

Review of Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements — Synthesis of Findings

Final Report

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Management Response

Both the Aboriginal Affairs Directorate (AAD within Employment Program Policy and Design) and the Aboriginal and Youth Operations Directorate (AYO within Employment Program Operations) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) would like to thank all those who participated in formulating and conducting this evaluation of the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS). In particular, we acknowledge the contributions of: the Assembly of First Nations; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; Métis National Council; Native Women's Association of Canada; and, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples in jointly formulating and managing this evaluation along with HRSDC's Program Evaluation Branch and the AAD and AYO. This collaborative approach is, in and of itself, a lesson learned/best practice reflecting HRSDC's partnership model with Aboriginal people, organizations and stakeholders.

We acknowledge the observations provided, endorse these findings and have developed action plans to strengthen the design and delivery of the AHRDS based on this evaluation in concert with other lines of evidence (e.g. Office of the Auditor General, AHRDS Renewal Consultations, internal analyses).

Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements (AHRDAs) enable Aboriginal organizations to deliver HRSDC programs and services to Aboriginal peoples from Aboriginal peoples. The objective of the AHRDS is to help Aboriginal people prepare for, find, get and keep jobs.

The AHRDS focuses on empowering communities with the opportunity and providing them with the means to: assume responsibility for designing and delivering programs that respond to local development strategies; accommodate the diverse needs of clients and communities; and, respects the diversity and richness of the social and cultural values of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The current Review of the AHRDAs was launched at the request of the Employment Programs Branch in the summer of 2002. The timing was appropriate since the AHRDS was in the fourth year of its five-year mandate. The Evaluation's focus was on the performance of AHRDAs, with the purpose of examining issues relating to the implementation and effectiveness of the AHRDAs. Evaluation issues set out in the July 2002 Terms of Reference included:

- The nature and extent of AHRDA capacity building;
- The strength of AHRDA planning activities;
- The strength of partnerships between AHRDAs and stakeholders;
- The success of horizontal management by AHRDAs of complex social, economic and employment issues;
- The nature and extent of program results as shown by available data; and

- The quality and completeness of the client and program results data.

Methods used in order to derive the evaluation's conclusions included:

- Case studies of ten AHRDAs;
- Analysis of Census data;
- Analysis of administrative data;
- Key informant interviews;
- Focus group discussions; and
- Client surveys.

This Review marks a first phase of work to examine the AHRDS but it is not sufficient in terms of understanding better and quantifying the program impact of HRSDC's skills investments in Aboriginal people. To deepen understanding of the program impacts of the AHRDS, HRSDC, working closely with its partners, plans to carry out further review and evaluation of the AHRDA holders with the objective of developing a more comprehensive perspective on results achieved and lessons learned. This additional review work will examine in greater depth and detail the relevance, success and cost-effectiveness of the program, including: partnerships created; quality and reliability of administrative data collected; and, program impacts on individuals. Phase II is planned to begin in the fall of 2004 and the scope of the Review will include, among other things:

- more case studies to ensure broader coverage of AHRDAs;
- representative client surveys designed to provide reliable information about the whole client population;
- an examination of the roles and functions of HRSDC, the five National Aboriginal organizations, and the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Council in support of the AHRDAs;
- an examination of the First Nations and Inuit Child Care component of the AHRDS; and
- further examination of capacity building, data systems, overlap and duplication, and individual outcomes.

This Review and follow-up work is taking place at a time when the Government of Canada is advancing a broader agenda with Aboriginal people, the Canada-Aboriginal People's Roundtable process. One of the six key themes of this initiative is *Accounting for Results*, including the importance of sharpening our results and outcomes reporting and statistical gathering. HRSDC is a key player in the Roundtable initiative and we hope that the lessons and issues derived from the Review and follow-up work will have broader applicability in the work ahead of the Roundtable.

The following outlines Management's Response and commitments to the Evaluation presented by Program Evaluation. It is presented in the order with which the issues were set out in the Terms of Reference as listed above.

Capacity Building

The review has underlined the central importance that capacity building plays in program design and delivery. The AHRDS is one of a very few federal initiatives that provides a specific allocation (\$30M over five years) to invest in the human elements of designing and delivering programs and services. There is strong on-going support from the National Aboriginal Organizations and the AHRDAs for specific capacity investments. Aboriginal partners indicated that increases in the capacity allocation should be made in future strategies. AYO and EPPD acknowledge the observation surrounding "capacity funds" and agree that investing in the capacity of AHRDA staff and structures is a pre-requisite for success. This evaluation gives direction for further examination and analysis of the strategic use of these capacity funds as a precursor to potential reallocation within a renewed strategy or seeking incremental capacity funds to add to the strategy.

AHRDAs are making efforts to establish and enhance their capacity so that they can better plan, design, manage, deliver and account for AHRDA funded programs. As a start, greater clarity and consistent application of the use of capacity funds is underway to ensure excellence in service delivery. To address the need for more clarity, consistency and comparability, AYO has developed a glossary of terms that is posted on the HRSD AHRDA web page and is available both internally to HRSDC and to external AHRDAs. This glossary outlines a common understanding of terms in order to ensure that parties within HRSDC and with the AHRDA community are speaking the same language.

Business, Strategic Planning and Partnerships

The AHRDAs have demonstrated a high degree of aptitude towards business, strategic planning and partnerships. Five-year strategic plans and annual tactical/operational plans reflect sound planning of activities, expenditures and expected results. The Case Studies also reflected AHRDAs as community integrators creating partnerships with: other parts of HRSDC, other federal departments, provinces/territories, learning institutions (especially indigenous learning institutions) and the private sector. Case studies also reflected predominance on managing/investing in the supply side of the labour market equation through client case management, tracking client interventions and action plans, etc. The evaluation indicated less attention is being focused on the demand side of the labour market equation. This observation is consistent with renewal and direction provided in The Prime Minister's Reply to the Speech from the Throne 2004 and Moving Canada Forward where greater alignment of human investments with labour market needs was highlighted. AAD and AYO have developed an action plan to better align Aboriginal supply through AHRDS investments with labour market demands.

To further the focus on the supply side of the equation, HRSDC sought and obtained funding for Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnerships (ASEP), a program which has had success in bringing together AHRDAs, provinces and territories, other federal

departments, and the private sector to ensure Aboriginal people can participate in emerging major economic opportunities. During renewal of the Strategy, AAD will further explore incentive based mechanisms to foster collaboration and joint strategic planning and business development between a broad range of partners and corresponding to a diverse range of opportunities.

Criticism of the limited outreach of the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Sector Council (AHRDSC), particularly from eastern AHRDAs, was noted. Within the last year, the AHRDSC has expanded its office base to Atlantic Canada and there have been efforts to strengthen the AHRDSC as an entity to foster greater partnerships between AHRDA holders and the private sector. An action plan to specifically enhance the AHRDSC is emerging and is intended to align itself with the department's other sector councils and focus of strategic investments in the labour market (e.g. Aboriginal apprentices).

Managing Complex Social, Economic and Employment Issues

Findings from the evaluation state that AHRDAs examined were often successfully grappling with issues around the horizontal management of complex social, economic and employment issues. Numerous examples demonstrating the AHRDA's ability to work in a holistic fashion with their clients were presented.

Of concern was the perception that while there existed a need for a holistic approach to managing complex social, economic and employment issues, the AHRDS performance indicators did not reflect - or - give credit to the AHRDA for all of its successes. While acknowledging that the AHRDS speaks to the issue of jobs, the emerging action plan begins to address this concern. AAD and AYO in partnership with the AHRDAs is enhancing its results-based accountability regime to include additional, more robust labour market output and outcome indicators that reflect short and medium term attachment to the labour force.

AHRDA Result

The evaluation's case studies reflect an overriding message concerning the central importance of providing communities the means to assume responsibility for designing and delivering programs that respond to local development strategies that accommodate the diverse needs of clients and respect Aboriginal social and cultural values.

The challenge faced when seeking quantitative holistic results in the AHRDS is that the positive effects at the community level are “intangible and may occur outside the clients who actually receive the intervention”. This is further compounded by the perception that the short-term economic quantitative indicators (i.e. return to work) fail to capture all of the outcomes derived from AHRDA programming. In fact, the review found that there was a concern that the current results structure was not reflecting the full benefits of the AHRDS: healthier and more resilient individuals and communities.

In Phase II of the Evaluation, AYO and AAD will facilitate collaborative work between the two areas of responsibility and Program Evaluation so that we can demonstrably enhance the perception of the results/outcomes data ensuring consistency, comparability and clarity.

Actions that have been taken to increase consistency and pertinence include:

- The development of a glossary of terms that is posted on the HRSDC AHRDA web page and is available both internally to HRSD and to external AHRDAs which outlines a common understanding of terms in order to ensure that parties within HRSDC and with the AHRDA community are speaking the same language;
- The development of a Methods to Measure document that is to be used by all Regions and AHRDAs that details how to calculate targets and results. This document is to be posted on the AHRDA web page for both the regions and the AHRDAs to access;
- AYO is working with Corporate Accountability to develop a report by which data uploaded by the AHRDAs to HRSD, but not captured as a result, will be provided a reason as to why the particular entry did not qualify as a result;
- AYO will be updating its Operational Manual for both the Regions and the AHRDAs;
- The development of directives from National Headquarters to Regional staff on numerous subject matters pertaining to consistency;
- The continuance of annual File Certifications including Regional Executive Head's sign-off by the early fall of 2004;
- AYO in conjunction with EPO's Accountability and Integrity Branch will be instituting Regional and National quality assurance measures to enhance the veracity of our results;
- AYO will be embarking in training sessions across the country for both Regions and AHRDAs to increase their capacity around results;

- Strengthening the accountability regime by adding additional measures such as funded and non-funded clients in order to more accurately reflect the work being done by AHRDAs;
- AYO and AAD will be working with other federal departments to create an “Annual Aboriginal Report Card” to demonstrate progress along a series of “life chance indicators” designed to track the closing of the gap between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

AYO and AAD will continue to work with Program Evaluation to examine ways of strengthening linkages between data sources that reflect long-term integration of outcome measures. Areas of examination could include better linkages to existing data sets within HRSDC, Social Development, Indian and Northern Affairs, and other government departments that would provide more holistic and long-term information, thereby enabling a higher degree of confidence around the impacts of AHRDS programming. As well, AYO has identified the continued need to strengthen both the data received by AHRDAs and the measures used in order to continue to support and rationalize the AHRDS as an innovative way of implementing social and economic policy. AYO will continue to work with AAD, Program Evaluation, AHRDAs, NAOs and like minded stakeholders to further foster this intent.

Delivering Programs and Services

The Evaluation indicated that local decision making and community-based service delivery approaches are recognized as significant strengths of the AHRDS model. However, issues have arisen concerning agreement on operational definitions of ‘interventions’ and eligibility. AYO and AAD have undertaken action plans to address the above issues:

- A glossary of terminology was recently disseminated to improve the definitions of interventions and outcomes. This effort, articulated nationally and communicated regionally, will help to improve clarity, consistency and comparability in the way AHRDA holders upload information and HRSDC collects and report on results and outcomes; and
- The AHRDA Operations Manual will be updated and disseminated to all AHRDAs by November 2004, bringing together and refreshing a suite of directives and guidelines that have evolved over the previous strategies.

Client Impacts and Satisfaction

Focus group discussions and interviews indicate that “the primary and secondary indicators of AHRDA performance do not adequately measure success at the individual client level”. The renewal consultation process confirmed this finding. However, finding adequate proxy measures of success that are also easily and generically captured and nationally aggregated is not an easy undertaking. As the Review notes, “the findings suggest that many (if not most) of the positive impacts at both the community and individual levels are intangible”. HRSDC has sought to capture the “intangibles” of

human capital development through various publications both at the regional and national level and through conference proceedings, but more work could be done here to sharpen the quality and applicability of this qualitative work. The Case Studies capture a community's ability to absorb new labour market entrants and measure the success that the AHRDS has had in helping individuals seize those opportunities. The Case Studies also pointed out that in some communities the capacity of the local labour market to absorb new entrants is very limited regardless of the types of supply side measures taken. This case study approach begins to explore, on a more holistic scale, the over-all impact of the AHRDS and provides direction for further examination and analyses.

Recalling the primary objective of the AHRDS is to help Aboriginal people prepare for, find, get and keep jobs, the labour market emphasis of the AHRDS has tended to focus data capture on direct labour market outcomes (i.e. return to work, EI unpaid benefits) and lesser so on other human capital data sets. That being said, the AHRDS does capture "returns to school" although not as the Evaluation suggests "increases over time of literacy among clients and the attainment of high school equivalency".

The collection of labour market specific variables is a by-product of the connectedness of the AHRDAs to the terms and conditions for the Employment Benefits and Support Measures (EBSMs). Efforts to add, change or delete certain measures will need to reflect on a number of considerations, namely efficacy, cost effectiveness, consistency through discussions with our Aboriginal partners and stakeholders.

HRSDC plans on retaining and improving the collection of information in various areas, including social assistance (SA) savings. Further, colleagues at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and from some of the provinces are very interested in SA savings as they provide an indication of SA displacement and savings to their programs and a measure of their return on investment in collaborative AHRDS partnerships.

In conclusion, the department in partnership with NAOs, AHRDAs, other government departments (federal/provincial/territorial/municipal) will work together to enhance the next generation of the AHRDS as we continue to help Aboriginal people prepare for, find, get and keep jobs and ultimately participate more fully in the workplace and the community.

1. Review of Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements — Synthesis of Findings

1.1 Background

Aboriginal people face significant labour market challenges in comparison with the Canadian population as a whole.

Most Aboriginal communities experience chronically and significantly higher rates of unemployment, lower rates of labour force participation and higher rates of social assistance than other Canadian communities. Compared with Canadians in general, Aboriginal people have lower levels of education, lower earnings from employment and lower incomes. Many Aboriginal people live in remote communities where access to employment and resources is limited, and where the cost of living is high. Moreover, the Aboriginal population is growing fast, so that youth and young adults make up a larger proportion than is the case for the Canadian population overall.

Data available from the 2001 Census illustrate clearly the nature and extent of the labour market challenges faced by Aboriginal people in comparison with the population as a whole. The following provides some highlights in this regard:

- Unemployment among Aboriginal people (both on- and off-reserve) is much higher than among the labour force as a whole. The unemployment rate of the on-reserve Aboriginal labour force in 2001 (27.6%) was almost four times that of the total Canadian labour force (7.4%), while the unemployment rate of the off-reserve Aboriginal labour force (16.5%) was more than twice as high;
- Not only are unemployment rates much higher among Aboriginal people, the rate at which they participate in the labour force is lower. This is especially true in the case of on-reserve Aboriginal people. The 2001 Census showed their participation rate as slightly more than 50% compared with over 65% for the population as a whole. In effect, this means that compared with the total working age population, a much greater proportion of the Aboriginal working age population has no employment—which indicates that this problem is much more serious than the unemployment rates alone suggest;
- The Aboriginal working age population is much younger than the total working age population – and it is the young who traditionally experience significant difficulties in the labour market. Over 37% of the Aboriginal population is between 15 and 29 years of age, compared with less than 25% of the total population. Further, fully one-third of the Aboriginal population in 2001 consisted of children aged 14 years and under, compared with less than one-fifth of the non-Aboriginal population. A significant growth in the Aboriginal working-age population can therefore be anticipated in future years;

- In general, success in the labour market tends to be positively related to the level of education. In this regard, the 2001 Census shows that the Aboriginal working age population has significantly lower educational attainment than the total working age population. Nearly 59% of the on-reserve Aboriginal population over 15 years of age, and 44% of the equivalent off-reserve population, did not have high-school graduation, compared with about 31% of the population as a whole;
- Far fewer Aboriginal children live with two parents than is the case with non-Aboriginal children. Compared with 17% of non-Aboriginal children, nearly one-third of Aboriginal children on-reserve, and almost a half in large urban areas, lives with a single parent. The difficulties faced by single parents in maintaining a regular attachment to the labour force are well known;
- Aboriginal people are significantly more mobile than other Canadians. Some 22% of Aboriginal people moved in the 12 months before the 2001 Census, compared with only 14% of other Canadians. This high level of mobility increases the challenges for planning and implementing programs relating, among other things, to human resources development;

Finally, Census data show that the Aboriginal share of Canada's total population is rising. In the last half of the 20th century, the Aboriginal ancestry population increased sevenfold, while the population as a whole only doubled. In the 2001 Census, about 976, 000 people (3.3% of the total population) identified themselves as Aboriginal.

Aboriginal organizations have assumed increased responsibility for human resources development programs over the last decade.

The federal government has introduced several Aboriginal-specific policies and programs since the mid-80s to promote economic development and to reduce unemployment and dependency on social assistance. Over the last decade, Aboriginal organizations have assumed increased responsibility for administering and delivering federal government programs, including human resources development programs.

The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements (AHRDAs) are the key pillar¹ of a broader Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy. The AHRDAs replace the Regional Bilateral Agreements that were in effect until March 1999, and through which control and responsibility for the design and delivery of labour market programs had been devolved directly to local Aboriginal organizations.

¹ The five other pillars of the AHRDS are: Internal HRDC Program Integration; Capacity Building; Partnerships; The AHRD Sector Council; and Horizontal Management.

2. Description of AHRDAs

The objective of the AHRDAs is to help Aboriginal people prepare for, find and keep employment.

The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements enable Aboriginal organizations to deliver a wide range of labour market and associated programming to their people. The framework within which these bilateral agreements are negotiated between HRDC and Aboriginal organizations is designed to encourage capacity building, sound public administration and results-based accountability.

The objective of the AHRDAs is to support Aboriginal people in preparing for, finding and keeping employment. To this end, contribution agreements (the AHRDAs) are signed with Aboriginal organizations that design and deliver labour market programs either directly or through sub-agreements, sub-contracts and the like. Through the AHRDAs, the federal government provides assistance and funding to Aboriginal organizations to develop and implement programs that may include labour market, youth and child care programs, and that address the local and regional needs of Aboriginal people.

The targets to be attained and the results to be achieved by the AHRDAs are negotiated between the Aboriginal organizations and HRDC in the context of the contribution agreements. These targets and results address a series of primary and secondary indicators,² as shown in the table below:

Table 1 Primary and Secondary Indicators of AHRDA Performance	
Primary Indicators	Secondary Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – number of clients employed or self-employed³ – unpaid benefits accrued to the Employment Insurance Account – First Nations and Inuit child care spaces supported and occupied⁴ – number of persons who returned to school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – number of training interventions completed – savings to Social Assistance – number of persons with disabilities accessing services

² According to the contribution agreements between HRDC and the AHRDAs, the AHRDA results data (both primary and secondary indicators) must be uploaded at least once every three months. According to HRDC, however, most AHRDAs upload these on a more regular basis.

³ Results relating to returns to work are supposed to be collected 12 weeks following the completion of an intervention, although the system will accept the data earlier or later than that window of 12 weeks after the completion of an intervention.

⁴ Data on the number of First Nations and Inuit Child Care spaces supported and occupied are recorded every three months, based on a manual/paper collection (i.e. this has not been automated).

The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy builds on the relationships between Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and the five national Aboriginal organizations (the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Native Women’s Association of Canada)⁵. National Accords between HRDC and these groups establish the protocol and provide a framework for the AHRDAs negotiated between HRDC and various Aboriginal organizations.

Nation-wide, 79 AHRDAs have been established, with the intent of providing labour market programming to all Aboriginal peoples via approximately 200 sub-agreements and 400 points of service.

A total of \$1.6 billion in funding is available to AHRDAs over a five-year period from 1999 to 2004.

The AHRDAs fall under two separate funding authorities: the *Annual Appropriation Acts* that establish the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Program and Section 63 of the *Employment Insurance Act* that provides for the developmental use of Employment Insurance (EI) funds. A total of \$1.6 billion is available to AHRDAs from these two sources for their five-year duration (1999–2004), broken down into the following six components:

• Labour market (LM) programming	\$1.06 billion
• Urban component of LM programming	\$150 million
• Child care	\$205 million
• Youth programming	\$125 million
• Persons with disabilities	\$15 million
• Capacity building	\$30 million

Administration costs associated with the delivery of AHRDA programs and services must be met from the funds allocated to each AHRDA from these funding programs, and are typically limited to no more than 15% of the total allocation.

Not all of the AHRDAs have access to resources under each of the six funding programs identified above. For example, only the First Nations on-reserve and Inuit AHRDA holders have access to child care funding. Similarly, some restrictions apply to the availability of funding under the “youth programming” and “persons with disabilities” components. In this context, the two national AHRDAs (Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Native Women’s Association of Canada), as well as the urban AHRDAs, do not receive funding for these components.

⁵ HRDC also provides funding contributions to the five national Aboriginal organizations to help them develop capacity to support their affiliates in interfacing with HRDC on policy within the context of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Strategy.

AHRDAs involve partnerships among national, regional and community stakeholders.

The AHRDAs involve partnerships among national, regional and community stakeholders, each with its own role to play in the administration of the process. The key players include:

- The *Aboriginal Relations Office of HRDC* supports the implementation and management of AHRDAs by providing functional policy and operational guidance to HRDC regional offices, as well as support and advice to HRDC senior management, the Minister (HRDC) and the Secretary of State (Children and Youth);
- *HRDC Regional Offices* establish strategies to provide equitable access to the program; negotiate and monitor agreements, budgets and targets with AHRDA holders; build and strengthen capacity at the local level; promote the program; confirm client eligibility and receive results from, and report results to, AHRDA holders;
- *AHRDA holders* establish service and program delivery models; negotiate budgets and targets with sub-agreement holders (where applicable); build and strengthen capacity; promote the program; identify clients and confirm their eligibility; counsel clients and determine their needs; match clients with appropriate services; track clients and receive, monitor, assess and report results;
- The *Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC)* is one of the six “pillars” of the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy. The AHRDCC is mandated to work on a national scale to develop innovative employment training and skills solutions for Aboriginal people, including encouraging private sector investment in Aboriginal human resources development. It carries out this role by establishing partnerships with the public sector, Canadian corporations, industry sectors and AHRDA holders.

3. Purpose and Method of Review

3.1 Purpose and Scope

In the summer of 2002, with the AHRDAs in the fourth year of a five-year mandate, HRDC launched a review of their implementation and performance. The subsequent participation of the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Métis National Council, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Native Women's Association of Canada in the review was an important new development and a move towards greater partnership and co-operation between HRDC and these five groups.

The review examines issues relating to the implementation and effectiveness of the AHRDAs.

The review's focus was on the performance of Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements (AHRDAs). The purpose was to examine issues relating to the implementation and effectiveness of the AHRDAs so as to gain an appreciation of results achieved, to identify best practices and lessons learned, and to determine the potential of the AHRDAs as a model for program and service delivery.

The broad issues set out in the July 10, 2002 terms of reference for the review focused on program results as well as functions and processes. These issues were:

- the nature and extent of AHRDA capacity building;
- the strength of AHRDA planning activities;
- the strength of the partnerships between AHRDAs and stakeholders;
- the success of horizontal management, by AHRDAs, of complex social, economic and employment issues;
- the nature and extent of program results as shown by available data; and
- the quality and completeness of the client and program results data.

HRDC commissioned and undertook review and evaluation work that brought to bear multiple lines of evidence on these and other issues.

3.2 Method

The lines of inquiry employed by the review include:

- *Case studies of 10 AHRDAs.* For each of the 10 selected case studies, information was collected from a variety of sources, including socio-economic data on the regions within which the AHRDAs are operating, administrative data, files and documents, examination of local delivery models, interviews with key informants,⁶ focus group⁷ discussions and client surveys. Appendix 1 provides a brief overview of the 10 AHRDAs selected for case studies;
- *Analysis of Census data.* Data from the 1996 and 2001 Censuses were analyzed to draw comparisons between the labour market situations of Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in general, as well as to assess relative changes over the intervening five-year period;
- *Analysis of administrative data.* Data reported by AHRDA holders and held by HRDC in administrative data bases were analyzed to throw some light on the profile of clients and, where possible, the attainment of negotiated targets and results;
- *Review of lessons learned.*⁸ A review of Canadian experiences and the international literature focusing on the lessons learned in the design and delivery of employment, labour market and economic development programs and services for Aboriginal peoples provided background and context for assessing the results of the case studies.

This report analyzes and draws together information from these various sources to develop findings and conclusions with respect to the issues addressed by the review.

3.3 Strengths and Limitations of Review Findings

In general, the effectiveness of labour market programs is best assessed by comparing the before-and-after experiences of groups of clients who have received specific program interventions with the experiences of groups of similar individuals who have not. In the case of the AHRDAs, this approach was not suitable for a variety of reasons, including the high penetration rate of AHRDA programming within individual communities and the large differences among populations and programs across the communities served.

⁶ Key informants included AHRDA coordinators and staff, local HRDC officials familiar with AHRDA operations and representatives of other stakeholders and partners with an important role in the design and development of initiatives as well as their ongoing implementation.

⁷ Focus groups included clients of AHRDA programs and services, service deliverers, community leaders and other stakeholders - such as employers and other partners.

⁸ This review of lessons learned is based on the synthesis document entitled: *Lessons Learned: Programs for Aboriginal Peoples*; Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, 1999.

The case studies may not be representative of the whole AHRDA experience, but provide a wealth of rich information.

It is the 10 case studies that constitute the most important source of information for the review. The Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis National Council, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Aboriginal Relations Office of HRDC (which recommended the urban AHRDA) shared in selecting the 10 case studies, taking into consideration:

- the size and scope of AHRDAs;
- the representation of Aboriginal groups (including on- and off-reserve); and
- geographical distribution, so as to reflect both regional and urban/rural experiences.

The case studies, therefore, were not chosen randomly so as to ensure a representative sample of all 79 AHRDAs in place. Because of this, the findings from them may not be fully representative of the AHRDA experience as a whole. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the cases studies cover the full range of Aboriginal groups, as well as a range of AHRDA size and context. Moreover, they account for a significant proportion of total AHRDA funding (about 40%, for example, in 2001-02).⁹ As such, they provide a wealth of rich information, and constitute the central tool for this review. Among other things, they demonstrate the potential as well as the challenges of the AHRDA approach.

An exploratory client survey was designed to be illustrative, rather than representative of the total client population.

A survey of AHRDA clients was carried out as part of each of the case studies. Each case study AHRDA provided the names of up to 100 clients who had participated in an AHRDA program to the reviewers. A community-based fieldworker then selected 50 clients from this list and administered the survey questionnaires either in person or over the telephone.

As with the case studies themselves, this survey was not specifically designed to be representative of the entire client population in each case study AHRDA. Rather, the survey was exploratory, intended to illustrate the nature and direction of the impacts of AHRDA interventions on clients. In this regard, the aggregate number of responses across the 10 case studies (approximately 500) is sufficiently large to lend considerable credibility to the use of the survey findings for such illustrative purposes.

⁹ This includes the total funding for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, the First Nations Human Resources Development Commission of Quebec and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples AHRDAs, although the case studies actually focused on smaller sub-components of these three AHRDAs.

There are significant differences between data maintained by AHRDA holders and in HRDC's administrative data bases.

The case studies showed that there were significant differences between data maintained by the AHRDA holders and similar data available from HRDC's administrative data bases. As an example, even data as fundamental as the number of clients served by an AHRDA, or the number of interventions completed, can vary widely (and in either direction) between the two sources.

These differences may point to gaps and weaknesses in either or both of these data sets.¹⁰ Although data maintained by the AHRDA holders have not been specifically used in this report, the report does include some analysis of administrative data held by HRDC. In view of the possible gaps and weaknesses in these data, the findings from this analysis need to be treated with caution.

Finally, although the Census data used in this review are only at relatively high levels of aggregation, and have limited explanatory value, they provide a useful means for framing the review's analysis and for understanding the significance and pervasiveness of the labour market problems faced by Aboriginal peoples.¹¹

3.4 Phase II of Review

HRDC, working closely with its partners, plans to carry out further review and evaluation of the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements in the future, with the objective of developing a more comprehensive perspective on results achieved and lessons learned. This additional review work will include, among other things:

- an additional 10 case studies;
- client surveys designed to provide reliable information about the whole client population; and
- an examination of the roles and functions of HRDC in support of the AHRDAs.

Work on Phase II of the review is planned to begin in the fall of 2004.

¹⁰ The case study findings were not specific enough to identify the full extent of such data problems, or their causes.

¹¹ It should be noted that under-coverage in the 2001 Census (i.e., people not counted) was considerably higher among Aboriginal people than other segments. Enumeration was not carried out, or was interrupted before it could be completed, on 30 Indian reserves and settlements. This under coverage is likely to have more impact on absolute numbers than on percentages (e.g., rates of unemployment or labour force participation).

4. Observations and Findings

4.1 AHRDA Functions and Processes

The following analysis is based primarily on information available from the case studies. The analysis looked for commonalities and patterns in the case study observations so as to ensure, to the extent possible, that findings would be reliable and corroborated. The findings below, therefore, are generally based on observations common to several (and in many cases all) of the 10 case studies. The following is very much a summarized synthesis of some of the information available in the case study reports. Those 10 reports themselves provide much greater detail and insight than can be conveyed here.

4.1.1 Building Capacity

A review of lessons learned in other programs for Aboriginal peoples underlines the central importance of capacity building.¹² Experience in several jurisdictions has shown that successful program development and delivery is dependent on having the necessary physical and human infrastructure (including a range of administrative, business, technical and bureaucratic skills) in Aboriginal communities. Particularly important elements of capacity include leadership and management skills, strong administrative institutions and reporting mechanisms to monitor results as a basis for learning and adapting.

The importance of building capacity to plan, partner, manage, design, deliver and account for AHRDA-funded programs is widely recognized.

The importance of capacity building is widely recognized by AHRDA holders in the case study communities, and they are making active efforts to establish and enhance their capacities to plan, design, manage, deliver and account for the AHRDA-funded programs. The review work indicates that well in excess of 300 employees are involved in managing and administering programs and services in the 10 case study AHRDAs. This in itself is evidence of considerable human resource capacity having been put in place. In addition, there is widespread acknowledgement that partnering with other public and private sector organizations strengthens the capacity of AHRDA holders to achieve desired results for their constituents.

Despite the widespread recognition of its importance, the priority given to capacity building appears to vary, depending on such factors as the stage of development of existing capacity, the funds available for capacity development, and the governance structures in a community, as well as the means by which AHRDA programming is delivered. For example, although most of the 10 case study AHRDA holders have set up formal capacity-building plans, some have not.

¹² *Lessons Learned: Programs for Aboriginal Peoples*; Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, 1999.

Several interviewees noted that building capacity is not a short-term or once-off exercise. Rather, it has to continue so that capacity can consistently be strengthened, renewed and maintained. In this context, some pointed to the inherent difficulties involved in building and maintaining staff capacity in communities with low levels of formal education. Moreover, while new employees frequently require long-term investments of time and money to bring them up to speed, there is significant turnover of staff once they do become trained and experienced.

In discussions of capacity building in the case studies, there is a heavy emphasis on the importance of training employees as the means to build and sustain capacity, and several findings are identified in this regard:

- Secondments of experienced staff from established bureaucracies (e.g., HRDC or provincial governments) are seen as particularly valuable;
- Finding or developing qualified permanent staff can be difficult and costly in communities where there is a serious lack of basic skills to start with;
- Turnover of staff is a problem, as those who do acquire training and experience are in demand by other employers;
- Training of staff is more effective if done at the local level than at a central location. Travel (of trainers or trainees) can be expensive where the AHRDA covers a large area, and in those cases the use of existing skilled staff to train and mentor their colleagues is viewed as being cost-effective;
- One important aspect of training is having appropriately documented policies, procedures and guidance in place;
- Some case studies noted complaints by front-line workers about insufficiency of training.

The case studies make almost no mention of the need to develop and maintain appropriate capacity in terms of facilities, equipment, information technology, and so on. However, it is not clear whether this means there are no capacity deficiencies in these areas or whether this is simply an oversight in the case studies.

Most case study AHRDA holders want more resources for capacity building.

The total allocation to capacity building across all AHRDAs over a five-year period is \$30 million, an average of \$6 million per annum. HRDC uses the National Aboriginal Resource Allocation Model (NARAM) to determine the allocation of these funds to AHRDAs,¹³ in accordance with the following variables and percentage weights:

Working age population	20%
Not in labour force + unemployed	25%
Some high school	15%
Without employment income	15%

¹³ No allocations for capacity building are made to urban AHRDAs, where having appropriate capacity in place is a precondition to signing Agreements.

Less than grade 9	5%
Lone parent	5%
Mother tongue other than English or French	5%
Remote Zone A – Far North	7%
Remote Zone B – Near North	3%

Interviews and focus group discussions in the course of the case studies indicate that capacity-building budgets are generally seen to be too small. However, it is not clear from the information available whether this is a problem primarily with the absolute amount of funds available for allocation or the manner in which the funds are allocated to individual AHRDAs (that is, the appropriateness of the NARAM for this purpose), and by the AHRDAs to subsidiary levels. With respect to the latter issue, the case studies show that where the AHRDA holders negotiate sub-agreements with local delivery mechanisms (LDMs), sub-agreements do not always earmark funds for capacity building. The result is that any capacity building at the local level must then be done at the expense of labour market programming. These findings underline the need for a clear and consistent policy to ensure an appropriate allocation of funds for capacity building in all circumstances and to all levels where capacity has to be in place.

Only one case study mentioned the existence and use of the AHRDA Capacity Self-Assessment tool. This tool, which is available to all AHRDA holders, has been designed to assist them to review and build their organizational capacities along five key dimensions:

- intervention capacity;
- socio-economic integration capacity;
- partnering capacity;
- administrative capacity; and
- accountability capacity.

Although the primary purpose of this tool is to provide a basis for developing plans to build capacity, it is worth noting that the use of this tool also provides the potential for developing some indicators or measures of actual capacity and, by means of periodic applications, for assessing progress in building it. Without some consistent measures of capacity in place and progress in building it, it may be difficult to ensure that allocations are appropriately sensitive to needs and opportunities.

While the case studies themselves provide little direct information on what capacity actually exists, the fact that significant capacity has indeed been developed is supported by case study findings on how successfully AHRDA holders plan, establish partnerships, manage complex issues and deal with the range of client issues they face in delivering the programs for which they are accountable. These findings are discussed in the following sections of this report.

4.1.2 Business and Strategic Planning

Case study AHRDA holders have shown considerable entrepreneurship and sophistication in business planning and strategic planning.

The “lessons learned” literature points to the importance of Aboriginal communities having the capability, including the vision and leadership, to plan their affairs in accordance with their own needs, priorities and interests.¹⁴

Approaches to planning vary across the case study AHRDAs. These varied approaches reflect, among other things, differences in AHRDA governance and in mechanisms for the delivery of programs and services. For example, in those cases where the delivery of programs and services is decentralized through local delivery mechanisms, planning is generally done on a bottom-up basis, with local plans subsequently rolled up at the AHRDA holder level. In other cases, planning is more centralized.

With few exceptions, the case study AHRDA holders have demonstrated considerable entrepreneurship and sophistication in their strategic and business planning. Examples include:

- setting up inclusive and representative structures to undertake planning;
- consulting with key stakeholders (including individual community members, employers and those who deliver the labour market programs and services) to assess community needs and to identify opportunities;
- exploring partnership opportunities to ensure coordination of activities, leverage available funding and improve the prospects for successful outcomes;
- setting targets and milestones for attaining objectives and monitoring progress against them;
- ensuring that staff at all levels have a good knowledge and understanding of the plans; and
- refining and redefining plans on a regular basis to take account of changing needs and opportunities.

One lesson that emerges from previous experience with Aboriginal programs is that without the existence of demand for labour, concentrating on the supply side will have little effect on increasing labour force participation and reducing unemployment in a particular community.¹⁵ Although in most of the case studies it is difficult to determine whether, or to what extent, there is any focus on the demand for labour, some clearly indicate that the demand side is taken into account in strategic and business planning.

¹⁴ *Lessons Learned: Programs for Aboriginal Peoples*; Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy, Human Resources Development Canada, 1999.

¹⁵ Ibid.

In one case, for example, the AHRDA holder is conducting joint planning sessions with provincial authorities to ensure co-ordination of programming under the AHRDA and Labour Market Development Agreements. In another case, the AHRDA holder is actively participating with other AHRDA holders and the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC) in planning an Aboriginal Apprenticeship Strategy. As part of this, key stakeholders (including employer associations) are being identified and their support is being sought for the initiative.

Although cooperation and contact with the AHRDCC was identified in two of the 10 case studies, in two others it was specifically noted that there had been no communication between the AHRDA and the AHRDCC, so that there was little information at the AHRDA level about its role or activities. This finding, coupled with the fact that in the remaining six case studies the subject of the Council's role was not identified, suggests that there is room for a clarification and a broader communication of its role in working with and supporting AHRDA holders.

4.1.3 Partnerships

All case study AHRDA holders have successfully established numerous partnerships to coordinate programs, leverage resources and promote successful outcomes.

The “lessons learned” literature¹⁶ illustrates clearly that partnerships with the public and private sectors are key to creating and capitalizing on economic development opportunities, coordinating a myriad of programs and services, and leveraging the funds available to Aboriginal organizations. The use of partnerships in AHRDAs is, indeed, both evidence of capacity and an extension of that capacity.

All of the case studies show that these 10 AHRDA holders, as well as associated local delivery mechanisms, have planned and worked to develop and participate in numerous partnerships. Without exception, they have been successful in negotiating formal as well as informal arrangements with a range of community, public sector and private sector organizations, including:

- educational and training institutions;
- employers and employer associations;
- federal, provincial and local government departments and agencies; and
- other Aboriginal organizations.

Some of the arrangements are bilateral, while others involve several organizations. Interviews with key informants, as well as the focus group discussions held in the course of the review, attest to the emphasis that has been placed on the effective use of partnerships as well as the synergy and positive results that have been achieved in many cases.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The partnerships are used to coordinate programming and delivery of services among public and community agencies and to leverage resources and other forms of assistance from all sectors. The case studies highlight and illustrate the important contributions of partnerships to coordinating and integrating the planning, design and delivery of services, making best use of available resources, leveraging outside support and resources, and promoting successful outcomes for clients.

Because the private sector represents a major source of labour demand, partnering with it is particularly important in view of the predominantly supply-side orientation of AHRDA programming. The case studies show that private sector partnerships can range from placing a single client into employment with the assistance of a wage subsidy to planning for human resource needs that can be foreseen some years in the future and putting in place programs to ensure that those needs will be met.

The case studies provide several illustrations of the use of partnerships and of their effectiveness. For example, one AHRDA holder entered into a successful employment partnership with a private sector firm to train 20 First Nations persons so as to help meet an identified shortage for Internet/Personal Computer Support Agents. In an initiative with a major international hotel chain, one AHRDA was able to provide practical hospitality industry training opportunities for First Nations clients. In yet another case, an AHRDA holder attributes the placement of more than 1,500 Aboriginal clients into meaningful employment in 2001-02 to the cooperative relationships it fosters and maintains with employers.

4.1.4 Managing Complex Social, Economic and Employment Issues

Case-study AHRDAs are grappling with the horizontal management of a range of complex issues.

The demonstrated focus on capacity building, inclusive strategic and business planning, and the extensive use of partnerships described above, provide strong evidence that the case study AHRDAs are indeed grappling (and frequently with success) with the horizontal management of complex social, economic and employment issues. They also illustrate how, at a strategic level, they are going about it.

At the operational or service delivery levels, AHRDAs are faced with a range of client issues, not just those that relate directly to training and employment. Other client issues can include, for example, addictions, health, housing and so on. Many of those interviewed in the case studies expressed the need to deal with clients on a case management (holistic) basis. While a more holistic approach is usually possible on-reserve, where services are delivered off-reserve and in urban environments, interviewees noted resource, capacity and jurisdictional constraints in this regard.

Examples of approaches being used by some of the case study AHRDA holders to manage complex and interrelated issues include:

- undertaking labour market research to help identify and plan for emerging challenges and opportunities;
- working with partners at all levels to integrate and coordinate strategies and operations;
- providing cultural awareness training to employers and potential employers;
- co-locating resources to provide a wide range of services through “one-window” approaches;
- providing good communications to potential clients about available programs and services; and
- promoting and supporting community initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles.

A specific issue that came up in many of the case studies was the need for AHRDA delivery staff to provide clients with essential employment-related services that were perceived as being neither funded by the AHRDA nor recognized in the indicators and measures of performance. Examples reported include providing assistance with compiling résumés, filling in Employment Insurance forms, and applying for Social Insurance Numbers. In effect, informants claimed that providing these services, though necessary from the client’s perspective, diverts resources from interventions that are recognized by HRDC. However, the Aboriginal Relations Office of HRDC (ARO) indicates that AHRDA funding is indeed available for such employment-assistance services (EAS), some of which can and should be counted as interventions by AHRDA holders.

4.1.5 Delivering Programs and Services

Local decision-making and community-based service delivery are recognized as significant strengths of the AHRDA approach.

Previous experience shows that there is no single best model for delivering programs and services to Aboriginal peoples. What that experience shows is that the effectiveness of delivery is positively influenced by several factors.¹⁷ These include:

- the availability of leadership and management skills;
- strong administrative institutions;
- reporting mechanisms to monitor results and to provide the information required to make necessary adjustments and innovations;
- access to other funds and resources through partnership arrangements;

¹⁷ Ibid.

- flexibility to adapt programs and allocate resources accordingly; and;
- an appropriate separation of political structures from business institutions.

In effect, the significance of these factors underlines the importance of building capacity (including the capacity to plan and to develop partnerships) as discussed above.

As is evident in the 10 case studies (see Appendix 1), AHRDAs operate in a wide range of circumstances with significant variation in such characteristics as geographic area, size of client population, the Aboriginal groups served and the nature and extent of economic development. One obvious effect of this is that there is much variety in how AHRDAs are implemented, in the range of delivery mechanisms used and in programs and services deployed. Indeed, the flexibility afforded by the AHRDA approach is seen by many key informants as an essential ingredient for success.

The case studies show that many of the AHRDAs are structured in such a way as to maximize decision-making in relation to resource allocation, program design and delivery at the community level. This is achieved by using local delivery mechanisms (based on sub-agreements, sub-contracts and the like) to decentralize these aspects while maintaining accountability to the AHRDA holder for the use of funds and the achievement of results. Interviews and focus group discussion in the course of the case studies indicated strong support for the local decision-making and the community-based service delivery that are intrinsic to a decentralized approach. In addition, AHRDA staff at all levels were generally seen to be professional, and dedicated to serving clients.

Programs and services delivered address diverse client needs and a range of labour market challenges.

The case studies also confirm that a large variety of employment, training and employment assistance services are provided to clients by the front-line delivery agents, with the particular mix of programs and services reflecting the particular AHRDA, as well as specific circumstances at the local level. Programs and services are tailored to meet the needs of potential clients, and may include all or some of the following:

- targeted wage subsidies;
- direct training course purchases;
- job creation partnerships;
- youth work experience;
- student summer employment;
- mobility assistance;
- employment assistance for people with disabilities;
- assistance to unemployed to start their own businesses;
- assistance to increase child care services;
- labour market information.

The case studies and other evidence point to differing degrees of flexibility across AHRDAs in relation to such program and service delivery issues as the operational definition of “interventions”, and the eligibility under the program of expenditures incurred by AHRDA holders. As these differences appear to reflect decisions made by regional HRDC offices, they point to the need to clarify the framework within which the decisions are made so that greater consistency can be assured.

The issue of overlap and duplication also surfaced in some of the case studies, especially where off-reserve or urban AHRDAs were serving more than one Aboriginal group or where AHRDAs were operating in close physical proximity. Although it is not clear from the evidence how extensive these overlaps or duplications might be, it is worth noting that the AHRDAs involved are actively managing the issue through making agreements and working in partnership with others. HRDC recognizes the importance of examining further the issues relating to overlap and duplication and is planning detailed review of this area in Phase II of the review.

4.2 AHRDA Results

The following analysis is based largely on an analysis of the case studies and the associated client surveys, supplemented in some areas by information available in HRDC’s administrative data bases.

4.2.1 Community Impacts

Mobilizing engagement, and enabling communities to take responsibility for human resources development, has led to several beneficial impacts.

The overriding message that comes through from the case studies concerns the central importance of giving communities the responsibility, and providing them with the means to assume the responsibility, for designing and delivering programs that respond to local development strategies, accommodate the diverse needs of clients, and respect social and cultural values. In effect, building the capacity, and giving Aboriginal communities the opportunity to plan and pursue their own interests helps them to gain a sense of control over their own destinies.

While many noted that additional funding would allow them to deliver even more programs and services, interviews with key informants and focus group discussions in each of the 10 case studies pointed to strong, positive impacts of the AHRDA approach and of AHRDA programs on affected communities. These were seen to include:

- a greater sense of confidence and pride in the community;
- more stable families, with positive role models available for children;
- a sense of hope for the future, based on evidence that change for the better is indeed possible;

- the retention of skilled people and money in the communities;
- expanded opportunities for Aboriginal businesses;
- raised expectations and aspirations that are now seen to be realizable; and
- changes in the perceptions of non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal communities, with some breaking down of negative stereotypes.

In all cases, the positive impacts on children and youth in the communities were seen to be particularly important. The perceived effects included improvements not only in such tangible areas as children's health, nutrition, care and living conditions but also in more intangible areas such as the longer-term benefits that flow from greater family cohesion, availability of better role models at family or community levels, and changes in the value placed on education and hard work.

It is important to note that the case studies emphasized that many of the positive effects at the community level are intangible and may occur outside the clients who actually receive the AHRDA intervention. As such, they cannot be directly measured by the quantitative primary and secondary indicators that have been used to define the targets and results of AHRDAs (see Table 1). It is only in the longer-run that these intangible effects are likely to be evidenced in clear improvements in quantitative indicators at either the individual or community levels.

Not only did many key informants note that the quantitative indicators (or statistics) fail to capture all of the important outcomes of AHRDA programming, some believed that the emphasis that has been placed on them is actually detrimental to AHRDA effectiveness. There is some perception that it has encouraged service deliverers to produce better numbers, but without necessarily producing better services or more effective programs.

4.2.2 AHRDA Participation and Results

AHRDA programs and services reach significant proportions of the potential client populations.

The 10 case study AHRDAs report a total potential client population of about 367,000¹⁸. Data reported by the 10 case studies provide some sense of the extent of penetration of AHRDA programs and services within these communities. Unfortunately, these data are not available on a consistent basis across the case studies, as some refer to the number of interventions, some to the number of clients served and some to the number of clients successfully completing interventions. However, in just one year (2001-02), this information shows that the number of interventions delivered and/or clients served totalled nearly 37,000. Although this number undoubtedly includes some double counting

¹⁸ This number represents the total of the working age populations reported by the 10 case studies. The primary source of these data is the 1996 Census, which is also the source of the information used by HRDC in its National Aboriginal Resource Allocation Model.

of clients who received more than one intervention during that year, it is nevertheless of a magnitude to suggest that the penetration of AHRDA programs and services within the relevant communities is significant. It is also important to note in this regard that some AHRDA clients, who benefit from services that have not been counted as funded interventions, may not be included in the total number.

For the first three years of the AHRDAs (1999-2000 through 2001-02), HRDC's administrative data base includes information on more than 114, 000 case management records for clients who participated in one or more AHRDA interventions.¹⁹ The following table provides a capsule profile of these clients.

Table 2 Profile of AHRDA Clients – 1999-2000 through 2001-02	
Characteristic	%
Age	
Less than 31	58
31 and over	42
Sex	
Female	48
Male	51
(Not declared)	1
Region of Residence	
Atlantic	5
Quebec	7
Ontario	17
Prairie	43
British Columbia	22
Territories	6
Aboriginal Group	
First Nations (on and off Reserve)	45
Métis	16
Inuit	5
Non-status	3
Aboriginal Identity Unknown	31
Source: HRDC administrative data.	

Some additional information about the characteristics of AHRDA clients is available from the survey of 500 clients carried out as part of the case studies.²⁰ Among other things, the survey showed that the educational attainment of these clients was generally low. Some 22% of the 500 clients surveyed had not graduated from high school, and for another 29% high school graduation was the highest level of education they had achieved. In terms of

¹⁹ The 114, 000 refers to case management records maintained. It should be noted that the same client may have been counted more than once over the three-year period. For example, if a client had a new start intervention in 2001-02 and another new start intervention in 20002-03 then that client would be counted twice over the three-year period. However, the same client would not be counted more than once within the same fiscal year.

²⁰ As discussed in Section 3.3 above, the survey findings may not be fully representative of the entire AHRDA client population.

income, nearly 60% of those who answered the question said that their total 2001 income from all sources, and before any deductions, was less than \$20,000.

The case study AHRDA holders usually achieved or surpassed annual targets negotiated with HRDC, but the relevance and role of these targets are questionable

Each AHRDA holder negotiates annual targets with HRDC at the regional level. Depending on the particular AHRDA, these targets address all or some of the following areas:

Employment Insurance (EI)

- number of Employment Insurance clients returning to employment;
- number of Employment Insurance clients completing interventions;
- savings to the Employment Insurance Account.

Labour Market Programs

- number of clients returning to employment;
- number of clients completing labour market interventions;
- number of youth completing youth program interventions;
- number of youth obtaining employment (including returning to school);
- savings to social assistance;
- number of child care spaces supported and occupied;
- number of persons with disabilities returning to employment;
- number of persons with disabilities completing labour market interventions.

The Aboriginal Relations Office of HRDC notes that the targets may not be negotiated on a consistent basis. Whereas some regions use a formula for setting targets (based on the amount of funding and average cost per intervention), others negotiate targets based on historical performance of the AHRDAs.

In most cases (but not all) information gathered for the case study AHRDAs shows that such annual targets are being surpassed. However, there are frequent shortfalls in savings to the Employment Insurance Account or to social assistance in relation to established targets. The fact that there are such shortfalls even in some cases where, for example, the numbers of Employment Insurance clients who complete interventions and return to employment exceed targets, suggests that there may be problems either in setting realistic savings targets or in estimating the actual savings that accrue. However, there is no repercussion if an AHRDA holder does not meet established targets; neither is there a bonus if the targets are met or exceeded.

The information on results in relation to targets does not appear to be consistent or robust enough across the case study AHRDAs to allow aggregation.

4.2.3 Client Impacts and Satisfaction

The case studies point to a wide range of positive impacts on individual clients of AHRDA programs and services.

Focus group discussions and interviews with key informants carried out as part of the case studies consistently identified strong and positive impacts on individual clients who participated in AHRDA programs and services. The following – few of which are being captured by ongoing measures and indicators of performance – were among the impacts identified most frequently:

- increased self-esteem and self-confidence;
- higher skill levels and more positive attitudes;
- better prospects of success in the labour market;
- increased motivation to stay at school, or to go on to further education and training;
- decreased substance abuse and healthier lifestyles;
- greater economic independence and enhanced living standards for clients as well as their families (together with the pride that results from this);
- reduced dependence on income assistance; and
- greater knowledge of, and respect for, one's own culture.

The discussion and interviews identified many individual success stories, including instances where clients claimed that they had been able to turn their lives around completely as a result of their participation in AHRDA programs.

Many of the focus groups emphasized the positive effects on Aboriginal youth. They believed that AHRDA programs were successful in helping youth to make better life decisions with respect to such matters as education and careers. More youth were seen to be staying in school and aiming higher in terms of their career aspirations.

A survey of clients shows positive perceptions of the impacts of AHRDA interventions.

The client survey carried out as part of the case studies throws some additional light on the experiences of clients and their very positive perceptions of the impacts of AHRDA programs and services. The following highlights some of the aggregate findings from the survey:²¹

- 73% reported no difficulties in participating; for those who reported difficulties, financial reasons were most commonly cited;
- 60% reported that someone had followed up to check on their progress and experiences after the intervention had been completed;
- 83% found the intervention useful in gaining specific job-related skills;
- 75% found the intervention useful for finding employment or establishing self-employment;
- 82% said the intervention increased their self-confidence; and
- 87% were more optimistic about their future work prospects following the intervention.

Data from the survey also show that 60% of clients surveyed were satisfied with the programs and services they had received. By way of comparison, this is somewhat, but not dramatically lower than the findings of recent formative evaluations of Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) with provinces and territories. These evaluations found that the satisfaction of clients with services received under the LMDAs were generally in the 65-80% range, depending on the province/territory.

With respect to more concrete indicators of impact, over two-thirds of respondents were employed at the time of the survey, most of them full-time. Another 14% were unemployed and looking for work, while the remainder were not in the labour force, mostly because they were students. Nearly two-thirds of those who responded to the question reported higher hourly wages in their most recent job, compared with their pre-intervention job. Of those who reported higher wages, nearly 40% reported that their hourly wages were more than 50% higher in their most recent job.

Administrative data available to HRDC shows the situation of AHRDA clients three months after the completion of interventions.

Another source of information on AHRDA interventions and results is the administrative data reported to HRDC as part of the AHRDA holders' accountability. As noted above (see footnote 13), these data are maintained by HRDC on a case management basis and include the labour force status of AHRDA clients three months after completing an "action plan" – which may include one or a series of funded interventions.

Table 3 shows the ratios of employment and return-to-school "results" to completed action plans for all 79 AHRDAs, annually since 1999-2000.

²¹ See Section 3.3 above for a brief description of this survey and its limitations.

Table 3 Employment and Returns to School, Three Months after Intervention, as percentages of Completed Action Plans (1999-2000 to 2002-2003)			
Fiscal Year	Employment (%)	Returns to School (%)	Total (%)
1999-2000	51.9	Not available	Not available
2000-2001	48.2	8.4	56.6
2001-2002	42.8	14.9	57.7
2002-2003 ²²	32.8	15.2	48.0
Source: Administrative data – HRDC			

It is important to recall that the case studies found significant differences between the data available to the Aboriginal Relations Office of HRDC and the data that the AHRDA holders had in their own records (see Section 3.3 above). Therefore, the information on which Table 3 is based may be flawed and it has not been possible to verify it in the course of this review. Nevertheless, the fact that the information in Table 3 is based on many thousands of case management records, and has been used here only at an aggregate level, does lend the findings some credibility.

As an additional important caveat, the data do not automatically allow any cause and effect conclusions to be drawn. That is, it should not be concluded automatically that a person's status three months after the completion of an intervention is the effect of that intervention. However, the data do provide a preliminary perspective on program impacts. Moreover, due to difficulties in designing more elaborate comparison group approaches to measure employment impacts in this case, it would be very difficult and costly to undertake such work and the results measured might still remain questionable. Nevertheless, there is room for improvement with respect to the current indicators. Their very short term (three months post-intervention) nature may encourage programs to favour superficial short term solutions to employment problems. Instead, longer term solutions and longer term employment benefits are what is required.

The primary and secondary indicators of AHRDA performance do not adequately measure success at the individual client level.

As in the case of community impacts, there was broad consensus among case study focus groups and interviewees that success at the individual client level cannot be adequately measured by the primary and secondary indicators that have been established for AHRDAs. This is evident if one compares those indicators (see Section 2) with the impacts on clients that were identified by focus groups and interviewees (see above).

In addition, the identification of “results” just three months after the intervention puts the focus on the short term, when, in the light of the significant human capital deficits and disadvantages that exist among Aboriginal peoples, it is the longer-term impacts that really matter. In many cases the client's barriers are so great that a single AHRDA

²² Beginning in late 2002-03, a new method for recording results was introduced to avoid the possibility of employment results being double-counted. This change may partly explain the reduction in the percentage employed three months after intervention in 2002-03.

intervention cannot be seen as a “magic bullet” that can be expected to show up in favourable employment results just three months later. It is more likely to be just one step among many in the longer-term process of someone becoming an active member of the labour force and a productive member of the community.

This suggests, in turn, that measures of success and program accountability may need to focus less on such broader areas as savings to Employment Insurance and social assistance, and more on progress in strengthening human capital at the individual level, including, for example, increases over time in literacy among clients and the attainment of high school equivalency. This would have the effect of making AHRDAs accountable for achieving such results and help focus their activities. Among the implications for performance measurement is that there is a place for measurement of client experiences, progress and impacts at a series of time-points following an intervention (for example, at three months, at nine months and again at 18 months), as well as for the compilation and analysis of longitudinal data (in effect, case histories) at the individual client level.

4.3 Findings from Census Data

Census data show that Aboriginal people continue to face serious and entrenched labour market problems.

An examination of Census data from 1996 and 2001 indicates that the labour market problems of Aboriginal peoples, though improving somewhat over this five-year period, are very serious and remain strongly entrenched. Given the long-standing nature of these problems, this finding is hardly surprising.

The entrenched nature of the problem is particularly evident in the case of on-reserve unemployment. As indicated in Table 4, below, on-reserve unemployment in 2001 stood at nearly four times the average rate for Canadians as a whole, and the gap actually widened between 1996 and 2001 (possibly due to cyclical reasons).

Table 4 Unemployment On-Reserve vs. Total Labour Force, 1996, 2001		
Population	Unemployment (%)	
	1996	2001
Aboriginal Labour Force On-Reserve	28.6	27.6
Total Labour Force	10.2	7.4
Ratio	(2.8):(1)	(3.7):(1)
Source: 1996, 2001 Census		

Census data lend a perspective on the relationship between program impacts and the highly entrenched problem of unemployment among Aboriginal peoples.

This highly entrenched nature of on-reserve unemployment poses significant evaluation questions as to whether supply-side adjustment measures alone (such as AHRDAs) are sufficient to improve the employment situation in these circumstances. The evaluation evidence would call for a closer integration/co-ordination of local economic development strategies and programming (demand-side measures) to be combined with the supply-side human capital investment approach which the AHRDAs are designed to embody.

With respect to off-reserve unemployment, the situation is more positive. In this case, the 2001 Census indicates that, for off-reserve Aboriginal groups, unemployment improvements have essentially kept pace with the general improvement in Canadian unemployment rates over the 1996-2001 period (Table 5). However, the off-reserve rate still remains about double the rate for the Canadian labour force as a whole throughout the period. (i.e., overall, no narrowing has occurred).

Table 5		
Unemployment Off-Reserve vs. Total Labour Force, 1996, 2001		
Population	Unemployment (%)	
	1996	2001
Aboriginal Labour Force Off-Reserve	18.1	16.5
Total Labour Force	10.2	7.4
Ratio	(1.8):(1)	(2.2):(1)
Source: 1996, 2001 Census		

The implication from the above is that while the case studies indicate that the AHRDA framework has clearly demonstrated a potential to make a positive contribution to address this situation, progress has (as would be expected) been somewhat limited with respect to the impact of the AHRDA approach on the labour market as a whole. This is doubtless due to some extent to the limited amount of time the AHRDAs (1999–2001) had been operating at the time of the most recent Census.

Census data highlight the need for greater human capital development within the Aboriginal labour force, especially on-reserve.

The persistently high unemployment rates further highlight the need to consider fundamental questions relating to the nature and extent of the human capital deficits among Aboriginal peoples. These issues are illustrated by the following 2001 Census data on educational attainment:

Table 6 Highest Level of Educational Attainment: Aboriginal and Total Populations 15 Years and Older			
Highest level of Education	Aboriginal On-Reserve (%)	Aboriginal Off-Reserve (%)	Total Canada (%)
Less than high school graduation	58.6	43.9	31.3
High school graduation only	6.8	11.0	14.1
Some post-secondary	10.8	13.3	10.8
Trades certificate or diploma	11.9	12.2	10.9
College certificate or diploma	8.3	12.8	15.0
University – below Bachelors	1.3	1.4	2.5
University degree	2.3	5.2	15.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census			

As table 7 suggests, the differences are particularly stark at the lowest and highest levels of educational attainment; nearly half (44%) of Aboriginal people living off-reserve do not have high-school graduation, compared to 31% for the total population of Canada. It is notable that the comparable on-reserve figure is even more serious at 59%. Given the strong correlation typically observed between success in the labour market and educational attainment, the very high proportion of the Aboriginal population that has not completed high school faces a significant disadvantage.

The evidence overall points strongly to the need to increase human capital in Aboriginal communities in the long term, as part of broader efforts to increase the availability of sustainable employment and the integration of Aboriginal peoples into the labour force.

5. Conclusions

The most recent Census confirms the seriousness and the persistence of the labour market challenges that Aboriginal people face across the country. Whether on- or off-reserve, the labour force participation of Aboriginal people is lower, and their rate of unemployment continues to be much higher, than for the Canadian population as a whole.

As discussed in Section 3.1 above, this review of the AHRDAs set out to examine three main groups of issues:

- the progress that AHRDA holders have made in building capacity, planning their activities, establishing partnerships and managing complex, interrelated issues;
- the nature and extent of program results that AHRDAs have achieved; and
- the quality and completeness of client and program results information.

5.1 Progress made by AHRDA Holders

The case studies provide encouraging findings about the importance that AHRDA holders accord to having the capacity that is needed to plan, partner, manage, design, deliver and account for AHRDA-funded programs and services, as well as the emphasis they have placed on its development and maintenance. Key informants stressed the importance of capacity building to the successful administration of the AHRDAs but noted further that the current level of funding for capacity building was insufficient to meet their needs. However, the evidence available from the current evaluation does not permit any firm conclusions regarding the adequacy or the uses of the capacity building funding that is currently allocated to the AHRDAs, i.e., it is unclear to what extent the problem lies with the actual amount of funds available for allocation (about \$6 million per annum), the manner in which HRDC allocates the funds to AHRDAs, the manner in which AHRDAs allocate funds to subsidiary levels, or some combination of the three. A more detailed assessment of capacity building budgets and activities will be explored in detail in Phase II of the Review of the AHRDAs.

The case study AHRDA holders have shown entrepreneurship and sophistication in conducting their planning activities, and all have been active in establishing numerous partnerships with public and private sector organizations to coordinate programs, leverage their resources, and promote successful outcomes for their clients. As a result, there is evidence that they have established the means to strengthen their management of the complex social, economic and employment issues that they face, and to design and deliver programs and services that address diverse client needs and a range of labour market challenges.

Despite the potential that has been demonstrated and the successes that have already been achieved, the case studies emphasized the need for realism in expectations and the importance of taking a longer-term perspective. There are no magic or instant solutions available.

Although some issues were raised relating to such matters as the need to clarify the amount of flexibility that exists, and the limited amount of funding available, the case studies showed strong and consistent support for the AHRDA model. In particular, local decision-making and community-based service delivery are widely recognized as significant strengths of the AHRDA approach. An overriding message that comes from the case studies is the central importance of giving communities the responsibility, and providing them with the means to assume the responsibility, for designing and delivering programs that respond to local development strategies, accommodate the diverse needs of clients and respect social and cultural values.

In effect, the case studies demonstrate clearly that building the necessary capacity, and giving Aboriginal communities the opportunity to plan and pursue their own interests helps them to gain a sense of control over their destinies.

5.2 The Nature and Extent of Program Results

The evidence shows that there is a significant penetration of AHRDA programs and services among potential client populations. Moreover, interviews with key informants and focus group discussions held as part of the case studies pointed to strong, positive impacts of the AHRDA approach and of AHRDA programs and services on affected communities as well as on individual clients. In all cases, the positive effects on children and youth were seen as particularly important.

The findings suggest that many (if not most) of the positive impacts at both community and individual levels are intangible. These include such effects as changes in confidence, pride and motivation, increased stability of families and the availability of better role models. It is only in the longer-run that these intangible effects are likely to result in clear improvements in any quantitative measures of results.

The survey of 500 clients carried out as part of the case studies also shows that these clients were generally satisfied with the programs and services they had received. They expressed strongly positive perceptions of the impacts of these interventions on such matters, for example, as increasing their self-confidence, gaining specific job-related skills and finding employment. It should be pointed out though, that these positive and optimistic perceptions ultimately need to be nurtured and sustained by practical possibilities of active and productive engagement in the labour market.

The case studies, therefore, indicate that AHRDA programming has demonstrated considerable potential to make a positive contribution at the level of the individual client as well as that of the community. However, Census data suggest that progress to date has been somewhat limited (as might be expected) with respect to any effects on the labour market as a whole that might be attributable to the AHRDA approach. This may be due, in part,

to the limited amount of time the AHRDAs have been operating and the need for sustained and persistent efforts (possibly extending over generations) to overcome the serious human capital deficits that exist among Aboriginal people.

The very high rate of unemployment among Aboriginal people, and its entrenched nature, also pose questions about whether adjustment measures that operate primarily on the supply side (such as AHRDAs) are likely to improve their employment situation significantly in either relative or absolute terms. One reading of the review evidence is that there needs to be a closer integration and co-ordination of local economic development strategies and programs (demand-side measures) with the supply-side human capital investment approach that the AHRDAs are designed to embody. This is not a case of either-or, as demand-side and supply-side approaches are mutually supportive, and the success of either ultimately depends on the success of the other.

5.3 The Quality and Completeness of Information on Results

Interviews and focus group discussions carried out as part of the case studies showed that the current menu of quantitative indicators and measures (see Table 1) was widely seen by key informants and focus groups as failing to capture all of the important effects of AHRDA programming at both the community and individual levels. Indeed, some key informants were of the view that an ongoing focus on these relatively short-term measures may actually be detrimental, as their pursuit may result in taking action that will boost these numbers, but at the cost of action that would have a more profound effect on addressing the serious human capital deficits that exist.

The evidence points strongly to the conclusion that the nature of AHRDA “success” needs to be redefined to take account of the kinds of effects and outcomes that AHRDAs are actually generating – especially at the level of individual clients. There needs to be much greater clarity about the results that can reasonably be expected; that is, results that are required, logically feasible, and within the capacity of AHRDA holders to deliver. Among other things, it is with respect to results which focus on improvements in human capital that accountability needs to be rendered by AHRDA holders. Further, if the negotiation and establishment of targets for results is to have any meaning, then something needs to hang on whether or not the targets are met.

Finally, a sound framework for the mutual (two-way) accountability relationships between AHRDA holders and HRDC must be based on valid and reliable data, consistently and transparently available to both parties (i.e., the administrative data software, data-entry process, and results-uploading to the regions and NHQ may require streamlining and realignment to decrease the potential for error). The evidence shows that this is not the case at present, and that the considerable efforts and costs incurred in sustaining current data flows between the parties and maintaining data bases may be ineffective.

Appendix 1

The 10 Case Study AHRDAs

Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle (ALFDC)

The ALFDC acts as an umbrella organization that provides funding to six local delivery mechanisms (LDMs). The LDMs, in turn, deliver employment and training services to a potential client population of approximately 5,000 Aboriginal people in Ontario.

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC)

The AMC negotiated an AHRDA for all of the 62 First Nations in Manitoba and established a central body for its administration and co-ordination. Thirty-six sub-agreement holders provide program and service delivery to all First Nations people in Manitoba. One of the largest sub-agreement holders (the Peguis First Nation) was the specific focus of this case study. The Peguis First Nation has a potential client population of more than 7,300 people on and off reserve.

Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD)

CAHRD is one of three AHRDA holders in Manitoba. It serves a potential client population of more than 40,000 Aboriginal people in the urban Winnipeg area through sub-contracts with several Aboriginal institutions and delivery agents.

First Nations Employment Society (FNES)

The FNES was formed by 10 First Nations in the Greater Vancouver/Sunshine Coast service area. Each of the 10 First Nations is represented on the FNES Board of Directors. Programs and services are delivered through 11 Local Delivery Agreements (with points of service on each reserve) to a potential client population of almost 15,000 people of First Nations and Inuit Ancestry.

First Nations Human Resource Development Commission of Quebec (FNHRDCQ)

The FNHRDCQ is a large AHRDA, covering most of the province of Quebec. For the purposes of the case study, the focus was on a single community – the Listuj First Nation, as represented by the Listuj Mi'gmaq Development Council (LMDC). The potential client population served by the LMDC is in excess of 1,000.

Kativik Regional Government (KRG)

The KRG is the AHRDA holder for the region of Nunavik in Northern Quebec. Although most residents of this region are of Inuit descent, the KRG offers employment and training services to all 9,000 residents. To do so, it maintains offices in all 14 Nunavik communities.

Manitoba Métis Federation Inc. (MMF)

The MMF AHRDA delivers labour market programs and services to Métis, non-status Indians (off-reserve) and Inuit living in Manitoba. Approximately one-third of AHRDA funds are allocated to province-wide initiatives, with the remainder being designated for local projects decided and administered by seven Local Management Boards. The potential client population across Manitoba is more than 56,000 people.

Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA)

The MNA, which represents 67 Métis Locals in Alberta, has province-wide responsibility for delivering AHRDA programs and services to a potential client population estimated to be over 60,000. There are 18 Local Employment Assistance Centres that provide programs and services to off-settlement Métis. The Employment Assistance Centres are cost-shared with First Nations, and only 40% of their clients are Métis, even though MNA provides over 70% of the funding.

New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council (NBAPC)

The NBAPC refers to itself as “an off-reserve Aboriginal voice for...Status and Non-Status Aboriginal people who reside in the province”. To deliver its programs and services to a potential client population of about 7,500 Aboriginal people, NBAPC has divided the province into four territories, all of which are serviced from its Fredericton headquarters.

Saskatchewan Indian Training Assessment Group (SITAG)

The SITAG AHRDA serves 72 First Nations in Saskatchewan, as well as the First Nations and Inuit people residing off-reserve. To deliver programs and services to an estimated client population of more than 46,000, it has signed 24 Local Labour Force Development Agreements with Tribal Councils, independent First Nations and urban groups.