

I DO BUSINESS. Atlantic Regional Summit
Strategies for Aboriginal Success

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I DO BUSINESS. Atlantic Regional Summit - *Strategies for Aboriginal Success* was just that, a great success! The three-day Summit, held December 3rd - 5th 2013 at the Truro Best Western Glengarry Hotel, attracted well over 120 participants. This first **I DO BUSINESS. Atlantic Regional Summit** focused on developing capacity for Aboriginal Entrepreneurs to effectively grow and sustain their businesses through forward thinking procurement strategies and business partnerships.

It was an exciting three days with an excellent lineup of presenters and workshops. There was something for everyone included in keynote addresses, plenary presentations, multiple workshops and plenty of opportunities to network. Businesses, individuals, emerging entrepreneurs, as well as business students networked and made great connections based on the testimonials, evaluations and comments provided by the attendees.

The dedication of the experienced planning team brought together a wealth of expertise to provide those who attended with valuable tools, information and connections. It's intent was to bring together Aboriginal Entrepreneurs, Provincial & Federal Government Procurement & Business Development Departments, Aboriginal Leaders, Financial & Economic Development Officers, Education/Social/Health Departments as well as mainstream Industry, Corporate and Private Sector businesses and organizations.

The Summit included a traditional welcoming from Chief Robert Gloade of Millbrook First Nation, Elder Lawrence Wells as well as cultural performances by Eastern Eagle and dancers. The first keynote address from Ms. Barbara Pike, CEO, [Maritimes Energy Association](#), one of our leading funding partners, was followed by a power-house line up of keynotes and plenary sessions for the next two days.

Well known Mi'kmaw lawyer Mr. Bernd Christmas, (Founder of The Bernd Christmas Law Group) from Membertou First Nation, spoke eloquently about his past experiences and working with not only First Nation communities and leaders but also with industry and corporate companies starting in the early 1990's. His work in helping to negotiate towards building long term socio-economic opportunities for the Mi'kmaw people through community economic development as well as capacity building of individuals and businesses captivated the audience. He spoke about key events that changed the way business was done by the Mi'kmaw in Nova Scotia and how new doors were opened with major projects such as the Marshall Fisheries and the Sydney Tar Ponds Project. He also spoke about how First Nations need to look at building a model that will help to shape the future of Aboriginal business in terms of generating long term,

sustainable and inclusive procurement and contract opportunities.

We also had a plenary presentation by Kelly Campbell LeFort from the St. Mary's University Sobey School of Business on the recent Mi'kmaw Leakage Studies that were carried out for the Unama'ki Economic Benefits Office in 2009 and another one in 2010-11. These studies clearly showed the millions of dollars that were being spent on non-Aboriginal business services and products each year by First Nation communities, organizations and individuals across Nova Scotia. Collectively these studies identified over 100 million dollars that is spent by our Mi'kmaw people and goes into the mainstream "off-reserve" businesses. This was a significant presentation for the Atlantic Regional Summit, given that the focus of the Summit was to create opportunities for Aboriginal business owners. As a result of this session, many participants now fully grasp the impact of this leakage in relation to future opportunities for Aboriginal business, as well as the work that is needed to develop both short and long term planning to learn more about terminology such as leakage, contracting and procurement as well as building business capacity to provide needed services.

Other keynote addresses came from Mr. Craig Hall, COO, who spoke on "Economy Building Strategies & Procurement", and Mr. Terry French, Director of Commercial Development for the Millbrook First Nation, who discussed "Successful Strategies & Partnerships – Working Towards A Positive Future".

Evening keynote speaker for Day 2 was Cassandra Dorrington, President of the Canadian Aboriginal Minority Supplier Council (CAMSC), which is based in Toronto, Ontario. Ms. Dorrington spoke about the enormous amounts of opportunities that exist for business owners that are ready to do business.

She highlighted the very successful initiatives that they have utilized to bring large size multi-national and Fortune 500 companies on board to support the work that they are doing to build and open new doors for qualified Aboriginal and Minority companies from across Canada. Her message was very clear, be ready to do business – if you are not ready, you will be left behind. Do what needs to be done, don't make excuses, partner if you must but at the end of the day it is up to you to be successful.

A great way to do business is to also understand what your needs are and know how to ask for help and where to look for help. Ms. Dorrington also left with a message to Aboriginal business owners by saying "When you feel you are ready, come and give us a call and we will be ready to help you to do big business, the rest is up to you".

Those who attended also brought with them a wealth of knowledge to share with one another. All together, this was a recipe combined for a fantastic outcome. The proof is in the pudding and the success of the conference can be measured by the testimonials:

“The quality of the venue, presenters, topics and general organization were top notch, my expectations were exceeded. The atmosphere was conducive to discussion, sharing of ideas and networking. I feel that our attendance has helped us greatly and in fact moved us ahead as an Aboriginal company.” *Barry Stevens, Owner of Stevens Solutions & Design Inc.*

All presentations and workshops received positive reviews. Ryan Ginnish of Membertou attended the Joint Venture Strategies Panel and said "I think it's awesome that Mi'kmaw people are entering the renewable energy sector. We need to lessen our dependence on fossil fuels." He also commented on the overall Summit in his evaluation saying, "The whole conference was well organized, highly recommend it." Business Consultant Darlene McCulloch of Millbrook FN found the Summit very useful for the "networking opportunities and connecting with other business owners".

Michael Kennedy of Wickwire Holme Law Firm in Halifax, NS presented a workshop on "Doing Business with First Nations - Duty to Consult". He had a captive audience and shared some valuable information.

In the "Networking: A Key Business Tool" workshop presenter Natalie Clifford, a practicing lawyer and Public Relations Consultant, shared her expertise with many in attendance who found it to be very useful. One participant commented that he will use the information learned "to practice and utilize the tools and techniques I've learned to make an intriguing pitch."

Chief Misel Joe of Miawpukek First Nation, NL spoke at the "Successful Strategies & Partnerships Plenary" on day two of the summit. He shared his community's moving story of their struggles and journey to becoming a model community success story across the nation that brought him a standing ovation from his audience. Teresa Pennell spoke of his talk "...Chief Joe's journey and story were absolutely inspirational. A true leader! Thank you for speaking." Heather Stevens of Millbrook First Nation also commented on his talk "Mi'sel seems to be a person (chief) of the people, he cares so much for his people!"

Internationally renowned comedian Don Burnstick from Manitoba shared his own personal life experiences and struggles leading up to starting his successful entertainment business. It was inspirational and moving to hear the serious side of this great performer. Later that evening he shared his amazing gift of making people laugh. And laugh they did. Burnstick reminded us all of the importance of keeping humor in our every day lives as he performed skits throughout the evening that had the whole house in stitches! Of course he received a well-deserved standing ovation.

The last day of the event focused on gathering participants together to brainstorm on what they have learned and what they believe community leaders and organizations

should start to consider when thinking about how best to help support Aboriginal business owners and new entrepreneurs.

Two plenary presentations closed out the day with discussions centering on whether Aboriginal business owners would benefit from and support an Aboriginal business chamber in the Atlantic Region. A healthy discussion generated great ideas in small group discussions on what some challenges, benefits and future goals would be experienced should such an organization be formed in the future.

The last plenary and small group discussions allowed participants to share their knowledge and what they have learned at this event on the key elements of contracting and procurement. These discussions allowed participants to learn more about the difference between these two, how they both work and interact with each other and how they make a difference to business owners. This also generated ideas on how First Nation communities and businesses (new and existing) need to start thinking about building procurement models and policies surrounding supporting an Aboriginal-First initiative to help the short and long term growth of businesses.

These very interesting discussions gave an opportunity for emerging entrepreneurs, new and existing business owners to begin to understand the level of commitment, work, investment and effort it will take to become a successful business owner.

This regional event was hosted collaboratively by Robert Bernard, CEO of Diversity Management Group based in We'koqma'q First Nation in NS along with Susan Wilson and John Kor, Owners of "**I DO BUSINESS**. Inc.", an Ontario based company.

Diversity Management Group is a 100% Aboriginal sole proprietorship registered in Nova Scotia. Owned, operated and managed by CEO, Mr. Robert Bernard, DMG focuses on increasing the capacity of Aboriginal individuals, communities and organizations. **I DO BUSINESS**. Inc. supports emerging and established entrepreneurs to obtain the knowledge, skills and resources they need to achieve dreams and find success in business.

Most recently, **I DO BUSINESS. National Summit & Tradeshow – Success for Aboriginal Entrepreneurs** was held in March 2013, and is being followed by **I DO BUSINESS. Community and Regional Summits** across Canada. Robert Bernard attended **I DO BUSINESS. National Summit** in Ontario and was so impressed with the event that he agreed to partner with the **I DO BUSINESS**. team to bring it to the Atlantic Region. This begins one of many regional summits to take place across the country.

I DO BUSINESS Atlantic Regional Summit brought to the forefront information and opportunities to develop and enhance business in the region. The objectives of **I DO BUSINESS Summits** are to support entrepreneurs and business development through implementing strategies for business growth; bridging First Nation and Municipal

business; building contract and procurement opportunities and understanding the procurement process.

Funding for the event came from several sources, including the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada as well as provincial, Mi'kmaq and corporate sponsors.

Many NS Mi'kmaq businesses and business students were able to attend through an incredible opportunity for funding support thanks to the Assembly of NS Chiefs (KMKNO EnCana Funding) as well as the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Economic Benefits Office. The generous funding received and secured covered their full registration, meals and hotel costs for the entire event. The funding for this event from our many sponsors made it all possible and was a great investment into our communities.

Business owner Mary Louise Bernard of Wagmatcook First Nation summed up the conference in a thank you note to the conference organizer.

*“Robert, I would like to formally congratulate you and your associates for bringing us the ‘**I DO BUSINESS.**’ Summit. Right from the get GO - you made us feel welcome. The workshops were very informative; especially the interaction aspects of it and the special guest speakers were awesome.*

*I think the word I use to best describe the **I DO BUSINESS. Summit** was the feeling of ‘Inclusiveness’ from the young entrepreneurs just starting out into the business world, the pro’s and for some that are retired or looking for a side business. It provided us a chance to network, ask questions and to meet business minded Aboriginal people from across the Atlantic.*

I made several new friends and business contacts during the Summit and will spread the word to others to look for future conferences or Summits you shall be delivering.”

Wela’liq, Mary Louise Bernard/ Indian Maiden Maple Syrup

Conference proceedings and a conference video will be available online for participants of the Summit soon. For more information on the Summit proceedings and future Summits to be held, visit www.idobusiness.ca