

Best Practices in the  
Progressive Aboriginal  
Relations Program (PAR)

---

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS,  
SHARING KNOWLEDGE**

Progressive Aboriginal  
**RELATIONS**

---

Canadian Council for  
Aboriginal Business 

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

- WHY PROGRESSIVE ABORIGINAL RELATIONS..... 2**
- INTRODUCTION..... 3**
- I. EMPLOYMENT ..... 4**
  - Recruitment
  - Retention
  - Advancement
  - Company Profile: ESS Support Services Worldwide
- II. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ..... 6**
  - Procurement
  - Supply Chain Engagement
  - Building Support for Business Capacity
  - Company Profile: Cameco Corporation
- III. COMMUNITY INVESTMENT ..... 8**
  - Community Investment Initiatives
  - Employee Community Engagement
  - Company Profile: Sodexo Canada
- IV. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT..... 10**
  - Aboriginal Customer Relations
  - Company Profile: BMO Financial Group

## **WHY PROGRESSIVE ABORIGINAL RELATIONS?**

The PAR program encourages companies to evolve and participate in a growing Aboriginal business economy across Canada. The fastest growing segment of Canada's population comes within its Aboriginal community, which is also becoming increasingly urbanized. These four performance areas; employment, business development, community investment and community engagement provide a basis for the PAR program and represent the core ingredients to successful business relations with the Aboriginal community. PAR companies continue to expand upon the initiatives undertaken over the past twelve years of the PAR program's existence. These companies recognize the importance of Aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy and have demonstrated their commitment to working across cultures. Their efforts have resulted in the leading practices that have contributed to PAR companies establishing and improving relationships with the Aboriginal community. The CCAB and the PAR program focus on these past achievements and continue to develop new strategies in order for your business to establish, maintain and achieve excellence with the Aboriginal business community.

***Join the growing number of Canadian companies who recognize the importance of Aboriginal participation in Canada's economy by becoming PAR Certified.***

## INTRODUCTION

The PAR program is organized into four performance areas; Employment, Business Development, Community Investment and Community Engagement. This document provides companies with a sample overview of leading practices that PAR companies have established in these four areas. Additionally, in each section we highlight the innovative approaches that PAR Certified Gold companies are undertaking to raise the bar. For companies new to Aboriginal relations or for companies seeking to improve existing relations, these practices can form the foundation for the development of customized programming for individual companies and industries.

Each company in PAR has a different business model and operates with a different mandate, industry, and location. However, there are essential components that all PAR companies have implemented. These are the proven practices that aid with the creation of mutually beneficial business relationships between any company and the Aboriginal communities they work with. For example, senior leadership commitment to Aboriginal relations is essential. Another example is that as part of planning, PAR companies consult, perform environmental assessments, and engage the community in the development of any initiative or activity. Underpinning these examples, the PAR program stresses that measurement and feedback processes are essential for continual improvement with the growing Aboriginal business community.

# I. EMPLOYMENT

## RECRUITMENT

### *MAKE FINDING ABORIGINAL TALENT A PRIORITY*

Recruitment is the first step in ensuring that companies access Aboriginal talent, whether from the local community or from learning institutions across the country. Word of mouth is a strong recruitment tool; if your Aboriginal employees feel valued and achieve their career objectives with your company, they will tell others in their community. Targeted recruitment also sends a clear message that a company values the contribution that Aboriginal people make to the workplace. Leading PAR companies assess the systemic barriers to Aboriginal hiring and implement practices and policies to address those challenges. An example of this is might be to have a standing committee or focus group comprised of hiring managers, recruitment, HR representatives, Aboriginal employees, and a group of external stakeholders (usually from local Aboriginal communities) in order to provide a forum for discussion and idea generation about how to maximize Aboriginal hiring. PAR companies, depending on their industry, location, and strategy, use a combination of the following activities to build effective recruitment programs and attract a talented Aboriginal workforce:

- Aboriginal talent specialization within a company's human resources team and specialized training for the entire HR team to better understand the Aboriginal community
- Quantifiable hiring targets for all company departments and/or policies that promote "Aboriginal preference" hiring
- Attendance at Aboriginal-focused recruitment events and job fairs with position postings in community and national Aboriginal media and job boards

## RETENTION

### *CREATE A SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT*

Retention of Aboriginal employees is not only important to saving a company the costs of replacing an employee, but it creates ambassadors for the company in Aboriginal communities, attracting additional Aboriginal talent. Reducing employee turnover is dependent on the total work environment a company offers its employees. Employers need to consider the Aboriginal culture and individuals' experience to create a work environment that retains Aboriginal talent. There are a number of different ways that PAR Certified companies learn how to create supportive work environments for their Aboriginal employees. For example:

- Hold routine exit interviews with resigning employees to effectively determine where systemic dissatisfaction exists
- Establish a permanent sub-committee of Aboriginal employees to provide input into attraction and retention initiatives for Aboriginal people
- Refer to relevant annual industry benchmarking surveys with respect to employment and retention to ensure the company's performance is comparable

### *PROVIDE ABORIGINAL-SPECIFIC CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING FOR ALL EMPLOYEES*

Each company's retention strategy requires a combination of programs and activities that fit with its business and is preferred by their Aboriginal employees. The right combination can lead to an Aboriginal retention rate equal to or more than the non-Aboriginal retention rate, notably in communities where Aboriginal people represent a higher percentage in the overall population. Many leading PAR companies provide Aboriginal cultural awareness training for

all employees whether or not they are working in Aboriginal communities. Best practices include:

- Employment policies that address culture and tradition, for example, Aboriginal employees can take time off for traditional practices such as hunting
- Stress, lifestyle and financial management training/ counselling programs are offered to mitigate any personal issues that impact Aboriginal employees
- Elders can play a significant role in counselling and can also teach about First Nations, Metis and Inuit cultural traditions

## **ADVANCEMENT**

### ***MAKE ROOM FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE AT THE TOP***

Advancement is facilitated through career planning and focused company efforts to promote the mobility of Aboriginal employees throughout employment sectors and levels. Advancement is important to turning a job into a career. It helps to create a sense of ownership in the workplace. Many PAR companies have implemented some combination of the following practices to enable the advancement of their Aboriginal employees. For example:

- Supervisor and leadership training is provided to those Aboriginal employees who are candidates for supervisory and management positions
- Company succession and HR planning intentionally considers Aboriginal talent and their career objectives, and offers the opportunities for Aboriginal talent to advance; and
- Aboriginal employees are integrated into succession planning through the development of a pool of high potential Aboriginal employees for assumed succession to leadership positions

## **COMPANY PROFILE**

### ***ESS SUPPORT SERVICES WORLDWIDE***

ESS Support Services recently launched the Aboriginal Manager in Training Program (MIT) designed to increase the number of Aboriginal managers in the company. The MIT Program provides hands-on work experience for selected Aboriginal employees in a diverse variety of ESS Camps located in the Alberta oil sands. Complementary training courses focus on the basic knowledge and skills required for camp management with ESS, including safety orientation, 24/7 training, 7 Essentials of Customer Service and Food Safety. Graduates of the program will be qualified for supervisory or managerial positions within their sites. ESS aims to utilize the MIT Program to provide training to members of partner Aboriginal communities in the areas they operate.

In addition to the specialized MIT program, the Aboriginal Relations team at ESS ensures that all ESS policies and procedures are in line with the PAR commitments relative to employment and hiring. ESS publishes internal job postings of all available jobs, across the country. On a monthly basis a list of postings is distributed to a number of Aboriginal and outreach contacts through Aboriginal Relations. Our hiring hierarchy gives first preference to members of the local community. Where we have a JV with First Nations communities, the First Nations members have first priority in our hiring hierarchy. In regions where we have Aboriginal partners, ESS has maintained and achieved an employment target of 15% annual increase in the number of Aboriginal employees on the ESS payroll. In the last four years, we have experienced an overall increase of over 54%.

## II. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

### PROCUREMENT

Aboriginal businesses are expanding rapidly within urban and remote areas and represent both a growing market and a source of goods and services. Community-based economic development entities represent major sources of goods and services in addition to over 37,000 Aboriginal entrepreneurs operating across Canada in many different sectors. With a young and growing Aboriginal demographic that exhibits strong entrepreneurialism; Aboriginal businesses will become increasingly competitive and represent an important source of business innovation. PAR companies collectively procure millions of dollars annually from Aboriginal-owned businesses. In several cases, a combination of efforts has created a robust and complete Aboriginal supplier network. For example:

- Implementation of preferential procurement practices, such as set-asides and restricted tendering; specific Aboriginal business sourcing as parts of large contracts; single source negotiations; select tenders; and, inclusion of Aboriginal evaluation criteria
- Creation of an Aboriginal supplier database to identify Aboriginal businesses offering required goods and services for placement on vendor distribution lists and advance notification of opportunities to supply the required goods/services to the company
- Specific publicly tendered Requests for Proposals (RFP) and a company's openness to business with the Aboriginal community is promoted at trade-shows, on the web, and through other media consumed by the Aboriginal business community

The most successful companies may have a specialized Aboriginal Procurement Coordinator position in place. This role raises awareness within the organization about how the company can increase the volume of business with the Aboriginal business community. This role would also be responsible for assisting Aboriginal contractors/suppliers in understanding the company's work processes and structure, as well as assisting these businesses in exploring new business opportunities.

### SUPPLY CHAIN ENGAGEMENT

PAR companies have been leaders in creating strong Aboriginal business networks through their own work and through encouraging and supporting others in the supply chain to support Aboriginal business through any of the initiatives noted above. This has been accomplished through the sharing of information among existing partners, collaboration on initiatives that create opportunities for Aboriginal businesses, and importantly, the lead company's expressed commitment to its policies of business development with the Aboriginal community.

In some cases, companies have written agreements that have required that mainstream suppliers or partners establish B2B relationships with Aboriginal businesses, in addition to establishing programs to encourage employment. In these cases, contractors and primary suppliers would be monitored by questionnaire as to their percentage of workforce that is Aboriginal or the amount of goods and services procured through Aboriginal businesses. This form of supply chain engagement is emerging as extremely important and lead companies on these initiatives are at the forefront in educating and supporting their partners' compliance.

## BUILDING SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS CAPACITY

Business support is important to improving the amount of business a company does with Aboriginal suppliers and partners. To nurture the growth of Aboriginal self-employment, CCAB's 2011 National Aboriginal Business Survey identified the need to improve access to capital, create Aboriginal procurement strategies, develop a business plan, and build stronger Aboriginal business networks. Corporations have a huge opportunity to help Aboriginal business in these four areas. In fact, many PAR companies have already improved Aboriginal businesses' prospects for success with the implementation of some of these practices. For example:

- Use of joint venture models that allow a community to partner or provide services to the company's operations, in some cases, with the company providing the financial support for business start-up or expansion with repayment terms back to the company
- Encouragement of collaboration between existing business partners and Aboriginal suppliers by providing introductions and facilitating engagement

## COMPANY PROFILE

### CAMECO CORPORATION

Building business capacity among northern, aboriginal-owned suppliers is an integral business strategy developed by Saskatoon-based Cameco Corporation to broaden economic and social benefits from uranium mining for people living in northern Saskatchewan. Cameco's Northern Preferred Supplier program provides the foundation for more than 700 northerners to gain work with northern-owned companies. These suppliers, particularly contracting companies, supply an array of services to Cameco operations including mine development work, drilling, catering, site maintenance and construction. The Northern Preferred Supplier program gives a leg up to northern vendors bidding on Cameco work while insisting on high standards and fair, competitive pricing. Cameco's business development team keeps in regular contact with approved vendors, outlining upcoming business opportunities. Cameco also works with new ventures to help them with their business plans and suggest how they might partner with more experienced companies to get contracts. In becoming a Northern Preferred Supplier, aboriginal-owned companies are expected to maintain a strong northern and aboriginal hiring component, reporting monthly to Cameco on their hiring success. As a result of the Northern Preferred Supplier program, aboriginal-owned companies which are based in Saskatchewan's far north, collectively do hundreds of millions of dollars annually in business with Cameco.



### III. COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

PAR's performance area of Community Investment (CI) is the commitment of resources (money, time, expertise, or other in-kind supports) that are provided voluntarily to an Aboriginal community or group, often a not-for-profit organization. Like corporate investments generally, CI supports the social interests of Aboriginal communities or groups (i.e. arts, culture, health, education, and housing) and may support community economic development. CI may be truly philanthropic, but can also support the achievement of corporate business objectives. In PAR reporting, it is important to distinguish between a program in CI or an investment in a different PAR performance area. The key distinction is in the extent of connection between the achievement of business objectives and the CI. For example: if a company supports a learning institution that will train Aboriginal people in a certain trade, that CI supports an overall increase in the supply of people trained in that trade. This benefits the business. Without an exclusive linkage between a student or the students and the company, this investment would be considered CI.

If a corporation directly supports a person (or persons) in his or her training, with an agreement that the student is employed by the company following their training, that would be considered an initiative under the PAR performance area of Employment. Following that distinction, scholarships will generally be considered CI even though recipients of funding may at some point in the future join a company's workforce. There is a body of best practices that ought to be integrated into all corporate CI policies and programs and those are the foundation of effective CI with the Aboriginal community. However, effective CI among PAR certified companies is informed by a strong understanding of the Aboriginal community, as distinct from other company stakeholder groups. Companies that work directly with Bands or communities, have some combination of the following activities in place to ensure effective CI programming. For example, the team/group that works most closely with the community plays a role in the identification of opportunities and the granting/gifting of CI support. A CI advisory committee, with representation

from the company and community, collaborate on planning and implementation of a CI plan;

In the case of CI programs in Northern and remote communities, CI initiatives must reflect an understanding of the impacts of development, both positive and negative, including unintended impacts. In Northern and remote communities, the starting place for CI should always be a community needs assessment. Overall, company CI programs, notably those of PAR companies operating in Northern and remote communities, show an increased focus on economic development. Related initiatives build economic capacity in communities and support entrepreneurial development, recognizing that sustainable progress in all communities is tied to both economic and social prosperity. Increasingly, companies may make financial donations to support elements of Aboriginal business start-ups, support the establishment of business associations, or participate in mentorship programs like the CCAB's Aboriginal Business Mentorship Program. Membership in associations like CCAB and other Aboriginal business associations, offer benefits of membership and are considered under the PAR performance area of Community Engagement.

#### COMMUNITY INVESTMENT INITIATIVES

Planning identifies the combination of programs and initiatives that best meet community needs and priorities. Scholarship and bursary support provided directly through the company or through an Aboriginal organization (e.g. Indspire) are extremely common and could be considered standard programming.

PAR companies commit their resources to a diverse range of other community initiatives and through different forms of support, ranging from sponsorships to untied donations, which includes the sponsorships of Pow-wows, other cultural events, sports teams, dinners, auctions and program sponsorships, for example, "stay in school" or nutritional education programs or cultural awareness programs that build bridges between Aboriginal communities and other Canadians. When these represent long-term program commitments (3 – 5 years), they

may be best categorized as partnerships. While PAR does not identify a financial benchmark for total CI in the Aboriginal community, Imagine Canada encourages companies to invest 1% of its pre-tax profit to CI. In corporate CI programs overall, untied gifts of money or outright cash donations, are increasingly uncommon with a trend towards greater involvement of employees in community investment initiatives. This trend is also evident in the Aboriginal community. For example:

- The team/group that works most closely with the community plays a role in the identification of opportunities and the granting/gifting of CI support;
- Processes and policies, including the application or request process, are presented in clear language that considers the literacy and numeracy levels of potential applicants, and are transparent and accessible to the community;
- A CI advisory committee, with representation from the company and community, collaborate on planning and implementation of a CI plan.

## EMPLOYEE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS PART OF CI

Companies are discovering creative ways to work more closely with communities through initiatives that involve their employees. This creative approach offers benefits to communities and to the company and its employees. An example is Employee volunteer programs that provide the opportunity for employees to work directly with community members, for example in a playground build, increasing cross-cultural awareness and building strong relationships between the company and community. Third-party fundraising initiatives offer a company's employees the opportunity to take a hands-on role in raising funds for important community initiatives. The placement of company employees with Aboriginal organizations or providing on-going access to necessary expertise, for example: to help improve the success of community economic development, one PAR company provided economic development consultants to local Aboriginal communities.

## COMPANY PROFILE

### SODEXO CANADA

Sodexo has two main channels for their community investment initiatives. The first is on a case-by-case basis depending on the needs and requests of a community. Many communities approach Sodexo for volunteers as well as for support for things such as locating missing people; community emergencies such as floods and winter storms; and, events. These are truly dependent upon circumstances and unique to each individual community that Sodexo operates in. Sodexo assesses each request on an ongoing, case-by-case basis.

The second channel Sodexo uses for CI is Servathon. Servathon is Sodexo's most important initiative dedicated to making a difference in the fight against hunger in the local communities that they operate in. Servathon takes many forms – be it fundraisers, volunteering at local food banks or food agencies, canned food drives, rolling up your sleeves to make fresh salads and sandwiches at a soup kitchen or making payroll contributions to the Sodexo Foundation which are then matched by the company. Servathon is about mobilizing its employees – it's not just about money or food. It is a month where Sodexo employees join forces to raise awareness about hunger through various activities in the local communities. It builds awareness amongst employees and provides a team-building experience within the community. The basic idea behind Servathon is to have as many of Sodexo's 10,000 employees as possible go out into their communities sometime during that month to fight hunger. A strong showing also inspires others in the community to join in and help or to assist their own relief organizations. The impact of thousands of Sodexo employees from across Canada, joined in a common cause, is powerful. Sodexo's employee's level of commitment makes a memorable and important contribution to its communities.

## IV. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### ENGAGE EARLY; ENGAGE OFTEN

Although third parties, such as corporations, do not have a legal obligation to consult Aboriginal groups who may be impacted by corporate activities, many companies have come to recognize that it is good business practice to engage with Aboriginal communities within their sphere of influence. In order to define how these companies engage Aboriginal communities, they often create a clear policy that outlines the company's commitments and philosophy. For example:

- A company may develop the policy that compensation occurs when project development interferes with trapping or other traditional practices
- The company engages and consults Aboriginal organizations, Aboriginal governments, elders, community members, Aboriginal businesses, and training institutions
- The company uses the resources from the local community for archaeological monitoring and traditional use studies required for environmental assessments of new capital projects

### ABORIGINAL CUSTOMER RELATIONS

Aboriginal customer relations offer customer service in Aboriginal languages, educating employees about how to conduct business with Aboriginal clients, or providing Aboriginal specific services. Some PAR companies have made an effort to provide appropriate Aboriginal customer relations. For example, a company has an Aboriginal relations team whose responsibility it is to ensure that there is a constant open communication stream with Aboriginal communities and the Aboriginal customer services team is staffed primarily by Aboriginal employees focused on providing service to Aboriginal customers and developing business partnership ventures with the Aboriginal community. This allows the company to serve an Aboriginal community for its team members. This guide includes topics such as overview of cultural topics, key products and services unique to Aboriginal clients, a summary of the Aboriginal Market and a list of resources.

### COMPANY PROFILE

#### *BMO FINANCIAL GROUP*

On reserve BMO branches are staffed with Aboriginal people who can converse in the language of the Nation's members. On National Aboriginal Day, the branch will close or remain open on June 21<sup>st</sup> and is based on the decision of each individual community. Senior management holds town halls, and departments and individual teams hold meetings on a regular basis. BMO's primary survey is the Annual Employment Survey (AES), which is available to all permanent employees online and is accessible using adaptive technologies. When employees leave the bank voluntarily, BMO conducts exit interview surveys. For example, in addition to questions about their reasons for leaving, employees seek feedback on how well we are doing in creating an equitable, diverse and inclusive culture. Employees have access to Employee Relations to consult with for disputes/concerns. Employees also have an escalation process if they are not satisfied with the response/resolution at first step. Information about complaints is reported to OSFI, Financial Ombudsman and other regulatory bodies as required by law. All information is confidential the privacy of information is protected.

*CCAB hopes that this overview of leading practices in Aboriginal Relations has provided you with insight into building stronger relationships with BMO Financial Group variety of opportunities that support you in achieving your Aboriginal relations goals and objectives and PAR standing.*

**For comments, feedback, or advice, please email [par@ccab.com](mailto:par@ccab.com) or call 416-961-8663.**