



Meaningful engagement with Indigenous businesses

CHALLENGES

Aboriginal Procurement Champions highlighted several challenges to meaningfully engaging with Indigenous businesses:

- **Barriers for Indigenous Suppliers**

- Certificates such as safety, security, insurance and other requirements can be expensive and complicated.
- Some may be unable to meet the supply requirements of major companies and engage in national distribution.
- A lack of follow-up from corporations after registering for supplier portals.
- Difficulties navigating corporations and identifying relevant procurement managers.

- **Finding Indigenous suppliers**

- It can be difficult to find relevant suppliers, know where to focus efforts and do business in an intentional and effective way.

- **Decentralized and manual processes**

- Corporations can have many procurement teams – national, regional, etc – and often lack a centralized system where suppliers can enter their information. This can result in procurement managers and teams being inundated with opportunities and lacking the capacity to follow-up with Indigenous suppliers.
- Procurement processes may also be very manual in regard to outreach and follow-up which poses challenges to effectively building relationships.

- **Internal communication and turnover**

- It can be difficult ensuring continuous internal education on cultures, traditions, and building out understandings of Indigenous procurement and engagement. This is integral, particularly with large companies, given the need for a focused stance and message for Indigenous suppliers they are working with.
- There is often a lack of pass-off when turnover occurs with Indigenous procurement leads, resulting in the loss of relationships with Indigenous suppliers and organizations.

KEY TIPS

Aboriginal Procurement Champions had three key tips to share for organizations wanting to meaningfully engage with Indigenous businesses:

1. **Involve leadership** – leadership must be on board from the beginning and have a regular seat at the table.
2. **Know why** – individuals within an organization need to know what's in it for them - why they are engaging with Indigenous suppliers, have a clear message and be able to action on that message.
3. **Ensure clarity** – have clear objectives and those will bring focus for key stakeholders, internally or externally.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES

Here are some best practices used by Aboriginal Procurement Champions that can and should be used across Indigenous procurement processes to meaningfully engage with Indigenous businesses:

Gather information – hold roundtables, engagement sessions and other conversations to hear about what your organization can do better to support Indigenous suppliers. These should involve suppliers from different backgrounds and levels of expertise, as well as those that have been successful and unsuccessful.

Tailor your approach – examine what your customers will purchase, what your organization needs on the back end, and work to understand the nuances and different considerations involved in working with different Indigenous businesses and communities.

Plan it out – analyze where the opportunities lie with Indigenous businesses in your supply chain. This should involve conducting market research and consulting with Indigenous businesses to understand their current realities.

Be creative – If an Indigenous business' offerings don't fit your organization's needs, work to engage with them in other ways like providing training, connecting them with clients that they can work with, or placing specific orders.

Build a network or supplier diversity ecosystem – help to facilitate networking opportunities, mentorship and the bringing of diverse perspectives to the table. Look beyond just engagement and dollar spend, work to create a supplier diversity ecosystem.

Foster an inclusive culture and meaningful connections – work to foster a culture and mindset of serving diverse suppliers and representing the communities your organization serves.

Look locally – focus on the local level, build community connections and work with local businesses to involve them. This could involve the establishment of local buying programs or turning large national contracts into several smaller regional contracts.

Focus on economic reconciliation – strive to take a holistic approach to supporting Indigenous businesses and communities. This should involve working to support economic, educational, employment, social, and other positive outcomes.

“The tide rises all of the boats.”

Make it easy – establish and streamline RFP processes and supplier diversity portals.

Set an example – advocate for the importance of economic reconciliation, be a thought leader and inspire other firms to do similar things along the way.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES *(continued from previous page)*

Establish connections – it’s important to establish a human connection and reach out to suppliers directly, have them sign up on the portal and ensure follow-up.

“We need to work together to grow”

Break it up – unbundle contracts where possible to provide opportunities for local businesses and support growth. This could involve breaking up large, national contracts into several, small regional contracts where feasible.

Play to your strengths – look at what your company can achieve and try to do it.

Maintain momentum – ensure pass-off when turnover occurs with Indigenous procurement leads and develop succession plans.

Engage and demonstrate a presence – the Aboriginal procurement marketplace is a two-way street – there’s a need on both sides to update information and include RFPs and other opportunities from Champions in the news feeds.

Learn from others – strive to learn from the best practices of others in the space and find mentors for how to improve Indigenous procurement efforts. See what practices cross industries and tweak and apply them.

Build your group of advocates and allies – most supplier diversity leads can’t do it all, but they can find others to help along the way.

