Barriers to Indigenous Recruitment

Consultation findings and recommendations

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Candidate for Open Government

Table of Contents

[Introduction 3](#_Toc135208768)

[Issues… 3](#_Toc135208769)

[Objectives 3](#_Toc135208770)

[The consultation process 4](#_Toc135208771)

[Methodology 4](#_Toc135208772)

[Topics explored 4](#_Toc135208773)

[Findings 4](#_Toc135208774)

[Summary of findings 4](#_Toc135208775)

[Specific findings 5](#_Toc135208776)

[Q1. Why aren’t Indigenous peoples applying to join the federal government? 5](#_Toc135208777)

[Q2. What kind of support or tools are required to improve Indigenous recruitment? 6](#_Toc135208778)

[Q3. How can the interview process be improved to remove barriers for Indigenous candidates? 6](#_Toc135208779)

[Recommendations and way forward 7](#_Toc135208780)

[Recommendations 7](#_Toc135208781)

[Actions 9](#_Toc135208782)

[Conclusion 9](#_Toc135208783)

[Annex 10](#_Toc135208784)

# Introduction

The Indigenous Centre of Expertise at the Public Service Commission (PSC) conducted a series of consultations in 2020-2021 to understand and further explore the barriers experienced by Indigenous peoples in federal government recruitment processes and practices.

## Issues

The [Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/knowledge-circle/many-voices.html) (MVOM) challenged the whole of government to improve Indigenous representation in the public service. It clearly identified 50 barriers faced by Indigenous peoples seeking and living a public service career and recommended a strategy and actions to remove these barriers. This consultation builds on two [strategic objectives](https://www.canada.ca/en/government/publicservice/wellness-inclusion-diversity-public-service/diversity-inclusion-public-service/knowledge-circle/many-voices.html#toc21) from the MVOM survey:

* Encourage and support Indigenous People to join the Public Service
* Support, engage and communicate with Indigenous employees and partners.

A recent PSC [Audit of Employment Equity Representation in Recruitment](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/publications/audit-of-employment-equity-representation-in-recruitment.html) uncovered the following issue:

“Indigenous candidates represented 3.5% of the survey of applicants drawn, which is below market availability. It was found that Indigenous candidates experience a reduction in representation at the assessment stage, in particular the interview stage, where a drop from 4% to 2.9% in representation occurred.”

## Objectives

The consultations led by the Indigenous Centre of Expertise identify best practices from external and internal partners to address barriers. It also outlines ways to update programs with evidence-based recommendations drawing from the most current and effective tools and guidance for Indigenous recruitment.

The consultation had two objectives. First to address one of the three recommendations from a recent PSC [Audit of Employment Equity Representation in Recruitment](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/publications/audit-of-employment-equity-representation-in-recruitment.html):

“Recommendation 2: The PSC should work with other central agencies and employment equity groups to identify specific factors that impact success of employment equity groups and visible minority subgroups within the hiring process and implement solutions.”

Second, to build on the findings of the MVOM report to answer a critical question:

“How could the federal public service improve its recruitment process for Indigenous peoples?”

The consultations focused on:

1. Understanding what barriers exist in current recruitment and staffing strategies, tools, methods, approaches, mechanisms, and systems.
2. Determining the reasons behind the decrease in Indigenous representation from 4.0% to 2.9% at the interview stage.

# The consultation process

## Methodology

The Indigenous Centre of Expertise engaged with 16 Indigenous partners between July and September 2021.

The internal and external partners below were selected for meeting the following criteria:

1. They are partners of the Public Service Commission.
2. Their organization has a high representation of Indigenous employees or has shown extensive expertise and experience in Indigenous recruitment and employment.

The parties consulted are listed in the [annex](#_Annex).

## Topics explored

The consultations aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Why aren’t Indigenous peoples applying to join the federal government?
2. What kind of support / tools are required to improve the recruitment of Indigenous Peoples?
3. How can the interview process be improved to remove barriers faced by Indigenous candidates?

# Findings

## Summary of findings

The following themes emerged from the consultations:

* Our hiring and recruitment processes are complex and challenging to understand.
* There is little support offered to Indigenous applicants throughout the process.
* Our interview method is intimidating.
* There is insufficient engagement with Indigenous community partners.

The results of the consultations lead us to believe that the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) is not well known, including the supports offered to Indigenous students through the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity program.

The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program is designed to help Indigenous people improve their skills and find employment. The Program provides funding to Indigenous service delivery organizations that design and deliver job training services to First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban/non affiliated Indigenous people in their communities. The partners who we consulted with during this exercise reported having measured their success by tracking the number of new hires; the positive relationships developed with communities; and the supports from working with Indigenous Skills and Employment Training ([ISET](https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-skills-employment-training.html)) funded organizations.

## Specific findings

### Q1. Why aren’t Indigenous peoples applying to join the federal government?

#### The recruitment process

The respondents unanimously cited the complexity of the recruitment process as the main reason to explain why Indigenous Peoples weren’t applying to federal government jobs. Public service application and assessment processes are perceived as long and challenging to understand. This feedback was collectively shared by community leaders, Indigenous student services counsellors at universities, students who have applied to positions as well as ISET organizations. The absence of communication and long periods between the various steps in the recruitment process were also a deterrent.

#### Access to opportunities

The topic of access to and awareness of employment opportunitiesfrequently came up during the consultations. The results show that the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) is not well known amongst job seekers, including the work experience supports offered to Indigenous students through the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity program. They highlighted the need to develop relationships with ISET organizations, given they are a trusted source for communities as well as a positive measure that provides further access to employment opportunities for Indigenous job seekers.

#### Building trust

Building trust with Indigenous peoples through the hiring process was reported as essential for Indigenous job seekers to consider the Government of Canada as an employer of choice. It involves recruiting Indigenous peoples for their talents and skills rather than to meet representation targets; being transparent about why Indigenous talent matters; and showing honesty and humility.

### Q2. What kind of support or tools are required to improve Indigenous recruitment?

We discovered through our consultations that the ISET program was essential to the hiring success of many federal organizations. Hiring managers and HR specialists can more successfully recruit Indigenous talent thanks to ISET funded organizations' knowledge of and connections to the local communities.

The ISET funded organizations are the conduit to Indigenous regional talent and can provide a great deal of support to both hiring organizations and Indigenous job seekers. A few of the partners consulted have enlisted community trusted sources and/or ISET funded organizations to take a critical look at their job posters.

Other findings from discussions with partners are as follows:

* Perform screening using an applicant-centred approach. This means taking a detailed review of applicants, not to eliminate but to include.
* Make job advertisements concrete and clear. Indicate why we need the Indigenous talent specifically.
* Provide mentorship or pre-process support via an information session and subject matter experts (employees who know the work/job).
* Develop cultural awareness and cultural humility in federal public servants (mind, heart, and willingness).
* Offer ambassador programs for students (students helping students).
* Screen based on potential skills and competencies, not necessarily work experience.
* Conduct conversation-based interviews to allow for a more personal exchange.
* Build relationships and co-develop recruitment solutions with key community leaders or Indigenous partners.

### Q3. How can the interview process be improved to remove barriers for Indigenous candidates?

Partners highlighted the need to streamline and humanize hiring and recruitment processes as a top priority throughout the consultations. Their top recommendations for improving the interview process were:

* Provide consistent contact throughout the process.
* Offer an information session on how to navigate the job application process.
* Make interviews less formal and use a conversation-based approach and focus on establishing rapport.
* Ensure Indigenous representation on assessment boards.

# Recommendations and way forward

## Recommendations for federal hiring organizations

During our consultations, we observed that many federal departments are making the required shifts to remove the employment barriers that Indigenous peoples face. We identified numerous tools and promising approaches that have shown to evidence of a more inclusive hiring process for Indigenous. All these tools and activities helped to inspire the following recommendations.

Based on the consultation’s findings, we created six practical actions to remove barriers across the whole of government, and outlined three actions that the Indigenous Centre of Expertise will take to help support these recommendations.

#### Federal departments should partner with Indigenous and community organizations on recruitment initiatives Support from community partners

Building relationships and co-developing recruitment solutions with community leaders or Indigenous partners have been the mark of success for many departments in recruitment.

Case study: a federal partner in the Ontario region reported having piloted a recruitment initiative to staff PM-01 positions that was co-developed with the support of ISET organization.

#### Develop the cultural competency of recruitment experts within the federal government:

There is a need to understand the culture of the Indigenous peoples whose talent is being sought to break through barriers.

Case study: a federal partner who consulted with community leaders on the best way to recruit Indigenous peoples through a large-scale officer recruitment program attributed their success partly to the use of fellow Indigenous officers as mentors, who assisted Indigenous applicants navigating the recruitment process.

#### Allow Indigenous job seekers to stay in their communities by considering flexible work arrangements, such as telework

The importance of being in the community was identified as a barrier to employment. Hiring organizations have the option to consider flexible work arrangements, such as telework or remote work. This can greatly benefit the public service’s recruitment success. It is highly suggested that federal departments consider allowing telework when operational requirements permit to attract a wider pool of Indigenous talent.

#### Raise awareness about available employment opportunities among Indigenous students

The results of the consultations with ISEO program participants, ISET organizations and university counsellors are leading us to believe that the FSWEP is not well known, including the supports offered to Indigenous students through the ISEO program. Additional efforts are needed to develop and execute outreach strategies to meet job seekers where they are.

#### Adapt assessment processes and interviews to meet the needs of Indigenous job seekers

The Public Service Commission has developed a lot of tools to support hiring managers and human resources specialists in to recruit Indigenous talent. These should be leveraged and, where needed, further developed, to address the following consultation findings:

* Conduct information sessions for candidates during the application period.
* Conduct an oral and interactive evaluation rather than a written evaluation, whenever applicable.
* Spend time to welcome candidates and establish rapport.
* Include prompting questions that bring further clarity around the elements that the selection board will be looking at, such as "What is important to you?"; "Could you tell us some more about…?"
* Recognize that it may be contrary to Indigenous peoples’ cultures to highlight their individual contribution to projects. Selection board members should consider that individual leadership is not viewed as such by many Indigenous people when it is done to support the community and/or in a spirit of service.
* Ensure that the questions and content of assessment tools are reviewed by subject matter experts for equity assurance purposes (avoid clichés and stereotypes, contentious or biased themes, etc.).

## Actions

The Indigenous Centre of Expertise aims to continue exploring innovative and promising staffing initiatives and contribute to collaborative efforts to promote these practices**.** Based on the consultations, we will move forward with the following actions:

1. Update the PSC Indigenous Recruitment Toolbox to include outreach and interview tipsand promote it to managers and HR specialists through outreach efforts.
2. Leverage means to attract, support, and hire Indigenous job seekersby collaborating with Indigenous Career Navigators, hiring managers and HR specialists and promote the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunityand the Indigenous Career Pathways.
3. Build relationships with regional partners, colleges, universities, and community leadersto attract more Indigenous job seekers; and explore the possibility of co-developing focussed recruitment initiatives and culturally tailored assessment strategies.

# Conclusion

The consultations brought to light the many promising practices and important work being done in the space of Indigenous recruitment. It was inspiring to see that many departments are doing the work that is required to shift the needle and making it a priority to change hiring practices to reach Indigenous talent. Partners and HR communities from across the country showed openness to collaborate and share their successes, tools and best practices in order to eliminate barriers.

# Annex

The partners consulted are as follows:

* Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador
* Atlantic Hiring Managers Indigenous Recruitment Working Group
* Community of Practice of Learning for Indigenous Employees
* Fisheries and Oceans Canada / Canadian Coast Guard – Indigenous Recruitment Program
* Human Resources Advisors’ community within the National Recruitment Directorate
* Indigenous Federal Employee Network
* Indigenous Navigator Program
* Indigenous Services Canada
* Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity participants
* Indigenous Talent Acquisition Circle
* Knowledge Circle for Indigenous Inclusion
* Manitoba Métis Federation
* Michèle Audette, Commissioner, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
* Mount Saint Vincent Indigenous Student Centre
* National Managers’ Community
* National Staffing Council.