



Canadian Centre for  
Policy Alternatives  
Manitoba Office

# work *life*

## Making the case for a Labour Market Intermediary

**T**here is a growing opportunity in Manitoba to bridge the economic and social divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. First of all, Manitoba employers are looking for skilled workers. Second of all, our large and young Aboriginal population continues to increase at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people who are skilled and educated will have few problems finding and keeping good jobs. However, as a whole, Aboriginal people have poorer labour market outcomes (lower participation rates, employment rates and earnings, and higher unemployment rates) because many face multiple barriers to employment. Action is needed to ensure that they, along with the employers who want to hire them, are supported in their efforts to find and keep good jobs - those that pay well, include benefits, and provide opportunity for advancement. This bridge can be provided through a Labour Market Intermediary (LMI).

*Making a case for a labour market intermediary: the experience of BUILD* is the latest research report providing evidence for the utility of an LMI. Multi-barriered jobseekers in Manitoba have access to a multitude of supportive training environments, including those provided by community-based organizations and social enterprises such as Building Urban Industries for Local Development (BUILD), but it is a challenge to ensure that jobseekers do not lose access to supports when they exit training and transition into employment.

BUILD staff and graduates indicate that it can be difficult for graduates to adjust to being on their own after leaving BUILD's supportive environment after only six months. Some have had weak or no labour market history

and many continue to struggle with the damaging effects of colonial policies and continued racism. For these individuals, adapting to a workplace culture can be an intimidating, overwhelming experience and many need ongoing support to access housing, health care, childcare, money management training, driver's license training, justice system supports, addictions supports and other services. BUILD graduates often report not knowing how to access the supports they need. While BUILD does its best to support all who walk through its doors, it does not have the capacity to follow up with individuals after they graduate. Without ongoing guidance, some graduates will fall off their path to sustainable employment.

An LMI would support the work of existing training organizations like BUILD by deploying caseworkers to develop relationships with multi-barriered jobseekers and the employers committed to hiring them. An LMI would not interfere with the work of existing training organizations, but would partner with them to connect jobseekers to employers who offer good jobs. Caseworkers would also provide employers and employees with access to comprehensive and long-term supports to ensure a successful transition to employment and labour market attachment. Having already established a relationship with graduates while training, caseworkers would offer continuity and create a sense of stability for graduates when they transition into a new setting. As a result, they will be less likely to quit their jobs if they start to feel overwhelmed.

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IN LABOUR ISSUES

While private sector employers may have human resources staff members in place, they do not necessarily have the expertise or explicit mandate to work with multi-barriered employees. As a result, they are less likely to take the time to work with these employees to help them successfully adapt to the work environment. It is highly unlikely that employers will hire staff specifically to take on this role. However employers may be open to working with an LMI that can provide social supports to both employer and employees. An LMI with experienced caseworkers would be in a better position to offer these supports because it will already have established a trusting relationship with employees—research has shown that trusting relationships are essential.

An effective LMI would be clear about the population it is targeting and its specific needs. The model proposed in the report would concentrate on the labour market outcomes of Aboriginal people with barriers to employment. This focus would allow Manitoba's growing and young Aboriginal population to become a significant source of labour, particularly in the private sector where the demand for labour is growing.

Given the realities of racial discrimination within the workplace the LMI could offer courses and workshops for management and staff to raise awareness and increase receptivity to Aboriginal workers. Improving relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will require

that non-Aboriginal people better understand the historical context and how the effects of colonization have led to a deep divide. Decolonization and cultural reclamation also play an important role in the training process. A graduate of one training organization known for integrating cultural reclamation into its programming described her experience this way: "learning about my culture and colonization was as important to me as the technical training I received. It helped me to understand why I had so much difficulty in the past...I needed to do that before I could move forward." The LMI could contract with experienced Aboriginal organizations to ensure it fully integrates decolonizing programming that would be available to all Aboriginal jobseekers at time of entry and throughout their transition into the workplace to provide an opportunity to learn, heal, and move forward.

An LMI can also simplify relationships between employers and training organizations by acting as a single point of contact for employers who are looking to hire Aboriginal employees. This will prevent employers from potentially having to reach out to multiple organizations before finding the workers they need. Furthermore, it will enable training organizations to free up limited resources because they will no longer have to develop relationships with employers to get them to hire their graduates, a time consuming task that is normally beyond their mandates. An LMI can also help strengthen lines of communication between employers and training organizations by acting as a medium through which employers

can inform multiple training organizations about the specific skills they need in their workforce.

Given the poor labour market outcomes of a growing Aboriginal population it is important to consider how an LMI can help ensure that Aboriginal people with barriers to employment can access and sustain jobs that pay well, offer benefit programs, and provide opportunity for advancement. A community-based LMI such as the one described above would allow all stakeholders to interact more efficiently and help meet the needs of Manitoba's labour market.

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The full report *Making the Case for a Labour Market Intermediary: The Experience of BUILD* is available on at [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

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