

Engaging Inuit Youth in the Canadian Economy

Funded by the Urban Aboriginal Strategy of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada completed a project to learn directly from Inuit youth aged 15-24 years about the best ways to engage them in starting a career or starting their own business. The idea was to learn about their challenges, priorities, and interests when it comes to job training, employment, and career planning and to find out how Pauktuutit can help Inuit youth prepare for work in the Canadian economy.

Guided by an Inuit youth advisory committee, the project undertook two key activities:

1. A face-to-face forum with eight youth representing the four Inuit regions. The goal was to learn about their experiences finding jobs or starting businesses and the ways they think other Inuit youth want to learn about career development.
2. An online survey for Inuit youth. Gathering data about schooling, employment and training options, and the different tools that Inuit youth use to stay connected with each other and with the larger community, and the tools they prefer to use when looking for work or starting a career.

The two-day Youth Forum took place in Iqaluit in March 2013. The participants talked about the ways they can help each other in their community, about the job and career support that is available to them, about the challenges they face, and about the help they feel Inuit youth need to get a good job or to start a business.

A consistent theme raised throughout the youth forum was the need to improve youth self-esteem and to strengthen Inuit cultural identity. Inuit role models, mentors, and job shadowing programs were recommended as ways to provide inspiration and confidence. These programs and services must be holistic and offer community, cultural, and emotional support along with the development of job search skills. The youth also expressed a need for youth-specific services that help them take advantage of the various opportunities for education, training, and employment. The forum shows that the Internet and services like Facebook are important tools for contacting Inuit youth and maintaining connections, but in the end, role models, workshops, conferences, school events, and counselling were recommended to teach job skills and provide individual support.

The Engaging Inuit Youth in the Canadian Economy survey was posted online during May and June 2013. The intent of the survey was to get a broad idea of how to meet the information and support needs of young Inuit entering the workplace. A total of 92 responses were received, with most coming from Nunatsiavut and Nunavut. The average age of the participants is 20 years and they tend to be well-educated. About half are still in school and about half say they are not working at this time. On average, the participants have had between 2-3 and 4-5 jobs in their life. Only nine percent state that they have never had a job.

About one-third of participants indicate they are interested in starting a business, but are concerned about the lack of start-up money and their lack of knowledge about finances and the steps involved. Some expressed the need for more confidence and experience. When asked about the tools they need to start a business, many wanted workshops, job shadowing, and on-the-job training.

The survey confirms that Inuit youth recognize they may have to leave their community and the North for further education, skills, or work experience. However, 64 percent indicated that they plan to keep living and working in the North.

In terms of finding a job, family and friends, personal contacts, and word-of-mouth are important. The survey suggests almost all Inuit youth use the Internet and Facebook, usually several times a day, and that this is part of the way they find out about jobs and community activities and events.

As a result of the Engaging Inuit Youth in the Canadian Economy project, Pauktuutit has developed the following recommendations:

1. **Communications:** The Internet and Facebook are important tools for communicating with Inuit youth. To be effective, programs, services, and organizations must reach out to Inuit youth using the Facebook pages and Internet sites they use the most. These tools are valuable for communicating information about events and opportunities, but they should not replace face-to-face gatherings.
2. **Literacy:** The Inuit forum and survey suggest Inuit youth need to improve their financial and business literacy and need to learn about the requirements and steps needed to start a successful business. The current lack of understanding contributes to their lack of confidence.
3. **Job Market Tools:** Some Inuit youth are not aware of all the resources available to them when it comes to finding a job or a career. There is a need for community specific programs and tools that identify all the local, regional, and national resources available to Inuit youth and help them judge the current and future job market within in Inuit communities. Fact sheets, community workshops, school events, and online resources are viable options.
4. **Role Models and Mentors:** Role models are an important learning tool for Inuit. Role models can offer young Inuit a sense of pride, inspiration, and confidence. Programs should be developed that present Inuit youth with examples of success stories and the opportunity to talk and learn directly. Case studies or profiles are relevant but should not replace face-to-face gatherings.

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