



Addressing the Needs of Entrepreneurial Growth

As we approach and celebrate June 21, National Indigenous People's Day, it seems appropriate to also celebrate the many Indigenous entrepreneurs and business owners that contribute to the sustainable economic growth of First Nation and Metis people living on Sólh Téméxw, Stó:lō traditional territory. Stó:lō communities are rich in tourism, culture, logging, fishing, ingenuity and of course entrepreneurial spirit! The health and success of our businesses strengthen our local, regional, and national economy on a whole, supplying a wide range of valuable services and products that are widely distributed.



Building Indigenous Business Capacity

The Stó:lō Business Association (SBA) is Canada's first independently run Indigenous business organization unique to Sólh Téméxw. It works for all Indigenous peoples that do business or reside within Stó:lō territory (Fraser Canyon to Fort Langley). The membership-driven organization is effective in improving conditions for entrepreneurs as it:

- Creates Networking Opportunities
- Serves as an Advocate for Indigenous entrepreneurs/businesses
- Fosters Businesses supporting Businesses/buy local programs
- Helps with Marketing for Indigenous business
- Provides educational opportunities i.e. bidding on contracts
- Host Tradeshow for local Indigenous businesses
- Promotes Aboriginal business growth/Employee/Owner benefits
- Hosts 'Women in Business' mixer events
- Host Let'se Q'ep (Let's Gather together) Regular business networking sessions
- Offers access to entrepreneurs for training and education

Turning Challenges into Opportunity

It would be rare for an entrepreneur to succeed without help, though all face challenges not all entrepreneurs face the same challenges. That hill can be a mountain to climb and for some Indigenous women and youth, the dream of bringing their business to life might never become reality. Currently, Indigenous entrepreneurs lack equal access to qualified Indigenous employees, business training, investment networks, financial and technical business know-how and mentoring. These business and social challenges are best understood by our own people, support is crucial in helping develop and grow their business ideas. Many smaller communities do not have Economic Development Corporations (EDCs), and those that do tend to focus on the prosperity of the Nation and not necessarily in developing entrepreneurial opportunity, which can actually speed up capacity and employment as a component to the over-all economic success of that particular Nation.



Building Indigenous Business Leaders

The SBA board of directors are all accomplished business professionals sharing their years of business experience with each other and with future Indigenous *wantrepreneurs*. The association offers a variety of memberships, including one for graduating start-ups and student memberships. This gives potential entrepreneurs access to business and mentoring advice while they are either getting their start-ups off the ground or moving their existing online business to brick to mortar. With the help of Stó:lō Community Futures, SBA has developed a business network and eco-system that includes close ties with many financial, educational, and community partners. Our sustainable business success is built on Xwélmexw values of respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility & truth.

FACTS: Indigenous entrepreneurs' growth rate continues to exceed that of their Canadian counterparts (Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Survey 2016, www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/CCAB-PP-Report-V2-SQ-Pages.pdf), and over the last 5 years, there has been a significant shift in policy, politics, and progress in developing independent Indigenous business within Stó:lō territory. Many initiatives are already in motion, but are in their infancy, such as the Stó:lō Business Association (2017). (www.stolobusinessassociation.ca)

Why is Entrepreneurial Support Crucial to Economic Success?

The goal of economic self-reliance is what motivates entrepreneurs and our young entrepreneurs are increasingly attracted to creating and controlling their own destinies. No economic plan can be sustainable without including them as the risk would be to lose our innovation, ingenuity and our future economic independence to the 'Big City'. The Stó:lō Business Association is a worthy agency that needs to be supported by our EDCs and our Nations. Honoring individuals who excel in business also helps create role models for young entrepreneurs. Honoring also helps strengthen the community socially, politically and economically. The SBA recognizes this as an important component of our culture and will be hosting the first ever Stó:lō Business Awards February 15, 2020. So...as we celebrate National Indigenous People's Day, let's celebrate those that are working hard to re-build our Nation, our Nation's economic culture and the relationships that elevate our entrepreneurs. If you are or know someone that we could be helping, let them know that we are here! - Louis De Jaeger MBA

Louis De Jaeger MBA is co-founder/past-president of the Stó:lō Business Association. He is a graduate of Simon Fraser University's EMBA program in business and Aboriginal Leadership. He holds certification in Indigenous Governance from the University of Arizona's Native Nation's Institute, Expandig Skills in Economic Development (BCEDA), Historical Impact (Stó:lō Service Agency). Accolades include: 2016 BC Business Volunteer of the Year (Community Futures, 2015 Aboriginal Business of the Year (Chilliwack Chamber), 2012 Outstanding BC Aboriginal Business (BC Achievement Foundation). He is a board member of Stó:lō Community Futures, University of the Fraser Valley Senate Committee on Indiginization and is Vice-President of the Chilliwack Metis Association.

