

ACR Aboriginal Programs Project Program Template

Program Area:	2.0	Workforce Development
Sub Program:	2.4	Programs Sponsored by Government and Non-Profit Agencies
Template:	2.4.12	Pre-Apprentice and Aboriginal Awareness Training
Sponsor(s):	<i>Construction Labour Relations Association</i>	

1. Objective

To improve the success rate of Aboriginal candidates entering apprenticeship training and to create a more supportive workplace environment for Aboriginal people in the construction industry.

2. Description

The Construction Labour Relations Association (CLRA) used the following programs to support Aboriginal employment:

- Pre-Apprentice Training
- Supervisory Training

The construction workplace has not typically been as welcoming, supportive or accommodating of Aboriginal workers as it needs to be to ensure that Aboriginal workers will be attracted to, trained for and remain with construction employment. As a result, CLRA and the Alberta Building Trades Council (ABTC) partnered and worked with the Blackstar Group to develop, pilot and deliver both types of programs.

3. Implementation

These programs were designed and administered by the Blackstar Group, an Aboriginal business.

- **Pre-Apprentice Training** was a three-week, in-class course followed by a six-week, on-the-job shadowing and mentoring experience to gain exposure in various trades. A further week of in-class training and evaluation followed the work experience for a 10-week total. An enhanced program developed for some northern Alberta communities involved 16 weeks in class plus six weeks of work experience. Mentoring carried through into the first and second year of apprenticeship, with case workers available for participants dealing with camp life and workplace issues. Special functions were held with Elders on site to celebrate milestones. Candidate criteria included age, education/literacy, experience, ability and willingness to work. Blackstar screened initial candidates for entry into classroom training. In-class training included life skills, communication skills, exam writing, understanding expectations in the workplace, basic safety preparedness (WHMIS, fire safety, H2S Alive, confined space, PPE, standard First

Aid/CPR, dangerous goods), small tools, time management, and introduction to construction.

- **Supervisory Training** involved workshops for foremen and senior supervisors, including company presidents and union stewards. The main focus of the workshops was to provide cross-cultural and Aboriginal awareness training. This included issues related to workplace integration, the benefits of diversity and the importance of better understanding people in the workplace. The Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative (AWPI) Employer Tool Kit was used as the main printed resource. Trainers from the Aboriginal community delivered the workshops, supported by higher level management personnel in the contractors' organization. Following completion of the pilot sessions, contractors made their own arrangements directly with Blackstar for the delivery of supervisory training workshops. Sometimes more than one company shared a workshop, which provided for better discussion.

These two programs are now defunct as Blackstar is no longer in business for reasons not related to the programs. However, the construction industry views both programs as having been successful and the feedback from the Aboriginal community was positive.

The First Nations Training-to-Employment Partnerships Program delivered by Alberta Human Resources and Employment has similarities in providing First Nations people with the skills needed for sustained employment. See the First Nations Training-to-Employment Partnerships template (2.4.11).

4. Timeframe for Results

The Construction Labour Relations Association began working with Blackstar in 1998, building on Blackstar's existing program for Pre-Apprentice Training to make it more suitable for heavy industrial construction. A complementary pilot program for Supervisory Training was added in January 2001. Blackstar failed in 2002 at which time the programs halted.

5. Measurable Criteria

Approximately 200 participants completed the Pre-Apprentice Training Program and entered an apprenticeship stream. For the Supervisory Training Program, approximately 15 cultural sensitivity workshops were delivered on-site before the Blackstar Group halted operations.

6. Budget

For Pre-Apprentice Training, the Blackstar Group received funding from Human Resources Development Canada (Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements) and Alberta Human Resources and Employment for the in-class portion of the training as well as the on-the-job and apprentice mentoring. The balance of the costs, after the launch of the program, were borne by employers.

For Supervisory Training, the program was offered on a pilot basis and there was no charge to participating employers. The Construction Labour Relations Association and the Alberta Building Trades Council funded workshop development and sponsorship of the program. Blackstar Group did receive funding from Human Resources Development Canada (through Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements) and Alberta Human Resources and Employment.

7. Partners and Sponsors

Construction Labour Relations Association, Alberta Building Trades Council, Blackstar Group, Human Resources Development Canada (AHRDA), and Alberta Human Resources and Employment. For the Pre-Apprentice Training Program, training was initially done with Nova Chemicals and later in conjunction with Suncor Millenium and other industry partners.

8. Experience with the Program

Both programs were regarded by the construction industry as successful. Specific comments follow:

- **Pre-Apprentice Training.** A very high percentage (80 per cent) of the graduates entered formal apprenticeship contracts, stayed in the apprenticeship stream or had achieved journeyman status based on a five-year audit of Blackstar's pre-apprentice training operations. On-the-job mentoring worked very well and helped participants choose a trade for apprenticeship.

A more transparent screening process would have enhanced the program. Also, it may have been better to have contracted for the development of the workshop curriculum separately and retained the rights to the materials, curriculum and teaching guides. The delivery of the workshops could then have been contracted to various Aboriginal training services rather than relying on only one service provider which eventually failed for reasons unrelated to the program. A "train-the-trainer" component might have been developed for delivery internally by contractors.

- **Supervisory Training.** Early response from contractor representatives was enthusiastic. They seemed much more comfortable with the issues and welcomed the forum in which their questions could be asked freely, answered, and discussed. The program did not last sufficiently long to allow measurement of its impact.

Some helpful learnings came out of the experience with both programs. The approach of using an external employment and training agency to custom-design and deliver this type of program is sound. It also provides a means for enlisting industry-wide support and reduces the need to develop in-house capacity to deliver such programming. However:

- Industry sponsors should establish and maintain interfaces with government rather than relying on the training agency.
- Funding should be secured through the industry sponsors to stabilize cash flow and underwrite the program.
- Industry sponsors should retain ownership of whatever training materials are developed so that they can be used again by a different delivery agency if required.

9. General Applicability

These programs are generally applicable to any construction owner, contractor or union interested in improving the success rate of Aboriginal candidates entering apprenticeship training or creating a more supportive workplace environment for Aboriginal workers in the construction industry.

10. Additional Information or Support

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