outcomes of approaching engagement with this mindset? According to the (non-Indigenous) businesses who told their stories at the Forward Summit, it resulted in positive environmental and community legacies. These are outcomes that all companies should want.

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“How do you align yourself with the Aboriginal business community? To take that first bold step, it takes some ingenuity around respect, being in the community.”

### **There’s a long life to relationships**

Good engagement starts well before a project is initiated. But it is also important to remember the flip side: that the relationship will continue for a very long time – possibly up to 80 or 100 years. Indigenous communities understand and place a high value on the importance of this long-term relationship. After all, CEOs come and go; individuals retire or move on for personal reasons. But the project stays where it is; and the community cannot just move if they are dissatisfied.

For this reason, the relationship needs to extend beyond just a handful of “engagement specialists” and become embedded into the DNA of the company. This is how a stable, positive relationship – and one that is faithful to the vision that was initially put forward – can be maintained over the decades that a project is in place.

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“Our commitment [as a company] needs to continue. It’s more intense now that the project is a reality.”

### **Dealing with disagreement**

Even with a good relationship, it is unlikely that all parties will see eye-to-eye all of the time. How do you manage when there is disagreement or discord?

Dialogue is key. There needs to be a process for communicating, and a mindset where all parties are open to discussion. Both sides should be able to speak their truth without being slighted. As one participant put it, “Never stop talking, but even more important, never stop listening.”

This also holds true for relationships between Indigenous communities, which have a variety of interests and may disagree over how development should unfold.

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“We have to accept that it is OK to fumble through the uncomfortable moments.”

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“I think it is OK if we disagree – I think it is how we disagree that is important.”

### **Government is not always a helpful partner**

Forward Summit participants had mixed things to say about the role of government in economic reconciliation. On one hand, government has provided financial supports that have allowed some communities to take advantage of opportunities. On the other hand, government procurement opportunities are relatively few and can be difficult to obtain compared to opportunities with industry. Government policies and laws have often hindered Indigenous communities that want to get involved in opportunities to create own-source revenue. These obstacles are not in the interest of anyone. It is critical that governments at both the provincial and federal levels find a new way forward with Indigenous business – one that will serve the interests of both Indigenous peoples and the country at large.

“It is now time to sit with the government and set aside policies that no longer work.”

“If we want the government to solve reconciliation, we’re going to be waiting for a long time. Industry needs to lead.”

## INCLUSIVITY & AN INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE

**THERE IS NOT ALWAYS A MATCH BETWEEN GOOD INTENTIONS** of a company to hire Indigenous workers, and what actually comes to pass. Why not? Partly because successfully integrating an Indigenous workforce needs to go much deeper than a surface show of diversity. True workplace inclusivity permeates all levels of a company and is reflective of the company’s true values. When a company lacks inclusivity, Indigenous workers spend their time and energy trying to fit in, rather than being able to fully contribute to the company’s success.

“It is not about lowering the bar, it is not about changing criteria – it’s about providing the opportunities that should have been there from Day One.”

### Being inclusive is more than just being diverse

Inclusiveness is more than just diversity. Diversity is the “face” of the workforce, what can be easily seen. Inclusivity goes far deeper and permeates the culture of a company. Inclusivity means people at all levels of the company – from the hiring managers to the senior leadership – believe in the value of having Indigenous people contribute to the company and represent it publicly. It means reducing friction so that employees can show up as themselves, and put their energy into creative, innovative work, as opposed to spending that energy towards “fitting in.”

How does a company do this?

- It needs to start at the top. Leadership needs to set an example.
- The company needs to set and advertise its goals – which are not necessarily the same as targets. Targets are numbers-based; goals are values-based.
- Get human resources on board – they can act as a backstop if the hiring managers are not giving due consideration to value of Indigenous hires.
- Start early. Help Indigenous students understand the value and relevance of working in your industry. Bring in Indigenous students as summer interns.
- Do not just post job advertisements in the “usual places” – recruit through those places where Indigenous people go to learn about jobs.
- Develop an Indigenous employee network.
- Provide Indigenous awareness training to all employees.
- Participate in initiatives such as Orange Shirt Day.

## Communities also need to recognize constraints

Indigenous communities also need to recognize that even when companies have the best intentions and have made commitments, it is not always possible to meet their hiring targets. Sometimes there simply is not enough skilled labour within the community. In other situations, community members who receive government benefits may be reluctant to take on a job if they think it will be short-term and jeopardize the stability of their current situation. Building community capacity in advance, getting individuals to the point where they are job-ready and being realistic about hiring targets are important for everyone.

## Companies often lack Indigenous people at senior levels

It is not just at the “worker” level that Indigenous people need to be included. Having Indigenous people in senior leadership and on the board of directors helps create buy-in and build trust with the communities where the company will operate in future.

This contrasts strongly with the situation on the ground. The Shareholder Association for Research and Education looked at 173 TSX-listed Canadian companies to benchmark current reporting about business and reconciliation. The study found that only five per cent of the companies had Indigenous people working in senior and professional roles; and fewer than one per cent of the companies included Indigenous people on their boards.

# PROCUREMENT & THE BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP

**PROCUREMENT – THAT IS, COMPANIES HIRING OTHER BUSINESSES** to supply goods and services – represents one of the most powerful mechanisms to foster economic reconciliation. It enables Indigenous companies and individuals – providing everything from construction to cosmetics, from transportation to IT, from manufacturing to project management – to build their businesses, provide jobs, and create the wealth that communities rely on.

“Investing in an Indigenous entrepreneur is laying a path for the community. I can think of no better act of reconciliation than creating a path back to sustainability and purpose.”

## Procurement is king

Procurement represents a key element of the relationship between non-Indigenous industry or government, and Indigenous businesses. It leads reconciliation today by providing a market for many Indigenous businesses to sell their goods and services. The size of procurement opportunities is enormous: according to the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB), oilsands companies procure on average \$1.8 billion in goods and services from Indigenous businesses each year.

“The Development Minister from Chile almost fell off his chair when heard that we did \$2.5 billion in business with Indigenous companies in a year.”

## Structure procurement opportunities to encourage Indigenous bidding

Some businesses – and government as well – would like to encourage Indigenous businesses to bid on tenders – but then inadvertently take actions that actually make it more difficult. Industry needs to think about how to offer procurement opportunities in a way that Indigenous businesses can take advantage of them. This includes thinking about the following:

- **Appropriately sized tenders.** Ensure that tenders for work are not too large and are broken down into pieces that would be the right size for a smaller Indigenous business or community to bid on.
- **Build demand through the supply chain.** Build an “ecosystem of demand” by encouraging or requiring top-tier contractors to hire Indigenous subcontractors – and do not accept excuses that they do not want to or have to. Try to match contractors who have capability for the larger project with Indigenous subcontractors who can support elements of the work.
- **Minimize barriers for small business.** Review administrative requirements that may be too burdensome or not scaled to the size of the business that is bidding or the job that is being bid on. Work with your own HSE (Health, Safety & Environment) team to ensure their requirements are scaled appropriately and consider providing HSE resources to the bidding companies. Review the timeframes for paying suppliers; overly long timeframes make it difficult for small businesses to stay in business.
- **Build trust and confidence within your business units in advance.** Encourage your business units to get to know Indigenous suppliers in advance, so that there is already familiarity and confidence when procurement opportunities arise.
- **Help Indigenous businesses succeed “the next time.”** Let the losing bids know what was lacking, so that they can build the capacity to succeed the next time.

## Indigenous does not mean lesser quality

Companies that procure goods and services are highly sensitive to cost and quality – and some may have the perception that procuring with Indigenous companies means getting lower quality or higher cost. But this is a misperception. As Suncor’s supply chain VP stated during a panel session on procurement, “Our experience is just the opposite.” Suncor found they did not give up quality, cost or time; further, they set up businesses that would be around when and where they needed them.

## The importance of Indigenous procurement must be embedded in company culture

To successfully wrap Indigenous procurement into the supply chain, it needs to become part of company culture.

Leadership plays a role in convincing everyone in the organization not just that it needs to be done, but why it needs to be done. A business rationale also exists: if you are going to serve a diverse client base, you need a diverse resource base. And finally, there are external resources – such as the CCAB – that can provide a roadmap of what to do and where to start.

## Ensuring the authenticity of Indigenous businesses

Some companies worry about how best to determine whether businesses they want to hire are truly Indigenous. They want to ensure that benefits flow to Indigenous communities, and not primarily to non-Indigenous partners – without excluding those businesses that have legitimate joint partnerships.

One way to do this is to ask the local community economic development officer; they may well have good information. More broadly, resources such as the CCAB’s list of certified Aboriginal businesses can help.

# CONCLUSION

The stories brought forward by the Forward Summit participants were powerful and led us (the report authors) to four conclusions.

First, the path to economic success is winding and bumpy. No success occurs without hesitations, learning, setbacks and roadblocks.

Second, the path does not look the same for any two individuals, businesses or communities. While there is much to learn from the experience of others, there cannot be “cookie-cutter” duplication. The hard work of building capacity and skills, building relationships and identifying how success can power Indigenous communities needs to be given consideration in each new context.

Third, not all Indigenous communities are at the same stage in terms of achieving economic independence. Some of the earliest industry and Indigenous community partnerships were grossly one-sided with minimal participation of Indigenous communities. The evolution of collaboration agreements, impact benefit agreements,

and opportunities agreements created avenues of participation through employment, procurement and joint venture agreements. Now, many communities are capable of taking on a much greater stake and being full equity partners and participants. This evolution is shown in the figure on page 17. There is no one “right” place to be on the rainbow; and it is important to remember that striving for economic independence is a process.

And finally – and most powerful – the future is here. Many Indigenous individuals, businesses and communities have found success. There has been a rise in meaningful and equitable partnerships that generate success on many levels. Indigenous economies have evolved to be very different now than they were even recently – and there is a need to paint a more accurate picture of today’s reality and tell this story to the world. While it is time to celebrate success, there is still plenty of work to do.





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“When we think about economic reconciliation, what does that mean? It means when Indigenous communities are no longer managing poverty, but managing wealth.”

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“The stronger the Indigenous communities are in Canada, the stronger Canada is.”

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“Now we have a seat at the table. We want equity ownership. We want to earn our own money. We’re not here to veto major projects. We just want sharing of the wealth. We want to be true players at the table.”

# SUMMARY

*of sessions*

TUESDAY  
FEB 26

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**PANEL**

**The Common Objective – Moving projects forward together**

**Moderator:** JP Gladu, CCAB  
Niilo Edwards, FNMPC  
Brian McGuigan, CAPP  
Jason Edworthy, BluEarth  
Steven Fleckenstein, National Bank

This panel discussed key elements of how industry and Indigenous communities can work together to move resource development projects forward. The panel touched on changing the narrative of First Nations being “against” natural resource development, which is often not the case and merely sets up expectations of the company and community as adversaries. The panel also highlighted relationship-building elements that help industry to build trust with the community, including listening to and validating the concerns of the community, and engaging in “collaborative advocacy” – enabling Indigenous voices to be heard. All speakers

emphasized the importance of having communities meaningfully involved in the project in some way, from providing services to taking an ownership stake.

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**PANEL**

**The Economic Development of Potential of Indigenous Trusts**

**Moderator:** Luanne Whitecrow, CCAB  
Vickie Whitehead, Deloitte  
Rachel Forbes, Shareholder Association for Research & Education (SHARE)  
Leith Cardinal, National Aboriginal Trusts Association (NATOA)

This panel discussed what an Indigenous trust is, what it must include, distinctions between different trust models and what it can enable for communities. Panellists described how banks and investors view Indigenous trusts, and how they can be improved (for example, working with institutional investors to promote responsible investment policies and practices that include reconciliation goals). The role of the National Aboriginal Trust Officers Association (NATOA) in building knowledge and capacity around trusts for Indigenous communities was also highlighted.

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

Shane Gottfriedson, *Former Band Councilor, Chief, Tribal Chief, regional Chief of BC Tk'emlups Indian Band*

Mr. Gottfriedson spoke about the positive impact his family has had on him, and how providing a better way of life for his family has been his overriding goal. He spoke about the company he started, Pow Wow Trail Coffee, and how his company has owned and operated a Tim Horton's franchise.

**ROUNDTABLE****Attracting Capital and Sustainable Economic Participation**

**Moderator:** David Robinson, *TechKnowledge Group*  
Mathew August, *Animus Capital Partners*  
Preston Manning, *Manning Centre*  
Chief Jason Gauthier, *Missanabie Cree First Nation*  
L Zhu, Qi Qin, and Ye Zhao, *China Railway First Survey and Design Institute Group (FSDI)*

This roundtable was framed around the concept of an Indigenous Investment Infrastructure Trust, which is a proposed financial framework for financing infrastructure projects in a way that positively benefits Indigenous communities. Panellists brought different perspectives on finance, design of infrastructure projects, and Indigenous community leadership. The panellists and audience discussed different elements of getting projects started. One of the biggest concerns was access to capital, as was a lack of political will. The importance of all different stakeholders who are interested in getting a project built working together was discussed, with moderator David Robinson noting, "There are a lot of soloists singing the same song, but we need a choir."

**ROUNDTABLE****Hydrocarbons – The Economic Reconciliation Trailblazer**

**Moderator:** Ryan Robb, *Suncor*  
Moderator: Marla Orenstein, *Canada West Foundation*  
Chief Bernice Martial, *Cold Lake First Nations*  
Mel Benson, *Suncor*  
Chief Jim Boucher, *Fort McKay First Nations*  
Allan Murphy, *Canadian Propane Association*

The session described the long and bumpy road to economic self-sufficiency for the Cold Lake First Nations and the Fort McKay First Nation. While resource development opportunities provided the initial financing, these FNs have since diversified enormously and now own and operate businesses ranging from catering to security to hotels, and are also providing opportunities for other FNs to benefit and succeed. The original relationships between these First Nations and hydrocarbon industry proponents were founded on trust that was built up over time; but it also rested on approaches that ensured accountability and transparency.

**ROUNDTABLE****Mining Partnerships in Canada**

**Moderator:** Chelsie Klassen, *Hatch*  
Ian Wilson, *Saskatchewan Research Council*  
Norman Fraser, *Teck Resources*  
Yvonne Walsh, *Teck Resources*  
Vickie Thomas, *Ktunaxa Nation*  
George Greene, *Stratos*

This roundtable focused on success factors for partnerships between Indigenous communities and the mining sector. This was set against the context of mining as a decades-long activity that creates opportunities for lasting relationships and the trend of mining companies seeing good relationships as a competitive advantage. Among the success factors noted were: an understanding of one another's viewpoints; a level playing field; the right information shared all the way through; community readiness for negotiating an agreement; and joint accountability in implementation. Speakers noted that compared with other countries such as New Zealand, Chile, and South Africa, Canada has the best practice, where obligations are tied to Indigenous rights.

**ROUNDTABLE****Capacity Building –  
Strengthening Agreements**

**Moderator:** Jorge Aviles, *CWL Energy Management*  
Geoff Greenwell, *2G Group of Companies*  
Billie Fortier, *MLT Aikins LLP*

This roundtable focused on the idea of two-way capacity building, with an emphasis on community and organizational objectives, mutually beneficial approaches to agreements, natural resource development projects and environment assessment. Control of capacity development by Indigenous communities was identified as a priority. Ultimately, capacity building is closely related to important economic and employment outcomes within communities. The roundtable was used to identify concepts and ideas that will support the improvement of capacity.

**ROUNDTABLE****Market Access – Energy Gridlock**

**Moderator:** Harrie Vredenburg, *University of Calgary*  
Karen Ogen-Toews, *First Nations LNG Alliance*  
Laurence Riel, *Pembina Pipeline Corporation*  
Dione McGuinness, *BRITT Land & Engagement*

This roundtable discussed the underlying causes of – and possible solutions to – situations where energy infrastructure projects become stuck in an apparent standoff between some Indigenous communities and the project proponents. Participants noted that much of the time, it isn't the project itself that is the problem, but rather the way that it is being implemented, and/or the nature of relationship that the company is proposing. Speakers noted the importance of industry understanding what a successful project would look like from various different perspectives, including an Indigenous perspective. The disconnect over the Trans Mountain pipeline was discussed, and the importance of not over-simplifying the positions or alignments of the groups involved.

**WEDNESDAY****FEB 27****PANEL****Building Sustainable Relationships –  
The Frontier Project**

**Moderator:** Heather Lawrence, *Teck Resources*  
Bill Loutitt, *McMurray Metis*  
Dr. Robin Johnstone, *Teck Resources*  
Melody Lepine, *Mikisew Cree First Nation*  
Robin Sidsworth, *Teck Resources*

This panel discussed the Frontier Project, which is a proposed oilsands mine in northern Alberta that has been developed through a partnership between Teck Resources and Indigenous communities in the area. Teck panellists noted the business case for building relationships with communities – how it makes the project stronger, beyond it just being the right thing to do. Indigenous panellists spoke about how the project may benefit their communities, and actions that Teck has taken to give them confidence in the company's intentions and approach, such as establishing a biodiversity area to act as a buffer. All panel members emphasized the importance of investing time and effort in building relationships.

**PANEL****LNG Canada & the Gitxaala Nation**

**Moderator:** John Blanchette, *Mammoet*  
Chief Clifford White, *Gitxaala Nation*  
Michael Eddy, *LNG Canada*

This panel focused on the evolution of the relationship between LNG Canada and Gitxaala Nation in BC, and the key elements that each group felt were important in ultimately making it a successful relationship that worked for both sides. Of key importance was the fact that LNG Canada listened to the community from Day 1, and understood the need to create a positive legacy that took into account both historical impacts and current socio-economic needs. Developing this relationship took time and work on the part of both parties, and there were challenges along the way – in terms of

communication, negotiation, and how to hold one another accountable. As Chief White emphasized, the long-term relationship with the company became even more important than the LNG project itself.

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**PANEL**  
**The Power of Procurement –  
 Evolving the Supply Chain**

**Moderator:** Myrtle Engram, *Fluor*  
 Howard McIntyre, *Suncor*  
 Jeff Provost, *Bird Construction*  
 Denise Pothier, *Stantec*  
 Elizabeth Aucaeda, *Sodexo*  
 Kiruba Sankar, *RBC*

The panel focused on how industry can promote Indigenous businesses through the procurement supply chain. Key elements noted include: internal education within the company; pressuring top-tier suppliers to involve Indigenous businesses; and setting goals to move Indigenous businesses from being sub-contractors to being prime contractors. The panel also noted the importance of structuring procurement opportunities in a way that Indigenous businesses can take advantage of them; for example, through ensuring that tender sizes enable smaller businesses to bid.

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**KEYNOTE**  
**Business Opportunities for Indigenous  
 Communities in the Power Sector**

Guy Lonechild, *First Nations Power Authority (FNPA)*

Guy Lonechild is the CEO of the First Nations Power Authority (FNPA), an organization focused on involving Indigenous people in the power sector in Canada. Mr. Lonechild described how Indigenous people have been excluded from the national conversation about energy, and how problematic that has been. He described the successes that the FNPA has realized – such as negotiating and securing an agreement with SaskPower – and how the organization works to build capacity within communities to succeed in the renewable energy space.

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**PANEL**  
**From Seed to Success**

**Moderator:** Heather Black, *Creative Spirit Solutions*  
 Jordan Jolicoeur, *Carvel Electric*  
 Jenn Harper, *Cheekbone Beauty*  
 Teara Fraser, *Raven Institute & Iskwew Air*  
 Stephen Nairne, *Raven Capital*  
 Melrene Saloy, *Native Diva Creations*

This panel focused on the personal stories of successful Indigenous entrepreneurs who built enterprises ranging from an airline to beauty supplies. Panellists emphasized that, while challenges are numerous, true entrepreneurs thrive in solving problems. Specific hurdles that they faced included finding financing and operating in a procurement environment that is tailored to larger companies. Panellists also described ways that they were able to “give back” to the Indigenous community, including mentoring, donating profits, and creating opportunities for youth. A number of points were raised for industry to take note of when engaging with Indigenous entrepreneurs: viewing Indigenous people as a source of knowledge and innovation, understanding that building trust is a process, and partitioning tenders into smaller sizes that can be bid on by smaller, Indigenous companies.

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**ROUNDTABLE**  
**Entrepreneurial Investment  
 and Socio-Economic Impact**

**Moderator:** Holly Atjecoutay, *Business Link AB*  
**Moderator:** Sandip Lalli, *Calgary Chamber*  
 Jordan Jolicoeur, *Carvel Electric*  
 Rob Rollingson, *Indian Business Corporation*  
 Stephen Nairne, *Raven Capital*  
 Teara Fraser, *Raven Institute & Iskwew Air*  
 John Pantazopoulos, *ATB Financial*

This roundtable discussed the broad range of challenges and opportunities that Indigenous entrepreneurs face. Primary among these was access to capital. Although panellists disagreed on the wisdom of borrowing in order to fund a new venture, there was general agreement that

new opportunities for financing can be helpful to those entrepreneurs who need it. The group also described the many positive community impacts that flowed from the establishment of a successful business; and how this fits into the framework of economic reconciliation. Some of the key takeaways identified include the need for systemic change, the importance of building momentum, the importance of returning to your communities to have a positive impact, and that all entrepreneurs are social entrepreneurs.

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#### ROUNDTABLE

### Clean Tech – Funding the Future Energy Mix

**Moderator:** Helen Platis, *QUEST*  
 Guy Lonechild, *FNMPA*  
 Jason Edworthy, *BluEarth Renewables*  
 Joseph Duperreault, *First Renewable Energy Partners*  
 Randall Benson, *Gridworks Energy*

Three major themes emerged: engagement, barriers to implementation, and financing. For increasing the engagement of Indigenous-led renewables projects, access to capital is a key component. To ensure the authenticity of partnerships between industry and Indigenous communities, a great deal of time and relationship-building needs to be put in, as does the opportunity to review projects. Financing is challenging, but there are options, such as provincial government funding programs and international financing that is looking for carbon credits. Government was cited as being frequently a barrier to Indigenous economic participation.

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#### WORKSHOP

### Procurement Design & Best Practices

**Moderator:** Max Skudra, *CCAB*  
 Luanne Whitecrow, *CCAB*

This session presented statistics on Indigenous employment and businesses across Canada in terms of numbers, sectors, and personal values. Presenters described the challenges that Indigenous businesses face in procurement, which include overly large contracts, dense administrative

requirements and challenges with capacity and timeframes. Finally, an overview was given of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business's Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR) program, a certification program that confirms corporate performance in Aboriginal relations.

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#### ROUNDTABLE

### The Growth of the Cannabis & Hemp Industry

**Moderator:** Roland Bellerose, *Cannabis and Hemp Indigenous Consortium Canada*  
 Chief Joe Norton, *Kahnawà:ke*  
 Lorraine White, *Seven Leaf Medical Cannabis*  
 Francine Whiteduck, *Whiteduck Resources*  
 Isadore Day, *Bimaadzwin*

Cannabis is a unique business opportunity; it has a large growth potential and is aligned with an Indigenous history of trade in medicines. For many elders, however, it has a stigma and also has ties to addiction. Ultimately, every community will have to decide for itself whether or not to participate in the cannabis economy. The Canadian Indigenous Hemp Cannabis Consortium is working to be able to gather the data, statistics and facts that can help inform communities' choices.

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#### ROUNDTABLE

### Forest Certification – Developing practices and procedures for sustainable forest management, and increased market access

**Moderator:** Paul Robitaille, *Sustainable Forestry Initiative*  
 Ken Price, *TimberWest*  
 Gregor Macintosh, *Sustainable Forestry Initiative*  
 JP Gladu, *CCAB*

This session used the example of forestry in B.C. as a way to show how Indigenous communities can be uniquely well-placed to prosper from partnerships, despite harmful legacies of the past. Participants described the process of building trust between communities, programs and companies; and also described how the Sustainable Forestry Initiative was able to build capacity among Indigenous youth.

Finally, suggestions were given for how companies can ensure that their partnership and outreach efforts are both respectful and effective – such as ensuring that the Board of Directors contains at least one Indigenous member.

THURSDAY  
FEB 28

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**PANEL**  
**Indigenous Peoples in Canada  
and the Future of Work**

**Moderator:** Samantha Morton, *CCAB*  
**Moderator:** Aditi Trehan, *Tate Consultancy Services*  
Balaji Ganapathy, *Tate Consultancy Services*  
Melissa Hardy-Giles, *Origins Inc.*  
Alicia Dubois, *CIBC*  
Max Skudra, *CCAB*

This panel focused on skills, the role of technology, mentoring, and creating opportunities for Indigenous youth. The panel recognized that it is difficult to identify what skills will be needed for the jobs of the future. Skills were called “the new equalizer.” There was discussion of the Indigenous economy, and it was noted that Indigenous businesses “out-innovate” the average Canadian business significantly. Traditional perspectives are key: in the words of Alicia Dubois, “If we can encourage our youth to be curious and creative and encourage them to ask their traditional questions or use their traditional perspective, it’s such a useful addition. It will allow every sector to bloom.” Mentorship was discussed as important by all members.

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**PANEL**  
**Inspirational Women’s Series**

**Moderator:** Nicole Robertson, *Muskwa Productions & Consulting*  
Billie Fortier, *MLT Aikens LLP*  
Janice Laroque, *Spirit Staffing*  
Jenn Harper, *Cheekbone Beauty*  
Krystal Abotossaway, *Aboriginal Professional Association of Canada*  
Raylene Whitford, *Canative Energy*

This panel explored the stories and the lessons learned from each of the panellists, all pioneering women in their fields. They spoke about some of their biggest challenges, which included access to financing, work-life balance, and lack of access to decision-makers. The panellists described the different ways they bring cultural knowledge into their businesses, which include placing a high value on relationships, hiring Indigenous people, and “trying to Indigenize everything all the time.” The panel’s advice to future leaders from the next generation included the value of hard work, believing in yourself, pushing your personal and professional boundaries, and remaining true to your core principles.

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

W. Brett Wilson, *Canoe Financial*

Mr. Wilson discussed his hometown – North Battleford, Sask. – and how proud he is of his prairie roots. He talked about his experience as one of the investors on CBC’s *Dragon’s Den*. He also discussed the Code of the West, something that he lives by: live each day with courage; take pride in your work; always finish what you start; do what must be done; be tough but fair; when you make a promise, keep it; be proud of who you are and where you’re from; talk less and say more; remember that some things aren’t for sale; know where to draw the line.

**PANEL****Creating Pathways to Employment**

**Moderator:** Stephanie Beaulieu, *Spirit Staffing*  
 Marlana Anderson, *Teck Resources*  
 Pat White, *Suncor*  
 Krystal Abotossaway, *Aboriginal Professional Association of Canada*  
 Kirsten Ryder, *Stoney Tribal Administration*  
 Richard Lemaire, *Alberta Ministry of Labour*

One of the major themes that this panel focused on was diversity versus inclusion, and the difference between the two. Speakers emphasized the need to go beyond simply asking the workforce look diverse, to one in which different experiences are truly valued. Other challenges discussed included workplace readiness, cultural values not being aligned, and bias among hiring managers.

**ROUNDTABLE****Indigenous Youth Participation in STEM – Breaking Down Barriers**

**Moderator:** Peter Salusbury, *Stantec*  
**Moderator:** Christine Foster, *Tata*  
 Rob Cardinal, *IndigeSTEAM*  
 Noreen Demeria, *Actua*  
 Denise Pothier, *Stantec*  
 Jessica Vandenberghe, *Urban Systems*  
 Jezelle Zatorski, *Imperial Oil*

This session discussed how industry can better partner with Indigenous communities to support students entering into the STEM disciplines. Although STEM is not new to Indigenous education, there remain barriers to the full participation or inclusion of Indigenous students. Relevance is one such barrier; however, industry can help students understand how STEM education can lead to specific career paths. Other challenges include identifying ways for students to see diversity among people in STEM careers; the need for holistic support that takes into account basic needs (food, shelter, access to clean water, etc.) as well as education; and the need for support for teachers to tackle STEM subjects. Participants noted that collaboration, rather than donation of funds or resources, is the preferred approach for any industry partnership around STEM Education.

**WORKSHOP****Workforce Diversification – Indigenous Inclusion Strategies**

Buffy Handel, *Working Warriors*

Topics discussed at this workshop included language and communication barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – barriers arise not just from differences in the actual languages spoken, but also in how things are communicated. The importance of engaging with Indigenous communities was discussed. High-value jobs are critical in advancing Indigenous welfare. All high-value jobs are critically important for Indigenous people – as moderator Buffy Handel noted, “If it is life changing for one person, it can be life changing for a nation.”

**WORKSHOP****Making Welcome – The Art of Hiring Indigenous Talent**

Amber Boyd, *Spirit Staffing & Consulting*

Companies want to attract and retain Indigenous talent. Indigenous workers want to find fair, equitable and meaningful employment. This workshop explored some of the barriers faced, and what more successful approaches could look like that contribute to economic reconciliation.

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*About the*

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