

Canadian Council for
ABORIGINAL
BUSINESS



Relationships and Reciprocity

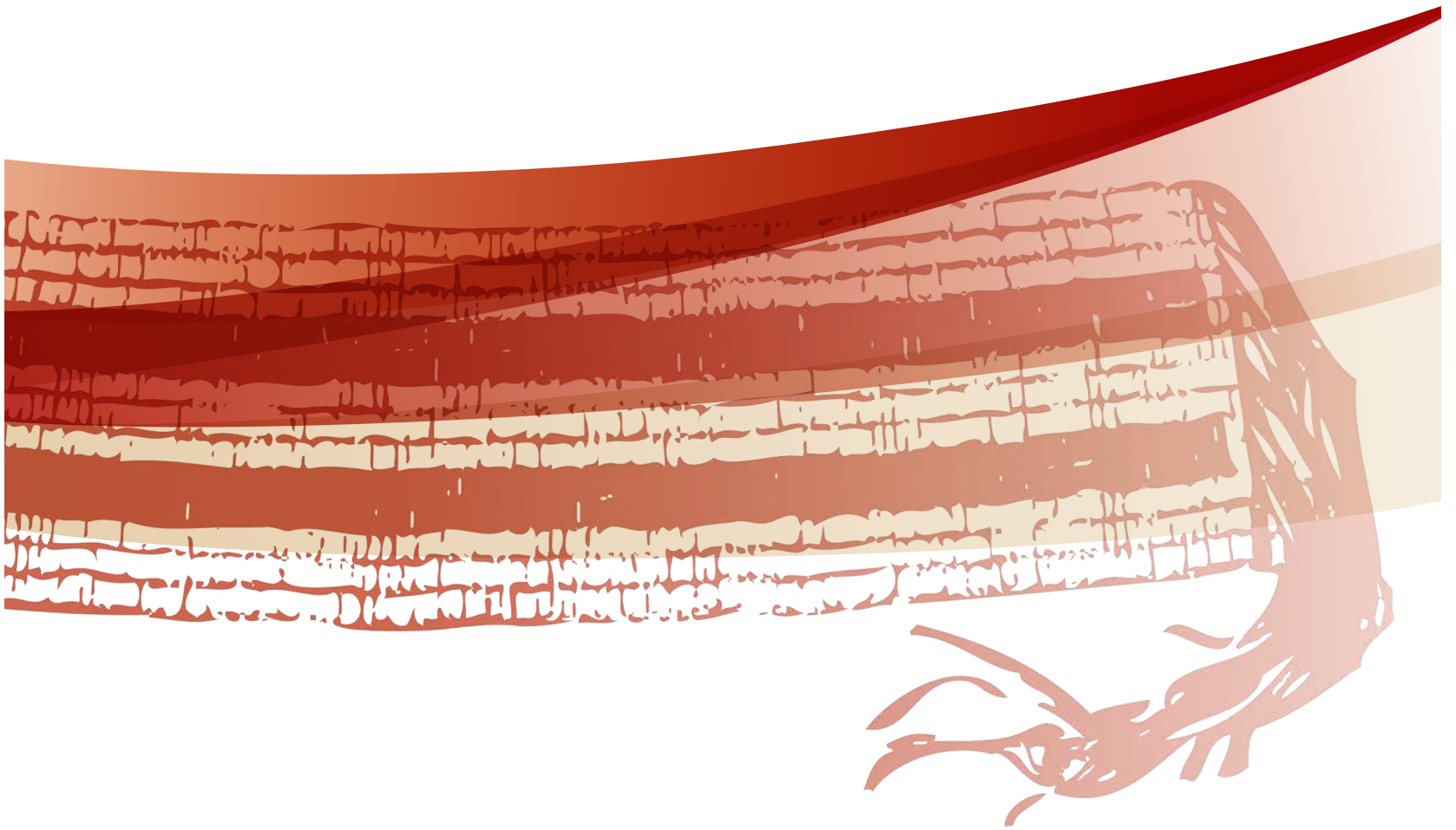
Exploring Aboriginal Business

Research Report Fall 2015



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About the image on our cover

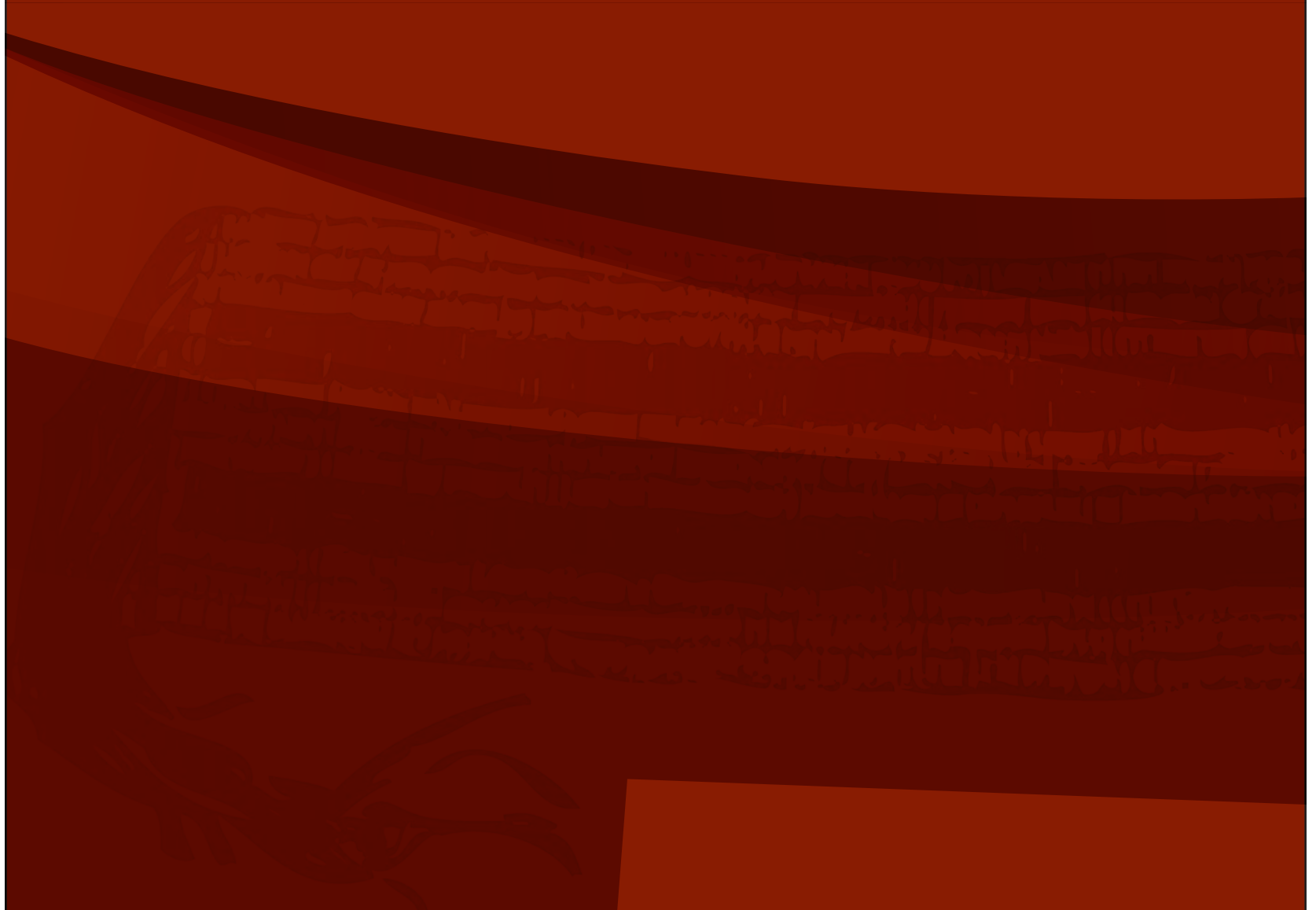
Indigenous attorney and scholar Robert A. Williams Jr. eloquently describes the meaning of the Gus-Wen-Tah, or Two Row Wampum as follows:

"There is a bed of white wampum which symbolizes the purity of the agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those two rows have the spirit of your ancestors and mine. There are three beads of wampum separating the two rows and they symbolize peace, friendship and respect. These two rows will symbolize two paths or two vessels, travelling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws, their customs, and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither will try to steer the other's vessel."

In the spirit of peace, friendship and respect, the CCAB strives to build sustainable business relationships between corporate Canada and the Aboriginal community. The focus of our research is to develop a mutual understanding of the Aboriginal business vision as told by First Nations, Inuit and Métis business people.

1

Executive summary



About the research

It is widely accepted that economic development is crucial to improving the well-being of Aboriginal peoples and closing the gap with the non-Aboriginal population across Canada.

The role of strong business relationships in helping Aboriginal entrepreneurs achieve success is a common theme throughout the body of research conducted by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) over the past several years. Relationships and/or partnerships are a key growth strategy, providing access to bigger and better business opportunities, much needed capital or other diverse needs, such as skills training and experience, mentoring and advice, equipment, physical location or a skilled workforce.

What is not as well-known is how Aboriginal business relationships develop, how they are structured, what stages they go through and what obstacles they face. *Relationships and Reciprocity* is a pilot project led by the CCAB to help address this gap. Using qualitative research (a mix of focus groups and in-depth individual interviews), CCAB has set out to explore what positive Aboriginal business relationships look like and what organizations – including Aboriginal and mainstream businesses, and governments – can do to assist in their development.

This report begins with a summary of the existing academic and non-academic research on Aboriginal business relationships as context for the primary qualitative research described later in the report.

The CCAB's research reports are available for download at www.ccab.com.



Research highlights

- The existing body of research on Aboriginal business relationships has yet to produce an accepted model for understanding the scope, structure and features of successful partnerships. This reinforces the need for foundational research – both qualitative (exploratory) and quantitative (confirming population statistics) – to determine which aspects of business relationships are most appropriate to measure, and will be the best input into future decision-making about policies or programs.
- Aboriginal business owners instinctively understand what is meant when asked to describe their business relationships or partnerships. However, they refer to a wide range of examples, that include client-supplier, subcontractor, or government relationships where partners don't necessarily have, or feel they have an equal say. There is a need to clearly define what is meant by "business partnerships" to ensure a consistent interpretation of the concept for research participants and those using the resulting data.
- Partnerships tend to be described in interpersonal terms rather than organizational ones. A common metaphor is that a business relationship is like a personal relationship. Participants identify trust and credibility as the cornerstone of a good relationship, in addition to factors such as enthusiasm, communication, respect and transparency (among others). The findings are less clear about organizational aspects of business relationships, such as how they are planned or structured. Moreover, participants do not distinguish between various stages of a partnership other than an early/development phase versus a later/maintenance phase.
- By and large, the stated purpose of these partnerships is growth, as Aboriginal business owners pursue opportunities to build their business. Among the business owners included in this research, there is little evidence of other priorities for entering into a partnership, such as information sharing, or achieving a longer-term change or impact (e.g., to affect public policy, to create a shift in the marketplace).
- Aboriginal businesses identify three main challenges with their business relationships: (1) finding/locating partnership opportunities; (2) qualifying or screening them to ensure they are the right fit; and (3) addressing circumstances that can negatively affect a partnership.
- While relatively few participants have an existing relationship with the Ontario or federal governments, there was interest in future opportunities. However, private-public sector partnerships are typically perceived as less collaborative. Aboriginal businesspeople feel that government rules and regulations put them at a disadvantage, particularly when they are seeking funding.

Methodology

The results are based on three focus groups and eight in-depth individual interviews (IDI) conducted with business leaders in Toronto, Ottawa and Sudbury, in April and May 2015. Most research participants were Aboriginal business owners representing a wide range of industries, including mining, engineering, finance, communications and consulting. A handful of non-Aboriginal participants were also included in order to provide their perspectives on building relationships with Aboriginal business.

The research was undertaken as a collaboration between CCAB and Environics Research Group, one of Canada's leading public opinion research firms. Environics led the questionnaire design and reporting, with input from CCAB and representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. CCAB representatives identified and recruited the research participants, and conducted the focus groups and IDIs.

We would like to thank Max Skudra, Paul-Emile McNab, Karen Travers and Danbi Cho for their contribution to this research.

Statement of limitations: Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. While the results of the focus groups/IDIs cannot be projected to the full population of Aboriginal businesses, it can be used as directional information in developing policy and communications.

It should also be stated that this is a pilot project, designed as an initial exploration to gain a stronger understanding of how to measure successful business relationships for Aboriginal entrepreneurs and community owned businesses.

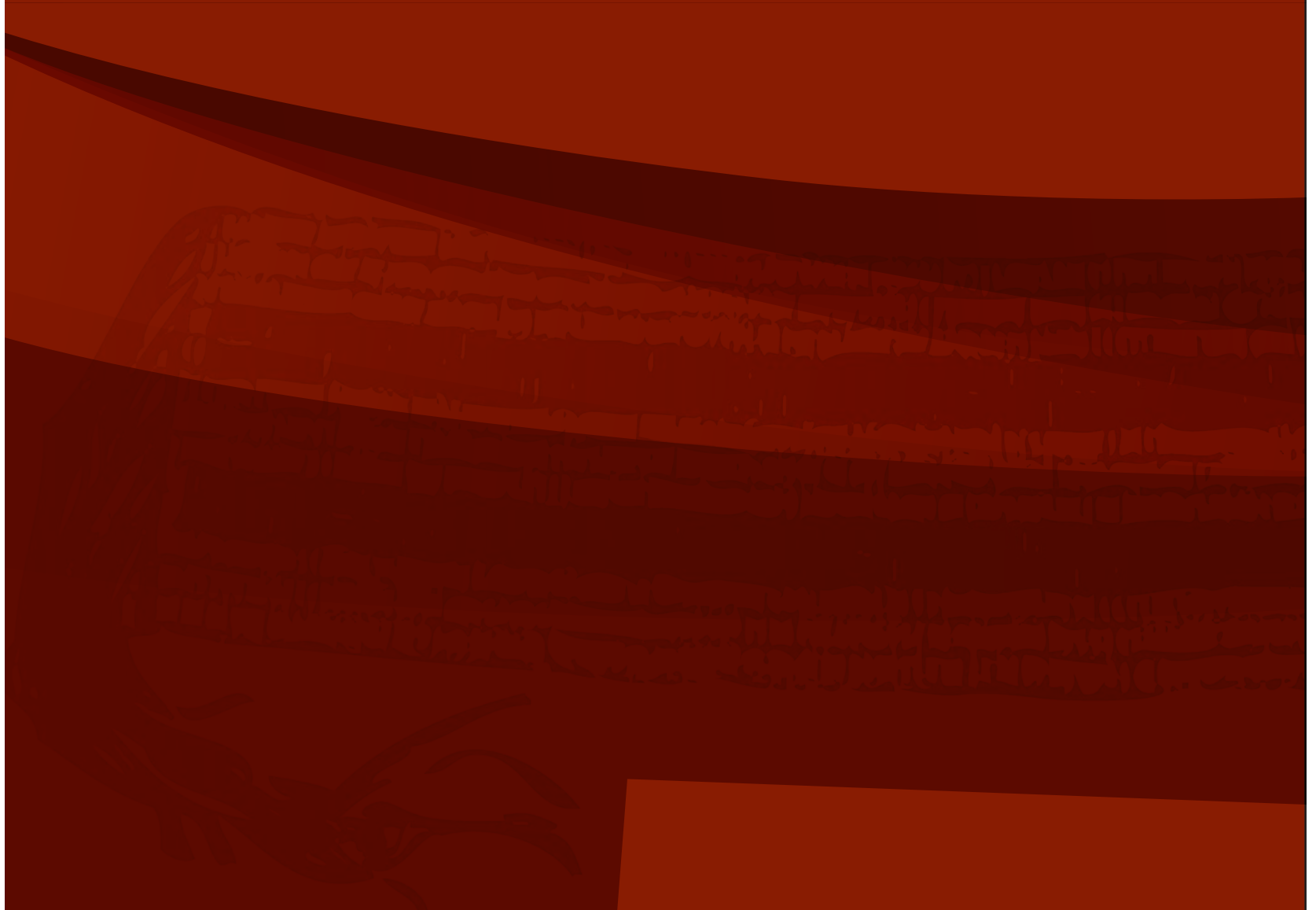
The CCAB wishes to thank the Government of Ontario for funding this pilot project.

Without their generous contribution, this initiative would not have been possible.

2

Research on Aboriginal business relationships

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize what is already known about Aboriginal business relationships. Ultimately, the existing body of research has not yet generated a comprehensive understanding of these partnerships in terms of what works and what doesn't. Some of the major gaps are described in the following section.



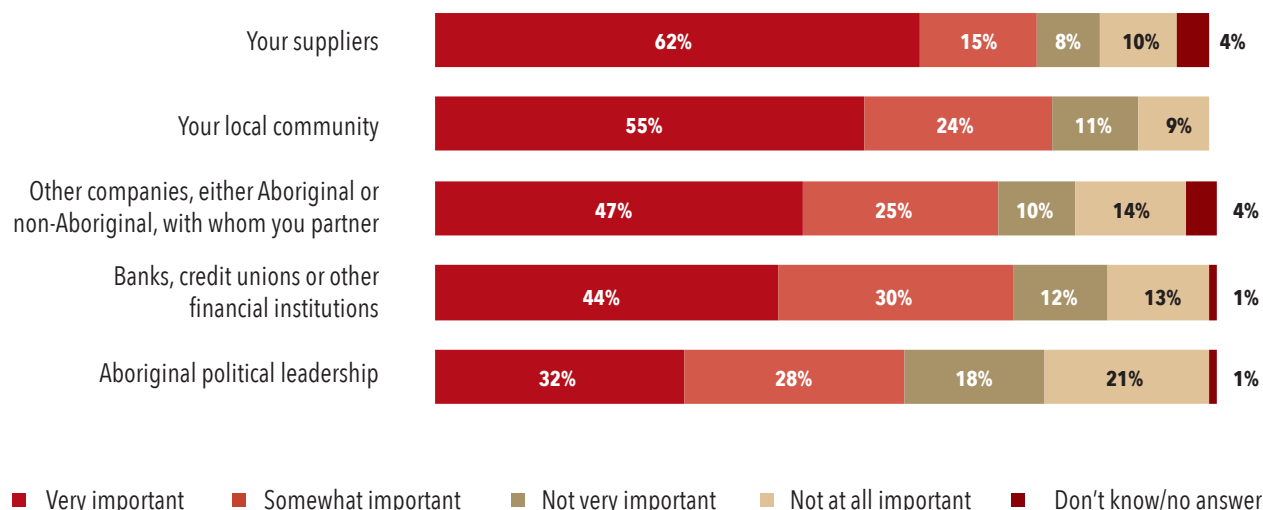
CCAB research

It is widely accepted that economic development is crucial to improving the circumstances of Aboriginal Peoples across Canada. Furthermore, CCAB's own research program has identified partnerships as a best practice that helps lead to business success. For instance, CCAB's 2013 study of Aboriginal economic development corporations (AEDCs) in Ontario found that *"some AEDCs have found it very beneficial to build relationships, particularly with other AEDCs, but also with industry or private sector organizations, as a way to access knowledge/information as well as business opportunities."*

A follow-up survey in 2014 found that two-thirds of Ontario AEDCs have partnerships with other organizations, and that the structure and goals of these partnerships appear to be as varied as the AEDCs themselves. Purposes for partnering include skills transfer, providing a revenue source, leveraging business contacts or leveraging their experience in specific industries/areas.

A 2014 national survey of Aboriginal small business owners also found that seven in ten (72%) consider partnerships with other businesses (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal) to be important to their business success, second only to the importance of their ongoing relationships with the local community (79%) and suppliers (77%).

Importance to business success



Q. How important to the success of your business are ongoing relationships with each of the following?

Source: 2014-15 National Aboriginal Business Survey (to be published in Fall 2015)

Other academic and non-academic research

While partnerships are universally perceived as a vital aspect of the process of economic development, there is little in the literature that establishes how Aboriginal businesses build strong relationships and networks to help create mutually beneficial economic development initiatives.

For example, a 2005 review found that much of the literature focusing on relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses is conducted in five areas: journalism, government, business and industry, universities and by Aboriginal peoples¹ for their own immediate purposes. Across all five groups of studies, the main focus is a desire to find a formula or set of characteristics possessed by 'successful' businesses or communities that can be universally applied to those who are struggling. However, there are major limitations: the studies are not consistent in approach or methodology, they do not build upon past scholarship, and are produced in stakeholder silos where they are not shared, nor are outcomes studied, measured or compared.²

In contrast, a small group of prolific business scholars and social scientists are the principal producers of academic research on Aboriginal economic development partnerships, and social and economic conditions on reserves. With few exceptions, studies that examine business relationships from an Aboriginal perspective or that incorporate their aspirations and expectations with any consistency are often community-specific case studies profiling successful "break-out communities" at a moment in time.³ There is little in the way of long-term or follow-up analysis in case study methodology that allows for an analysis of the processes involved in growing and maintaining business connections once established.

Other gaps in the existing body of research were identified:

- The bulk of studies are from the 1990s and reliant on older data. These economic forecasts do not account for post-2008 recessionary changes and, more recently, the impact of the drop in oil prices, and the increase in online marketing and sales.

¹ Kevin Hindle and Michele Lansdowne, "Brave Spirits on New Paths: Toward a Globally Relevant Paradigm of Indigenous Entrepreneurship Research," *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship* Vol. 18, No.2 (2005): 131.

² Hindle and Lansdowne, 131; Matthew Pasco, "Strategic Alliances in Indigenous Entrepreneurship Contexts: A Case Study of the Scuzzy Creek Hydro Project," 5. Accessed July 23, 2015, Available Online at: researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/vital/access/services/.../swin.../SOURCE2.

³ Wein, *The State of the First Nation Economy*, 7.

- Business relationships inspired and created by Aboriginal people both between themselves and with non-Indigenous companies, such as treaty economies, co-operatives and AEDC's, are under-represented in the literature.
- As barriers to economic development, credit and financing are persistent themes. However, relationships between Aboriginal businesses and banks and various levels of governments with respect to financing programs/policy, and access to capital, are not well-studied.
- While it is understood in most studies that 'Aboriginal' includes Inuit and Métis, the latter in particular and their business relationships are neglected in the literature.
- Many authors continue to stress that Aboriginal people off reserve and in urban areas are not well-represented. Comparative studies of business relationships would also help understand aspects of both situations (reserve/off reserve, rural/urban) that facilitate/detract from the formation/development of business relationships.
- Research currently focuses on large corporations in resource extractive industries, despite the fact that small businesses and entrepreneurs are major economic drivers. Similarly, case study methodology favours certain business partnerships, such as joint ventures in extractive industries (forestry, mining, oil), with focus on success stories and community impacts.

A review of the current literature suggests that a lack of common terms of reference and understanding of Aboriginal business relationships, or what these relationships entail, impairs the ability to discuss, analyze and understand them.

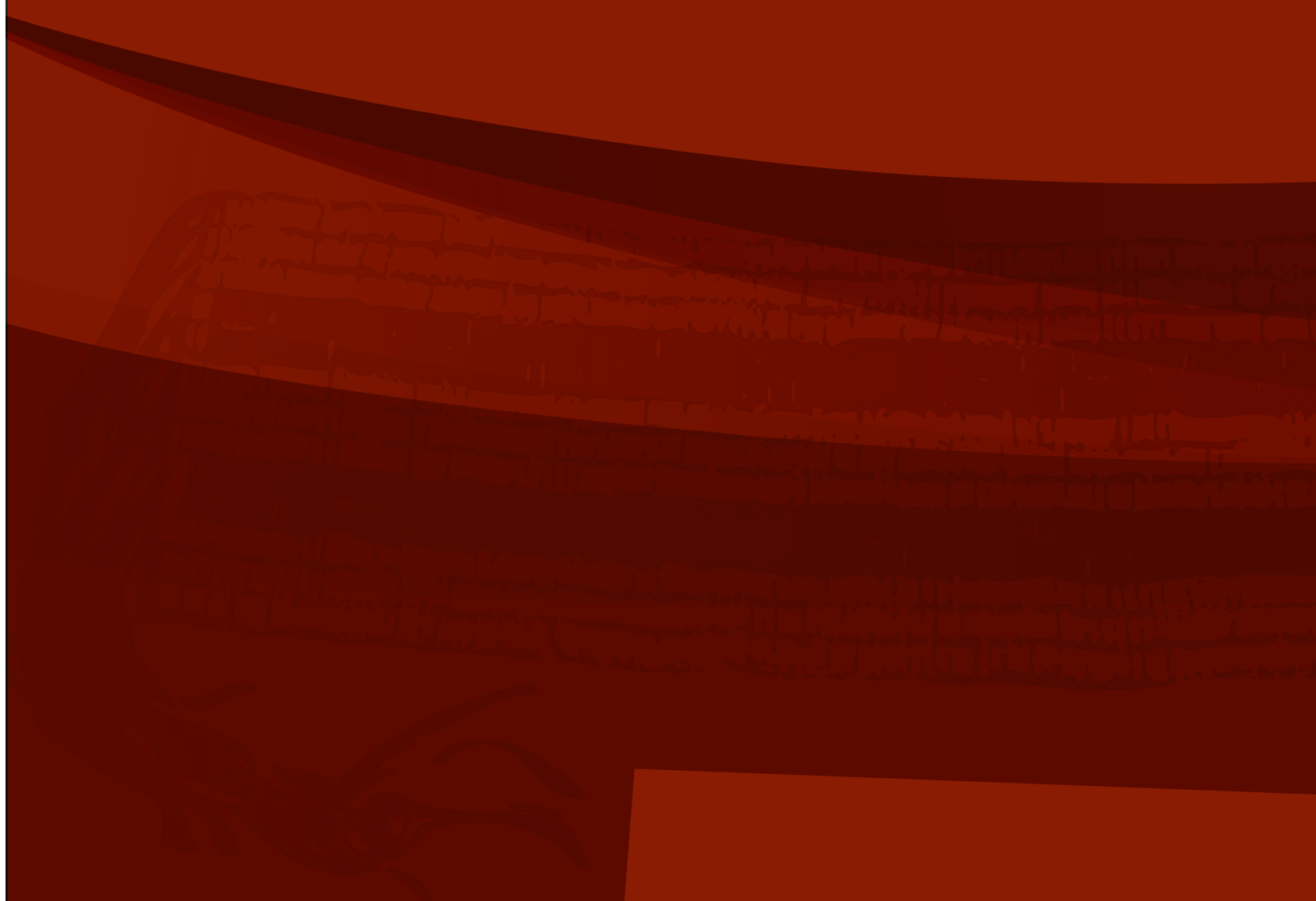
As well, business and government seldom discuss partnerships or relationships in detail beyond recommendations for change or action, meaning they are treated as incidental to legal, contractual or regulatory frameworks rather than as significant entities worth understanding in depth.

Business relationships need to be shaped by Aboriginal people from their own point of view, for their own communities and for their own benefit. In the absence of a common conceptual framework and an understanding of what relationships with Aboriginal peoples entail, or how they are built, maintained and threatened, government

Given that there is not yet a comprehensive picture – or model – of Aboriginal business relationships available, exploratory qualitative research (as described in the next chapter) is an appropriate starting point. The next chapter describes the findings of the focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted with primarily Aboriginal business owners, as well as a small number of mainstream businesses.

3

Current research findings



I. Developing strong business relationships

Aboriginal business owners identified a variety of business relationships or partnerships, suggesting that a clear definition is needed for future research. In general, these relationships are considered to be between people rather than between organizations.

When defined as a partnership “where the parties involved realize they can align their resources and achieve more by working together,” most participants stated they currently have one or more strong business relationships or partnerships.

One of the key findings here was that, participants understand Aboriginal business relationships in a broad sense, but have very different ideas about what they are when we discussed concrete examples. There was a wide variety in the examples they cited. Relationships included not only partnerships between equals, but also a variety of arrangements such as client-supplier or subcontractor relationships where one party had greater influence or authority over decision-making. Several participants also pointed out that a power balance exists in their relationships with government. While these may all be valid examples of the concept we are exploring, the lines are blurry. Looking ahead to future research, it is crucial to develop a working definition of “business relationship” or “partnership” that is clearly understood by participants, so that we can be certain we are measuring what we have set out to examine.

The small number of entrepreneurs who do not currently have any (active) partnerships were nonetheless able to talk about one they had in the past and/or to indicate interest in building a partnership in the future (if the right opportunity presented itself).

A second key finding is that, generally, these relationships are thought of as being between *people* rather than between *organizations*. One reason is that at least half of the Aboriginal businesses in the research can be classified as small, and thus the relationship between two businesses in point of fact is a relationship between two individuals (i.e., the business owner and their counterpart). More than once, these relationships were likened to dating or other personal relationships.

The discussions used a primarily interpersonal lens (e.g., discussions of personality, trust) rather than an organizational one (e.g., Does a partnership have a formal structure? What aspects have been agreed upon in advance?). This has implications for selecting any theoretical frameworks about business relationships that might be used to guide future research, as well as for how future research questions are worded.

“To me, whether you talk business or marital or any relationship, it’s kind of the same thing. It’s nurturing, you want growth from both parties, respect from both parties, trust...”

(Toronto participant)

"Sometimes a project is too big to do the work on my own. Then I partner with other Aboriginal firms to get the skills capacity I need and to bring in more money for everyone."

(Sudbury participant)

II. Relationships as a growth strategy

Since the goal of Aboriginal businesses is to succeed and prosper, the main purpose for developing relationships is to grow their business through access to new clients and markets, beyond what they could achieve on their own.

The main purpose of these relationships is to access opportunities that the business could not otherwise qualify for or complete on their own. Aboriginal businesses consciously use them as a growth strategy and one that gives them a competitive edge: how do I get my product or service to market and build consumer confidence in it?

Partnerships can help businesses fulfill their strategic plan. The business owner identifies where they want to be down the road, how they plan to get there, and the kinds of people they want with them along the way. They may develop a kind of "war chest" or "toolbox" that includes partners they can draw on to fulfill specific projects. Business relationships are also used to create opportunities, rather than to always be responding to RFPs, since the latter is a generally viewed as a tough slog requiring a significant amount of time and effort.

In most cases, the partnerships involve each party contributing their own skills and expertise. In the case of smaller businesses, the parties may work in "silos" to fulfill their own part of a project (e.g., subcontracting relationship). The most common thing that entrepreneurs report *getting out* of a partnership (other than access to opportunities and resulting business growth) is increased capacity. They may learn new skills or how to use their existing skills in a different way (for example, to branch out into project management). Partners may even identify opportunities that the business owner would never have considered for themselves, because they know what the individual is capable of and are willing to take a chance based on past successes.

Because the research was conducted with businesses whose primary day-to-day concern is growth and the bottom line, there was less evidence of partnerships formed to achieve longer-term change or impact (e.g., to affect public policy, to create a shift in the marketplace).

III. Features of good relationships/partnerships

Aboriginal business owners identify trust and credibility as the cornerstones of a good business relationship.

What do Aboriginal business owners consider to be the features of a good business relationship? Participants identified trust as the number one feature of a good relationship: can they rely on the other party to deliver on their side of the bargain? This is a challenging aspect, since trust is “hard to develop and easy to lose.”

Note that having trust in a partner doesn't mean *being trusting*. Many participants mentioned the importance of doing due diligence on those they consider working with, meaning they dig, do their research and look into who they are. Thus, a second key factor is reputation, credibility or track record. How prospective partners are perceived by industry, government, and Aboriginal communities is important. Aboriginal businesses in particular, are interested in the environmental record of potential partners. If red flags are raised, serious thought is given to whether the partnership is worthwhile. Some participants have had bad experiences with a partner, which has led them to become much more selective in their choices.

Other factors participants look for in a strong business relationship include:

- **Enjoyment, rapport, enthusiasm** – entrepreneurs are passionate about their businesses. It is not just a job, and they often seek someone with a similar spark.
- **Communications, respect, nurturing** – each partner listens and takes the other person's perspective, approach or way of doing things into account. It takes effort to maintain and strengthen a relationship.
- **Transparency, ethics** – being able to say “I don't know how” or “I can't” rather than promising what can't be delivered.
- **Mutual fulfillment** – Partnerships are not one-sided, they must benefit both partners.

The latter case is important for Aboriginal businesses since they may find themselves in the position of being sought out as a partner solely for their Aboriginal credentials. One participant recommended evaluating the “return on investment” of any partnership overall, to determine that the Aboriginal business is getting its fair share of benefits.

“That's where the challenge is, if you're able to - when you're in your negotiations - building those relationships. They're looking for opportunities to build trust. You're looking for ways to build your bottom line. I think that's understood, so really how can we develop that trust, those bonds, that confidence?”

(Toronto participant)

It is notable that the elements of a good business relationship and the approaches used to develop them are common to all types of business relationships. However, because this ultimately is about relationships between people, it is equally important to know about the person on the other side of the table.

Understanding something about their cultural background and perspective – regardless of whether they are Aboriginal or from another cultural group – is a critical part of that.

IIIa) Finding and building a partnership

Partners are typically located through a business owner's existing network. In the early stages, face-to-face meetings are important to confirm that there is a good connection and to develop trust.

The most common way potential partners are identified is through referrals and word-of-mouth, further confirming the importance of reputation in this process. Many put considerable effort into networking as a way to meet new contacts, putting themselves "out there" in whatever forum possible (e.g., conferences, trade shows, lunches, dinners). Not only does this mean they have a wide network to draw from, but it also means that prospective partners may approach other businesses based on recommendations from common acquaintances.

Participants stress face-to-face meetings as key to building trust and getting to know and understand a partner. Some also speak to the need for in-person meetings to truly get to know a potential partner, to read their body language and determine if there is a good connection. They use colloquial terms such as "gut feel" or "pick up vibes" to indicate that this is an instinctive or intuitive process.

Overall, these findings reflect common sense about how to build relationships, regardless of culture. This is not surprising given that Aboriginal businesses largely operate in a largely mainstream business environment. It also suggests there are no shortcuts or tricks and that finding and building business relationships is typically the result of hard work.

IIIb) Maintaining partnerships

The approach to maintaining a business partnership is similar to other relationships - ongoing communication and effort.

The main way that Aboriginal businesses maintain relationships is through dogged, hard work. Many say there is no short cut to this, and that once a relationship has been developed, it continues to require ongoing communications and face-to-face time. They reach out to the partners to find out what's new and what they are working on (market intelligence), and also to keep themselves top-of-mind should a new opportunity come up.

A few participants also described the value of "going the extra mile," doing favours, reaching out with information or simply recognizing people as individuals (e.g., checking on them in time of family or health crises), without expecting anything in return.

IIIc) Structure and planning

Participants provided little detail on any formal structures or agreements used in their partnerships, but it's unclear whether this is because such structures/agreements do not exist or because they were focusing on the interpersonal elements of a relationship rather than the organizational elements.

Participants do not think of their business relationships as going through different stages of maturity, aside from the early stage of developing a partnership versus the later stage of maintaining it. It is unclear the extent to which these partnerships involve a formal structure (e.g., defining vision, accountability, governance, etc.) or use a planning document that outlines the resources committed or the kinds of activities that will take place. As discussed earlier, this may be due to the interpersonal rather than the organizational focus of these discussions.

The research suggests that such structure and planning is:

- Less common early in a company's life because at that stage the focus is on getting the business at all costs. However, in hindsight, a few participants stressed the importance of defining terms from the outset.
- More common in partnerships involving larger organizations (e.g., joint ventures in the natural resource development sector) because the stakes are higher and/or the organization has the necessary capacity to develop a plan.
- Particularly like regular check-ins, particularly important mechanisms for identifying and resolving problems early to ensure things are going to plan.

Millie Knapp, President and CEO of Knapp Media Inc.

Millie has worked in media and the arts for more than twenty years. She is manager of advertising sales for the Smithsonian's magazine *American Indian* and is the executive director of the Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts.

Millie's professional connections are important to her and help her access individuals she otherwise would never have met. "When you are looking for contracts, your relationships give you leads. You can name drop to skip steps or get in and raise your priority. It shows you have something to offer and adds credibility. My reputation and history of integrity and accomplishment help me build relationships. Not everyone knows my name, so my relationships help me get to those people. For example, I have a relationship with the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and they will write letters of support or vouch for me. Reciprocal relationships are very important, they help me and I help them. Giving back is key."

They (government) are very frustrating. They are part of business, but they are also regulators, legislators, gatekeepers. They are the biggest player at the table."

(Sudbury participant)

IV. Partnerships with government

Aboriginal businesses are interested in partnerships with government, but many find it difficult to identify the people they need to connect with ("enablers") and to navigate government rules.

Government relationships are seen in a different light than those with other private sector organizations (whether Aboriginal or not). In most cases, they are not seen as a true partnership or collaboration, where the two parties are working together to achieve a shared goal.

One reason appears to be the differing goals: in private sector partnerships, both parties are looking for growth and profit, whereas in private-public sector partnerships, Aboriginal businesses often receive funding for capacity-building projects which governments consider to be for the greater community good. In the latter case, a common concern is a perceived power imbalance, when government sets the rules by which businesses must abide (eg...) perceived power imbalances become common concerns.

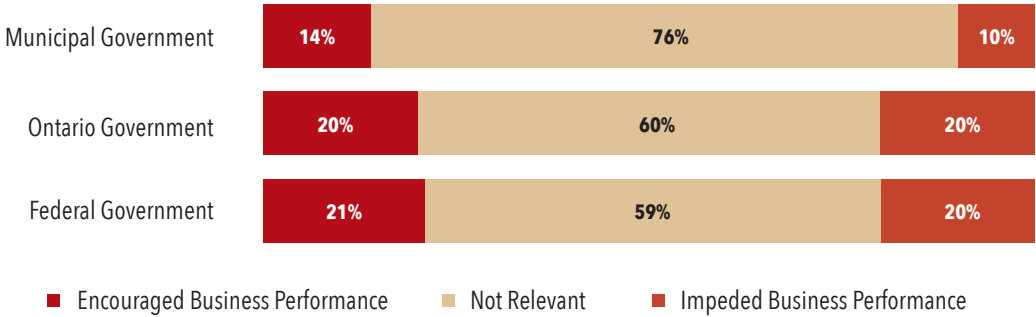
Much value is placed on face-to-face communications, it is particularly interesting that companies based outside of Toronto and Ottawa feel a lack of access to the provincial and federal governments.

Relatively few participants indicated that they have a relationship with the Ontario government, in any capacity. Participants were more likely to say they have a relationship with the federal government, although often it is difficult to parse comments about the business relationship from comments about the federal government's constitutional responsibilities for Aboriginal peoples. Generally, however, opinions regarding access to government and the perceived power imbalance in business (or funding) relationships were discussed for both the Ontario and Canadian governments.

Participants say that governments can support the development of strong Aboriginal business relationships in the following ways:

- **Act as a liaison** – introduce people and provide (free or low-cost) opportunities for networking.
- **Be a champion for Aboriginal business** – by promoting their successes as a way to help address corporate Canada's concerns about working with these businesses (and ultimately, help the general public understand why these businesses are important and mutually beneficial).

Role in supporting business



Q. For each of the following organizations or groups, please tell me whether you feel it has encouraged the performance of your business, is not relevant to the performance of your business, or has impeded the performance of your business.

Source: Promise and Prosperity: Ontario Aboriginal Business Survey (Spring 2014)

Cheryl Recollet, MSc, EP—Environmental Coordinator for the Wahnapiatae First Nation

Cheryl Recollet is the acting Interim Executive Director of Sustainable Development at Wahnapiatae First Nation and a founding board member of the Aboriginal Environment Leadership Council. Cheryl develops and coordinates environmental management initiatives with mining companies and with Taighwenini Technical and Environmental Services group, a business which provides similar services to First Nations communities and Industries. Relationships provide access to opportunities that the business could not otherwise qualify for or complete against on their own. Aboriginal businesses consciously use them as a growth strategy and one that gives them a competitive edge. In most cases, the partnerships involve each party putting their specific skills and expertise together.

“If it wasn’t for the relationships we developed with industry, we wouldn’t have been able to develop the environmental capacity we have. Through these relationships and

opportunities, we got trained on various techniques, protocols and various assessments used in environmental screening. Initially, this was not to open a business, but to understand the environmental impact of the industrial projects happening on our territory. It was through that experience that we were able to develop a specialized skill set and offer a suite of services to our industry partners related to environmental management and monitoring, as well as provide support and resources to other communities dealing with the same types of situations. Without those relationships, we wouldn’t be where we are today, at least in terms of our environmental capacity.”

By acting as a liaison and helping Aboriginal businesses network, governments can help facilitate relationships. “Networking is a key component, of any business development opportunity. Any opportunity we get to speak and promote our business, we definitely take it. Networking is key.”

V. Challenges/obstacles

The primary challenges facing Aboriginal partnerships are finding the right ones and solving conflicts or problems that may arise.

Overall, Aboriginal businesses identify three main challenges with their business relationships:

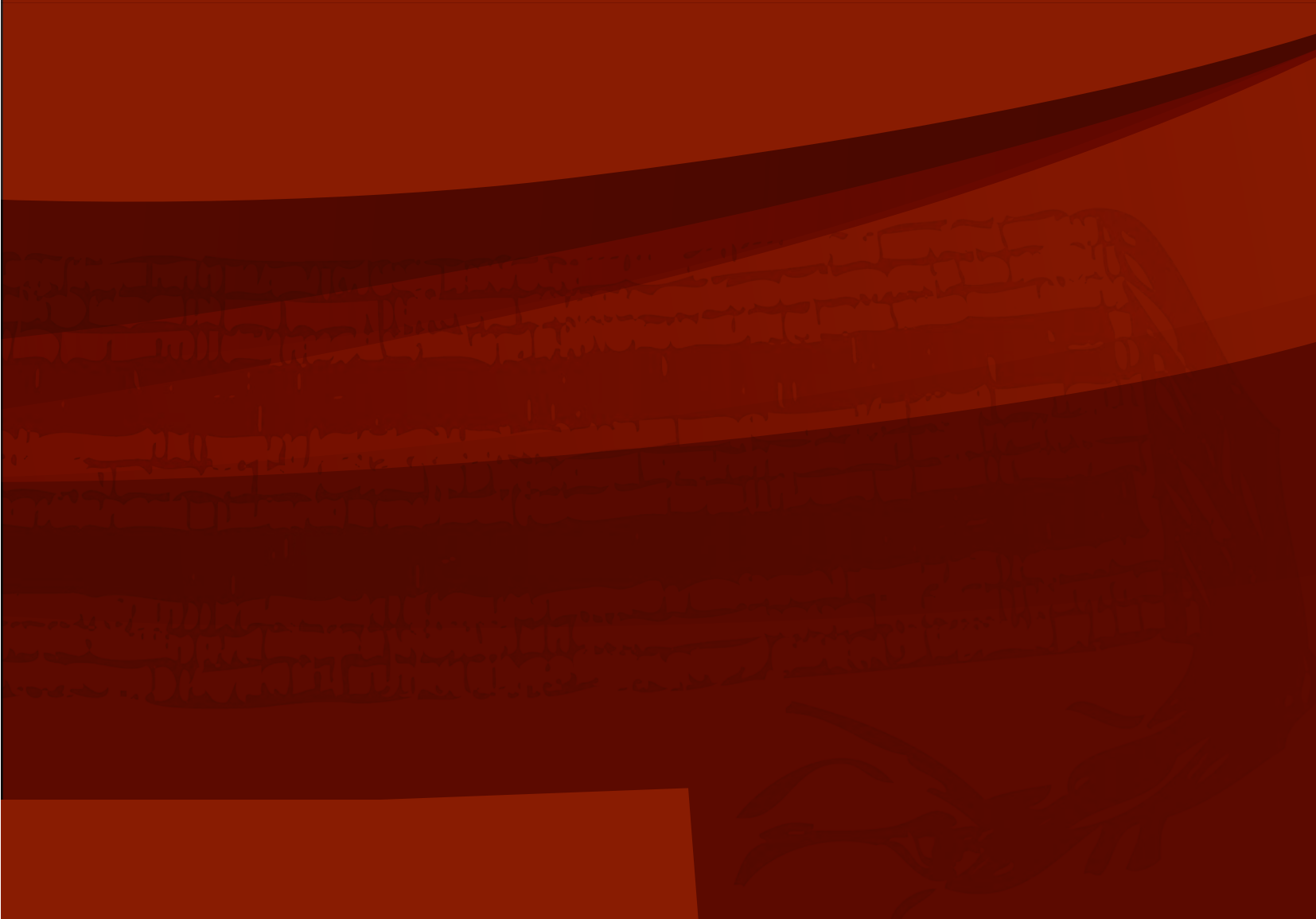
- **Finding/locating partnership opportunities.** Essentially, how does an Aboriginal business figure out who is available and interested in a partnership, and how do they make a connection? A marketing “hard sell” approach to self-promotion is not natural to many Aboriginal peoples, who may not feel comfortable telling other businesses why they would be a great partner. They may also lack the understanding of the culture of business, and the importance/value of building business relationships.

On the flip side, for corporate Canada, especially for larger companies, there can be a lack of Aboriginal businesses that are large enough to partner with. Instead, they may show their support by encouraging their suppliers to use Aboriginal businesses.

- **Qualifying or screening them to ensure they are the right fit.** Once a potential partnership has been identified, Aboriginal businesses need to determine whether or not it is likely to become a successful one. Despite the availability of technology to reduce distance in business interactions, the dispersal of Aboriginal business (particularly those in rural and remote areas) means challenges in having the face-to-face interaction that is important for building trust, especially in the early stages of relationship development.
- **Dealing with situations that can negatively affect a partnership.** In this case, participants recommend being proactive in communicating with partners. The value of a partnership is tested when something goes wrong, and the goal should be that all parties have the confidence to identify a problem and find a way to solve it, rather than sweeping it under the rug or soldiering on.

4

Next steps



Next steps

Based on the findings of this pilot project, the following modifications are proposed for future research, recognizing that the current research is a preliminary investigation of Aboriginal business relationships. Ultimately, to answer what makes a successful partnership with Aboriginal business, it would be useful to:

- 1. Define what is meant by a business relationship or partnership.**

This definition may vary depending on the target audience involved (e.g., small vs. large businesses, for-profit vs. not-for-profit organizations) or the focus of the research (e.g., private sector partnerships vs. partnerships with government). However, a more concrete definition will enable research participants to respond with specific examples and research findings will more accurately reflect their understandings of how well parties work together or how parties feel about the business relationship.

- 2. Explore these business relationships using an organizational lens.**

Participants clearly preferred to discuss business relationships from their own perspective. More information is needed to determine what, if any, organizational aspects are relevant to successful Aboriginal partnerships. For example, what formal structures are helpful and what features are most critical? What type of planning is necessary, such as how to address conflicts that arise? If the relevant aspects can be identified from other literature, it may be most effective to measure these through a quantitative survey.

- 3. Consider the pros and cons of existing models of business relationships.**

It is unlikely that the benefits and challenges Aboriginal businesses face in this study are unique to their relationships with non-Aboriginal businesses. This suggests there is value in exploring the potential application of mainstream business partnership models, in whole or in part, to Aboriginal businesses.

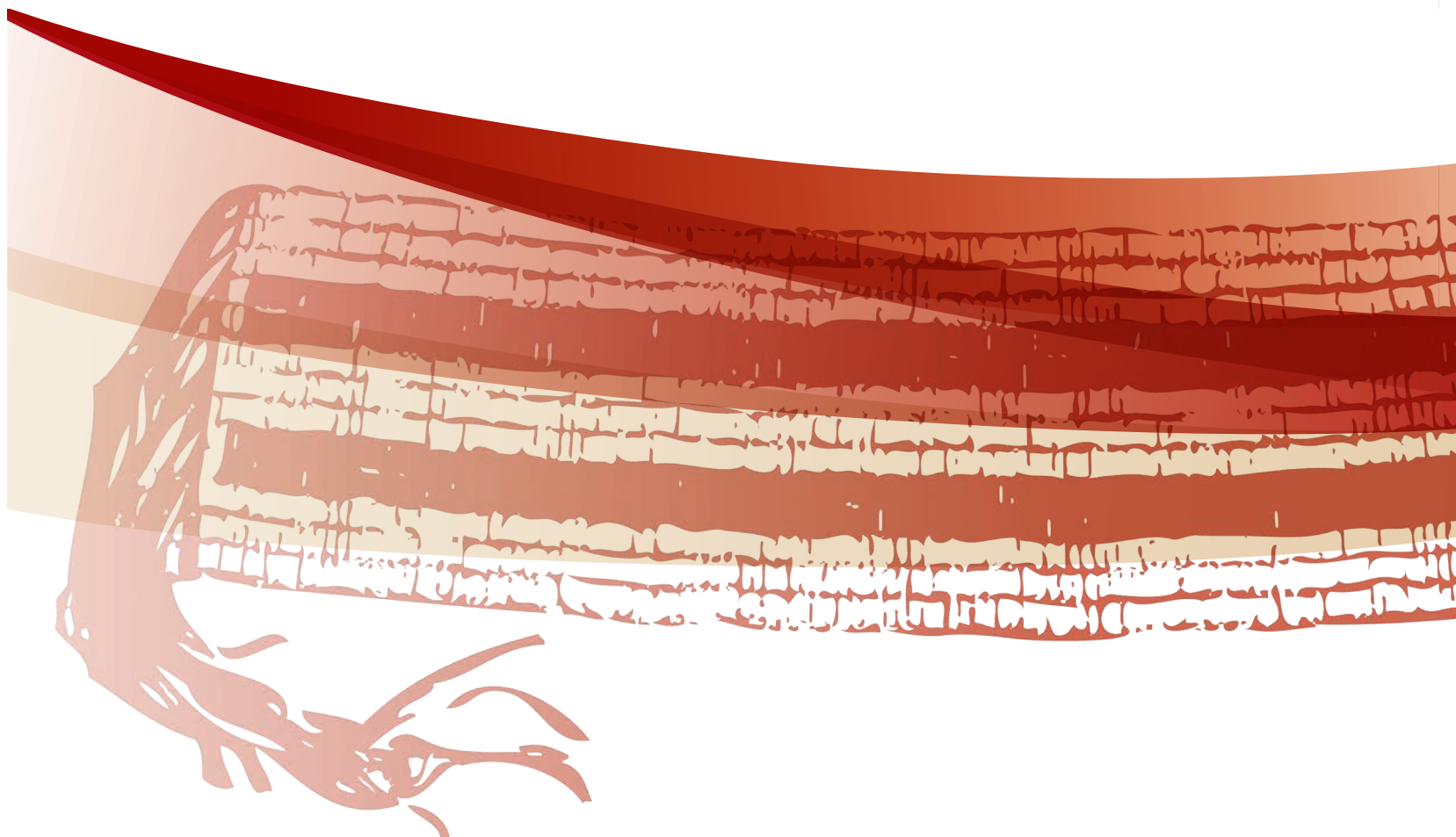
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Relationships and Reciprocity

Exploring Aboriginal Business

Research Report Fall 2015

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