



First Nations and Business Thought Leadership Forum Summary February 24, 2021



**A Report Submitted in Support of the Labour Market Partnership Project:
*Inclusion of First Nations Communities in the Lower Vancouver Island Workforce***

Canada 



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Background

On February 24, 2021, Harbour Digital Media (HDM) hosted a virtual forum using the ZOOM online platform. This forum provided a unique venue for First Nations and business leaders to identify and discuss issues related to employment of First Nations workers. The forum also allows business and First Nations leaders an opportunity to develop personal connections that enable the development of strong working relationships. The development of these relationships is fundamental to impacting employment issues faced by First Nations and the local business community.

The forum was structured around three themes. These were:

- **Transforming the Workforce** - Mavis Underwood – Band Councillor, [Tsawout Nation](#). This presentation outlined how the Tsawout First Nation is working to transform its community. The presentation and discussion dealt with culture as an important building block for inclusion of First Nations workers in local businesses and transforming the local workforce.
- **First Nations Economic Development: Benefits for the Southern Vancouver Island Region** - Christina Clarke – CEO of the Songhees Development Corporation for the [Songhees Nation](#). This session described how First Nations economic development organizations help contribute to workforce development in the region. It will also describe the business partnership work that the Songhees First Nation is engaged in, factors affecting employment of First Nations workers from its community, and the broader employment and workforce development issues the community is facing.
- **Transforming the Workplace** - Rick Quinn – Director – [Terra Remote Sensing](#). This presentation illustrated how Terra Remote adapted and developed a workforce environment that successfully engaged regional First Nations communities.

Presenters, Panelists, and Attendees

Individuals from the local business and First Nations communities were invited to register for the online event. A total of 41 individuals including seven presenters/panelists and two facilitators were involved in the two hour forum event.

A complete list of presenters, panelists, and registrants/attendees is provided in Appendix 1.

Agenda

The following agenda for the 2 hour virtual forum was provided in advance to registrants.

1. Introduction and Territorial Acknowledgement
2. Introduction of Speakers and Panelists
3. Presentations:
 - Transforming the Workforce – Mavis Underwood, Band Councillor, Tsawout Nation
 - First Nations Economic Development: Benefits for the Southern Vancouver Island Region – Christina Clarke, CEO, Songhees Development Corporation

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- Transforming the Workplace – Rick Quinn, Director, Terra Remote Sensing
- 4. Panel Responses
- 5. Audience Q & A
- 6. Closing Comments

Summary of Presentations

Presentation 1: Mavis Underwood, Band Councillor, Tsawout Nation

Councillor Mavis Underwood encouraged the group to consider how historically public policy has been a barrier to employment in First Nations communities. She outlined how the cultural bias in recruitment and employment tools used by companies and organizations has also been a barrier to employment for First Nations. She stressed the importance of each of us to consider First Nations' history (i.e. what we know; what we don't know; and what we would like to know). In other words, to become more inclusive in our HR practices we need to educate ourselves. She stressed the importance of on-going dialogue and build relationships as a way of breaking down barriers.

The following statement was provided by Councillor Underwood as a summary of her comments. Her comments from an email sent to HDM are provided verbatim.

Welcome and Affirmation, recognition of the WSANEC Territory and our Friends and Relatives in LEKWUNGEN Territory. Especially poignant for me was recently witnessing the Honouring of the New Moon NINENE led by the SENCOTEN Language Revitalists at LAUWELNEW Tribal School. This 13th Moon is often referred to as the "young ones", it ends and renews the Moon Cycle. This is often a relaxing time as the seasons move out of the cold and dark of winter into renewal and anticipation of land and weather reawakening and people moving and being active outside again and is marked often by duck hunting and arrival of herring.

My background in First Nations social and community development and has been reflected in my life and career. I have been active as a Learner, Educator, and a Social Activist. I have been agitated by a need for necessary essential change in Child and Family and Community Development and most recently as Elected Council for Tsawout First Nation. Motivations have been inspired by efforts to resolve problems in acquiring safe and affordable family and community housing, influencing health and healing, and influencing a growth of a learning culture and promoting advancement from education into employment and career pathways. From a First Nations' lived experience the road to influencing positive social change and establishing relationships of encouragement and advocacy has been challenging.

In reflecting on First Nations communities and the demographics in many communities I am presented with a picture of vibrant community of Young People. The populations are primarily infants, young children, and Young Parents. That means the challenge in considering housing, employment, health, and education looms large within families and in leadership. The challenge as well realizes that solutions do not rest within First Nations in isolation, but solutions rest effectively

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with fostering relationships of opportunity by working together in mobilizing resources of support and recognition.

In considering the topic of Transforming the Workforce there needs to be recognition of why the workforce has not been more inclusive and supportive in recruiting and maintaining First Nations workers. In many instances Labour and Industry have operated to screen out First Nations applicants from competition often through public policy developed without an effective lens for inclusion of First Nations people. This is often referred to as systemic racism or institutionalized racism that persists within public policy as an outgrowth of colonization, assimilation, and oppression. It is spawned in history, acceptance of history, and in an education curriculum from elementary to post-secondary learning institutions that is only now beginning to be transformed by Indigenous influences.

Presentation 2: Christina Clarke, CEO, Songhees Development Corporation

Christina Clarke provided an overview of the Songhees Development Corporation, its mission, vision and values. Within that context she highlighted the companies that comprise the corporation and the partnerships that Songhees has entered into. Songhees is engaged in a considerable range of economic development activities across the following sectors:

- Tourism and Hospitality;
- Property and Development;
- The Marine Industry; and
- The Retail Cannabis Industry.

In addition, the Songhees Development Corporation also runs an Innovation Centre which encourages the efforts of local entrepreneurs out of its Wellness Centre.

Christina Clarke is also engaged with the South Island Partnership (SIP) and co-chairs the Indigenous Economy Committee. This committee has made four recommendations that are intended to support the development of the regional economy. These are:

- All partners must further incorporate the indigenous economy into the regional economy;
- All partners must work together to build infrastructure and business development initiatives;
- All partners must work together to promote Indigenous businesses; and
- All partners must work together to provide opportunities for upskilling.

Additional details are found in Ms. Clarke's PowerPoint presentation in Appendix 2.

Presentation 3: Rick Quinn, Director, Terra Remote Sensing

Rick Quinn is the founder and a director of Terra Remote Sensing. His company has long history of working with indigenous communities and other partners in British Columbia and other parts of the world.

Mr. Quinn emphasized the importance of searching for employees (both indigenous and non-indigenous) who have talent, a positive attitude, and are able to work together as part of a team.

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His 40 year history of working with First Nations communities highlighted a number of 'lessons learned'. These included:

- The importance of respecting each other's culture;
- Being patient (it takes time to establish working relationships);
- Persevere together; and
- Listen to each other (i.e. do more listening than talking).

Additional details are found in Mr. Quinn's PowerPoint presentation in Appendix 2.

Discussion

Panel members and presenters engaged in a brief discussion related to skills, hiring and other indigenous employment issues. Comments stressed the importance of considering skills equivalencies when hiring (i.e. the importance of looking beyond high school diplomas or other certificates for evidence of knowledge and skills) and considering the cultural context of potential First Nations employees (i.e. they are not prone to 'brag' about their skills and knowledge in interview situations).

Lynn Brown, HR Manager, Schneider Electric, provided a brief summary of her experience in coming to understand the history of First Nations in BC and Canada as an important step along the journey to developing more inclusive recruitment and retention strategies for her company.

Mark Brajer (Tlicho Investment Corporation) reflected on his experience in working with First Nations in the context of a group of companies operating in the Northwest Territories.

Mike Williamson (Cascadia Seaweed) commented on the relationship that his company does in partnering with First Nations to develop a sustainable marine resource that benefits everyone in the local community.

Other final comments included a discussion about strategies for businesses to engage First Nations including:

- Reaching out to band leaders;
- Find out who the First Nations employment councilors are in the region;
- Get to know and understand one another and determine how to help one another; and
- Develop your own perspective on First Nations issues.

Appendix 1: Presenters, Panelists, and Registrants/Attendees

Presenters

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|--|
| Mavis Underwood | Tsawout Nation | munderwood@tsawout.ca |
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| Rick Quinn | Terra Remote | Rick.Quinn@terrareMOTE.com |

Panelists

| | | |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--|
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| Taylor Davis | Terra Remote | taylor.davis@terrareMOTE.com |
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Registrants/Attendees

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
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|---------------------|---------------------------|--|
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Appendix 2: Presenters' PowerPoint Presentations

Two PowerPoint presentations are included in the pages that follow in this appendix:

- Songhees Development Corporation Presentation
- Terra Remote Sensing Presentation