
The Indigenous Adult and
Higher Learning Association
(IAHLA)

FRAMEWORK



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
INTRODUCTION.....	4
INDIGENOUS ADULT AND HIGHER LEARNING ASSOCIATION.....	6
IAHLA INSTITUTES.....	9
STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT.....	13
A Funding	
B Accredited Courses	
C Cross-Cultural Outreach	
D Technology	
E Research	
F Trades Training	
G Mobile Training	
H Leadership	
CONCLUSION.....	20
APPENDIX 1: IAHLA Members.....	21
APPENDIX 2: Selected Data on Member Institutes from IAHLA Data Collection Project Year One Final Report.....	22
MAP of IAHLA Member Institutes.....	23
REFERENCES.....	24

INDIGENOUS ADULT AND HIGHER LEARNING ASSOCIATION

FRAMEWORK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) is the representative organization for a wide variety of Aboriginal controlled adult and post-secondary educational institutes across British Columbia. The community-based institutes offer a broad spectrum of courses and programs that include: college and university programs leading to certificates, diplomas, and degrees; Adult Basic Education leading to the Adult Dogwood Diploma for secondary school completion; language instruction; occupation specific training and upgrading; and a broad spectrum of lifespan learning programs that support Aboriginal people, communities, languages, and cultures.

None of the thirty-one Aboriginal controlled institutes are private, for-profit operations and only two of the institutes – Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) in Merritt, and the Institute for Indigenous Government – All Nations Institute (IIG) in Burnaby – are part of the provincial public post-secondary education system.

All IAHLA institutes are governed by Board members drawn from the Aboriginal community, and as such they are sensitive both to the needs of their communities and to the constraints that too often prevent Aboriginal adult learners from fulfilling their potential.

The community and cultural sensitivity of these institutes makes learning more relevant for Aboriginal adult learners. Many Aboriginal learners who struggle in public and private post-secondary settings succeed at Aboriginal controlled adult education institutes. The success of these students carries a major economic benefit not only for the successful students, but also for their families, employers, communities, the province, and the country.

IAHLA members also bring post-secondary education to remote communities. For the most part, IAHLA institutes work in partnership with public institutes to deliver certificate, diploma and degree programming which has been adapted to make the curriculum relevant to the learners and community. Supporting those efforts is a positive, proactive investment in social and economic community development.

Yet while Aboriginal controlled institutes are achieving significant success with their adult learners, they are doing so in spite of enormous challenges.

Aboriginal controlled institutes occupy a distinctive sector in post-secondary education, but the majority of them are struggling for recognition for the excellent work they do. Few Aboriginal institutes have access to secure, long-term funding; many are funded on a course-by-course basis, sometimes for only three months at a time. Base funding to cover

administrative costs and capital funding to provide safe, healthy learning environments is generally unavailable. Many of the institutes began operation over 10 years ago in substandard facilities that are now in urgent need of repair.

IAHLA is determined to bring recognition to Aboriginal controlled institutes as the third sector in British Columbia's adult and post-secondary education system. Once recognized as an important component of the higher education system, Aboriginal institutes can do the following.

- Contribute to the revitalization of First Nations languages and cultures
- Help narrow the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal attainment in education

- Work in partnership with the public and private sectors
- Participate in the economic development of First Nations communities
- Develop accredited courses and programs to be shared across multiple sites
- Take advantage of advances in educational and communications technology
- Collaborate to more effectively use both existing and new resources

This FRAMEWORK outlines the current situation of IAHLA and Aboriginal institutes. It also proposes ways to work collaboratively to improve the educational and economic success of Aboriginal adult learners and their communities.

INTRODUCTION



The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) was formed in 2003 by adult learning centres and post-secondary education institutes in British Columbia that are controlled by Aboriginal boards. This unique sector of adult and post-secondary education has achieved a remarkable record of success for its students and is emerging as a new and dynamic force in the campaign to overcome the constraints that have hindered adult Aboriginal learners.

As a relatively new and developing Association, IAHLA has prepared this Framework to share information about the organization and to outline its planned approaches for continued and expanded success. The Framework will also be useful to both the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education (MAVED) during its 2006/07 review of all aspects of post-secondary education in BC, and to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) as it develops an Education Policy Framework for all First Nations education systems.

Working together through IAHLA, Aboriginal controlled adult and post-secondary education institutes are striving to do the following:

- Increase recognition of the institutes' unique and successful approaches to community-based, culturally relevant learning
- Join public and private institutes as the third sector of the adult and post-secondary education community in BC
- Participate in existing initiatives such as the Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Fund
- Interface with First Nations' efforts to build economic and social development capacities
- Attract adequate base and program funding to allow for long term planning
- Gain recognition and accreditation for more of the courses and programs they provide
- Coordinate the development and accreditation of courses and programs across the sector and share accreditation with other institutes
- Develop and share curricula and credentials, particularly in First Nations language instruction and accreditation

- Collaborate to more effectively use existing resources and increase opportunities for adult learners
- Develop courses and programs that can be offered across multiple sites
- Share successful approaches with public and private sector institutes that want to improve the success of their Aboriginal adult learners
- Make specializations at First Nations institutes accessible to other institutes
- Provide lifespan learning opportunities for Aboriginal people and communities
- Make innovative use of the emerging communications and learning technologies, both to provide more educational choices to adult Aboriginal learners and to network among the institutes
- Provide Aboriginal adult learners with an Aboriginal option when choosing an educational institute
- Qualify as degree-granting institutes

The constituency of IAHLA members extends to all corners of the Province of British Columbia. With a population of approximately 170,000, First Nations people make up about 5% of the provincial population¹. First Nations people 18 years and over numbered more than 105,000 (63% of the First Nations population) in 2001. These adults are all potential clients, who are calling on Aboriginal institutes represented by IAHLA for lifespan learning of all kinds.

The educational participation and graduation rates for Aboriginal people, although improving, continue to lag behind the general population. For the 24 to 64 age group, 40% of Aboriginal people have not completed any educational credentials, compared to 21% of all BC residents. Less than 8% of Aboriginal people have graduated from university, compared to 24% of the general population.² Strengthening the community-based, culturally relevant programs offered by Aboriginal institutes will go far in improving this situation.

¹ BC Stats, Statistical Profile of Aboriginal Peoples 2001, www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/cen01/abor/tot_abo.pdf

² Ibid

THE INDIGENOUS ADULT AND HIGHER LEARNING ASSOCIATION



A DESCRIPTION

IAHLA is an alliance of adult learning programs and post-secondary educational institutes governed by Aboriginal groups and communities. Recognizing their mutual interests and common obstacles, the Aboriginal adult and post-secondary educational institutes formed IAHLA to speak with a collective voice.

The Association receives administrative support from the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and in 2006/07 it began receiving base funding from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

IAHLA members have developed extensive relationships with other Aboriginal organizations and with the larger post-secondary community. Those relationships will continue to grow, helping the institutes to develop and share credentials, programs and courses -- including undergraduate and post-graduate courses and programs in areas of special interest and expertise. IAHLA and its members include highly qualified specialists who maintain and

build friendly relations in the post-secondary community.

B VISION

The Vision of IAHLA is:

To support quality post-secondary educational institutions that leverage Indigenous language, culture and knowledge to create adaptable, competent, skilled citizens who are able to contribute to local, provincial, and national advancement.

C PHILOSOPHY

IAHLA is dedicated to expanding the role of Aboriginal people and communities in their own education systems. IAHLA promotes Aboriginal adult and post-secondary education as a unique and special area of education and supports a belief that by integrating Aboriginal culture and values into the education system, First Nations communities and people will be validated and strengthened. IAHLA recognizes the autonomy and independence of each institute, but the

Association reflects a belief that working together can help Aboriginal institutes in developing accredited courses and programs that offer adult students the opportunity to graduate in their own community with recognized certificates, diplomas, and degrees. IAHLA is committed to undertaking research that will help its members by highlighting successful approaches and identifying situations where cooperation will lead to synergy and greater efficiencies. IAHLA will support communication and coordination among the institutes for the benefit of all and, at the direction of its members, IAHLA will represent Aboriginal institutes in presentations and negotiations with provincial and federal government agencies.

D GOVERNANCE

IAHLA was registered on May 22, 2003 as a non-profit Society under the *Societies Act*. All the activities of the Association are governed by a comprehensive constitution as required by law.

Members

Full membership in the Association is limited to legal organizations in British Columbia that are governed by an Aboriginal Board and offer:

- Educational opportunities for adults pursuing high school graduation
- Preparatory or pre-requisite courses for post-secondary education
- Post-secondary education.

Educational institutes, colleges, universities, university colleges, learning centres, or other legal educational institutes governed by an Aboriginal Board are all eligible for membership.

Associate Members

Individuals or organizations that do not qualify as full members of the Association can apply to become associate members.

Board of Directors

In accordance with its constitution, IAHLA is governed by a Board of Directors. The ten members of the Board of Directors receive no remuneration for their service.

E CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

IAHLA has set itself ambitious tasks of developing synergies among its members and coordinating with relevant provincial and federal agencies. To carry out those important activities, IAHLA requires a Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO would be responsible to the Board for accomplishing the goals of the Association. To attract and retain the highly qualified and experienced person required for this position, a secure commitment for long-term funding for the Association is required.

F PLANNING CYCLES AND PROCESSES

IAHLA is developing a five-year plan for its activities and goals, which includes an annual review of its efforts, its achievements and challenges, and necessary modifications for the upcoming year. Planning over five years will allow the Association to attempt larger and sustained projects that incorporate its long-term vision. A good example of a long-term project is the IAHLA Data Collection Project, which is now entering its second year with exciting improvements. A long-term commitment to this project is crucial, as multi-year data provides more reliable information and allows for an analysis of trends over time.

Planning and executing in five-year cycles also provides greater certainty for agencies wanting to support IAHLA in its activities. The provincial and federal government and other organizations can be confident that they are dealing with a solid Association that has the support of its members and will continue to reach its goals.

IAHLA will also encourage its members and funding agencies to adopt a five-year planning cycle with annual assessments and adjustments. Many Aboriginal institutes are funded course by course, often only 3 months at a time, making it difficult to plan for the longer term. With assistance from IAHLA, longer term planning will help these institutes develop and grow, and provide better service to Aboriginal adult learners and their communities.

G THIRD SECTOR ACTIVITIES

Alongside public and private post-secondary institutes, community-based, Aboriginal controlled adult and post-secondary institutes fall within a unique and distinct **third sector** of post-secondary education. IAHLA and its member institutes will promote greater recognition of this third sector status with the federal and provincial governments and with the public and private sectors of post-secondary education.

Recognition of the important, unique role of the Aboriginal sector of post-secondary education should include adequate, multi-year funding commitments for Aboriginal controlled institutes. Such support will lead to many advances for IAHLA and its members, including the following.

- New and appropriate categories of Aboriginal controlled institutes
- Culturally appropriate assessment tools for learners
- Transparent and fair accreditation processes for First Nations language programs, easing a sharing of courses and programs across the sector and with the private and public post-secondary educational sectors
- Reliable and accurate statistical information on the success of Aboriginal institutes -- success that has yet to be confirmed statistically due to a lack of data
- Dedicated representation on post-secondary education associations, governing bodies, and consultative forums

IAHLA, with adequate funding and authority, is prepared to work with other education partners to develop its sector and member institutes, and to ultimately improve the participation and success of Aboriginal adult learners.

IAHLA INSTITUTES



DESCRIPTION

The thirty-one IAHLA member organizations (see Appendix 1), all from British Columbia, vary from the urban Native Education Centre in downtown Vancouver to smaller and much more remote learning centres in the far North and along the province's remote coast.

Aboriginal institutes offer a wide variety of programs. Some are very small Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs, where adult students earn their Secondary School diplomas without leaving their home communities. Others offer ABE as well as college preparatory courses, post-secondary programs for specific occupations, college and university transfer courses and programs, and trades training. All IAHLA institutes are governed by Aboriginal Boards, and they consistently offer culturally appropriate, relevant programs that include significant individual support for adult learners.

A listing of IAHLA institutes appears in Appendix 1, and Appendix 2 contains information drawn from the IAHLA Data Collection Project³. A map of IAHLA institutes is attached.

None of the Aboriginal institutes in BC are operated as private, for-profit facilities, although several have registered with the provincial government through the Private Career Training Institutes Agencies (PCTIA).

The Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) in Merritt and the Institute of Indigenous Government – All Nations Institute (IIG) in Burnaby are the only Aboriginal governed public post-secondary institutes in BC that are part of the Province's public post-secondary school system. Their courses and programs are accredited and transferable to other post-secondary institutes through the BC transfer system. The other Aboriginal institutes exist on the energy, spirit, and determination of their founders, staff, students, and communities, with only ad hoc funding and haphazard recognition from provincial and federal authorities.

There are wide differences in the scope and variety of courses and programs offered at Aboriginal institutes but there are also common themes.

³ Kavanagh, B et al, *Collection Project Year One Final Report*, IAHLA, January, 2006,

www.fnesc.bc.ca/iahla/Data%20Collection%20Year%201.pdf

Bridging Gaps

Aboriginal institutes have evolved to fill needs that are in many respects not being met by either public or private education facilities.

More than 70% of Aboriginal communities in BC lie north of the 50th parallel (Kamloops to Port Hardy) and people in about 20% of all First Nations communities must travel in excess of 350 km to find basic services like banks, government services, and suppliers.⁴ Without Aboriginal institutes, in order to access post-secondary education, people from remote areas would have to attend colleges and universities in urban centres far from family and community support.

Aboriginal students attending urban institutes face not only physical isolation from their families and communities, they also face the additional challenge of cultural isolation. Only a small minority of students at most public and private post-secondary institutes are Aboriginal, and Aboriginal people are a small proportion of the population of the urban centres where the schools are located. While some colleges and universities have programs to help Aboriginal students adapt to urban life, few attempt to help non-Aboriginal students embrace Aboriginal values and culture and, of the provincial institutes, only NVIT and IIG attempt to integrate Aboriginal ideals and traditions into the fabric of the Institute.

Also, despite the best efforts of many provincial post-secondary institutes, the impact of racism is a reality that Aboriginal students face on a day-to-day basis. Racism may appear in direct or subtle ways, but regardless of the form in

which racism is manifested, its effects can be devastating. Aboriginal students are still too often subject to bias and stereotyping which effectively limits educational opportunities that non-Aboriginal students often take for granted. Racism through omission results in curriculum that does not take into account Aboriginal history and experiences. Support programs for Aboriginal students, if they are offered, are too often based on a framework that denies the role of racism in the lives of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal institutes can bring needed courses and programs to remote communities. Allowing adult Aboriginal learners to study in their home communities greatly mitigates the physical and cultural barriers to post-secondary education. With their acute awareness of the problems faced by Aboriginal students and the supportive structures they put in place, Aboriginal institutes can provide environments that are welcoming, collective, and inclusive of the history, culture and experiences of their Aboriginal students. These types of educational communities help Aboriginal adult learners to build confidence in themselves and their cultures. Aboriginal institutes can create positive attitudes toward post-secondary education, and college-preparatory courses offered by Aboriginal institutes also provide Aboriginal students with the knowledge and skills they need for success if they do pursue educational opportunities outside of their home communities.

Individual Support

Aboriginal institutes all recognize that education is only one of the challenges facing adult Aboriginal students, and they accordingly provide many services, programs and options beyond educational courses. Aboriginal institutes assist their learners in overcoming numerous constraints that restrict their

⁴ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Band Classification Manual, May 2006

educational and economic success, and they have met this challenge in interesting and exciting ways.

Aboriginal institutes provide individual support for students, teach courses in life-skills and Aboriginal language and culture, and arrange peer, community and distance mentors. At these institutes there is understanding of the challenges and problems faced by the students, support for constructive behaviour changes, and above all an environment of respect for the safety and sanctity of each individual. This emphasis on individual support is one of the reasons for their success.

Also, in response to the low literacy levels of many Aboriginal adult learners, Aboriginal institutes generally provide English language and language comprehension remediation. Improving literacy skills has proven vital to improving the success rates of adult Aboriginal learners.

Language and Culture

Another common theme is the institutes' emphasis on language and culture promotion. A "Think Piece"⁵ on Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education prepared for Campus 2020, the provincial review of all aspects of post-secondary education, points out the importance of culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy in making learning relevant to Aboriginal learners and in supporting Aboriginal values and beliefs. Properly funded and supported Aboriginal institutes have a critical role to play in developing such new

approaches to post-secondary education to improve the outcome for Aboriginal learners.

Aboriginal institutes recognize that retaining and developing the local culture is critical to the survival and well being of the people and their communities. Cultural activities and values are integrated into the fabric of the institutes from the boardroom to the classroom. Courses and curricula are reviewed for their cultural content and often modified to make them more sensitive and relevant to the Aboriginal adult learners.

The institutes also play active roles in the cultural life of the community, such as organizing cultural events and sponsoring cultural groups. Courses, workshops, clubs, and social events are developed to increase opportunities for all citizens to embrace, benefit from, and contribute to their culture.

In addition, most First Nations in BC recognize that their traditional languages are threatened with extinction and they are making efforts to recover and retain their languages as an important part of their traditional cultures. Aboriginal institutes are often at the forefront of these efforts to retain and strengthen Aboriginal language use. The Sto:lo Nation has developed a language program that has been accredited by the BC Ministry of Education as fulfilling the second language requirements for high school graduation. Several other First Nations including Nisga'a, Chemainus, Tsimshian, Carrier, Gitksan, and Heiltsuk, are currently working towards a similar goal.

Lifespan Learning

All of the Aboriginal institutes are committed to providing learning opportunities that will encourage all adults to continue developing

⁵ McCue, H, *Aboriginal Post Secondary Education*, Centre for Native Policy and Research, August 2006, www.campus2020.ca/EN/412/

throughout their lives. Through educational and cultural courses, workshops and special functions, Aboriginal people of all ages are encouraged to learn and grow. In particular, helping Elders share their knowledge and experience with younger people has proven valuable for the Elders, the adult learners, and the communities. Aboriginal Elders are often included on Aboriginal institute boards and as faculty, and they are invited to participate in a range of courses and activities.

Many of the institutes offer courses of general interest to local people. Some courses instruct in arts and crafts, hobbies, and sports. Others

focus on cottage industries that people can develop in their own homes. These courses are usually taught by local people with particular expertise, and they integrate the culture with the interest activities. With local people as both instructors and students, the institute helps to develop a “Learning Community.”

Consensus Decision Making

Most First Nations have traditionally used consensus decision-making and most Aboriginal institutes follow this approach. Finding consensus on important issues strengthens institution Boards, student government, and staff.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT



Aboriginal adult learners, Aboriginal institutes, and First Nations communities face many unique issues, which IAHLA intends to address through coordinated efforts.

A FUNDING

Securing reliable and long-term funding has been an ongoing problem for Aboriginal institutes. Most receive little or no base funding to pay for administration, planning, maintenance, and research and development. Instead, the institutes generally work within year to year funding at best, and they continuously compete for funds from a variety of unrelated and uncoordinated sources.

For example, most Aboriginal institutes provide upgrading programs for adult Aboriginal learners working to complete their high school education. These upgrading programs may receive INAC Nominal Roll funding on a per-student basis, but INAC only funds specific students who have not yet graduated with a Dogwood diploma.

The Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) also provides funding for programs at Aboriginal institutes, but that funding is on an annual basis

only, no program or institution is assured of support, and each year the demand for ISSP funding is far greater than the available resources.

Also, while the Province provides some funding to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal post-secondary students, that funding is generally aimed at provincial public institutes.

Community agencies, resource companies, and other employers sometimes contract with Aboriginal institutes to provide specific training – usually short and specific courses such as first aid or courses in new technologies. Aboriginal institutes have proven effective in providing such training because of their adult education expertise, local knowledge, and capable personnel. These courses do provide some revenue for the institutes. However, organizing and conducting the programs still requires a significant effort; even when a course is purchased, the Aboriginal institute often must upgrade basic student education levels and adapt the teaching materials so that the course is more culturally appropriate and relevant to First Nations adult learners.

Without sustained funding, Aboriginal institutes are unable to develop long-term plans and proactively provide educational opportunities in their communities. Few Aboriginal controlled institutes have capital funding, and many operate in facilities that are in urgent need of repair.

Direct, dedicated, long-term funding for base expenses, capital, and research and development would ensure that Aboriginal controlled institutes continue and expand as important community resources that validate Aboriginal values and culture and improve the educational outcome of Aboriginal learners.

Therefore, perhaps the most important area of strategic development for IAHLA institutes is in the area of base funding.

In 1990, the 'Green Report' strongly recommended that Aboriginal institutes be eligible for direct provincial funding⁶. Again in 1995, the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework recommended support for Aboriginal institutes, noting that "The Province is responsible for programs and services to British Columbians within its constitutional jurisdiction and for ensuring all British Columbians are treated equitably by government."⁷ The Framework also states: "Post-secondary education participation, retention, and success rates for Aboriginal peoples will at least equal to that of non-Aboriginal people, and will be attained within a post-secondary education system in which both public institutes and Aboriginal organizations and institutes play appropriate roles and are

supported by the combined resources of the Federal and Provincial Governments."⁸

As part of its goal to expand First Nations' control over education, the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada draft Education Policy Framework makes reference to the need to: "Provide funding to First Nations to establish new institutes and continue to support existing post-secondary institutes controlled under First Nation governance."⁹

Research also highlights the success of community-based delivery to address challenges caused by relocation to urban or distant schools and to overcome the marginalization Aboriginal people feel in the mainstream post-secondary system. (See, for example, "Aboriginal and Post-Secondary Education What Educators Have Learned", Malatest, 2004).

As noted in the 2001 BC Stats Profile, a non-Aboriginal person is three times more likely to have a university degree than an Aboriginal person living off-reserve and five times more likely than one living on reserve.¹⁰ The goal of all levels of government is to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal citizens.

By demonstrating the success of First Nations adult learners at Aboriginal institutes, IAHLA aims to convince the respective levels of government to coordinate their efforts and

⁶ Report of The Provincial Advisory Committee on Post-Secondary Education for Native Learners, Feb 28, 1990.

⁷ AVED, Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework, 1995,

⁸Ibid.

⁹ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's (INAC's) Education Policy Framework Draft 4, June 2006, [www.fnesc.ca/Attachments/EPF/06-06-29%20EPF%20\(5\)%20June%2029%202%2000%20pm.doc](http://www.fnesc.ca/Attachments/EPF/06-06-29%20EPF%20(5)%20June%2029%202%2000%20pm.doc)

¹⁰ BC Stats, *British Columbia Statistical Profile of Aboriginal People 2001*, www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/cen01/abor/tot_abo.pdf

provide base funding that will allow Aboriginal institutes to continue their important role in increasing success for Aboriginal learners.

B ACCREDITED COURSES

As part of the BC public post-secondary school system, NVIT and IIG programs are accredited and their courses are transferable to other post-secondary institutes through the BC transfer system. In addition to courses on campus, both NVIT and IIG have on-line learning programs to offer their accredited programs and courses to remote students.

NVIT students can earn a variety of certificates and diplomas and, through an arrangement with Thompson Rivers University, a Bachelor Degree in Social Work. IIG-All Nations Institute offers 1st and 2nd Year University programs and courses in the arts, sciences, and professional studies. IIG students transfer to other public post-secondary institutes to complete their degrees.

The success of NVIT and IIG in developing recognized, accredited courses that are transferable to other public post-secondary institutes is a remarkable achievement. Indigenous knowledge and culture are important in all aspects of NVIT and IIG, and Aboriginal histories, cultures, and experiences form an integral part of their accredited courses. With their own Aboriginal heritage included in the courses, Aboriginal adult learners find NVIT and IIG courses relevant to their lives.

Other Aboriginal institutes have successfully accredited courses by making arrangements with third party provincial post-secondary institutes. First Nation language programs are good examples, with the Nisga'a, Tsimshian,

and Carrier working cooperatively with the University of Northern BC (UNBC), the Sto:lo and Heiltsuk working with Simon Fraser University (SFU), and Chemainus working with Malaspina University College (MUC).

Overall, the accreditation arrangements are as varied and imaginative as the institutes themselves. Sometimes, adult learner classes or individuals follow distance courses with assistance from local tutors. Sometimes courses are purchased outright from another institute, which supplies the instructor and all of the required materials. More often, the accredited institute supplies course material, marks the examinations, vets the instructors, and oversees the course from afar. Until recently, the Open University (OU) and the Open Learning Agency (OLA) were major sources of accredited courses and programs for Aboriginal institutes. Thompson Rivers University (TRU) has now shouldered the responsibility previously held by OU and OLA. TRU is still developing this part of its services and it is not yet clear how cooperation with Aboriginal institutes will evolve. Consultation among the parties is essential as TRU develops its programs.

Innovation and coordinated development in the accreditation of courses will move all Aboriginal controlled institutes ahead in their quest to provide the best service for their students and communities. It will advance, as well, the agenda of government agencies¹¹ whose mandate is to help Aboriginal adult learners achieve greater success in their studies and their lives.

Specifically, IAHLA can undertake two areas of strategic development in this regard.

¹¹ INAC BC Region Strategic plan, Strategy 1.4, www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/bc/whho/ltvis/bcstpl/spcp_e.pdf

Accreditation of Courses

By working together through IAHLA, individual institutes can collaborate on accrediting and sharing courses and programs. This approach will provide an efficient way to offer accredited courses to Aboriginal adult students at their community institutes.

Development and Accreditation of Aboriginal Language Instruction

While the program of study for each First Nation language must be unique, one of the purposes of IAHLA is to help language development programs work together and share successful approaches and strategies. IAHLA and Aboriginal institutes can work with relevant agencies to develop an accreditation template that would apply to all languages. The requirements for an accredited language program would then be transparent and clear to all.

C CROSS-CULTURAL OUTREACH

As mentioned above, Aboriginal institutes play a key role in the revitalization of Aboriginal languages and cultures, and through IAHLA, Aboriginal institutes can exchange ideas and programs to support this area of activity, learning from each other and building on what works well.

Aboriginal institutes also develop cultural sensitivity training for their non-Aboriginal staff. Effective cultural sensitivity training developed by Aboriginal institutes would be of interest to other local agencies, including health centres, hospitals, and primary and secondary schools, to help non-Aboriginal staff understand their community and integrate better into the workplace. Such training also would be useful to public and private educational institutes that

serve Aboriginal students as a minority of their student body. These cultural sensitivity courses and workshops could be delivered as distance education programs, as a residential program in another Aboriginal community, or in larger schools and colleges by staff from the Aboriginal institute.

Aboriginal institutes adapt courses and programs acquired from other educational agencies to make them more culturally appropriate and relevant to Aboriginal adult students. In addition to being of interest to other Aboriginal controlled educational institutes through IAHLA, these adaptations could help non-Aboriginal educational institutes modify their own courses to improve their cultural content and interest to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. IAHLA also could coordinate the review of courses and programs that are supplied to Aboriginal institutes.

Most provincial institutes of higher learning have developed support programs for their Aboriginal students and cultural centres to showcase Aboriginal culture. IAHLA and Aboriginal institutes can contribute to these programs, making them more effective and relevant for Aboriginal students and helping spread knowledge of First Nations culture to the larger student population.

IAHLA could also promote greater recognition of Indigenous knowledge as a unique and exciting alternative knowledge system. Knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal history, culture and values would lead to curriculum and pedagogy that is culturally appropriate for both Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal population. Not only would learning be easier for Aboriginal students whose lives and ancestry would be validated; non-

Aboriginal people would also gain from having the traditions integrated into their educational experience. Collaboration between public institutes and Aboriginal institutes could lead to culturally appropriate career counselling, as well as better student, course, and program assessment tools.

D TECHNOLOGY

The role of modern technology in communications and education has interested Aboriginal institutes for some time. Interactive CD and DVD - based training programs, distance education using the Internet, as well as telephone and Internet communications advances are slowly changing the face of adult and post-secondary education.

Computer based training, either by DVD or the Internet, is available to either supplement classroom courses or replace classroom courses altogether. While this appears to offer a major advantage to small and remote institutes, to date the results of such technologies have been mixed, with success rates somewhat lower than anticipated. Recognizing that computer-based training courses could expand their course offerings significantly if success rates can be improved, some Aboriginal institutes have found effective ways to support students following computer-based courses. Mentoring, counselling, time management advice (in Life skills courses, for example), and technical assistance are all contributing to increased success rates in on-line learning.

The Internet has also become a primary research source for students, instructors, school administrators and everyone else associated with education, as it has for almost everyone. Unfortunately, many remote Aboriginal communities and institutes cannot yet access a

broadband Internet connection. Many agencies from both government and the private sector recognize the importance of broadband access and are making attempts to address this issue.

On-line learning for undergraduate, masters, and PhD degrees are an important resource for First Nations community leaders. It means that communities can provide these individuals with professional development opportunities without losing their leadership. As well, Aboriginal institutes can operate their own distance education courses in areas where they have developed particularly successful approaches.

IAHLA also intends to increase efficiency and save money by using the new technologies for communications, commerce, and information sharing. IAHLA maintains an interactive website, uses remote conferencing technology to hold meetings whenever possible, and manages its research mostly over the Internet.

E RESEARCH

Critical research, such as the IAHLA Data Collection Project, will provide reliable and useful information to demonstrate the effectiveness of Aboriginal controlled institutes. There are limited coordinated and comprehensive studies of the Aboriginal adult and post-secondary education sector in BC, and good research will help to identify approaches that work. IAHLA can also participate with INAC BC and the Ministry of Advanced Education in their efforts to develop reliable data in this field¹². Continued quality research and reporting will be of benefit to IAHLA member institutes, the larger post-secondary

¹² INAC BC Region Strategic plan, Strategy 1.4, www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/bc

education environment, and Aboriginal communities across British Columbia.

F TRADES TRAINING

Certification for most trades involves a combination of a multi-year apprenticeship working under the supervision of a certified tradesperson and regular coursework at an accredited post-secondary institution. In small, remote First Nations communities, there are few certified trades people to supervise apprentices and most often no “community of scholars” where apprentices can learn together. With the added problems of attending courses in an unfamiliar urban environment isolated from family and community support, there is little wonder that many prospective Aboriginal trades workers do not embark on the road to certification.

To help with this situation, IAHLA and its members could organize trades training in local communities that would allow apprentices to avoid the problems of limited training spaces and urban adjustment at existing trades training centres. Aboriginal adult training institutes excel at support programs like mentoring, peer counselling and life skills courses. All of those supports would assist apprentices significantly in their quest for certification.

One method of bringing trades training to local communities would involve mobile courses. Instructors and all the required equipment for a particular trade could move from community to community, offering apprenticeship training through the local Aboriginal institute.

For some trades, it might be more effective if one Aboriginal institute developed a program for a particular trade and trained apprentices

from other communities. Apprentices would have to leave home for the training, but at least they would be trained in Aboriginal communities that they would find more familiar and comfortable.

Certification for most trades is a provincial responsibility and there have been a series of major changes in the BC certification programs with successive governments. This is another area in which IAHLA can effectively represent its members and Aboriginal apprentices to ensure that rural and remote communities and Aboriginal students are able to participate in the trade certification programs.

Interesting and innovative approaches to trades training and certification are being devised and tested in Alaska and several other places. IAHLA can connect with these programs and then work with its members and the provincial and federal agencies to develop an effective approach to trades training and certification.

G MOBILE TRAINING

Encouraging economic development is a priority for First Nations communities and governments, and for the provincial and federal¹³ governments. Economic development depends on skilled, capable, local workers, and Aboriginal institutes can respond to community needs for trained workers.

However, some small and remote Aboriginal institutes can have as little as two or three instructors and fewer than fifty students. It is difficult for such institutes to provide the variety of programs required to meet the needs of the adult students in their communities. One of the

¹³ INAC BC Region Strategic plan, Goal 1, Strategy 1.3, www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/bc

ways to overcome this difficulty is to coordinate, through IAHLA, the development of programs that can serve many communities -- each through its own local institute.

Mobile learning programs, supported by distance education assistance, could be developed to bring accredited training to small institutes in remote locations. As suggested for Trades Training, when specialized and often expensive equipment is required, well-equipped mobile classrooms and specialized instructors could travel from community to community to provide accredited training that would allow students to qualify for recognized certification.

Where some special resource exists in one community, specific accredited training programs might better be developed at one institute, where students from all communities could come for training. While students would still have to leave home, they would continue to benefit from the level of support and special programs that Aboriginal institutes offer.

H LEADERSHIP

Many Aboriginal institutes exist solely because of the vision, personal energy, commitment, and determination of a small core of individuals -- often only one or two people. These individuals

are making amazing contributions to their communities, but with the institutes so heavily dependant on one or two individuals, it is important that successor plans be developed. Successor plans could include both mentoring new individuals to take over leadership and gradually restructuring the organization so that the responsibilities are more broadly distributed.

Similarly, more general local government institutes are often dependant on just a few individuals. Aboriginal institutes are playing pivotal roles in developing the leadership capacity both of these individuals and of new leaders who expand the leadership pool.

As mentioned above, in small, remote First Nations communities, the existence of local institutes allows community leaders to continue with their academic studies and Lifespan Learning programs without leaving home. For many, this is an important consideration and it helps retain the most capable leaders in the community where they are needed.

CONCLUSION



Aboriginal institutes occupy an important but not widely recognized **third sector** in adult and post-secondary education in British Columbia, distinct and separate from the public and private sectors. The combination of their Aboriginal character, their expertise in adult education, and their attention to individual support make Aboriginal institutes important both within their local communities and in the Province as a whole. Through the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association, local communities and the provincial and federal governments can coordinate their recognition and support for this third sector, allowing it to flourish and develop. Such coordination can lead to an improved use of existing resources, exciting new initiatives in adult and post-secondary education, better exploitation of new technologies, revitalization of First Nations languages and cultures, economic development in First Nations communities, and a narrowing of the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education attainment and employment rates.

APPENDIX 1

INDIGENOUS ADULT AND HIGHER LEARNING ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS

Cariboo Chilcotin Weekend University, Cariboo Tribal Council, Williams Lake
Chemainus Native College, Ladysmith
Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations, Kamloops
Enowkin Centre / (Okanagan Indian Education Resources Society), Penticton
First Nations Training and Development Centre, Prince Rupert
George Manual Institute (Neskonlith Band School), Chase
Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society, Hazelton
Gitwangak Education Society, Kitwanga
haahuuhtpayak Adult Education Centre, Port Alberni
Heiltsuk College, Waglisla
Institute of Indigenous Government, Burnaby
Kwadacha Dune Ty (Aatse Davie School), Fort Ware
Kyah Wiget Education Society/, Smithers
Muskoti learning Centre, Moberly Lake
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT), Merritt
N'Kwala School, Merritt
Nuxalk College (Lip'Alhaye School), Bella Coola
Penelakut Adult Learning Centre, Chemainus
Saanich Adult Education centre, Brentwood Bay
Seabird Island Indian Band, Agassiz
Sechelt Indian Band Education Centre, Sechelt
Secwepemc Cultural Education Society, Kamloops
Skil' Mountain Community School Adult Basic and Continuing Education, Shalalth,
Sto:lo Nation, Chilliwack
Ted Williams Memorial Learning Centre, Burns Lake
Tl'azt'en Adult Learning Centre, Fort St. James
Native Education College (The Native Education Centre), Vancouver
Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, New Aiyansh

Associate Members

Northwest Community College, Terrace
Squamish Adult Education, North Vancouver
University College of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford

**APPENDIX 2 SELECTED DATA ON MEMBER INSTITUTES
FROM IAHLA DATA COLLECTION PROJECT
YEAR ONE FINAL REPORT**

Size of Institute	Enrolling more than 100 students	Enrolling 50 to 100 students	Enrolling 0 to 49 students
Number of institutes	4	5	8
Percent of institutes	24%	29%	47%

- Of the responding institutes, 12% opened less than 10 years ago, 41% opened between 10 and 19 years ago, and 49% opened more than 20 years ago.
- 14 of the institutes offer some combination of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and post-secondary programming. The remaining three offer only ABE.
- Of those institutes that offer post-secondary programming, 36% have been doing so for less than 10 years, 50% for 10 to 19 years, and 14% for 20 to 29 years.

Instructors' Highest Level of Education	Percentage of Instructors in Institutes with		
	More than 100 students	50 – 100 students	0 – 49 students
Bachelors degree	23 %	28 %	57 %
Bachelors with other post-baccalaureate training	5 %	6 %	11 %
Masters degree	45 %	20 %	18 %
Doctoral degree	14 %	6 %	0 %

Instructors' Other Qualifications	Percentage of Instructors in all Institutes	Percentage of Instructors in Institutes with ...		
		More than 100 students	50 – 100 students	0 – 49 students
Native Adult Instructor Diploma	9%	8%	6%	18%
Relevant work credentials	7%	7%	8%	4%
First Nation Language Teaching Credentials	8%	1%	14%	18%
First Nation Language Skills	18%	19%	6%	36%
Relevant work experience	68%	69%	62%	75%
Other	4%	4%	2%	2%

Completion and Retention Rates	Percentage of all Institutes	Percentage of Institutes with ...		
		More than 100 students	50 – 100 Students	0 – 49 students
Course completion rate	77%	74%	83%	90%
Program completion rate	53%	33%	70%	80%
Retention rate in multi-year programs	63%	81%	27%	92%

Level of satisfaction with progress being made	Of those who are studying a First Nations language ...		
	% of all students	% of first year students	% of non-first year students
Very satisfied	41 %	40 %	41 %
Satisfied	45 %	48 %	43 %
Not satisfied	12 %	8 %	14 %
Not at all satisfied	0 %	0 %	0 %
No answer	3 %	4 %	2 %

INDIGENOUS ADULT AND HIGHER LEARNING ASSOCIATION MEMBERS



Extracted from map Produced for illustrative purposes by Professional and Technical Services, INAC: November, 2006

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