

First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

Case Study:

Mining Essentials: A Work Readiness Training Program for Aboriginal Peoples



Canada

This project is funded by the
Government of Canada's Office
of Literacy and Essential Skills



About the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) in partnership with Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami developed a comprehensive inventory of Essential Skills initiatives aimed at First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The *First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES Inventory Project's (FIMESIP)* goal is to better understand the state of practice with respect to Essential Skills initiatives tailored to First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth and adults living in diverse communities throughout Canada and to share these insights and lessons learned with a larger community of practice. Through FIMESIP, we have identified factors ("markers" of promising practice) that contribute to the initiatives' success.

CCDF gratefully acknowledges the support of the Steering Committee and Working Group of FIMESIP:

The markers, inventory, case studies and evaluation toolkit are available at: www.fimesip.ca.

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About the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF)

CCDF is a non-profit organization that works to advance career services and the capacity of the profession to respond with empathy and skill to their clients and stakeholders in an ever-changing work environment. CCDF is a nationally and internationally recognized leader in the field of career development and works on a range of projects and specializes in areas of:

- **Applied Research:** Creating an evidence-base for the outcomes of career services and interventions;
- **Policy Consultation:** Bringing policy makers and service providers together to develop policy that is attuned to the realities of service provision in the field;
- **Training:** Developing and delivering training courses for a range of practitioners aligned to the competencies set out in the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Development Practitioners;
- **Resource Development:** Making career products that respond to client and practitioner needs;
- **Service Capacity Building:** Working with diverse partners to enrich and strengthen career services and to integrate career, community, economic and workforce development.

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Overview

Mining Essentials: A Work Readiness Training Program for Aboriginal Peoples is a partnership program of the Mining Industry Human Resource Council (MiHR) and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), in collaboration with a National Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, industry partners, educators, and other stakeholders.

Program research and design began in 2009 when MiHR conducted a needs assessment with industry, educators and representatives from other stakeholder groups to investigate if there was a need for a national work-readiness training program focused on the mining industry and, if so, whether it should target a specific audience. MiHR's research confirmed a need for a national program targeted to an Aboriginal audience. Stakeholders also wanted training that was standardized nationally, but flexible in delivery to allow for tailoring to local community contexts.

At the same time that MiHR was doing its needs assessment, the AFN was entering into Memoranda of Understanding with various mining industry partners, including the Mining Association of Canada (MAC). The AFN was informed by MAC that MiHR leads the Canadian mining industry in human resources development. MiHR then approached the AFN to ask if they would be a partner in developing this new training program.

In 2010, a joint proposal was approved for funding by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund. In the same year, the project also received funds from Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) for a three-year term to provide custom Inuit and Métis materials and methodologies.

Since its inception, 15 Mining Essentials sessions have been delivered across eight delivery sites and boasts 107 graduates. The program is administered by MiHR, with program fees subsidized by publically-funded dollars. MiHR's aim is to move to a self-sustaining (break-even) model by charging program fees.

This case study examines three delivery sites that have implemented the national Mining Essentials model to meet local mining industry needs. The program is typically delivered in a 12-week period and focusses on preparing participants for work in the mining industry. It introduces learners to minerals careers in the industry. It also supports learners to prepare for work by

integrating work-readiness training that is tailored to the needs of Aboriginal learners. The training is based on a blended learning style, integrating both in-class and on-the-job work experience complemented by further training as determined by the industry and community partners.

Essential Skill Focus

Mining Essentials provides training on [all nine Essential Skills](#) (ES). MiHR has developed and documented work tasks for entry-level worker requirements in three areas of the industry: underground mining, surface mining, and minerals processing operator. MiHR used the ES profiles developed as part of MiHR's National Occupational Standards to develop Mining Essentials. The ES occupational profiles developed by ESDC were considered in the development of MiHR's National Occupational Standards, which were fully developed by committees of industry members.

Mining Essentials does not focus on raising participant literacy levels; rather, it provides training on targeted ES that are required for entry level work in the industry. As a result, the program does not offer pre- or post-testing of ES levels and participants who are accepted into the program must meet a grade eight learning level. The ES training takes place through a variety of activities that are facilitated by MiHR-approved trainers at local training sites. These activities may include individual assignments, group discussions and projects and on-the-job work experience.

Objectives

The following objectives for Mining Essentials were established by the National Advisory Committee:

- Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have the skills and confidence needed to enter the mining industry directly or via additional education;
- Provide mining and exploration companies with a skilled, local workforce now and in the future;
- Deliver a nationally recognized work-ready skills development program, offering consistency in learning outcomes and worker mobility and supported by training experts;
- Facilitate the ability of mining industry employers to identify and verify the work-readiness of candidates who have successfully completed the program, and;

- Enhance partnerships between Aboriginal communities, educators, and the mining industry.

These objectives are achieved through strong partnerships at both national and local levels.

Promising Practice (Keys to Success)

Methodology/Approach

Mining Essentials is holistic in its approach, supporting both industry's need for work-readiness and ES development and valuing Aboriginal peoples' ways of understanding life and learning. The holistic nature of the program was rooted in its initial development. MiHR and AFN created a Development Committee with representation from industry, education, First Nations, Métis and Inuit stakeholders and curriculum experts experienced in ES and Aboriginal learning concepts. The development process also included input from front-line employment counsellors and trainers, so that the program would be responsive to the needs of the community and potential participants. To achieve this, the AFN, called on its national network to help identify Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) agreement holders with front-line expertise to be part of the team.

“When you have someone who’s been a Director of an ASETS for 10 or 20 years, they know exactly what the challenges are and what’s needed to get their clients into work.”

Bryan Hendry, Senior Policy Advisor, Economic Partnerships AFN.

The Development Committee has evolved to become an Advisory Committee to support the development of additional program elements and contribute to sustainability and quality control.

To ensure the curriculum was relevant to industry, the Development Committee provided industry information, examples and scenarios. Sheila Simard & Associates Education Consulting Ltd (SS&A) was engaged to develop the course materials and Bear Vision, was contracted to ensure the curriculum and methodology were culturally appropriate for Aboriginal learners and communities. The program includes a *Mining Essentials Guiding Wheel*, a visual concept that is used throughout to connect the skills being built to the development of learners' spiritual, emotional, physical, and/or mental self. A key guiding

principle of the program is that “[the] trainers, the learners, the learning environment and the program all work together for participant success” (Introduction to Module 1: Welcome to Mining Essentials). Through this holistic approach, Mining Essentials is not only responsive to industry need, but also respects and contextualizes the training to Aboriginal culture and the needs of the learner. The result is increased engagement of Aboriginal learners in the program.

The success of Mining Essentials is further supported by trainers' guides and a train-the-trainer workshop. It has been developed with flexibility so that trainers can easily insert alternative activities that better reflect local labour market realities and the needs of local employers. This blend of providing training standards for consistency across delivery sites, while being responsive to local needs, could not have been achieved without its holistic approach that integrated the voices of all stakeholders from the start.

Structure of the Program

Mining Essentials is a 12-week work-readiness program for entry in the mining industry. The program is customizable to the needs of learners and their communities. It was developed to provide work-readiness and ES training required for mining sector employment for First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. It includes methodologies unique to the needs of all three Aboriginal groups.

Mining Essentials is promoted nationally, provincially and locally through a combination of activities, which include industry/ education/community presentations, articles or advertisements in mining or Aboriginal-specific media, social media, word-of-mouth, referrals and networking. There has been a noted increase in cases of the Aboriginal community groups and colleges informally championing the program by promoting it among their networks.

At the local level, when an organization prepares to deliver *Mining Essentials*, they promote it to learners using strategies that are tailored to the local community. These may include working with local agencies to generate awareness of and referrals to it, networking with Aboriginal employment and training offices, community organizations and services, or making community presentations. It has also been helpful to use social media, informal networking and word-of-mouth. In many cases, training partnerships between education, the Aboriginal community and industry already exist and this has also helped to generate interest in the program.

Evaluation is at the core of *Mining Essentials*. Each training site must be approved by MiHR and the Advisory Committee. Once approved, the training site must ensure that it completes the required learner assessments and sends these to MiHR for tracking purposes. During the program, trainers are evaluated twice. At mid-session, they receive a verbal report based on participant feedback collected on the “Trainer Evaluation Form”. MiHR reviews feedback from learners and the Site Coordinator with the trainer. If needed, MiHR helps trainers come up with strategies to improve their training methods. Trainers are reassessed upon completion and, if the trainer achieves an 80% average score, he/she becomes a ‘Qualified *Mining Essentials* Trainer’. The Site Coordinator is informed of all feedback provided to MiHR through the mid-point and final evaluations. This connection between MiHR and the trainers/training site helps to ensure each delivery is supported for success. Training sites are also required to follow-up with participants at 3, 6 and 12 months following course completion. This allows MiHR to track participant progress and build an evidence-base for the program.

Currently, existing funds support new program development and some administrative support. Delivery sites must fund the operation costs of the program, purchase the modules and training materials and pay a modest registration fee to MiHR. To help build program sustainability, all operational and delivery process and strategies to support community-based delivery are being reviewed to find ways to streamline and reduce costs. As part of this process, an online learning management system is in development to support trainers’ completion and submission of learner assessments and all other evaluation reports to MiHR.

Content of the Program

Mining Essentials is delivered by MiHR-approved trainers. To successfully complete the program, learners must pass quizzes, meet attendance requirements, complete a work-readiness skills checklist and develop a portfolio which must contain, at minimum, a cover letter, resume and a WHMIS certificate (MiHR web site). The program blends classroom training and enrichment opportunities (e.g., on-site industry visit, work experiences, safety certificate training, and environmental education). In *Mining Essentials*, skills are taught using workplace examples (e.g., workplace scenarios, and documents) and traditional knowledge methods (e.g., sharing circles and the involvement of Elders).

The trainers’ guide details the resources used to develop and

teach lessons. This supports the trainers in finding additional readings and background materials to help them prepare for the course. Trainers are also encouraged to supplement the materials with local community resources, videos, documentaries and website sources. Some trainers, like those in the Temiskaming program (see below), have taken the YWCA’s LifeSkills Coach Program, which they have found valuable in supporting the delivery of *Mining Essentials*. The community delivery sites may also conduct their own learner assessments using the Test of Workplace Essential Skills and the Canadian Adult Achievement Test.

Delivery of the Program

Mining Essentials is delivered at the local level through community colleges, Aboriginal training institutes and community-based organizations. To be a training provider, an organization/institution must first apply to MiHR and be assessed and approved to deliver *Mining Essentials*. The proponent must submit a Demonstration of Capacity form and meet the requirements it stipulates. A community can access a copy of the form from the MiHR’s portal for Aboriginal Engagement in Mining www.aboriginalmining.ca. The National Advisory Committee reviews all applications. The host organization must demonstrate that three key partners are engaged: an Aboriginal organization with a need for the *Mining Essentials*, an educational organization with the capacity to conduct the training, and mining industry partner(s) who will support the initiative through activities such as, providing guest speakers, offering local mining industry experience, or the intent to hire graduates.

It is the responsibility of the training organization to secure funds to cover the costs of: training facilities and supports, trainer fees/salaries, cost of the *Mining Essentials* registrar fee and course materials for each participant. The organization may wish to have other supports or training materials in their program and this is at their discretion and cost.

In order to deliver *Mining Essentials*, applicants are required to have two trainers, preferably with industry experience and at least one of Aboriginal descent, who can support the delivery of the life skills and work-readiness content from an Aboriginal perspective. Trainers must be approved by MiHR and are assessed through the submission of a Trainer’s Application form. The community may select their own trainers or, to support communities who do not have qualified trainers, MiHR has a list of qualified trainers from which communities can draw.

Although *Mining Essentials* is nationally standardized, the three delivery sites below illustrate how the curriculum can be tailored to meet the unique needs of learners and their communities:

- **Temiskaming Native Women's Support Group: Aboriginal Women in Mining**

The mandate of the Temiskaming Native Women's Support Group is "to recruit, train and support Aboriginal women in accessing mining career opportunities through partnerships created with the mining industry". To carry out this mandate, the organization offers a training program with a group of women who come from across the service region of Temiskaming (it also includes women from as far away as the Atlantic region) all of whom want to find employment in mining in this Northern Ontario community. This program includes *Mining Essentials* and offers, as funding allows, wrap-around supports for the participants including: accommodation, childcare, transportation and mental health or family violence counselling. Program organizers work with local service providers to provide these supports.

The *Mining Essentials* Program has established relationships with local mining and mine service employers who provide guest speakers and industry tours, and deliver an eight-week work placement. Certified life skills coaches and experienced facilitators deliver the content in the modules through a range of activities. The facilitators also play the role of career coach, helping participants to set goals and identify areas of strength and possibilities related to the world of work.

"This supportive training delivery approach allows us to streamline the content to specific industry entry points where the participants have identified a career interest and where they would have a chance to be happy and succeed at the same time. It's not just enough to succeed - you have to be happy there, because success isn't really success unless you are happy."

Kelly Lamontange, Life Skills Coach for the Temiskaming program.

The course sets out a number of learner expectations, including attendance, team work, work-role responsibilities, taking initiative, problem solving, and interpersonal communication skills that mirror those required in the

workplace. Industry-related training components are supported through a combination of certificate training sessions in various industry-related tickets, guest speakers, site visits and tours. Throughout the program, the team works with the participants to build their self-esteem and confidence.

- **Ring of Fire Aboriginal Training Alliance: Delivery at Constance Lake First Nation**

Constance Lake First Nation is delivering *Mining Essentials* as part of a larger regional strategy entitled the Ring of Fire Aboriginal Training Alliance (RoFATA). The RoFATA is a partnership initiative of the Matawa Tribal Council, Confederation College and Noront Resources to meet the labour market needs of the mining industry in the region. The training is delivered by two trainers engaged by the College: one who has industry background and a familiarity with ES content and the other who is of First Nations descent and focuses primarily on the life skills and workplace-readiness portions of the program. The trainers work separately, one teaching the ES component in one community while the other teaches life skills and work-readiness in another community. They then swap locales so both communities receive both elements. The training session is delivered over 12 weeks. Course material is supplemented by guest speakers from the industry who share first-hand experience of different careers in mining.

When asked about the importance of the program in light of changes in legislation assigning more accountability to the worker, Ken McIntyre, *Mining Essentials* trainer at Confederation College stated that "...the mines want the workers to enjoy work, but also understand it's not just showing up for work, do what I'm told, and go home. There are responsibilities. You have to be able to read and understand the documents you are given. These days mining, like every other industry, now has to create a lot of documents to ensure that workers are properly trained, they understand their responsibilities, they understand the hazards...When you sign an employment contract, you are signing a legal document [for which you will be held accountable]."

- **Anishinabek Employment and Training Services**
Anishinabek Employment and Training Services was one of the first pilot sites for *Mining Essentials* and has delivered it

three times with a variety of educational and industry partners, each time tailoring the training to the needs of local learners. Adaptations of the program have included: implementing a drug and criminal check for potential candidates in response to industry requirements; delivering portions of the program at the mine site to provide learners with the opportunity to experience the workplace and also the work cycles of camp life; and adding Mine Common Core training (an Ontario requirement for workers in mines) to the program. Some of these customizations were made possible through funding provided by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Outcomes of the Program

The early data from *Mining Essentials* is promising. Of the 107 graduates, about 75% have gone on to further education or secured employment (in the mining industry or other sectors) within three to six months of completing the program. This strong employment outcome is due in part to the fact that the competencies in *Mining Essentials* are aligned to the National Occupational Standards recognized by the industry. Participants who complete the program receive a certificate from MiHR and the AFN that employers recognize as *Mining Essentials* as a demonstration of these core competencies. There is no formal agreement between *Mining Essentials* and post-secondary institutions for credit/course recognition; however, some colleges are giving some credit towards other related college programs.

Adaptability

Mining Essentials was developed to be highly adaptable. The keys to its local adaptability include:

- Develop strong partnerships at community, provincial and national levels to support learners;
- Keep in mind that training, even when focused on a particular industry such as mining, can be a stepping stone to other types of work and broader education;
- Have qualified and experienced trainers who have highly relatable life experience to support their connection with learners;
- Always ask industry partners the qualifications and technical training needs for work/workplaces specific to the region and find way to integrate this into ES curriculum;

- Be flexible to meet the local needs of your learners and take into account their life experiences and challenges so that supports can be provided to facilitate their success.

Lessons Learned/Challenges

The key lessons learned as a result of delivering *Mining Essentials* include:

- **Demonstration of Capacity by the Training Site:** From the pilot test, MiHR saw the need for a rigorous Demonstration of Capacity (training proposal) from delivery sites. In some early applications, while the site met the requirements as written in their application, the physical site and administration of the program did not support learner success. Now MiHR and the AFN require sites to submit photos of their potential training location as part of the process for approval and MiHR staff conduct a site visit and meet the trainers at the start of the training.
- **Evaluation of Trainers:** While some trainers “looked good on paper”, their training style and level of commitment to the program did not meet the standard required by MiHR and AFN. To support training excellence, MiHR and AFN introduced a trainer qualification process whereby a trainer is evaluated midway and at the completion of the program by the learners and the Site Coordinator. MiHR summarizes these evaluations and debriefs the findings with the trainer. According to MiHR and AFN, this rigour in trainer evaluation has supported quality training in the classroom.
- **Support for Training Site in Finding Local Trainers:** To help improve access to trainers by communities that may not have someone locally to be a trainer, MiHR now provides a list of qualified trainers, on their website.
- **Support Training Sites in Finding the Funds to Deliver the Program Locally:** To help communities find funding, MiHR tries to identify and communicate funding sources, including new program announcements and calls for proposals, through its networks.
- **Strength of Partnership:** From the inception of *Mining Essentials*, Development and Advisory Committee partners have worked collaboratively to meet the goals of the program. The strength of the partnership was based on respect for diversity and a commitment to improving the employability and confidence of Aboriginal peoples.

“You must have the right people at the table. Be conscientious of the skills in your committee and the passion within the committee; have a good range of people at the development table.”

Melanie Sturk, MiHR’s Director of Attraction, Retention, and Transition.

- **Streamline Reporting and Tracking:** To help reduce costs and generate reports more efficiently, a Learning Management System is being developed that will be accessible by Site Coordinators and trainers to facilitate online completion and submission of forms.

Benefits

The interviews conducted for this case study focused on the benefits for the learners in the program. The benefits that emerged from these interviews include that the learners:

- Developed key skills to improve their abilities to work in the mining industry.
- Enjoyed being part of a program that is respectfully preparing them to develop their careers in mining or another sector. “A lot of the skills that we’ve been learning here are transferable skills that you can take into other careers...It doesn’t have to be mining,” said one Constance Lake Participant.
- Developed a greater understanding of the mining industry: (e.g., learning about the workplace and culture, the global aspects of mining, and the connection to their health and safety rights as workers.)
- Appreciated being part of training that respects Aboriginal culture by creating a learning environment that supports the Seven Grandfather Teachings, fosters a sense of community and helps them connect to their culture.
- Valued training that models the expectations and responsibilities they will have as employees “It taught me to be more responsible, be on time every day, respect our peers...It gave us that choice to call when we’re not gonna make it, or be late. It’s like actual work, what we’re expected to do at work, that’s what we’re expected to do here,” said a Constance Lake Participant.
- Developed increased levels of self-esteem and confidence.

“The course was awesome, co-operative, there was no conflict, felt like a home environment, inclusive no matter the level, non-threatening, leads to jobs, perfect for those with no job experience or knowledge of mining, offers hope, faith, supports, and friends.”

Participant at the Temiskaming group interview.

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