

BRIEFING REPORT

Chiefs Of Ontario (COO) – First Nations Employment Services Engagement
January 2023

Purpose

The purpose of this briefing is to summarize the information gathered from an engagement session with the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) First Nations Employment Services Technical Table members, and Indigenous organizations across Ontario that provide employment services. This includes:

- common needs, concerns, challenges, strengths, and best practices of First Nation employment service providers;
- key principles for a First Nations employment services model for First Nations Peoples in Ontario both on and off reserve; and
- proposed next steps toward the design, development, and implementation of a First Nations employment services model.

The meeting was held in-person in Toronto, Ontario on January 16th, 2023, with some participants joining online via zoom.

The purpose of this meeting was to bring First Nations organizations together to co-develop common principles to inform the implementation of an integrated First Nations employment services delivery model for Ontario. Specific objectives included:

- ✓ understanding the background and context of the employment services transformation and the current Phase of implementation;
- ✓ hearing from communities and organizations that have implemented their own approaches about challenges and best practices;
- ✓ identifying needs, concerns, challenges, and best practices for implementation in First Nations in Ontario;
- ✓ co-developing principles—based on these needs, challenges, and priorities—for implementation in First Nations in Ontario; and
- ✓ determining next steps for the table.

Background

- In early 2019, the Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities (MTCU) announced plans to integrate employment services into Employment Ontario, including those outlined in table 1 (Government of Ontario, 2022).

Employment Ontario (EO) Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD)	Ontario Works Employment Assistance (OW) Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)	Ontario Disability Support Program Employment Support (ODSP) Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)
<p>For everyone, including individuals and employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suite of over 30 programs and services delivered by government or third parties. • \$1 billion+ invested annually in EO programs and services. • Some social assistance clients served through EO. • Primarily funded through Federal Labour Market Transfer Agreement. 	<p>For unemployed or underemployed people in temporary financial need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered by Ontario Works delivery partners (municipalities and First Nations and/or contracted third parties). • Some clients may be referred to Employment Ontario for direct support in finding employment. • Provincially and municipally funded. 	<p>For eligible individuals with disabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered by community-based providers, including for-profit and non-profit providers. • Provincially funded.

Table 1. Ontario Employment Services.

Adapted from: Government of Ontario, 2022, p. 5.

- This new delivery model creates direct relationships between the ministry and service system managers (SSM), which support service providers in their catchment area(s) (Government of Ontario, 2022)
- Ontario has stated that the purpose is to make employment services more efficient, streamlined, and outcomes-focused (Government of Ontario, 2022)
- Since 2019, Ontario has been implementing the EST across the province by catchment area
- EST is leading to massive job losses totalling \$1 million and hundreds of millions in losses to First Nations in programming
- First Nations across Ontario expressed concerns and objected to the imposition of a provincial system and one-size-fits-all approach
- In response, the Government of Ontario:
 - confirmed in writing that the EST will not be enacted on First Nations;
 - conceded to First Nations’ calls to design and implement their employment services approach both on and off reserve
- As a result, COO struck a technical table on First Nations employment services to work with First Nations employment service providers across Ontario to design an employment services approach for First Nations Peoples in Ontario (both on and off reserve) over the next two years.

Engagement Summary

Elder:

- David Root, Elder, Saugeen First Nation

Facilitators:

- Ashley Sisco, Owner & CEO, Sisco & Associates Consulting Services Inc.
- Corall McNickle, Research Associate, Sisco & Associates Consulting Services Inc.

Panelist Presenters:

- Nancy Martin, Executive Director & Vickie Labranche, Special Projects Manager, Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training
- Russell Roundpoint, Executive Director, Akwesasne Career & Employment Support Services
- Laurie Froman, CEO Grand River Employment and Training
- John DeGiacomo, Executive Director, Anishinabek Employment and Training Services
- Glenda Maracle, Executive Director, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
- Elizabeth Richer, Director, Niigaaniin Services

Participants

First Nation / Organization	Representative & Position
Akwesasne Career & Employment Support Services	✓ Russell Roundpoint, Executive Director
Alderville First Nation	✓ Olivia English, Economic Development Manager ✓ Joanne Smoke, Manager
Anishinabek Employment & Training Services (AETS)	✓ John DeGiacomo, Executive Director ✓ Heather McMillan, Consultant
Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle (ALFDC)	✓ Glenda Maracle, Executive Director ✓ Steve Williams, Independent Representative
Anishinabek Nation	✓ James R. Marsden, RDGCC ✓ Polly Bobiwash, Director
Apitipi Anicinapek Nation	✓ Tina Lacourciere, Director of Social Development ✓ Corinne Watters, Human Resources
Chiefs of Ontario (COO)	✓ Ted Nolan, Political Advisor ✓ Charlotte Commanda, Chief of Staff ✓ Arvind Sharma, Director of Economic Development ✓ Stephen Kanagaratnam, Policy Analyst ✓ Jey Parkeerathan, Policy Analyst ✓ Alexis Kyyd, Health Policy Analyst ✓ Lance Copegog, Youth Coordinator

Grand River Employment and Training (GREAT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Laurie Froman, CEO ✓ Jordon Myers, Team Leader ✓ Peggy Claveau, Team Leader
Hiawatha First Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jeff Loucks, AIAI Representative
Huronian Area Aboriginal Management Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Carlene Keeshig, Special Project Coordinator ✓ Stella Pilessey, LDM Coordinator
Independent First Nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Diane Maracle, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs
Mamaweswen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yvonne Lafreniere, Employment Development Officer ✓ Natalie Chiblow, Employment & Training Coordinator
Mamaweswen, The North Shore Tribal Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Annie Austin, Employment Training Manager
Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Nancy Martin, Executive Director ✓ Vickie Labranche, Special Projects Manager
Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Samantha Maracle, Ontario Works Administrator
Mushkegowuk Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Carol Turner, Team Manager
Niigaaniin Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Elizabeth Richer, Director ✓ Tasha Becker, Policy Analyst
Office of the Grand Chief at Nishnawbe Aski Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jeff Werner, Senior Policy Analyst
Ogemawahi Tribal Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Guy Monague, Employment Officer ✓ Andrea Edgar, Employment & Training Coordinator
Oneida Nation of the Thames Community Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lorrie Antone, Administration Officer
Ontario Native Welfare Administrators' Association (ONWAA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Jessica Nadjiwon, Executive Director ✓ Muskaan Premji, Policy and Research Analyst
Saugeen First Nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ David Root, Elder
Shooniyaa Wa-Biitong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Marie Seymour, Executive Director ✓ Glenda Henderson, Program Officer ✓ Shirley Kelly, Program Supervisor
Six Nations Ontario Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Sandy Porter, Director
Tyendinaga Mohawk Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ R. Don Maracle, Chief
Wahta Mowhawk Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ariel Berwick, Youth Coordinator

Agenda Items

1. Elder Opening - David Root, Elder, Saugeen First Nation
2. Meeting Purpose, Agenda & Introductions
3. Employment Services Transformation Background
4. Panel: First Nation Employment Service Approaches – Challenges & Best Practices
5. Facilitated Discussion: Building Principles for First Nation Employment Services Model
6. Next Steps & Closing Circle
7. Elder Closing - David Root, Elder, Saugeen First Nation

Discussion Summary

The following summary details the concerns, challenges, needs, strengths, and best practices described by participants during the engagement session in relation to designing an employment services approach for First Nations Peoples in Ontario (both on and off reserve). Please note any facts have been provided by participants and have not been independently verified.

Concerns

1. **Funding & Job Losses**

Employment and training funding for First Nations service providers is already inadequate for the fast growing First Nations population, especially because of post-secondary gaps, and the merging of ISETPs and OW will only contribute to funding and job losses as it has with the EST for the general population.

- The Employment Services Transformation (EST) is leading to massive job losses totalling \$1 million and hundreds of millions in losses to First Nations in programming.
- First Nations are the fastest growing population and the need for funding still outweighs the amount(s) of funding received/provided.
- First Nations service providers do not receive enough funding and are forced to stretch their funds to deliver what programs and services they can.
- Ontario is focused on its own outcomes / results in terms of funding, with penalties being assigned when these targets are not met.
- ISETP and OW mandates overlap which may lead to further reductions in funding if services are merged.
- Indigenous entrepreneurs starting their own businesses require sponsors when accessing start-up grants.
- Opportunities exist in housing development, however not all resources are provided to fill this need.
- Gaps in funding for Secondary and Post-Secondary education continue to impact the level of need for Employment Services.
 - Education funding gaps should be addressed to reduce future need of Employment Services.

2. Lack of Recognition of First Nations Jurisdiction

Government of Ontario tried to roll EST out to First Nations but ultimately agreed to support First Nations in developing their own approach through this table. However, there is concern about non-Indigenous service providers servicing First Nations, and First Nations OW not being able to service First Nations members off reserve. Some SSMs are reaching out to First Nations to support them in servicing First Nations clients.

- Government of Ontario attempted to impose EST on First Nations populations.
 - First Nations opposed and the Government of Ontario has agreed that First Nations can have two years to develop their own approach through the technical table at the COO.
- Non-Indigenous SSMs are bidding on opportunities to provide services to First Nation populations.
- As the EST is being rolled out, OW SSMs are reaching out for support in serving First Nation clients.
- First Nation members on and off reserve are addressed differently when they should be addressed the same in agreements, as they are all First Nations individuals and should be served by their Nations.
 - First Nations OW providers are unable to provide services to members off reserve while ISETAs serve both on and off reserve populations.
- With EST rolling out in Ontario, changes may be made to OW role and responsibilities which may impact First Nations delivery through OW.

3. Imposing Provincial Approach that Doesn't Work for First Nations

Ontario assumed that there was a need for the EST across the province, but did not consult with First Nations, so it is unclear whether the current system for First Nations needs to change. What is clear is that the EST does not work for First Nations. First Nations have unique needs and contexts that influence best practice for employment service delivery, and there is diversity from one community to the next that must be accounted for.

- It is unclear whether First Nations need an employment service change.
 - First Nations were not consulted to determine whether EST was needed.
 - Government made an assumption that because Ontario needed EST, so did First Nations.
- The EST model does not meet the needs of First Nations, as it was developed through the lens of serving municipalities.
 - Provincial targets and outcomes do not match those of First Nations.
 - For First Nations, employability is not just about skills and goals, it involves the wholistic person and where they are coming from.

- First Nations Service Providers do not want to compete for contracts.
 - First Nations and First Nation services providers are forced to compete amongst each other for funding and opportunity to deliver programs and services.
 - First Nation service providers are forced to compete with non-Indigenous service providers to deliver programs and services to First Nation communities and members.
- ISETAs are not able to provide the same range of services available through OW (i.e., Crisis support, heating, mould removal, etc.), so capacity must be accounted for.

Challenges

1. *Accessibility of Employment Services*

While employment services in Ontario are accessible through municipalities, First Nations Peoples both on and off reserve experience challenges accessing employment programs and services delivered through their First Nations. First Nations in the North face unique barriers when accessing employment services.

- Both public and personal transportation is an access barrier for First Nations Peoples which prevents access to employment and employment services both on and off reserves.
 - There is a lack of public transportation on First Nations reserves and from major urban centres to First Nations reserves.
 - First Nations Peoples living off reserve often do not have reliable access to personal transportation.
- Lack of reliable, high-speed Internet connectivity on reserve hinders access to employment services and employment.
- Lack of affordable housing is a barrier to accessing employment and employment services.
 - Lack of affordable housing on reserve prevents access to employment and employment services for those living off reserve.
 - Lack of affordable housing off reserve prevents access to meaningful employment for those living on reserve who wish to seek employment and employment services outside of their First Nation.
- Northern First Nations face challenges due to lack of industry in the North.
 - This general lack of local industry leads to fewer employment opportunities in Northern communities.
 - Existing opportunities in the North come with undue barriers to accessing employment services and funding, which require greater advocacy.
- There is not enough information reaching First Nations Peoples living off reserve about how to access on-reserve services from their First Nation.

2. Capacity to Provide the Full Range of Employment Services

The Government of Ontario has recognized First Nations' rights to control the development and delivery of employment services for their members. However, First Nations service providers are not afforded the same capacity as provincial programs to offer the full range of services needed.

- ISETAs do not have the capacity to provide the full range of employment services their provincial partners offer.
 - The ISETP does not have the same capacity as OW to respond to crisis situations or use discretionary funding.
 - Service providers (both ISETP and OW) need more qualified employees.
- Those ISETAs that mostly service off reserve members lack the capacity to provide Indigenized programs and services.

Needs

1. Control Over Development and Implementation

First Nations must be afforded complete control over the full range of Employment Services for their members, without distinction (i.e., on and off reserve). Programs and services must be by First Nations, for First Nations as they know their communities and are best positioned to meet their needs.

- First Nations Employment Services must be designed and developed by and for First Nations and their members.
- First Nations must have control over their program and service offerings in order to meet community needs, ensure cultural inclusion and prevent barriers.
 - First Nations must be able to determine when and how employment services are to be implemented for their communities.

2. Flexibility of Employment Services

While First Nations share many similarities, they are each distinct Nations with unique cultures, circumstances and needs, which must be accounted for in the design and delivery of employment services. While an overarching model may be necessary for continuity, it must remain flexible enough to be tailored to each distinct First Nation and to meet the needs of all members in a meaningful way.

- Employment programs and services must be flexible to meet the needs of the 133 distinct First Nations in Ontario.
 - Each First Nation is unique and has its own set of needs, circumstances, and delivery models.
- Consideration must be made for the unique circumstances faced in the North, as well as rural and remote Nations.
- Programs and services offered on reserve must allow enough flexibility to reach members residing off reserve.

3. *Language Inclusion in Employment Services*

First Nations languages must be included in the provision of employment services to promote healing and reconciliation.

- Service delivery in First Nations languages promotes languages revitalization.
- First Nations languages revitalization is linked with First Nations well-being.
- The promotion of First Nations languages revitalization, including through programs and services, is an important component of reconciliation.

4. *Engaging Youth in Employment Services*

As engaging youth in employment services is seen as a good way to reduce future reliance on employment programs, programs and services must include options geared toward youth.

- Youth are the future and so employment services should be proactive in engaging youth.
- Youth who are engaged in employment programming early on may be less likely to need employment service in the future.
- Employment programs can attract youth by offering recreational programs and activities, like sports.

Strengths & Best Practices

Participants agreed that using existing First Nations' best practices to inform their approach to First Nation Employment Services is desired.

1. *Collaboration*

Building collaborative partnerships is seen as a foundational best practice among First Nations. Relationships are key in providing services effectively and being able to utilize resources to their maximum capacity. First Nations can be stronger together; relationships among Nations enable enhanced advocacy in attaining necessary support for their programs. Collaborative partnerships further provide a forum to exchange ideas and best practices, allowing First Nations to move forward with a well-informed approach.

- Collaborative partnerships and relationship building between First Nations, Service Providers, and Federal and Provincial Governments are key to designing and implementing successful programs and services.
 - The First Nation Job Fund (FNJF) was identified as a success story for this type of collaboration to the benefit of all involved.
- Sharing best practices and successful models between First Nations and Service Providers across Ontario, while being mindful of First Nation diversity, promotes successful development and application of employment services.
- Collaborating with experts to determine potential next steps can support First Nations in taking an evidence-based approach.

- When First Nations collaborate to improve access to resources, they have a stronger voice for advocacy.
- When service providers collaborate to assess the service landscape they are better positioned to ensure that there are no gaps and that diversity considerations are accommodated.

2. Focus on Community

First Nations service providers are inherently connected to and share a commitment to the communities they serve and, as such, are best able to meet their needs. This connectedness, paired with their focus on people and community, allow First Nations service providers to respond to community needs.

- First Nations service providers maintain a focus on the community(ies) they serve.
- Programs and services are provided in ways that best meet the needs of community members.
- First Nations service providers prioritize the needs and well being of the individuals they serve.

3. Holistic Approach

First Nations providers deliver employment services using a holistic approach. They strive to meet client needs in employment readiness, beyond the typical employment service provisions. This holistic approach realizes that there are many areas of life which impact employability and employment outcomes, and that all of these areas must be addressed to best support clients.

- First Nations service providers maintain a commitment to working from a holistic point of view, addressing all areas that may impact employment – not just providing mainstream employment and training services.
- First Nations service providers recognize that many factors impact employability and attainment, involving comprehensive individual well-being.
 - First Nations service providers ‘share’ clients through referrals to address as many needs as possible.

Principles of a First Nations Approach to Employment Services¹

Participants shared the following Principles that should be considered and included moving forward with the development of First Nations employment services.



FOR FIRST NATIONS, BY FIRST NATIONS

- First Nations employment services should be developed and delivered by First Nations individuals and organizations, as they understand the needs of their communities and members best and can provide offerings in a culturally appropriate way.
- First Nations employment service providers require the full control to deliver the full range of employment services First Nations require.



COMMUNITY DRIVEN PROGRAMS & SERVICES

- First Nations employment services should be driven by their home Nation (from which the services are provided) to best account for the diversity among Nations and each Nations' unique needs; a 'one size fits all' approach will not suffice.



CLIENT-FOCUSED DELIVERY

- First Nations employment services should meet each client where they are and consider the variety of needs each individual has.
- Some First Nations social program providers in other jurisdictions have used the term "relative" in place of client; while participants did not raise this during the meeting, it might be worth consideration as it seems to align with the relational approach.



HOLISTIC APPROACH

- First Nations employment services should take a holistic approach, including all aspects of life which may impact individual employability.
- This could include programming to engage youth and inclusion of First Nations languages to promote revitalization.

¹ **Please note:** First Nations employment service providers require a parity plus approach to funding to implement this approach. They require the same supports as mainstream providers to provide the full range of services needed, plus additional funds to address the unique needs of First Nations. This includes providing a more holistic approach, and addressing the needs in Northern, rural, and remote locations.



FLEXIBILITY

- First Nations employment services should remain flexible to ensure they can be tailored to each specific Nations' needs, serve populations both on and off reserve, and meet individual needs outside of typical employment service offerings.



COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT

- First Nations employment service providers should collaboratively assess both the service landscape(s) and organizational capacity(ies) to ensure services are provided consistently and effectively.

Recommendations



Develop a clear shared understanding of the work of the COO Technical Table on First Nations Employment Services, by:

- developing a terms of reference for the COO Technical Table on First Nations Employment Services, as well as a membership list; and
- developing a strategic action plan with clear impact statements, strategic directions, goals, champions, timeframes, and metrics. (The plan will aim to ensure the Table's continuity through funding acquisition and mobilize it toward advocacy and action in driving the development and delivery of the proposed First Nations Employment Services approach).



Keep First Nations Employment Service Providers informed of the work of the COO Technical Table on First Nations Employment Services by:

- developing and distributing an information package to First Nations Service Providers, including the Table's purpose, background, and the timeline of the two (2) year EST engagement process; and
- developing and implementing a communications protocol for sharing information among the Technical Table, COO Chiefs Assembly, the Government of Ontario, and the First Nations Employment Service Providers.

Next Steps

Moving forward, participants shared a desire to focus on planning, consolidating and sharing relevant information, and convening as quickly as possible to continue this work. These next steps will support an informed, structured, timely approach to the development and implementation of First Nation employment services.

1. Organize another meeting to be held online as soon as possible, ideally within thirty (30) days.
2. Circulate an information package in advance of the meeting to be shared among First Nations Service Providers, including the Table's purpose, background, and the timeline of the two (2) year EST engagement process.

References

Government of Ontario. (February, 2022). Employment Service Transformation (EST) Input from stakeholders in the Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB) region. <https://fnetb.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/REPORT-STAKEHOLDERS-INPUT-FROM-FEB-17-2022-EMPLOYMENT-SERVICE-TRANSFORMATION.pdf>

MTCU. (February 12, 2019). Employment Ontario Partner Memo. <https://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/est-memo-eo-network-es-transformation-en.pdf>