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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We are hearing from representatives about the issue of building capacity in communities for first nations peoples.

Before we get started, we always—in a process of reconciliation on which Canada has begun the path—recognize that here in Ottawa, we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

We are in the hearings phase of the report, so each group will have an opportunity to present for up to 10 minutes. I will give you signals as we get close and they will become more frequent as we get there, so just keep an eye on where we are. I will try to indicate how close we are to the end of your presentation time. After all presentations are done, we will go on to a series of questions from the MPs. Everyone has questions, so I encourage you to keep your interactions fairly short and direct because we would like to see a significant report on this issue.

Let's get started.

We have the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre in front of us. The team is here. It is nice to see Manitoba so prompt and handsome. I shouldn't say that—you're not handsome. I don't know if that's any better. That was a joke. Let's put that in the record.

Welcome, everybody.

You can get started, and then hopefully the other group will join us during that time. Any way you want to break it up, it's up to you.

Mr. Lorne Keeper (Executive Director, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre): Good morning. On behalf of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, I am very glad to be here with my colleagues, Donald Shackel and Shirley Fontaine.

Historically, Manitoba first nations started local control back in 1970. “Wahbung: Our Tomorrows” has been our leading light. Long before the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre was formed, our first nations leaders and people spoke to the need to develop an education system that would support the retention of our ways of knowing, primarily through the teachings of our ancestral languages and cultures. To be effective, education must be nurtured in relevancy, commitment, motivation and identifiable purpose. The

process must be part of the community activities and community progress. The beauty of our first nations education system was that it was failure-proof.

The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre is the largest first nations education service delivery organization in Canada. At present, we have over 250 service delivery staff and over 340 staff employed in 10 first nations schools, which are part of our newly created Manitoba First Nations School System. There are about 51 schools in Manitoba. We currently provide accredited training for over 300 first nations professional staff in various education fields, including school psychologists, speech and language therapists, and practitioners in a variety of other clinical fields.

As I mentioned, our philosophy is based on “Wahbung: Our Tomorrows”, a collective thought and approach. Our work is grassroots and community-driven. We work with first nations communities throughout Manitoba. Our big focus is on community-based programming and a capacity-building approach, so that we can build our own....

• (0850)

Ms. Shirley Fontaine (Associate Executive Director, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre): Thank you all.

I'll take over at this point. My name is Shirley Fontaine. I'm the Associate Executive Director for MFNERC.

I'm glad to be here this morning on the unceded Algonquin territory. Thank you for letting us speak to you.

I wanted to speak about our mandate. Our mandate is lifelong learning. It's not just capacity-building and the training of adults. We are also responsible for looking after the early learning pieces of education and also K-to-12 education. For us, lifelong learning is very important. It's something that starts in the womb and continues throughout a person's lifetime. It's very important for us because it's part of our philosophy of the importance of lifelong learning.

We have a lot of unique programs in Canada. Our programs are very successful, and we respond to community-identified needs. Right now, we are working with the new federal program on early learning and child care for ages zero to six. We are helping first nations develop their own strategies at the local level and also at the regional level. That's something we'll be working on over the next two years.

Our goal is to establish a stand-alone first nations organization to look after early learning and child care in Manitoba. We will be providing supports for head start programs, day cares, curriculum and resource materials, curriculum development, and training and capacity-building for early childhood educators. A lot of what we want to focus on is traditional methods of raising our children. For kindergarten to grade 12, we offer a wide range of academic support services for first nations students.

Most of our staff in Manitoba are first nations people. Over 70% of our staff are actually first nations professionals. We have some of the largest numbers of Ph.D.s and master's degrees. We have one of the highest capacities of any first nations organization in Canada. We have really high retention rates. Over 40% of our staff have been with us for over five years, and many of our original employees, from when we first established the organization, remain with us today.

We also have something we call the Manitoba First Nations School System. We support the administrators of the 10 member schools. We provide services in instructional leadership; professional development, which is training; crisis response planning; and other essential areas where we focus on effective education for effective schools for our students.

We are in our second year of operation. We have documented increases in student attendance and retention rates. This is mainly attributed to our culture-based, land-based and language-based programming.

While we have been able to retain more staff, we still face challenges in terms of recruitment for our northern and isolated first nations schools—and that's across Canada. It's difficult to attract people to work in the isolated communities.

We also have something that's unique in Canada. We have our own virtual collegiate that offers services to high school students. Students don't have to leave their communities to get the credits they need to enter university and college. The types of courses we offer include science, math and languages. Those are the prerequisites required for university programming.

I'll give it to Don.

• (0855)

Dr. Donald Shackel (Assistant Director, Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre): Thank you.

Good morning. My name is Dr. Don Shackel. I'm the Assistant Director of Special eEducation at MFNERC.

The area of first nation capacity that I will speak to this morning relates to first nation children with special needs living in first nations communities in Manitoba.

Until recently, first nations students with disabilities had to leave their community in order to access services, or remain in their community without any services at all, or often be placed in the care of CFS to receive those services. Manitoba has the highest rate of childhood apprehension, with the majority of those children being first nation.

As an ally, I've worked in first nation communities for almost three decades now. It would not be uncommon for me to run into a deaf student in one of our communities who had absolutely no access to learn American Sign Language.

To better meet the needs of the lives of these children, the education directors and the chiefs of Manitoba mandated MFNERC to move forward on two strategic initiatives, which are different and unique from any other region in Canada. First, our leaders directed us to move away from a case-by-case service delivery model and create a collective system of community-based clinical services under first nation jurisdiction.

I'm thrilled to let you know and to report today that over 3,000 Manitoba first nation children are now receiving services in their home communities from a range of full-time, salaried clinicians, including speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, nurses, mental health specialists, school psychologists, reading specialists, deaf and hard-of-hearing instructors, and American Sign Language instructors. Many of them are listening today in the schools where they're working.

The second mandate given by our leaders was to immediately begin training first nation community members so that our specialized services can relate to the language and culture of the students we're working with. We train first nation resource teachers, rehabilitation/education assistants, school psychologists, first nations speech language pathologists—who are bilingual in both their first language and English—occupational therapists, physiotherapists and first nation reading specialists. I'm so pleased and very proud to report today that we have over 300 first nation community members in these programs.

As our community members begin to graduate, we're seeing over 95% success rate. How do we accomplish that? We believe that the success rate on our credit, certificate, diploma, post-bac and master's level training programs relates to the following factors.

Number one is targeted recruitment and retention strategy. We have five-year and 10-year strategic plans. We have first nation-led partnerships with various Canadian and American universities. We have adequate targeted financial resources for travel for our community members to come out. It's important to note that most of our trainees are women and are working full time.

We have a cohort model with first nation peer supports. We have flexible and student-centred programming. We leverage interdepartmental funding from FNIHB and INAC, and we have a laddering approach. Most importantly, we treat people in our training programs like family.

I'm so pleased to report on that success.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Norm, you have my apologies. I scooped you in with Manitoba. It's always an opportunity to do that.

Mr. Norm Odjick (Director General, Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council): Maybe they'll adopt me.

Voices: Ha, ha!!

The Chair: Thank you for coming out.

Norm Odjick is the Director General of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council.

Please go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr. Norm Odjick: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning, members of the committee.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge our local MP, Mr. William Amos. I'm glad to see you on this committee. Will has helped us out a lot with our first nation and other nations, so thank you.

To Mr. Vandal, who recently toured some Anishinaabe communities, thank you for taking the time to do that.

It is a pleasure to be here today speaking about these important issues. I am Anishinaabe from the community of Kitigan Zibi and director of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nation Tribal Council. I have over 17 years of experience in upper management at both the community and tribal council level. During this time, I have directly experienced the challenges related to the retention of their staff and the building of their capacity. If you'll allow me, I'd also like to speak about the challenges of recruiting staff, which I feel is related to retention. I'll conclude by stating some of the initiatives that have been put in place by myself and the directors of the communities and tribal councils of Quebec.

In today's labour market, the recruitment and retention of qualified staff are quite challenging, and in first nations communities and organizations I believe this is amplified. My community is about an hour and a half from here and it's not an isolated community. It's very well developed. However, we have had difficulty recruiting for professional positions within my organization and the community. I have some recent examples. It took my organization about 16 months to recruit a new civil engineer when the former one retired. For my community of Kitigan Zibi, it took over two years to find a director of finance. In a smaller community that is isolated, the challenge to recruit is much tougher.

Today's employees tend to be more interested in a gig rather than a career. I have heard it referred to as the "quit economy." In addition to a high starting salary and attractive benefits, they are looking for a work-life balance and possibilities to move quickly up the ladder. In our communities, it's rare that we can offer career advancement since there are so few rungs on the ladder. Due to being short-staffed, employees have to wear many different hats and often take on duties that are in addition to their job description. As such, it's hard to offer them work-life balance, as they're covering for employees we cannot afford to hire. When you factor in circumstances such as housing shortages, it can be very difficult to be competitive.

For certain positions, it is easier to recruit and retain employees generally. Clerical positions, receptionists and similar positions are still filled by employees who intend to stay until they retire, but in professional positions and those that are highly sought after, it's much more challenging to recruit and retain. At the upper administrative levels, such as the director general, the turnover can be astounding. Twice yearly, we have Quebec regional meetings of the DGs and at every meeting it is practically guaranteed that there will be a lot of new faces around the table. Although there are roughly only 30 communities that participate in these meetings, we've often had as many as six new DGs within a six-month span. That's not good for stability and development of the community.

Looking at the capacity side, oftentimes there are employees hired who do not have training in the field that you are hiring them in. Many of our students end up in general arts or social science programs for a variety of reasons. It's not a slight against these programs, as I believe that all education is worthwhile, and I myself have a bachelor's degree in social science, but what often happens is that the pool of candidates with post-secondary education is limited. Therefore, many times employees learn on the job and hopefully there is someone there to mentor them. Of course, there are professional positions where this is not possible, such as engineering, architecture, and so on, but in many communities, people are not working in the fields in which they studied. With recruitment challenges, this is reality and we have to put in place solid capacity-building programs.

I don't want to just come here and complain. I want to offer the solutions we have been working towards and offer suggestions.

Suggestion one is for the government to commit to the post-secondary program and unequivocally state that the program will continue to exist. For the past 15 years, we've heard rumours that the current post-secondary funding program will be abolished in favour of a loans-and-bursary system. I wholeheartedly believe this would be a mistake. Yes, I know there are problems with the policies and procedures affecting how the program is delivered, but we should be studying how to improve upon it rather than abolish it. I fear that if the program is abolished, many students will never go to post-secondary studies and the capacity issues within our communities will increase.

The reason it is important to state that you are committed to the program is that there are organizations interested in creating scholarships to encourage students to study in specific fields. However, we don't enact these scholarships, because we don't want to endanger the program.

In addition to my functions at the tribal council, I'm president of the native benefits plan, the largest self-directed first nations pension plan in the country. We've wanted to put into place scholarships that will encourage students to enter into the fields of actuarial studies, finance and investment. However, it was suggested that we hold off in case it harms the post-secondary funding program. This program does produce results and it needs to be preserved and enhanced.

●(0900)

Suggestion two is to enhance the tribal council funding program. I was very disappointed, concerned and even somewhat angered to learn of the huge injection of funds into the First Nations Financial Management Board, not because it went to them specifically, but because I insist that part of the funds to this organization would have better served the first nations by going to the tribal council funding program.

Part of our mandate is to assist with the capacity-building of the communities and provide them with advisory services to increase their capacity. The tribal council program funding was frozen in 1996 and then gutted in 2013, and it has severely limited our ability to assist our communities. The government committed to lifting the 2% cap on funding for community programs, but the tribal council has not received any indexation since 1996, let alone 2%. Our purchasing power is diminished on an annual basis, yet we are asked and expected to do more and more. Our communities need more support, but it's a real struggle to give them what they need.

Meanwhile the FNFMB was granted \$50 million over five years in the 2018 budget, and they will receive \$11 million per year afterwards. The tribal council funding program has existed for many years and we accomplished a lot, but we cannot be an afterthought while investments are made into other governmental entities.

Suggestion three is to look at the investments made into the employee benefits program and see if the funding is adequate. If we want to recruit and retain qualified employees, we have to have competitive employee benefit packages.

In Quebec, we are lucky to have a defined benefits pension plan that is comparable to the federal government's. However, the funding has been capped for at least 10 years now, and the number of positions that are funded is limited. There is only one other province in all of Canada that has a defined benefits plan, and that has to hamper the recruiting and retention efforts in other provinces.

Part of the equation of retention is attractive benefits, and a solid pension plan is one of the cornerstones. If you want to look at a model as to how this can work, I strongly suggest you look at what we have been able to develop with the native benefits plan.

Suggestion four is to look for opportunities where there is a shared need and benefit from the economy of scale.

Years ago, I applied for funds under the professional and institutional development program in order to set up a Dropbox that would contain administrative tools to be shared among the communities in Quebec. We collected job descriptions, employee contract samples, supplier contract samples, policies, etc., and uploaded them into English and French folders.

This year I applied for funding for new employee contracts and policies developed for drugs, alcohol and cannabis in the workplace and human rights accommodations. We're also developing investigation guidelines for employers, including checklists and templates for the various investigations they are expected to do, such as misconduct, harassment and violence in the workplace.

Again, these will all be uploaded into the Dropbox for us to share, and I think it would be beneficial if all regions had something similar

that they could collaborate on. I think it's important that the professional and institutional development program has some funds set aside for the development of regional tools.

Suggestion five is the creation of a mentorship/coaching program at the director general level. As I mentioned, the turnover at the DG level is extremely high due to a number of factors, including stress, capacity and number of responsibilities. We jokingly refer to the position as "the ejector seat". Since we know there is a high turnover rate at that level, the program needs to be addressed. I think that at the tribal council level, if we had one resource per tribal council, that would be sufficient to assist the DGs, who would become more skilled, supported, less overwhelmed and more likely to remain in their position.

Suggestion number six is to encourage the development of distance learning programs for the communities. As I stated, I have a bachelor's degree in social science and a DEC, but I also went on to complete a master's certificate program with l'École nationale d'administration publique while I was working full time, and a lot of my peers did, as well. That helped us to enhance our skills.

I hope this gives you a better idea of the challenges we face in our communities, and I hope my suggestions prove useful.

Meegwetch.

●(0905)

The Chair: Thank you.

The third group is actually not attending today, so that completes our presentations. It will give us more opportunity to ask questions and dive in a bit.

We'll start off with seven minutes, and our first questioner is MP Yves Robillard.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

●(0910)

I'd like to begin with Mr. Odjick.

My first question is about the human resources management services your council offers. In the past, the committee has heard about how difficult it is for indigenous communities to retain workers, especially skilled ones. Can you describe those challenges and the way your council helps the communities?

Mr. Norm Odjick: We provide communities with human resources support. It's important to understand that retaining director generals and other senior managers is difficult mainly because of the stress they face and their responsibilities. I don't think they are adequately supported. When it comes to other employees, the problem has more to do with the fact that young people have different options.

That's why I said that we have to offer employees competitive salaries and benefits, as well as a work-life balance, but that's difficult to do when everyone has to take on additional tasks. We help them by providing advice. Every year, I deliver training to employees as a way to support them. There is no question that retaining workers will be a challenge in the future, especially millennials.

Mr. Yves Robillard: In one of your earlier comments, you said it was important that federal funding flow through the tribal councils so that all communities can benefit, regardless of their situation. Can you describe the specific role of tribal councils in community capacity building?

Mr. Norm Odjick: It's still a matter of economies of scale. It makes no sense that each community should have to apply for funding to offer training. When the tribal council provides the training, it's a huge help to communities.

The same applies to human resources experts. The communities experience high turnover in those positions. These are people who need to have a good grasp of the legislation, labour standards and all the rest. We are there to help the communities. Before disciplining an employee or letting them go, the community calls me to make sure it's following proper procedure. We are like a team of experts they can turn to because it's impossible to have experts in each community.

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Mr. Odjick.

Now I'd like to turn to Mr. Keeper.

In July 2017, you established the Manitoba First Nations School System, the first of its kind to be funded in the same way as provincial systems across the country.

Can you tell us more about your funding structure and the way in which this new level of autonomy benefits you?

[English]

Mr. Lorne Keeper: I just heard the last part of your question. Was it on finance and funding?

The Chair: He wanted to know how you structure finance.

Mr. Lorne Keeper: Of course, we're funded through the federal government. Presently, our annual budget is about \$138 million, I believe, including the 10 schools that we manage. We receive our funding through the federal government for the operations.

When we look at our organization, essentially, we're a large school board that provides service delivery to all the first nation schools. In

effect, that's how we manage our system. The 10 schools themselves receive approximately \$17,000 to \$18,000 per head. Regarding the value of the school system, I don't quite understand...the total amount for the system. We have a large operating budget for our organization.

• (0915)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: In your brief to the committee, you point out that you still face challenges attracting and retaining school personnel. Do you think the new approach to first nations education funding will help with that?

[English]

Mr. Lorne Keeper: I believe the work we're doing is going to have a great impact for our system. Historically, when we look at schools that are just stand-alone institutions, we see it's very difficult for them to operate and attract teachers who are going to stay.

We always talk about the power of the collective, and that's what we stress in the mandate of our resource centre. We want communities to work together rather than work alone. There are some large first nation communities, such as Opaskwayak, which is The Pas, Manitoba, or Peguis, which is about 100 miles north of Winnipeg. They're large enough systems to be stand-alone, but there are so many communities that require support. That's what we're here for.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP Kevin Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you, all four of you, for coming in this morning.

I'm particularly interested in the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, because it is the first of its kind in this country. I'm a former school trustee from Saskatchewan, and there were a lot of discrepancies between on-reserve funding and urban or off-reserve funding.

Ms. Fontaine, do you want to speak to this? I see that you're now at \$17,000 or \$18,000 per student. You were probably at \$10,000 or \$11,000 a few years ago, so that's a big gap. Can you speak to that? Go ahead.

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: Thank you.

With the Manitoba First Nations School System, we were able to negotiate a much better financial arrangement. We're actually closer to \$20,000 for this coming year. That allows us to provide better salaries for the staff working in our schools, so we have an easier time recruiting for the southern first nations. We still have a problem with recruiting for the northern, isolated first nations, but those are issues that we are working on right now.

We have a new campaign we call Teach for First Nations, and we're trying to promote the benefits of working with our school system and working in first nations schools in Manitoba. We have also provided more language- and culture-based programs for the students. We see higher attendance rates among the students, and because we're able to assist them by offering more high school programming, we expect to see more high school graduates in the near future. We also expect to see an easier transition to universities and colleges for our students.

We expect to see a large improvement, not just in attendance rates but also in the success rates of our students. We're in the second year of operations, so we'll have our second graduating class this coming June.

We expect to see great things in terms of having more resources not only for salaries of teachers but also for library books. A lot of the students told us they had no library books in the past. Now we have more money so we can provide better technology and better technological assistance for the students. They now have access to laptops and technology-based learning. The new funding model has allowed us to address a lot of the challenges and issues that our communities faced before.

The 10 first nations that are part of our system have expressed how pleased they are that we are helping them to manage and administer their schools, because they see a better future for all the students in our schools.

• (0920)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: The Auditor General was concerned that the department did not track graduation rates, that the department did not track literacy from kindergarten to grade 3, and that the department had no idea about special needs students. How is your division tracking all of those?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: What we're using in our system is something called Maplewood. We're collecting all kinds of data. We're collecting data—

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Are you sharing it?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: We're sharing some of it. We're basically looking at data on literacy rates, numeracy rates and the age-grade correlation, and we're also tracking the completion rates of our students and also their transitions, where they are transitioning to once they complete high school.

We do have an annual report that's available on our website. Some of our statistical data is available on our website, so it's publicly available, but we also have some more detailed data that's available to those participating first nations, which gives them a bit more detail in terms of their specific schools.

Our accountability is not just to the federal government, which funds us, but also to the first nations that are part of our school

system. So we want to make sure that we have the right data, that we're collecting the right data. We're also doing presentations nationally and internationally in terms of the statistical data from our school system. We'll continue to do that over the next few years, sharing our information.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Thank you.

Dr. Donald Shackel: With regard to the clinical database, the clinical area of special education, for the first time, with Jordan's principle funding and the high-cost special education funding, from two different departments, leveraging that funding has allowed us to create a database, so for all first nation children with special needs now, all of their information from the various clinical specialties is in one database that can be accessed and shared among the service providers.

That's the first time in Canada.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Yes, you have a model that needs to be shared, as I've said at this table. Manitoba and B.C. and parts of Nova Scotia seem to be well ahead of the rest.

Mr. Odjick, it's interesting. We really haven't talked about the teachers' grid, although your funding has stalled. What is the discrepancy between the Quebec teaching federations and your institution?

Mr. Norm Odjick: From my tribal council, we don't really deal with teachers. It depends on each community. They look after that themselves. That would be a better question for the First Nations Education Council of Quebec, the FNEC.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Is that an issue? I see retention is an issue. There are reasons for retention issues and I'm trying to understand yours. It's not all money, I know.

Mr. Norm Odjick: From my expertise, it's more along the lines of professional development, not necessarily with teaching but assisting the communities with more management and administrative-type positions.

As far as I know, for teachers, it has been hard for them to stay competitive, and it depends on the community. One of my communities, Long Point, is a semi-isolated community. They have a hard time recruiting and retaining teachers because of a number of challenges, but now they have a new school and they're able to build some new teaching residences. Because of those kinds of issues, it was hard for them to get teachers.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: What kinds of teachers are you getting? Are you getting indigenous teachers or those from other parts of Canada coming into your area for a year or two and then leaving?

Mr. Norm Odjick: For us, it depends. A community that's semi-isolated is less likely to have first nation teachers because they don't go to post-secondary as often, but for a community like mine, which is an hour and a half from Ottawa, I think it's 90% indigenous and community members who are teachers.

The Chair: MP Georgina Jolibois is taking over now.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Good morning, and thank you very much for coming. I learned a lot from you.

I have a question for the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre. The presentation that you provided is very thoughtful and fruitful, and it helps, I think. As MP Waugh said, Manitoba and B.C. are leading the way in many aspects, so thank you for doing the work that you're doing. Professional development and training for those who work with children on reserve, as we know, is a very important thing for all first nations across Canada.

What sorts of barriers do you experience with access to technology? Then I do have another question. Is educating the youth in areas like science and technology feasible in every community?

• (0925)

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: Thank you for those two questions. One is about the barriers to technology. Connectivity is an issue for many of our northern and isolated first nations. We are working with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs to try to come up with a strategy to better address connectivity in those northern first nations.

We have the Wapaskwa Virtual Collegiate, which offers high school courses for many of our first nations students, but ongoing connectivity is still a challenge in our remote and isolated communities in terms of being able to fully access the high school courses we have available. We have tried to address this issue, and we hope that with the support of government and the first nations leadership we can come up with a solution to increase connectivity for all first nations in Manitoba.

As to your question concerning science-related fields of study, we have one of the most successful first nations science fairs in Canada. Manitoba has an annual science fair. We have a lot of young children coming in from Manitoba first nations communities, and they present a lot of different science projects that combine our knowledge as traditional people with mainstream scientific knowledge. The students who are taking part in these science fairs have done well nationally also. They have received prizes at the national level for their science projects. They are really innovative. These students are interested in pursuing science-related careers in the future, so we hope to see more medical doctors, more dentists, more

researchers and other science professionals coming out of our first nations communities in Manitoba.

Our annual science fair is something we started when we set up our organization. It has always been a priority for us to make sure the students are aware of the potential for a science-related career.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: In your schools, do you have elder programs, and what does that look like?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: For us, knowledge of the elders is one of the most important things that our students need to learn for identity. In a lot of our communities they have what they call "land-based programs" where the elders and knowledge-keepers from the community help teach the essential knowledge and skills of our people. That helps our people better connect to the land and to the teachings of our ancestors. The elders play a very integral part, not just in land-based education but also in transmitting our traditional knowledge through our languages.

We have five languages in Manitoba. Our elders are fluent in our languages. They come in to help teach our languages to many of our students in our schools.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That's fantastic.

In the 10 schools you are talking about, for students who come from the north to the urban centres, I'm curious about the support system they have when they move. Do you have any knowledge about that?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: Sorry, the students...?

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: The northern students—

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: What we have is something we call a private home placement program. We have counsellors who work with individual students. We have tutors available for students, and we also make sure that the homes in which we place our students are supportive and they are encouraged to do well in school. We also have a Facebook group for students so they can communicate with each other for peer support.

We try to make sure the students are well supported in completing their high school education. We know they leave their communities at a very young age. In some cases, they are only 14 or 15 years of age. They are forced to leave their parents, their families, their communities, and it is a real challenge for these students to transition to an urban environment, but we have counselling as well as peer supports for the students.

We're hoping we'll achieve more success with our new model of working with the private home placement students in Manitoba.

● (0930)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Mr. Odjick, on staff retention, I hear that across Canada, particularly coming from Saskatchewan. I know that you had your presentation...language and culture. How can we make a connection when we look at staff retention?

Mr. Norm Odjick: With language and culture, what we've done.... We've put a lot of energy into preserving our language. It is a challenge for us. You wouldn't think that the dialects would be that different, but between seven or eight communities, the dialects are very different. We have an app coming out soon that's a picture dictionary. They'll be able to use that. That will be free.

In our schools, they do incorporate a lot of language and culture. In the communities, outside the schools, it's less so. It's hard to incorporate that, other than giving them cultural weeks so they can go and practise traditional activities, but it's hard to incorporate the language and culture in the day-to-day things. As I said, everyone is so busy and wearing so many different hats that it's hard to have time to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

That uses up all your time, MP Jolibois.

Now we move to MP Dan Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you.

First of all, thanks very much to all of you for being here. It's very much appreciated, as are the excellent presentations.

I want to clarify something. The people from Manitoba are part of the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre, but can you clarify your relationship with the Manitoba first nations school board? Can somebody begin by clarifying that?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: I can do that. The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre provides services to 50-plus first nations. In addition, in the past few years we've worked on establishing the Manitoba First Nations School System, which is an arm of the MFNERC. It's one of our sections. I supervise the directors of that particular arm of our organization. They have a separate office, but they still report to our board of directors and also to the senior administration in our organization.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay. Are there other members in the actual school board who are community-based? Are they appointed by you or by the organization?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: In terms of our governance structure, we have a seven-member board of directors. On that board, we have two representatives from those 10 first nations that are part of our school system. We're also setting up local advisory committees at the

community level so that there's a reporting relationship. We've also talked about establishing a governance advisory council of the 10 first nations. That's something we're working on currently.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

This study is about community capacity-building and retention of talent in the delivery of your services. What are the biggest challenges in that respect, in retaining talent and building capacity?

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: One of the challenges we have faced historically is lower salary grids, but we've been able to address that. We're a bit closer in terms of meeting provincial comparability for salary grids. That's helping us a bit.

The other thing we've been looking at is our long-term training needs. We're developing a 10-year first nations education human resource strategy for Manitoba, because a lot of our people are aging. If you look at us, you'll see that we are older—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: —so we need to train a new cohort of teachers. We need to train a new cohort of early childhood educators. We need to train 20-year-olds to take over the positions that we currently have, because many of our staff in our resource centre are in their fifties and sixties, and there are even some in their seventies. We do need to look at training a new group of people to take over the important functions that are required for a first nations education system.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That's excellent.

Mr. Odjick, first of all, I did take a tour of your region with William Amos. Is Barriere Lake part of your tribal council?

Mr. Norm Odjick: Barriere Lake is in the second Algonquin tribal council, but we had a meeting last week through the nation rebuilding program to start working together, all of the 11 Algonquin communities, so hopefully we'll be collaborating a lot more closely in the near future.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Then Lac-Simon is, but Barriere Lake is not?

● (0935)

Mr. Norm Odjick: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

I have the same question for you, Mr. Odjick. Relative to the focus of this capacity-building study, what are your biggest challenges?

Mr. Norm Odjick: It depends on the community. For us at the tribal council level, it took us 16 months, as I said, to get a new engineer. We try to be competitive with the salary, but in 2013 we got cut by 15% on top of zero indexation. We had worked on a national study for the tribal council program to look at the funding.

Back in 2007, we were already behind by 46%. I don't want to guess how far we're behind now, especially after another 15% cut on top of it. For us, it's about being competitive and offering competitive salaries. I give my employees the best working conditions I can. We work extra hours and they get Friday afternoons off in the summer and things like that.

It's hard to stay competitive when your purchasing power is so diminished. I hope that eventually the tribal council program will be looked at, because it has been an effective program. We do help the communities a lot with their capacity-building, but our ability to do so is severely limited now.

The Chair: Thank you, Dan.

I'm going to share a couple minutes of Dan's time.

In Manitoba, we have many communities that are still remote. In fact, Island Lake has 20,000 people with no road access. How does that impact learning?

You were sharing with me an example of permanent deafness... caused by the remoteness, really, and we know that, on average, graduation rates may be lower. I've seen some numbers still as low as 25%. Perhaps you could give us some context of how isolation in these isolated reserves relates to education and what the effects are of being isolated?

Dr. Donald Shackel: In terms of isolation, I think the general socio-economic conditions in the community have had huge impacts on learning. The example I was sharing with you, within the Island Lake area alone.... It's hard to believe, but we've only had an audiologist for the last year. When our audiologist went into these northern first nation communities, they found rates of hearing loss of up to 25% of the entire student population.

Up until now, these children have never had amplification systems and many children have not had hearing aids. The children who live with deafness have not had access to American Sign Language, so how do you succeed in education when you can't hear what the teacher is saying? They're eliminated from any possibility of success within that system, so it's about providing those supports, as Lorne Keeper said, using economies of scale, and training people from those communities.

I used to travel up into the Island Lake communities 20 to 25 years ago and it was all non-first nations specialists going in. They would do a quick assessment, leave and charge the communities an incredible amount of money. Our leaders and our education director said, "Let's stop that. Let's build the capacity in the community. Let's train local people." You go to a community and say, "We would like you to have your own psychologists." Our school psychology program, out of the University of Calgary, is training 15 first nation school psychologists, and four of those individuals are from Island Lake.

We're so proud. I call St. Theresa Point the school psychology capital of Manitoba. They're going to have their own psychologists who speak the language and will be able to deconstruct that western concept of psychology, which tends just to label and create deficits for first nation learners.

Isolation is a very crucial factor, and having worked in those communities for years, I know it's really important to build that local capacity.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we've run out of time on that window of questioning.

Now, we move to MP Phil McColeman.

Oh, it's MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): We can share.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Before I get going, I understand that all the parties did agree to defer the opposition's ability to put in a report on our last study for one week. I wanted to make sure it was on the record because it was by motion. Thank you for that. I know we're heading into a two-week constituency period, so it is a nice opportunity to do that. Again, I appreciate it when committees are co-operative and supportive.

Mr. Odjick, you certainly perked my ears up when you talked about the financial management board. Everything I've always heard has been really positive, in terms of the great work they're doing and the really important capacity-building throughout the country.

I think maybe it speaks to the tension of models. When is it best for funding to go directly to communities? When do we need first nations-led institutes that provide services across the country? Could you flesh out that piece? As I said, I have been a huge supporter, so your comments were surprising. Talk a bit more about that.

●(0940)

Mr. Norm Odjick: A lot of the role they are being funded for now overlaps with what we're supposed to do. A big part of our role at the tribal council is to help communities with their capacity, but we're shoved aside. Our funding is cut. Meanwhile, there's a big injection to that. There's a disconnect between the financial management board and the communities. They have regional offices, but they don't collaborate as closely with the communities as we do.

For example, every year I have to put in a work plan that the communities sign off on. When I hand in my report, the communities sign off on it. I'm accountable to them. I don't think the financial management board is as accountable to them. They are taking on a role now that's even higher. With the 10-year agreements, the communities are more or less going to report to them.

We're there; we exist. We're close to the communities. We can help them. We know what their capacity-building needs are, but we're shoved aside. That's my problem with it. It's not with the organization per se. It's the fact that we're shoved aside, while someone else gets the funding that we desperately need. I think there's a role for both, but it needs to be looked at what the two roles are.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: As I said, I know there has been a lot of support and great work, but you just raised a new point I hadn't heard before. I appreciate your comments about it.

I'm going to ask everyone.... Unfortunately, the indigenous language bill didn't get to this committee. Does anyone have any comments? Have you looked at it? Do you have any comments about it? I know many of us are sitting on both committees, so I certainly had hoped it would come here. I would appreciate any insight you might have on that bill.

It looks like Ms. Fontaine wants to make a few comments.

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: I have participated in the discussions with the Assembly of First Nations, in terms of the technical discussions related to the indigenous languages act. We see this as an important part of reconciliation. We see it as an important part of implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and we see it as first nation languages taking their rightful place in Canada.

We're portrayed as a bilingual country, and so we are, but historically our languages were spoken here for thousands of years. It's important for Canada to recognize the importance of our languages and the role they play in terms of building identity for our students, healing our communities and our families and creating a better future for our people. We have a lot of hope, in terms of seeing the indigenous languages act being passed. Canada, I guess, would be at the forefront.... It is the International Year of Indigenous Languages. If Canada passes this particular piece of legislation, I think it would be seen as a world leader in recognizing the importance of indigenous languages.

We do have some concerns with some of the current wording. For example, we believe that any development related to languages has to be first nation-led. There has to be protection of first nations' intellectual property. We don't want to see universities or provinces

controlling our languages. They need to work in partnership with first nations in promoting the expansion and use of languages, revitalizing our languages and making sure that students are learning our languages in the future. We believe they are integral to our identity.

●(0945)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: From your presentation, it sounded like you were doing significant work around language already. Do you perceive this as having any practical influence, in terms of what you do and how you do it? It does sound like you're in the forefront of the work that has been happening.

The Chair: We need to wrap up really quickly.

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: We see a need to train more language teachers. That's something we're developing a strategy for. We're going to develop more curriculum materials for the teaching of our languages. We're also going to be encouraging our day cares and head start programs to provide the language nest program—an immersion-type program you may be familiar with—and also having K-to-12 language immersion opportunities for the future. We're quite excited about the potential for more language programming in the future.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a very short question from MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you all so much for being here today.

You mentioned the 10-year HR strategy you're doing. You are doing some groundbreaking stuff. I know Kevin talked about this earlier, about sharing the model and sharing the best practices you're developing. It is first nation-led, first nation-driven and created, so I see this as so vitally important.

Are you expanding outside your scope somewhat to share that model with others? Even Norm himself.... We're seeing capacity problems everywhere, and you guys have developed a model around teaching that could spread to many other professions.

Ms. Shirley Fontaine: I'll speak briefly to that.

What we're looking at is.... Elements of our model include cohort education, and also making sure that there are the right supports for students, whether it's financial assistance for transportation, allowances, books or resources. Part of our strategy is also looking at establishing our own first nations' university in the future. Right now we are partnering with various universities, both in Canada and the United States. What we look at right now is who has the training that we need.

That's the type of training we implement, meaningful partnerships with universities, and we make sure that we provide the right student supports so that our students succeed. As mentioned, we have over 95% graduation rate from most of our post-secondary training programs. We're highly successful.

We are presenting at national and international conferences in terms of our models. I guess we do need to work on more academic types of presentations also. We have a partnership with various academics where we're looking at publishing more of our research so that we can share the information more broadly with others.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry but that ends our allotted time. We have other guests coming up.

Please accept our thanks for coming out all the way from home and spending some time with us. Norm, again, thank you for your perspective. It was unique. You could see that MPs really enjoyed learning from you.

Meegwetch to everyone.

To MPs, we're going to suspend for a couple of minutes for the new groups to come up.

• (0945) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0950)

The Chair: Okay. Let's get started because there's potentially another vote this morning. If that occurs, we will hear bells. I think it's a 30-minute bell. Let's get started because we do want to hear from you as you came all this way to make a presentation.

We have the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers; Raymond and Keith are here. Also, we have Daniel from the First Nations Land Management Resource Centre.

The way I have it is the council first, then Daniel.

Oh. Hi, Kelly. You are on teleconference. Welcome. We'll be sure to have MPs recognize whom they're going to be asking questions of.

I'm going to ask you to consider, if possible, shortening your presentations. We'd normally give you 10 minutes, but I'm very anxious that we might get called in. Try to do your best.

We're going to go to the council first.

Go ahead.

Mr. Keith Matthew (President and Director, Southern British Columbia, Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to recognize all the members of this particular committee.

It's good to see some familiar faces from back home. Cathy is my member of Parliament for the Kamloops area, and there's Mr. Hogg. It's good to see you.

I'm from British Columbia myself. My name is Keith Matthew. I want to say just a few words in my language.

[*Witness spoke in Secwepemctsin.*]

[*English*]

I'm from the Shuswap Nation. I'm currently the president of Cando. I have with me Ray Wanuch, who is our executive director. We want to talk to you today about community capacity-building

and the retention of talent in the delivery of essential services on reserve.

In particular, we want to talk to you about Cando, our organization, which serves our communities from coast to coast to coast. The question that we want to have in front of us is this: Is indigenous community economic development an essential service on reserve? To that, we say a resounding "yes".

We have over 400 aboriginal economic development officers throughout the country who belong to our council. As Chief Clarence Louie from Osoyoos says, "the economic horse pulls the social cart".

The very essence of a Cando-certified economic development officer, or EDO, is to work with the leadership to create a vision for the community and then use our skills in strategic and business planning, lands management and more, to create an economy that will support that very vision. Communities can use, then, profits from their many businesses to offset limited funding for essential services. That's a key point, because that's what my community is doing right now.

Since the early 1990s, Cando has been training and certifying economic development officers working within indigenous community economic development. Our mission is to build capacity, which strengthens indigenous economies by providing programs and services to community economic development officers. Our vision is to be the leading authority on indigenous community economic development. We represent first nation, Métis and Inuit EDOs from every province and territory in Canada.

The four guiding principles for education and training identified through Cando's certification process are to be relevant, accessible, affordable and certified. Currently, Cando has certified 202 technical aboriginal economic developer and 209 professional aboriginal economic developer graduates, for a total of 411 Cando-certified AEDOs from coast to coast to coast.

Our EDO technical certifications are delivered through eight accredited colleges and universities based throughout the country. Our certification consists of 11 competencies, focusing on economic development and lands management. Completing TAED through our institution equates to the first two years of a business undergraduate degree. The credits are also buildable and transferable between our accredited institutions.

Our competencies include organization and financial management, governance and leadership, community-based indigenous economic development, indigenous business development and entrepreneurship, and much more.

Along with our journal committee made up of volunteer members, many whom are the finest indigenous professors across the land, Cando annually produces its academic journal on indigenous community economic development.

Cando also delivers its courses and professional development workshops within its national annual conference and its many Links to Learning events offered in locations across Canada. Cando has hosted these events and is expanding this year.

Cando inspires success by adhering to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and hosting its annual national youth summit, which brings together four youth per 13 regions throughout the country. We ensure that there's representation from first nation, Métis, Inuit and non-indigenous youth at our national conference.

In regard to support for sectors within our community, we support our indigenous women through our women in business panel at our national conference and AGM. Women make up at least 50% of the delegates and membership of Cando. We also note that many of our EDOs are non-indigenous as well.

Cando is partnered with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to deliver its community economic development initiative, or CEDI program, which supports collaboration between a first nation and its surrounding municipality to create a joint economic development strategy for their region.

● (0955)

Cando celebrated its very highly successful 25th anniversary just last October, which served as an excellent opportunity for EDOs to network and learn from their peers, with generous support from Indigenous Services Canada and Western Economic Diversification. Cando communicates to its membership, educational institutions, government and industry stakeholders through its quarterly news magazine, monthly electronic brief, and social media platforms.

Social determinants of health, such as a job, are a direct indicator of health. The simple knowledge that you'll receive a paycheque in two weeks makes you a healthier person. However, we have some challenges in front of us. From our perspective, there are opportunities to support the creation of good jobs and economic development in indigenous communities. We have four points here we'd like to stress.

The first is to establish regional EDOs to serve smaller communities. Annual funding for economic development purposes within first nation communities is discretionary and based on a per capita formula. For communities with smaller populations, this means that there is not enough funding for the retention of a Cando-certified EDO. This results in the position being filled by an unqualified person who brings few, if any, results. There are economies of scale where the population of the community is so small that it would be better served by an EDO who serves several communities within a regional setting.

The second point we'd like to make is to retain high-quality EDOs. Many of Cando's certified EDOs are scooped up by companies offering higher salaries and better benefits. Rectifying this situation means increasing the annual salary and benefits. However, this may prove to be unsustainable, given the amount of funding a particular community receives on an annual basis. One solution may be to provide a small base salary with added incentives for funding brought in on an annual basis. Another solution is to create a sense of individual ownership, so community members realize a dividend on an annual basis. The EDO then realizes individual incentives along with the salary, but also realizes dividends based on the programs and services he or she delivers within the community as a whole.

The third point we'd like to impress upon you is to improve access to capital. We contracted the Evidence Network to conduct an unbiased third party analysis of the training and certification provided for EDOs, and also analyze the impact EDOs have within our communities. Their findings rate us at an eight out of 10. They found limitations in the area of lack of capital. As a result of that, our EDOs are not effective enough when it comes to dealing with community entrepreneurs.

Why train effective EDOs when there's no access to capital for the strategic plans and business ventures they've developed? Cando has now entered into a three-year agreement for its annual funding with Indigenous Services Canada because of its very low risk rating. As the next step, we need to determine where we stand now. With support from Indigenous Services Canada, Cando is currently conducting a country-wide national survey and analysis to answer the critical questions to determine how we can retain capacity within our communities and how we can serve our communities.

The final point I'd like to make to you, Madam Chair, is that the main elements of the CEDI program—our partnership with the municipalities that I talked about—are to use indigenous protocols to set the stage for relationship-building to begin, and then to begin third party intervention for a first nation to work alongside its surrounding municipality to create joint economic development strategies.

Thank you very much for this time this morning. I really appreciate the opportunity to address this committee on a really important issue. We know that we serve an under-represented area with indigenous people across Canada, and we'd be happy to answer any of those questions after our other colleague has presented.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

● (1000)

The Chair: Thank you so much, to all of you. You are all from B. C. Kelly is up very early to be presenting to our committee.

If the bells ring, do I have consensus from this committee to allow the presenters to present?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: All right, let's keep going.

We have Daniel, from B.C. as well.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Might I suggest that, because sometimes we don't know how secure the video link is, maybe it's always best to go with the video link first to make sure we at least get their presentation on record? Then we can go with the ones who are local.

The Chair: We don't want that to happen. It's never happened before, but let's do that. I see there's nodding.

Kelly, are you ready to present?

Kelly Shopland, Director of Aboriginal Education, welcome.

Ms. Kelly Shopland (Director of Aboriginal Education, North Island College): Good morning. *Gilakasla*.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with members of the standing committee on the study of community capacity-building and retention of talent in the delivery of essential services on reserve, including indigenous education.

[Witness spoke in Kwakwaka'waka.]

[English]

My name is Kelly Shopland and I'm a member of the K'ómoks First Nation. I am the Director of Aboriginal Education at North Island College on Vancouver Island in British Columbia.

I'd like to share with you today the ways in which NIC, as a rural, public post-secondary institute, partners as an active partner with first nations communities to offer and develop programs and training to address community capacity needs and priorities, as identified by nations.

North Island College is a comprehensive community college with a service area that spans approximately 80,000 square kilometres on central and northern Vancouver Island and parts of the B.C. mainland coast. With over 157,000 residents in its region, North Island College serves the largest population of all B.C. rural colleges. The college is honoured to acknowledge operations within the traditional territories of 35 first nations, inclusive of the Nuu-chah-nulth, Kwakwaka'wakw and Coast Salish traditions.

Students of self-declared aboriginal ancestry make up over 16% of NIC's domestic student population, exceeding the proportion of aboriginal peoples living within the college's service area, which is about 13%. First nations communities are located throughout the region, and many are not within a commutable proximity to one of our four campuses.

As a public post-secondary college, North Island College views itself as an active partner with first nations communities to provide educational opportunities and services as identified by the nation. As a rural college, NIC has embraced its role as a community capacity-builder, and through partnership and collaboration with first nations, community and industry works to grow local, economic and social development. However, all programs and initiatives are identified at the community level and guided and led by first nations communities throughout our region.

North Island College would like to acknowledge and raise our hands to the representatives of the 35 nations that collectively make up the Aboriginal Education Council to NIC. It is this council that is the true driving force in change-makers and the success of programs and education opportunities for first nations learners through NIC. Collectively, they are the voice for indigenous students and communities, and truly guide the work done through the college.

Programming and services are identified and prioritized by communities, regional advisory committees and the Aboriginal Education Council. Collaborative engagement with nations supports informed insight regarding economic development initiatives, which identify and inform programming priorities.

The council comprises members appointed by first nations and Métis communities, as well as urban organizations. Through regularly scheduled meetings, the council also provides advice to the college on all matters relating to local protocol, their respective

communities, local education and training needs, and goals and priorities. They provide information and advice on the local labour market needs and priorities, as well as local community development and economic development plans that may require corresponding short- to mid-term or long-term education and training strategies. As well, language and culture priorities are set forth by the respective organizations and communities.

Since 2014, more than 90 training programs were delivered across the North Island College region in response to nations-identified industry and educational needs. Over 400 remote learners were served across the north island and central coast. North Island College is meeting the needs of rural and remote communities through a regional delivery model, centring on in-community program delivery. To increase access and relevance for aboriginal learners, the college is committed to a regional delivery model of education, whereby programming and instruction are delivered face to face in aboriginal communities in partnership with the first nation.

Over the last decade, NIC has innovated with its off-campus, in-community programming, which brings faculty to students where they live. Programs have ranged from health and human service programs—like early childhood education, health care and education assistance—to things like tourism, language and essential skills.

This in-community programming model has many benefits for students, including allowing learners to be close to their family, their culture and their supports. It provides the opportunity to learn from the land in a relevant and real environment. It creates an opportunity to complete practicums, placement and work experience within their communities, and to begin to build those relationships for future employment. As well, the inclusion of local elders and community members as faculty members provides the opportunity for mentorship and establishing the traditional roles of community in training and capacity-building.

● (1005)

Flexibility is required to tailor the content, curriculum and delivery to meet community needs. Internal policies, procedures and services need to be reimagined as a result. To do this effectively and to support student success, funding models need to allow for flexibility as well as a higher cost generally required for off-campus programming.

I'd like to share with you a quick example of some programming that has been developed as a result of the community capacity need as identified by the Aboriginal Education Council. We developed and are currently offering for the first time our aboriginal leadership certificate. It was designed to give students practical tools and knowledge to work in management and administrative levels of aboriginal organizations and within nation governance.

North Island College was approached by K'ómoks First Nation about the need for leadership training to build their capacity within community with a specific focus on working for and with first nations. The goal was to prepare workers for executive-level positions within aboriginal organizations.

NIC worked with our Aboriginal Education Council and held a series of community consultations to gather input on what should be included to meet the needs of first nations in the region. Development was community-driven and community-based. While each first nation community differs in social, cultural, and economic ways, they shared a common need for in-community learning that respected local knowledge and engaged the wisdom of elders. The certificate complements traditional and hereditary understanding of governing and indigenization.

Another program is our Awi'nakola land-based learning with language, which combines core math and English curriculum with a more holistic approach that is connected to the land, taking students out on the land each day. We continue to hear about the importance of language to capacity-building, as language helps remove barriers for students, including those silent speakers, and allows them to start an educational journey in a culturally safe way. NIC has developed a suite of language courses, tuition-free, in response to the community need to get students started on their educational journeys.

This personalized community-based programming comes with a set of challenges. There is a need to be responsive, and we continue to rely on one-time funding sources, often on an annual basis. NIC respects the expertise of the nations when it comes to identifying their needs and priorities. We like to work collaboratively in a responsive way under their direction. With the limited availability of multi-year funding to develop and deliver innovative programs that lead to success, that's a challenge we always face.

These types of programs cannot be rushed. It's important to ensure there is sufficient time for students to prepare for studies, to find well-suited instructors that know the community, and to meet funding deadlines for student supports. The one-year funding models create additional stresses and barriers. Funding deadlines and parameters do not meet up when there is a call for funding to deliver or develop programming. Decisions and allocations often come too late for the needs of the students. They've missed their deadline to apply through their nation for funding as laid out in the post-secondary students support program. That's a major barrier we face each year. It continues to create barriers rather than foster access and success.

I'd like to close by once again acknowledging the role of the nations, communities, and the Aboriginal Education Council as the leaders and guiding forces in the work North Island College does to provide educational opportunities to students to increase access, retention and success leading to community capacity-building. The nations are the experts, and when it comes to identifying priorities and needs for their respective communities, we respect the work they have done with their community comprehensive planning, as well as gaps in needs assessments.

NIC is always honoured when we are chosen as the educational partner to enhance opportunities for members to continue to strengthen communities.

We'd like to thank everyone for having us today and hearing about what we're doing at North Island College.

● (1010)

The Chair: Everybody is aware that we have a vote in 25 minutes.

We do want to hear the next presentation, from Dr. Daniel Millette.

Dr. Daniel Millette (Director, Planning and Readiness, First Nations Land Management Resource Centre): Thanks so much for having me today. I'll get right into it and speed along.

I'm going to talk about the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management, which is a groundbreaking government-to-government agreement that was initially signed in 1996 by 13 first nations and Canada. It recognizes the inherent right of first nations to govern their lands, environment and resources according to their own laws. The same agreement provides an option for first nations to re-establish their jurisdiction and governance authority, as well as to begin to dismantle the colonial and outdated Indian Act.

First nations avail themselves of the framework agreement opportunity by signing it and by working with their members to design and ratify a land code. Once ratified by the first nation, the land code replaces 33 sections of the Indian Act that deal with land. That's about a quarter of the Indian Act.

There are two main first nations organizations that assist communities through the interested, developmental and operational phases of the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management.

The first is the first nations Lands Advisory Board, or LAB, which is an organization made up of elected members from first nations that have passed a land code. Its role is mainly to provide policy and planning at the political level, intergovernmental relations, and political advocacy with signatory and interested first nations. The responsibilities of the LAB on behalf of all signatory first nations are prescribed by the framework agreement, as ratified by the First Nations Land Management Act, FNLMA.

For technical and administrative purposes, the LAB created the First Nations Land Management Resource Centre in December 2001. The purpose of the resource centre is to discharge the technical responsibilities of the LAB. Hence, both the LAB and its resource centre are committed to supporting operational first nations in developing the land, environment and resource governance capacity required to achieve and sustain effective and appropriate self-determination through the lens of the framework agreement.

The role of the LAB and the resource centre is to provide sustained, high-level advice and technical support services at the request of first nations. The timing and sequence for meeting these obligations are primarily determined by first nations. Our role is advisory, not prescriptive. That is key.

Each community is presented with a challenging opportunity that spans many years of transitional activity, leading to the full exercise of their land, environment and resource governance powers and associated responsibilities.

Once they have ratified their land codes and individual agreements, first nations face the challenge of developing a customized land, environment and resource governance system to give effect to their community values and aspirations. In this regard, first nations differ from comparable local governments off reserve, which manage lands within the fully defined, prevailing provincial legislative and governance framework.

Furthermore, the contemporary resumption of indigenous land governance frameworks by first nations following a hundred years of imposed Indian Act rule can be a complicated and time-consuming effort. This process is considered an act of decolonization, first nation by first nation. That is our perspective. Operational first nations have reported that the transitional period can range from several years to beyond a decade.

Land code first nations exercise self-government over their lands. This includes the authority to decide what systems and personnel can best suit their needs. Individual first nations are best placed to decide how best to build capacity over time and retain skilled employees.

We recommend that federal government programming, as well as funding that assists with capacity development, remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of first nations. The federal government should not impose a single approach or federal capacity targets. To do so not only would be ineffective, but it would also be a colonial approach to the important issue of building capacity.

We also take a very flexible approach in responding to the needs and priorities of individual first nations. Our goal is not to certify or impose a single model of education on communities with different land codes, needs, cultures, structures or locations, but to augment and build upon established skills.

●(1015)

We work with first nations staff, leadership and communities to provide regular and customized opportunities for increasing training, mentoring and professional development. The implementation of a land code cannot and should not fall on the back of one person. That implies that there are a lot of community members involved in capacity-building. The framework agreement was not designed for this.

Further, A to Z complete training while working on a job is not always the best answer for a first nation with an ambitious work plan and complicated land transactions.

We also highly recommend that first nations use their operational funding dollars to provide competitive salaries for land governance directors and other staff involved in the implementation of a land code.

Operational first nations are on the cutting edge of re-establishing their governance in a post-Indian Act context. There is no instruction manual for this, but we've managed to establish an extensive network of communities that are having similar experiences, challenges and successes. This shared model of innovation is what drives the training curriculum we offer to first nations.

This subject matter relevancy, coupled with instructors from first nations that have experienced the development and implementation of a land code, is critical to the effectiveness of our strategy. We also work with other first nation organizations, both regional and local, to help provide even greater training opportunities and combinations.

Can we do more? Absolutely. We are continually looking to expand our strategy, enhance curriculum and build partnerships with other organizations to increase support for first nations.

Thanks very much for your time.

The Chair: We do want to apologize for not having an opportunity to delve into your presentations and ask questions, but all MPs must get into the House immediately.

The meeting is adjourned.

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