CASE STUDY | ILLUMINATING SYSTEMS CHANGE IN WINNIPEG

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It is well established in the world of social change that lasting solutions require systems change. This case study describes how the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC) has been embedding the Six Conditions of Systems Change model within their Indigenous Youth Employment strategy, and offers insight into how the approach can be applied to other poverty reduction initiatives.

At the 2015 Tamarack Collective Impact Summit in Vancouver, Karen Pittman, CEO of the Forum on Youth Investment, put it this way –
"Programmatic interventions help people beat the odds. Systemic interventions can help change their odds." Still, how systems change is understood in specific terms can vary broadly, and often, interpretation is limited to change in government policy and practices. *Six Conditions of Systems Change* is a model which casts a broader lens on systems change defining it as "shifting the conditions that are holding a problem in place" and offering six 'conditions' which range from structural to transformative.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

For systems change to be fully realized, it requires shifts across different levels and includes:

- Building of meaningful and respectful **relationships** amongst actors

- Providing **education** to challenge underlying assumptions; stakeholders understanding how their own way of thinking and acting may need to change

- An **equity** lens: ensuring equitable access to opportunities and removal of barriers to participation

About the Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council

The Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council (WPRC), an initiative of United Way Winnipeg, is a group of approximately 35 senior leaders representing a broad range of sectors including business, government, labour, health, education, non-profit, faith and Indigenous leadership. The Council convenes a range of sectors to address the underlying causes of poverty using a Collective Impact approach. WPRC's work is grounded in a Framework for Action, and in the belief that no one sector can successfully address complex issues, like poverty, alone.

ABOUT WINNIPEG

Winnipeg is known for its vibrant arts and culture scene and its ability to embrace an urban winter climate. It also boasts the largest Indigenous population of any major Canadian city, 12.2% of the total population.[1] This young and rapidly growing Indigenous presence is increasingly reflected in many sectors across the city – in arts and culture, as well as across government, education and in the social services sector.

Still, in some key areas such as employment, Indigenous residents fall significantly behind the general population. The unemployment rate for Indigenous people in Winnipeg is 11.8%, compared to 5.7% for non-Indigenous people.[2] Low labour market participation rates represent a loss not only for Indigenous job-seekers but also for employers whose bottom lines and workplace cultures would benefit if their workforce grew to reflect local demographics.

Winnipeg is fortunate to be home to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR), an organization established following the release of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) final report. The Centre's mandate is to be "a place of learning and dialogue where the truths of Residential School survivors' experiences are honoured and kept safe for future generations."[3] The WPRC is proud to work with the NCTR, and its current initiative was inspired by the TRC Report and its 94 Calls to Action.

EMPLOYMENT THROUGH AN INDIGENOUS LENS

In 2016, supported by extensive community consultation and review of the literature and demographic data, the WPRC identified "youth employment through an Indigenous lens" as a priority for action. The Council, whose membership includes leaders from education, training and business, was seen as well positioned to support a collective impact approach that could create connection and opportunity between Winnipeg businesses and Indigenous job-seekers.

Community consultations revealed that community organizations training Indigenous job-seekers for employment have difficulty helping the youth find job placements once they finish their training. On the other hand, business leaders in Winnipeg recognize the importance of this growing demographic and expressed a desire to be part of the solution, but did not know how to go about it. The WPRC saw this as an opportunity to help bridge that gap.

This discussion came on the heels of the release of the TRC. Of its 94 Calls to Action, #92 is a specific call to corporations. This Call to Action became the foundation for WPRC's initiative, **TRC92: Youth Employment**.

The **TRC92: Youth Employment** initiative brings together the business community with participants in community-based job training programs. The ultimate goal is to increase Indigenous employment rates; the initiative approaches this very much as a relationship-based learning journey where strategies are tested, barriers and gaps are uncovered in real time, and problem-solving occurs.

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[1] Statistics Canada 2016 Census table 98-400-X2016156
[2] Statistics Canada 2016 Census table 98-400-X2016176
[3] www.nctr.ca

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Championed by one of Winnipeg's prominent business leaders, the initiative uses a consortium model where representatives from private-sector companies work together to address Call to Action #92. The stated goal of the consortium is "a journey toward truth and reconciliation, incorporating business-to-business learning." An initial General Business Consortium began meeting in 2017, and a new one is just beginning to meet. In total, these two consortiums bring together 17 employers.

The WPRC also partners with 10 community organizations that train Indigenous job-seekers for employment. It is these organizations and their participants that the Employer Consortium connects with - to build relationships, learn about the issues, and ultimately to engage the participants for jobs and/or work experience.

Indigenous job-seekers often face unique barriers to finding success in employment, which includes intergenerational trauma and lack of experience. Invisible barriers that exist within workplaces also disproportionately disadvantage Indigenous people, such as racism and culturally misaligned human resource practices. Other external barriers include a lack of resources for organizations to provide training and support programs.

These factors underpinning the work speak to the need for a comprehensive, multi-layered approach.

SIX CONDITIONS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

The '*Six Conditions of Systems Change*' (FSG)[4] model posits there are six conditions, ranging from the explicit to implicit, which can contribute to "holding a complex problem in place" and that all of these conditions are relevant to systems change. If an approach is limited to addressing structural (i.e. explicit) conditions, for example, the problem is likely to re-occur or persist. For sustainable change to be realized, attention needs to be paid to all six conditions, as shown in Figure 1.

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[4] FSG helps organizations find new ways to achieve real results against society's toughest challenges through combining practical advice with unconventional thinking to create a more equitable and sustainable future (www.fsg.org).
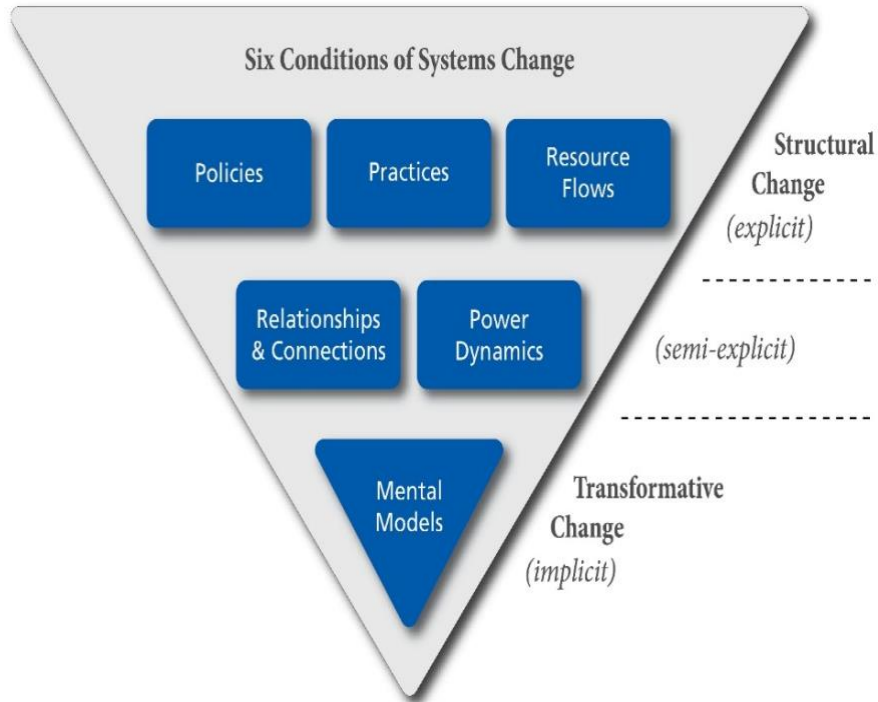
Figure 1: Six Conditions of Systems Change (www.fsg.org)

WINNIPEG'S STRATEGY AND ALIGNMENT WITH THE SIX CONDITIONS

The Six Conditions of Systems Change model is both affirming and is used as a helpful lens through which the WPRC approaches their **TRC92: Youth Employment** initiative. It has helped WPRC identify the relevancy and linkages between the various aspects of the initiative and to ask important questions: Where are we focused now? Can we be doing more in a certain area? What does progress look like in each of these areas? How can we measure it and tell the story?

The TRC Call to Action #92 aligns with the Six Conditions of Systems Change because it identifies everything from relationships and education to company policy. It calls on corporations to:

apply principles, norms and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples…commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships… ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities…provide education to management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples...including skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism." [1]

All of these directives correspond to the Six Conditions of Systems Change. And while the ultimate objective of the initiative is securing employment, Call to Action #92 reminds us that there is so much more involved in creating good job opportunities where Indigenous youth can thrive. Much of the work needs to happen on the employer side and includes building awareness, changing belief systems through education, and creating safe work environments.

Figure 2 illustrates how the initiative's three strategies align with the Six Conditions of Systems Change.
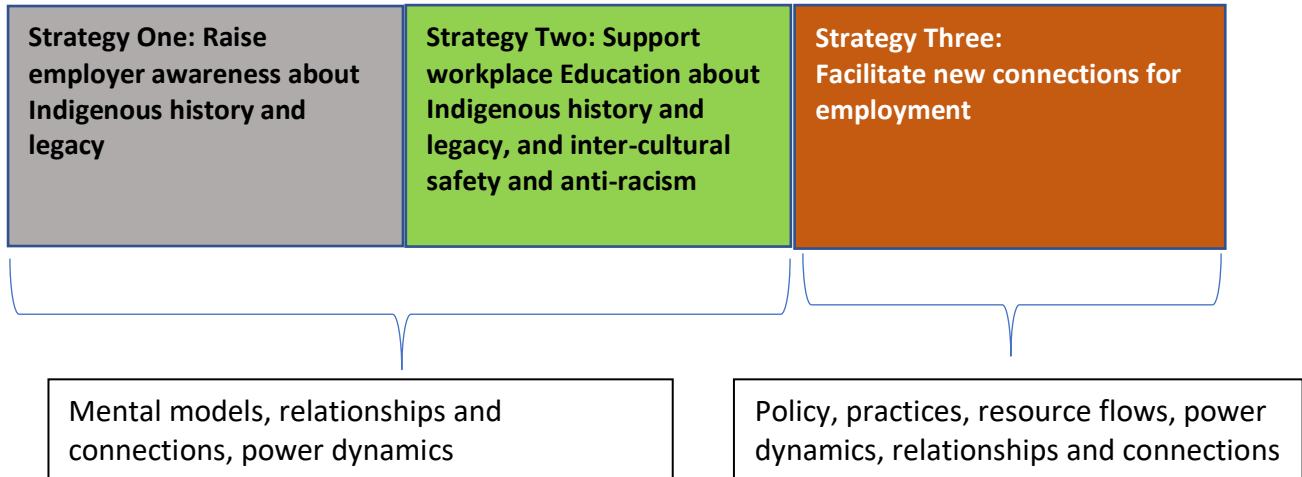
Strategy One: Raise employer awareness about Indigenous history and legacy	Strategy Two: Support workplace Education about Indigenous history and legacy, and inter-cultural safety and anti-racism	Strategy Three: Facilitate new connections for employment

Mental models, relationships and connections, power dynamics	Policy, practices, resource flows, power dynamics, relationships and connections

Figure 2: Three Strategies incorporated in TRC92: Youth Employment

WINNIPEG'S PROGRESS TO DATE

WPRC, as the backbone organization for **TRC92: Youth Employment**, not only convenes groups across sectors, but also learns about and shares local knowledge and resources, and continuously evaluates progress and strategizes accordingly. The Council creates the conditions required for the initiative's three strategies to unfold.

This work happens in a step-by-step, iterative manner, and builds on learnings throughout. Figure 3 shows the flow of progress.
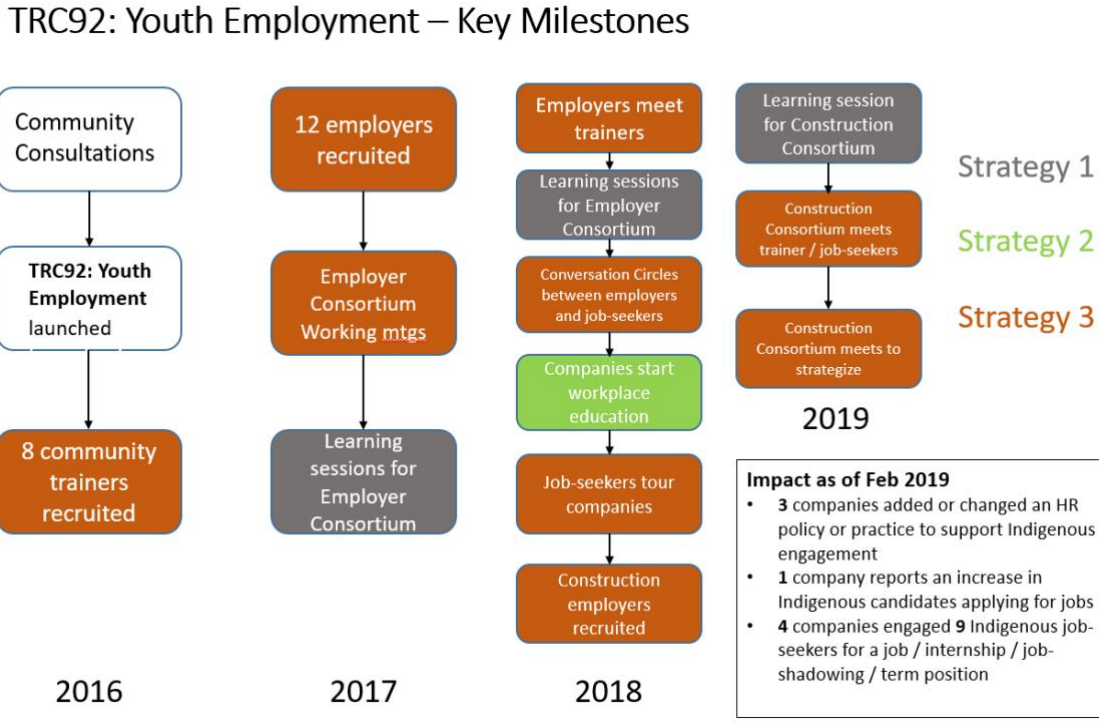
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TRC92: Youth Employment – Key Milestones

Figure 3: Key Milestones for the Youth Employment Initiative

LESSONS LEARNED

Relationships set the stage

Relationship-building is a key component of **TRC92: Youth Employment**. These include relationships between employers in the consortium, between employers and the community organizations, and between employers and Indigenous job-seekers. With relationships comes trust and increased understanding for everyone involved.

Early on, employers had several meetings with Indigenous job-seekers. They sat in circles of about ten people, with employers and job-seekers participating equally, asking each other questions such as "What is important to you in a work environment? What can employers do to make you feel welcome?" And from the job-seekers: "How does your company respond to racism in the workplace? What if an employee needs to take time off to attend cultural ceremonies?"

> **It is relationship-building that uncovers barriers and presents opportunities for problem-solving**

These conversations go a long way toward building relationships and changing perceptions. Job-seekers respond with surprise and appreciation that employers care about what they think. Employers gain a new understanding of the strong desire that Indigenous job-seekers have to succeed in the employment world. Without this understanding, there would be significant gaps and potential missteps for employers engaging Indigenous job-seekers. Similarly, it is relationship-building that uncovers barriers and presents opportunities to solve problems. Within the Employer Consortium, as employers get to know each other, any business-to-business competition becomes irrelevant, and they

begin to talk about the realities within their own work environments, and share challenges and suggestions with each other.

They also identify external barriers, or "conditions that are holding the problem in place."
As an example, employers have
identified that 'Transition Support'
for job-seekers - to help them make the transition from training to work - is critical for success, and that this is currently a significant gap in available resources for Indigenous job-seekers in Winnipeg. The WPRC table and the Employer Consortium model
provide a forum to explore innovative solutions to address this gap.

Employers in a conversation circle with Indigenous job-seekers

Truth before Reconciliation

Strategy #1 in **TRC92: Youth Employment** is about employers learning about Indigenous history and experience. To date, WPRC has offered several formal learning opportunities to the Employer Consortium, engaging local expertise including at the NCTR. WPRC also regularly shares other learning opportunities that arise and each consortium meeting includes a reflection related to the TRC such as a reading or speaker. Employer Consortium members have shared with WPRC that these learning opportunities are transformative and key to establishing commitment to the **TRC92: Youth Employment** initiative. Maintaining a focus on a reconciliation-based learning journey is critical to the evolution of **TRC92 Youth Employment:**

> **I left the session feeling quite emotional – a raw reminder of my privilege and as (the presenter) stated, deep anger of broken promises. Having two Indigenous sisters I have witnessed the impact of the residential schools and the Indian Act, and being a mother and grandmother, I cannot fathom the scars that have been created for seven generations as a result of our ancestors. But I also left hopeful for the future, that the time is now and that we all need to step up and make it our business to set the future right and repair this partnership. I commit to spending reflective time considering the TRC Call to Action and what next steps might look like for (my company).**

Employer Consortium member

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NEXT STEPS FOR TRC92: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Building on the Employer Consortium model

WPRC has learned that the Employer Consortium model is effective for peer-to-peer learning, building relationships and connections, changing mental models, and working together to test out strategies.

In recent months, the WPRC has created a new Employer Consortium comprised entirely of construction companies in order to align with community organizations who are training Indigenous participants in trades and construction skills. The task ahead is to look for more opportunities to scale up the Employer Consortium model.

Working toward structural change

Within the **TRC92: Youth Employment** initiative, structural change (policy, practices, resource flows) is relevant at several levels. For example, Employer Consortium participants are currently discussing how to initiate workplace learning about Indigenous history and experience and how to change current company policies and practices to create culturally-safe workplaces. At another level, lack of resources for Transition Support will require a multi-sector response with a wider range of stakeholders.

As the Employer Consortiums identify barriers and gaps to successful Indigenous employment through real-time experience, WPRC will initiate problem-solving efforts through processes such as social innovation labs.

SUMMARY

The Six Conditions for Systems Change is a meaningful framework for the WPRC's **TRC92: Youth Employment** initiative. The framework aligns with the initiative's three strategies that incorporate education about Indigenous history (i.e. transformative change and mental models), building relationships and connections, and changing policies and practices (i.e. structural change). In the experience of the WPRC to date, the Six Conditions are interconnected; addressing one impacts the others, and all require attention in order to achieve lasting change.

LEARN MORE

- Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council
- TRC92: Youth Employment video
- WPRC Framework for Action
- Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
- Indigenous Works: Call to Action #92 'Business and Reconciliation'
- The Water of Systems Change
- Systems Change: Action Learning Exercise (FSG)
- Swimming in the Deep End

For more information about Winnipeg's initiative please contact:

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