

Women's Economic Council

# Regional Clustering Model for Aboriginal Women

Aboriginal Women and Economic Development  
Feasibility Study Report



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## Executive Summary

### Objectives

- To highlight the needs of Aboriginal women, reflecting gaps in programming and services to women starting and/or maintaining enterprises or other types of income-generating activities
- To determine the feasibility of using a Cluster Model approach for increasing the number of Aboriginal women and potentially others participating in income-generating initiatives including self-employment, new business start-up and community economic development initiatives
- To determine the readiness of stakeholders supporting Aboriginal women to participate in and/or support a Cluster initiative focused on economic outcomes for women
- To identify possible pilot sites and/or partners that could be engaged and supported to start an Economic Cluster for Aboriginal women
- To identify Cluster Model outcomes and guiding principles that should be used in the design and start-up of clusters

### Findings

Aboriginal women in Canada require much greater support to successfully launch their aspirations for self-employment and entrepreneurship into economic reality. These women require support representing a continuum of business support needs:

- Product/service development
- Market analysis
- Business model options
- Resourcing/Financing
- Feasibility Determination
- Capacity Building
- Business Networks/Mentorship
- Sustainability and Growth

In addition to these types of supports, Aboriginal women and other marginalized women in Canada require supports addressing fundamental needs and challenges that reflect the realities of their lives in their communities as they try to start and sustain income-generating initiatives and enterprises:

- Confidence to engage and participate in mainstream activities
- Overcoming fear and making informed decisions impacting standards of living and existing benefits
- Childcare and transportation amidst limited resources and support networks
- Transitioning/transforming in new roles while retaining a support network

- Valuation of personal strengths, capacities and talents not traditionally recognized
- Knowledge and skill development plans and interventions for personal and business applications
- Working and leveraging initiatives within political, cultural and gender paradigms
- Work/life balance that enables sustainable participation in business and community

Existing resources and business support interventions in Canada for the most part fail to help Aboriginal women in particular and other marginalized women address these fundamental challenges. Mainstream employment, self-employment or entrepreneurial programs and resources readily acknowledge and support a menu of business needs of women. However, these investments often fail to acknowledge and address the scope and depth of needs women face when starting or working a business venture. Existing supports therefore fail to address the very needs that underpin the success of women in self-employment and other forms of business in Canada.

This report identifies a Cluster Model as a framework for successfully engaging, supporting and guiding Aboriginal women and other marginalized women towards self-employment and/or leading and participating in business enterprises.

A cluster model is a flexible framework that moves and changes depending on who is seeking the support and what needs are presented. This “living model” of support provides customize-fit programming, services, resources and networks relevant to supporting the needs of individual women and/or an organization supporting women.

*For example: If an Aboriginal organization comes to the table requesting support to start a social enterprise, the appropriate support and expertise will be recruited to help guide the process. Should an Aboriginal woman come to the table looking for mentorship to support her business, appropriate experts will be sought to guide and help her along the continuum of success.*

WEC consulted with Aboriginal women’s organizations, foundations and individuals to determine the readiness and feasibility of a Cluster Model for Aboriginal women. There was strong support for the use of this framework and also a readiness to get Cluster Models started. Clusters are needed where women live and the supports and resources provided to women must be built within their local communities and networks.

This feasibility study indicates that rationale, support and opportunity currently exist to implement and pilot this model.

## Recommendations



**Aboriginal women in Canada require much greater support to successfully launch their aspirations for self-employment and entrepreneurship into economic reality.**

This report provides evidence that Aboriginal women and other marginalized women can be supported more fully to participate, lead and grow self-employment initiatives and entrepreneurial enterprises in Canada.

Future investment in projects, programming, services and resources for women should consider the following recommendations:

1. Recognize that Aboriginal women and other marginalized women represent missed potential and missed opportunities for new business starts and labour market participation. Require an engagement strategy and holistic continuum that will appeal to and support women who reside outside mainstream society.
2. Provide support that recognizes and addresses the realities of women's lives (the context in which they live, the challenges they face, the personal asset-base they possess and feasible options that build their personal as well as business capacity) and use a holistic approach to help women start and/or lead a self-employment initiative or business enterprise.
3. Build strong alliances and networks with business leaders, community leaders and women champions both inside and outside of local communities. Consider the importance of accessing resources within a geographic range as well as virtually through technology and the internet.
4. Partner with agencies and/or people with expertise and experience using holistic approaches that support a range of needs women have as they pursue work.
5. Foster and develop community partnerships and alliances; recognize and use existing processes, tools and resources that can assist women rather than duplicate.
6. Where possible, encourage the support of women and women's initiatives through community activism and voluntarism.
7. Encourage local buy-in, community ownership, expertise in supporting business start-up and success, confidence and pride by building Cluster Models from the ground up with local stakeholders in leadership.
8. In addition to supporting women directly, support the regional and/or local community to strengthen its local resource base, networks and market initiatives supporting women as a "Win Win" scenario for stakeholders in the community.
9. Bridge women and women's organizations across provincial, cultural and language boundaries by forging new and supportive linkages, networks and partnerships within regions and across provinces and the country so that women-centered supports can be shared.

10. Link new initiatives led and supported by women to economic development plans so that government, business and community stakeholders recognize, value and appreciate the significance of women in the local economy as well as their contribution to their families' standard of living.

11. The target groups for the WEC Cluster are:

- First Nations, Inuit and Métis women regardless of their status or place of residence
- Aboriginal women's organizations delivering small business and or employment services to Aboriginal women
- Canadian women entrepreneurs and organizations which have expressed a desire to work in a culturally relevant way with Aboriginal women entrepreneurs
- Local expertise such as government representatives, business leaders, non government agencies and other trainers who can support the planning for the organization or individual within the labour market/entrepreneurial context

## Background

### Goals

The goal of the *WEC Regional Clustering Model for Aboriginal Women Study* was to explore how Aboriginal women and potentially others in their communities could participate in *Regional Economic Support Clusters* that would foster knowledge sharing and mentoring. This study examined existing support frameworks for Aboriginal women-led self-employment initiatives, business enterprises and/or community economic development work. This study also examined the feasibility of developing Aboriginal Women's Economic Development Clusters throughout Canada. This included a plan for proposed pilot projects and possible resourcing through funding proposals.

### Methodology

This study undertook a review of the current barriers and requirements for Aboriginal women and entrepreneurship in Canada, in order to identify strategies for addressing the barriers.

This study also gathered feedback from agencies currently supporting Aboriginal women or other marginalized women who have expressed the desire to start, lead or work in an income-generating capacity in their community. This feedback was used to identify the level of support available to Aboriginal women and other marginalized women who are successful in income-generating activities that support the economy.

In addition, this study interviewed key informants to assess the feasibility of using a cluster approach to address the needs of Aboriginal women as they work to support themselves and the economy in their regions. The readiness of Aboriginal women to support and possibly participate in a cluster support initiative for women was also assessed. These key informant interviews were also used to collect information that could identify potential pilot communities, project partners and ways a cluster model approach might complement services presently being offered and delivered to Aboriginal women entrepreneurs.

## Work Plan

The study included the following activities:

### Phase 1 – (August 1-September 15, 2010)

- Review and development of conceptual framework

### Phase 2 – (September 15 - November 15, 2010)

- Consultations - Telephone Interviews
- Analysis of survey and telephone interviews
- Preliminary draft of Research phase (Interim Report)

### Phase 3 – (October 15 – November 15, 2010)

- Development of cluster model design and business plan
- Testing of design with WEC advisory committee members

### Phase 4 – (November 15, 2010 to March 7, 2011)

- Revision incorporating comments and recommendations from WEC Board
- Completion of the final report

# Profiles of Aboriginal Women Entrepreneurs

## Aboriginal Context

A 2002 Aboriginal Entrepreneurs Survey provides data relevant for describing pieces of the Aboriginal business context.

Businesses owned by Aboriginal people are becoming a key driver of economic opportunity in Aboriginal communities and in Canada. From 2001 to 2006, self-employment rates among Aboriginal people in Canada grew by 25 percent, compared to just 7 percent among non-Aboriginal Canadians. In 2002, Aboriginal small and medium enterprises created approximately 82,000 full-time jobs, and 18,000 part-time jobs. Aboriginal-owned businesses represent approximately 2 percent of Canadian SMEs, whereas Aboriginals represent 3.8 percent of the Canadian population.

## Aboriginal Women Context

Women play a very important role in Aboriginal businesses, with 51 percent of Aboriginal-owned SMEs belonging entirely or partly to women, while the Canadian average stands at 47 percent. Since 1981 the number of self-employed Aboriginal women has grown at a phenomenal rate. Between 1991 and 2001, the number more than doubled and their numbers are increasing at seven times the rate of Canadian women. Aboriginal women accounted for 38% of Aboriginal self-employed people in Canada. This figure is slightly higher than that reported by the Aboriginal Business Canada in 1989 when 37.7% of Aboriginal businesses had some degree of ownership by Aboriginal women. This shows that Aboriginal women are continuing to experience barriers and difficulties in accessing support to follow their business dreams.

In the study conducted by Economic Development for Canadian Aboriginal Women (*A Profile of Aboriginal Women in Business – 1995*) it reports that Aboriginal women who operate sole proprietorships operate their businesses from home and create employment opportunities for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.



**Aboriginal women are continuing to experience barriers and difficulties in accessing support to follow their business dreams.**

Aboriginal women entrepreneurs are more likely to work in the secondary and knowledge economies, have college or university training, and operate in partnership than their male counterparts. As encouraging as these trends may appear, women remain less likely to own a business than other groups, and lag behind their male and non-Aboriginal counterparts on key socio-economic indicators, such as income and employment rates.

Moreover, program data suggests they are not benefitting from the support for Aboriginal entrepreneurship offered by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada at the same rate

as Aboriginal men. Aboriginal women still only represent one percent of the total number of women entrepreneurs in Canada while the Aboriginal population is near four percent. Aboriginal women-owned businesses tend to be smaller, newer and grow more slowly than their male-owned counterparts and as a result Aboriginal women entrepreneurs generate less income and tend to have fewer employees.

## Aboriginal Women's Needs



**Financing tends to be the most common problem experienced by Aboriginal women and their organizations.**

Aboriginal women are likely to face some of the same barriers as other women do in Canada. Aboriginal women are also likely to face the same barriers marginalized women face. Some of these barriers include isolation from mainstream society, decreased self-awareness and self-value, lack of confidence, insufficient personal and professional networks, discrimination, violence, lack of education, lack of essential skills, limited business knowledge or skills, little or no work experience, insufficient resourcing with limited or no credit and/or collateral or bank loans. (footnote: Key note informant, WISE, V. Carruthers)

Aboriginal women and their organizations as well face great difficulties in accessing business financing, access or establishing markets, keeping skilled employees and challenges in maintaining a family while operating a business. Financing tends to be the most common problem experienced by Aboriginal women and their organizations. Aboriginal women and their organizations cite lack of financing from either government or banks and obtaining an operating line of credit as barriers.

Factors such as “size, sector, and growth potential of their business... (including) personal credit worthiness also contribute to Aboriginal female-owned businesses being undercapitalized and more likely to fail.” Aboriginal women either on or off-reserve face many barriers in setting up businesses. These can include the lack of childcare, insufficient skills to formulate a business proposal and even the lack of awareness that Aboriginal women can become successful entrepreneurs.

## Profiles of Support Programs Available to Assist Aboriginal Women Entrepreneurs



**Only a handful of programs have been adapted or designed specifically for the needs of Aboriginal women.**

A scan of existing programs and services available to Aboriginal women found only a handful of programs that have been adapted or designed specifically for the needs of Aboriginal women. It was difficult to identify programs that addressed the needs of Aboriginal women and the realities of their lives in a holistic manner. Here are some examples of how organizations supporting women have tried to resource Aboriginal women more effectively for business.

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) and Pauktuutit both adapted and used the guide *Journey to Success*. In the case of Pauktuutit, their Inuit Women for

Tomorrow were able to deliver workshops but lacked the necessary resources to deal with the increased interest and support that these initiatives created. Pauktuutit is presently undertaking its own feasibility study to expand on its Inuit Women in Business project with funding from a recently announced program funding of \$1 million over two years from Indian and Northern Affairs. This funding is focused on improving the participation of Aboriginal women in economic development initiatives in their communities.

In the case of ONWA, it has continued to pursue its economic development program in partnership with PARO, an organization located in Thunder Bay that assists women to start and sustain income-earning initiatives and businesses. PARO is actively working to support Aboriginal women and held a Forum on Aboriginal Women's Economic Development in May 2010.

### Support Programs Available To Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

Other notable initiatives include CESO's *Aboriginal Women for Tomorrow* which was developed and delivered in partnership with the Native Women's Association of Canada for over two years. This program resulted in new skills and knowledge, the establishment of new support networks, increased confidence and self-esteem, and a changed outlook on their future prospects. The majority of women interviewed as part of the program evaluation indicated that the program gave them new knowledge and new skills. Almost half indicated that the program had improved their self-confidence. As is the case with many funding initiatives targeted specifically to Aboriginal women, the program was forced to cease its operations due to a lack of funding. CESO still receives requests from several communities and organizations to provide the funding support and programming based on information collected from a key informant interview.

Another interesting initiative funding by Alberta Employment and Immigration (AEI) and developed by Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) in 2008 was the Aboriginal Business Startup Program for women within the urban Aboriginal population. This program provided training, business planning assistance,

coaching, mentoring, network development opportunities and micro loans to assist in business start-up. In late 2008, the success of the pilot led to the development of Next Step to Success Learning Series, designed for women at all stages of business. AWE is hoping to develop more partnerships with Métis settlements and First Nations communities to further promote Aboriginal entrepreneurship among Aboriginal women.

A common theme is that Initiatives that have been developed and targeted specifically to Aboriginal women have not received the same sustained support from government.

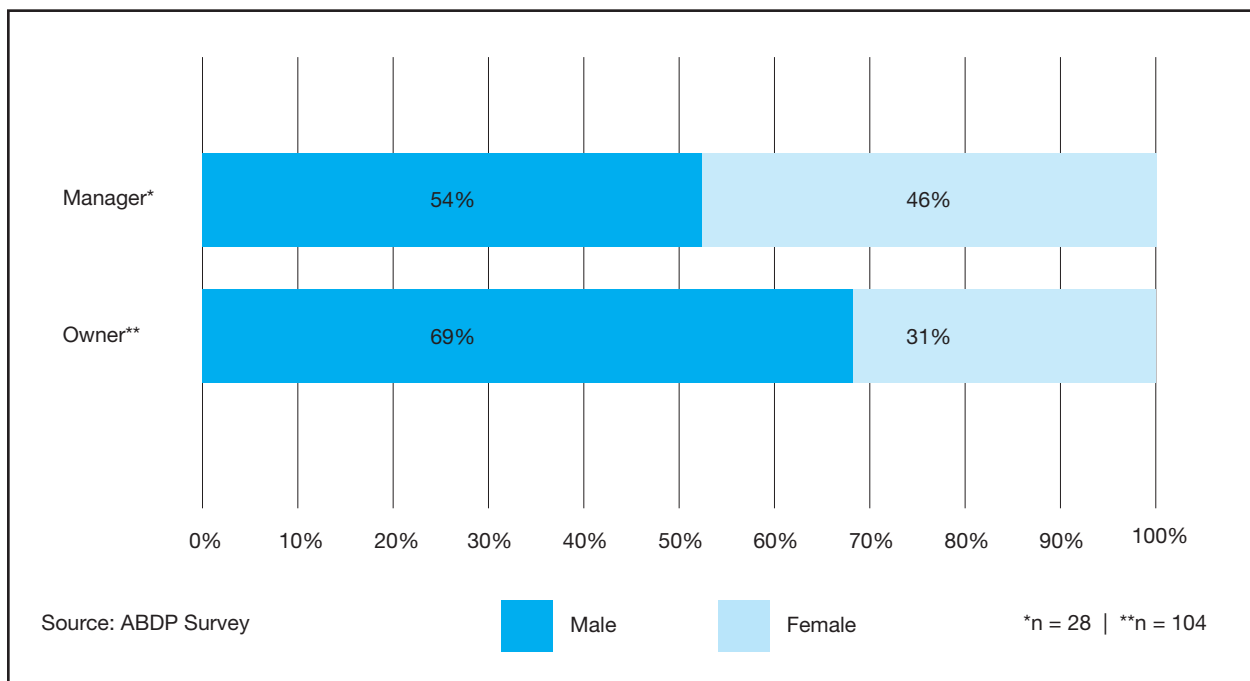
Over the years there have been initiatives such as small business manual and guide Journey to Success, from Indian and Northern Affairs. The guide is readily available on its website but no large-scale provisions were made for follow-up workshops or support for Aboriginal women.

## Financial Resourcing For Aboriginal Entrepreneurs

The largest resource is the federal government’s Aboriginal Business Canada managed by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. A recent evaluation of Aboriginal Business Canada found that while Aboriginal businesses owned fully or partly by women accounted for more than half of start-ups, Aboriginal businesses owned or managed by men were more likely to receive funding under Aboriginal Business Canada programs.

The Aboriginal Business Development Program Survey reports the following. The figure and graph indicates that only 31% of funding went to Aboriginal women business owners with the majority of funding going to Aboriginal businesses that were managed by a male.

**Figure 1 Gender of Owners and Managers of ABD Funded Firms**



The report also indicated that the trend in contributions to women is actually decreasing in terms of volume and size. It is believed that some of the eligibility criteria for ABC financing could discourage or even discriminate against women including the required equity contribution of 15 percent and the requirement to work full-time in the management and operation of their business. There are no specific initiatives aimed at increasing the percentage of women receiving ABC funding. Aboriginal Financial Institution representatives and other observers confirm that there are no specific initiatives to ensure gender equality in accessing financing. Some Aboriginal Financial Institutions said that proponents are judged according to cash flow and net worth. A number said that applicants are often family-run businesses that involve a husband and wife. Some respondents confirm that 70 percent of loan recipients are male.

Clearly Aboriginal women require greater support in accessing financing for their businesses; this includes Aboriginal women's organizations that may be pursuing community economic development or social enterprises.

## Consultations - Telephone Interviews

A series of telephone interviews were conducted with regional and local agencies or associations that offer programs and services to Aboriginal women entrepreneurs. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain a first-hand perspective on the types of challenges, trends, and opportunities faced by Aboriginal women entrepreneurs. The following is the list of people and/or organizations interviewed between September, 2010 and the December 2010:

- Assembly of First Nations Women's Council
- Native Women's Association of Canada
- Pauktuutit Women's Association
- CESO - Aboriginal Women for Tomorrow's Program
- Kahnawake Economic Development Commission
- Louis Riel Corporation
- Alberta Women Entrepreneurs Next Step Program for Aboriginal Women
- PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise
- Ka Ni Kanichinik
- Piruvik Centre, Leena Evik

An example of the questionnaire that guided the interview is in Appendix A.

## Findings/Recommendations

The following findings and recommendations made by the above stakeholders were factored into the final recommendations of this report. Individuals and associations supporting Aboriginal women indicated there was a need for:

- Business skills training and capacity building particularly as it relates to financial literacy
- A more global approach that integrates cultural and women-centered programming with conventional business/economic curriculum training
- Greater accessibility to financing and extended support services
- The establishment of mentoring and coaching initiatives by Aboriginal women for Aboriginal women
- Sustained funding and support for economic development initiatives targeted to Aboriginal women

- Better networking and coordination among organizations providing services
- Supports focused on the needs of Aboriginal women living in small rural and remote communities since lack of transportation and adequate broadband access hinder communication and information exchange
- A participatory approach in the development of tools and programming

## Potential Demand for a Cluster

WEC explored the potential for the development of an Aboriginal Women's Economic development cluster or national network. Overall, the response has been favourable. Most key informants have found that while the realities and goals of Aboriginal women are diverse, a mechanism is needed for exchange on information about the realities faced by Aboriginal women entrepreneurs.



**A mechanism is needed for exchange on information about the realities faced by Aboriginal women entrepreneurs.**

Given the recent growth rate in the number of self-employed Aboriginal women, their increased participation in small businesses and their increased level of education, we can anticipate that the demand for programs and services better suited to their needs, their situations and their goals will also increase.

Based on the review of existing programs and feedback it is recommended that WEC target the following regions and organizations for possible pilot sites:

1. Northern Inuit communities and partnerships with organizations such as Pauktuutit. Inuit women living in the far north face unique challenges due to distances, lack of infrastructure and small population sizes. Pauktuutit is presently building on its Inuit Women for Tomorrow program but needs additional support when it comes to developing further tools, programs and specific training programs. Representatives expressed interest in pursuing the possibility of a partnership with WEC.
2. Rural communities in northern Ontario and a possible partnership with PARO. PARO is working with the Ontario Native Women's Association in Thunder Bay to develop culturally-appropriate programming and services for women in the region. PARO too has expressed interest in working with WEC to help develop an Aboriginal Women's Economic Development Cluster.
3. The Assembly of First Nations Women's Council. For the cluster to be successful, WEC must establish effective partnerships with key Aboriginal organizations. WEC has communicated with the Chair and Women's National coordinator and they have indicated strong interest in a cluster model approach. Based on the limited data and information, it appears that Métis women and well-educated First Nations women are utilizing existing mainstream services in increasing numbers.

However, First Nations women on-reserve face their own unique challenges given the socio-economic situations faced by many First Nations communities and by Section 89 of the Indian act prohibits the use of reserve land as collateral, which makes it difficult for financial institutions such as banks to lend money to Aboriginal entrepreneurs if they do not have assets to seize if the client defaults.

## Next Steps

### Proposed WEC Cluster Model

In the past two decades the cluster approach has drawn a great deal of interest from governments, industry, scholars, and economic development agencies. Many Aboriginal communities and organizations presently participate in several industry and research-based clusters such as forestry, mining, the health and social services at both the provincial and national levels. The federal government and their provincial counterparts continue to promote a cluster model as an effective means of improving regional and local economies.

### What is a cluster model?

Although the definition of a cluster approach can vary greatly, most definitions refer to the definition provided by Michael Porter as a defined geographic of inter-connected firms and institutions working in a common industry. Over the years, however, the term cluster and the cluster approach model has become less associated with a specified geographic region or industry and more closely identified with the creation of collaborative and dynamic relationships between various players around common goals, innovative ideas, knowledge sharing, public and private investment. Such clusters foster a collaborative environment around a common framework designed to promote synergy and innovation.

A cluster model can function as an integrated unit of service with respect to sustainable program provisions, inclusionary practices, shared responsibility and accountability for transitions, achievement and client care while optimizing the use of resources and support service networks. An example of cluster in an Aboriginal context is the Aboriginal Human Resources Council, which fostered the creation of various clusters to address Aboriginal skills training and development and employment. It is this broader interpretation of the cluster approach that will form the basis of our proposed cluster model.



**A cluster model is a flexible framework that moves and changes depending on who is seeking the support and what needs are presented.**

It is a forum where women with their skills and opportunity can role model, support and guide resources, and information to community members in the development of economic development initiatives. Each cluster model would be a “living model” changing to accommodate whoever walked in the door. An example of this is the following.....an Aboriginal women’s organization may be looking for guidance and support to build a co-op. The cluster model coordinator would recruit community support with expertise in co-op development.

Or an Aboriginal woman may come to a cluster model looking for business start-up support. The cluster model would respond by recruiting local expertise that potentially has experience in this business, government resource guidance and financial support and other critically needed advice and

opportunities that will take that individual from the conception stage to the successful implementation stage. A cluster model brings together community, building strong networks to support the local economies.

Even though this model is targeted for Aboriginal women our feasibility study indicates that all women wishing to start community economic development initiatives would benefit from this model.

Cluster models can be supported through funding but can also be based solely on in-kind contributions, voluntarism helping to building strong networks and community support.

The start-up of clusters requires leadership and coordination functions for the first two or three years. However, the intent is to see these models operate and be sustainable over time through voluntarism and minimum resources.

## Purpose and Vision

The cluster model is based on the premise that all women deserve equal and fair access to a variety of programs that respect their culture, language, socio-historical realities and economic conditions. The “cluster” approach can help to address identified gaps in the services and programs to equitably expand program choice, supports and services especially important when resources are limited.

The long-term objective of the WEC Aboriginal Women’s Entrepreneurship cluster model is to promote entrepreneurship and economic development among Aboriginal women and therefore help to reduce the economic and social inequalities between Aboriginal women and their Canadian counterparts. Strategies and initiatives arising from this WEC initiative will ensure that they are primarily locally/regionally designed, administered and provided to Aboriginal women. This will be achieved through a collaborative approach based on the expressed needs of Aboriginal women themselves.

## Target Groups

The target groups for the WEC Cluster are:

- First Nations, Inuit and Métis women regardless of their status or place of residence
- Aboriginal women’s organizations delivering small business and or employment services to Aboriginal women
- Canadian women entrepreneurs and organizations that have expressed a desire to work in a culturally relevant way with Aboriginal women entrepreneurs
- Local expertise such as government representatives, business leaders and other trainers who can support the planning for the organization or individual

## Guiding Principles

- Aboriginal women will be engaged in a meaningful way in all aspects of the development of regional and local clusters
- Activities and initiatives will respect the diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures and traditions
- Activities will be collaborative based on the traditional Aboriginal values of caring, sharing, kindness, honesty, respect, courage and trust
- Cluster models will be designed based on geographic and regional realities and consistent with the local resources and support that come forward as women partners
- Priorities will be driven and aligned with the expressed needs of Aboriginal women and WEC and its partners will be transparent and accountable
- Cluster models will be established with the priority of establishing solid relationships and networks with business leaders and other resources in local communities to support the implementation of community economic development and entrepreneurial development for the area we operate within.

## Rationale for taking a participatory approach

A participatory and collaborative approach is in keeping with a cluster approach, a women-centred approach and Aboriginal principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP). Aboriginal women and Aboriginal organizations as well agencies and associations working with mainstream and non mainstream programming and services for women will be invited to collaborate with the design of the model.

The underlying belief is that Aboriginal women, entrepreneurs, community services, government and other organizations supporting women who are both in and outside of the mainstream of programs and services all hold valuable observation and insights on how to better design, deliver and evaluate programs and services that are offered to Aboriginal women entrepreneurs. This involves a considerable commitment of time and resources but such an approach, if implemented in a meaningful way, can contribute to significant learning and capacity-building for all participants.

As well, this women-centered, bottom-up approach to capacity building, networking and resource sharing will effectively engage and respond to the real needs of women in business. Potential partners who live side by side, who have traditionally not embraced or collaborated together are encouraged to meet, share and build in the short and long term new and creative approaches to economic success within their collective communities.

Over time, pilot sites for cluster models should be varied to indicate how geographic locations and the people who live in communities either support or hinder the progress of clusters. Best practices for what makes some models work and how challenges needs to be addressed should be documented and shared to guide other clusters.

## Strategic Objectives

- To increase the number of Aboriginal women and potentially others who are aware of the programs and services which promote entrepreneurship and economic development among women and Aboriginal groups
- To increase the number of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs and potentially others who choose to pursue a career in economic development
- To encourage and increase the number of mainstream Canadian women's enterprise organizations and women entrepreneurs who support Aboriginal women through the development of culturally appropriate training, materials, support, access programs, mentorship and coaching
- To identify conditions and practices conducive to creating supportive environments that will increase the number of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs or women-led community economic development initiatives
- To establish the foundations and basis for collaboration between all partners in a manner that is respectful, culturally appropriate and which will foster knowledge sharing and commitment collectively

## Goals

**(It is important to note that these goals will be expanded to support all women with a priority towards Aboriginal women)**

The overall goal of the pilot project phase is to:

- develop a flexible working model that promotes Aboriginal women entrepreneurship and involvement in community economic development initiatives; the model is adaptable but also respectful of the unique cultural, socio-historical, and local economic realities faced by Aboriginal women.

The main goals of the Aboriginal women's economic development cluster will be:

1. Development of strategies and initiatives to increase the number of Aboriginal women involved in Aboriginal economic development in their communities and the number of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs. The priority areas are:

**Awareness:**

- Activities to inform women about economic development and entrepreneurship from a more holistic approach
- Establishment of a directories, biographies and databases of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs and other women who have actively partnered to offer success stories and serve as models

**Increasing accessibility to funding/support:**

- Collaboration with Aboriginal women and partners to identify barriers specific to their gender. This can be done through workshops and focus groups and can lead to the development of tools and practices better tailored to their needs
- Create funding proposals that can be submitted using public and private sector resources to support community-based economic development, business development and/or training to support employment for Aboriginal women

**Bridging, access and mentorship programs:**

- The development of cluster sessions, workshops, and initiatives that focus on developing skills and support networks of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs who can share their experiences and build opportunities with their sister entrepreneurs

2. Improving existing services to Aboriginal women entrepreneurs

- By gaining a better understanding of the challenges that are unique to Aboriginal women and
- By developing tools/practices through locally and regionally-driven initiatives that help to create conditions for success. These tools, practices, and lessons could later be shared with a broader network of women's groups, Aboriginal economic development officers and non-Aboriginal services with a female Aboriginal clientele.

### 3. Capacity-building, collaboration, knowledge transfer and research

- Work with stakeholders and researchers to implement a gender-based analysis framework to establish baseline information and profiles of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs and those involved in Aboriginal economic development
- Work with partners to help define and develop a research agenda that is respectful of existing Aboriginal research protocols and ethical standards and which are community-based and culturally appropriate

## Suggested Pilot phases

### Phase 1 - Groundwork and Preparatory Tasks (six months to 1 year)

- Identification of potential Aboriginal women partners and local/regional pilot sites (4 pilot sites at most). This will include national and local regional partners (some of the partnerships may be with other women's organizations experienced in community economic development)
- Initial scoping of existing services/key stakeholders at potential pilot sites and gathering of baseline information on the number of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs and those working in economic development activities and the expertise available and interested to participate in a cluster
- Identification of barriers/challenges and successes faced by Aboriginal women in those sites
- Circle meetings with local stakeholders to determine a strategic plan for the establishment of each cluster model (each model depending on location will have unique features profiling their geographic realities and economies)
- Prepare a labour market profile for the area/region the cluster model will operate within
- Clarification and definition of roles and responsibilities between various partners – establish templates and partnership agreements
- Confirm partnerships
- Prepare work plans and communication strategies to support the launch of the cluster models

The major task will consist of exploring how the cluster model will work and how the cluster model can best be organized to meet the needs of all Aboriginal women in their areas. This will be done with consultation and input from everyone involved. The following questions may help to guide the discussion:

- What are the essential elements that all clusters must provide in order to ensure equitable service for Aboriginal women entrepreneurs?
- What are the possible variations in service delivery that will fit the conceptual framework and incorporate the essential elements but still accommodate local and regional differences?

- What kind of “wrap-around” services can be recruited to support the individual cases that participate in the cluster model services?
- How does the cluster model tie in with the existing government frameworks and initiatives?
- What should be the critical path of system development that merges all new information, best thinking and best practices?

#### Phase 2 - Development of Frameworks and Action Plans (first year of operation)

- Development of a Logic model to serve as a basic planning resource tool which will be adapted for each specific site
- Development of a participatory evaluation framework for each of the pilot projects
- Development of detailed Action Plans for each site which incorporates the logic model and evaluation framework

#### Phase 3 - Implementation and Delivery of Programs and Services at Pilot Sites (2<sup>nd</sup> year of pilot)

- To be defined and developed as part of an Aboriginal women-centered and locally/regionally driven approach
- Establishment of the cluster models in four locations of Canada

#### Phase 4 - Evaluation Analysis and Findings (Throughout to 3rd year)

- To be defined and developed as part of an Aboriginal women-centered and locally/regionally driven approach based on the participatory evaluation framework
- Continuous evaluation and tracking of component elements that not only make up best practices but that are also contingent to local conditions and realities

#### Phase 5 - Communication Activities

- To be defined and developed as determined by an Aboriginal women-centered and partners locally/regionally driven approach

## Anticipated Results

The anticipated results of this pilot project phase are:

- A better understanding of the issues and dynamic forces at play in Aboriginal women's economic development which could be published and promoted as three distinct case studies, a best practices guide, a how-to guide, conference presentations and other products
- More information to help profile women such as their age, status, education levels, location and the interplay between these factors and barriers and successes.
- The establishment of sustainable community economic development initiatives or entrepreneurial businesses that are women-led and supported

More important, however, are the tangible results, which should be an increase in the number of Aboriginal women entrepreneurs, female Aboriginal economic opportunities or those working in an area related to economic development. These results will have to be measured in both the short and long term.

### Short term

- Increase in interest and awareness of Aboriginal women regarding economic development
- Increased knowledge and skills around economic development and entrepreneurship
- more women developing business proposals, funding applications, seeking business services and developing expansion plans
- Identification of Aboriginal women interested in serving as mentors, coaches, sponsors and role-models
- Creation of peer-support groups and initiatives
- Creation of strong alliances, networks and partnerships through community leadership

### Long term

- Increase in the number of Aboriginal women business owners/partners including self-employed, Aboriginal women organizations in economic development opportunities or those working in areas related to economic development

## Recommendations

1. The WEC continue to pursue resources to support the piloting of cluster models for Aboriginal women and others in four different regions of Canada
2. The WEC partner with appropriate women's organizations to support the establishment of the cluster models
3. The WEC expand access of the cluster model to all women in regions wishing to pursue community economic development or business start-up
4. The WEC nationally coordinate and document the findings of the cluster model pilot project for potential expansion and/or duplication outside of the 4 pilot sites
5. That WEC produce templates, tool-kits and resources to support the establishment, implementation and continuation of women-led cluster models in Canada

## Conclusions



**The WEC Cluster Model offers excellent opportunities to strengthen relationships and to establish new partnerships to build/sustain economic development initiatives run and owned by women.**

Aboriginal women are keen to work with others to help support entrance or re-entry into the economy. The WEC Cluster Model offers excellent opportunities to strengthen relationships and to establish new partnerships to build/sustain economic development initiatives run and owned by women.

The untapped resource in building effective partnerships is in bringing together the expertise and resources that are available in Canada at the community level. These relationships could energize new dynamics towards capacity building and sustainable initiatives. It is anticipated that these models could eventually be sustained with very few resources. Sweat equity will always be the corner stone and main ingredient required to make a cluster model work.

The WEC is well placed to provide the national leadership that will support local development for these models.

## Appendix A

### WEC - Aboriginal Cluster Model - Key Informants Questionnaire

The goal of this survey is to obtain a better understanding of the nature and scope of Aboriginal women's economic development and entrepreneurship "on the ground." Each of the key informants will be invited to share their insights so that WEC will gain a better perspective of what is presently available to Aboriginal women, what is working and what unique barriers and challenges they face. Your responses will be incorporated into WEC's feasibility study on the development of an Aboriginal Women's Economic Development and Entrepreneurship Cluster Model. This model would propose the creation of regional clusters that would bring together women's organizations and entrepreneurs (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to help promote and support Aboriginal women's economic development and entrepreneurship.

The interviews should range from between 25 to 30 minutes and will be based on the following guided questions:

#### Services presently being offered and used by Aboriginal women

1. In your estimation, what percentage of your clientele are Aboriginal women?
2. Could you briefly describe some of your services that Aboriginal women are presently using. This may include general programs and initiatives as well as those targeted specifically to Aboriginal women.
3. Do you feel that Aboriginal women have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the existing programs and services that could benefit them? If not, what steps would you recommend be taken to make such programs and services more responsive to the needs and goals of Aboriginal women?

#### Barriers and Challenges faced by Aboriginal Women

4. What are the major barriers facing Aboriginal women when it comes to economic development and entrepreneurship?
5. Do unique Aboriginal cultural/jurisdictional aspects pose special challenges for these women?
6. Besides promotional activities, what additional measures should be taken to help Aboriginal women to take full advantage of existing programs and services?

#### Opportunities and Recommendations

7. Do you feel that more should be done to specifically target Aboriginal women? If so, how?
8. What types of training/support would you recommend be developed specifically for Aboriginal women.
9. Would you or your organization be interested in participating in a national or regional Aboriginal Women's Economic Development and Entrepreneurship cluster ?
10. How could your organization support the development of such clusters in your region?