

DR 598 FINAL PROJECT REPORT

An Evaluation of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, Year 2 (2008/2009)

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the future generations of Aboriginal youth, including my own younger sibling, nieces and nephews – in hopes that your future careers will be full of possibilities to use your own voice to create positive change in our families, communities and nations.

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INTRODUCTION

The British Columbia Public Service Aboriginal Youth Internship Program (AYIP) has been in operation since 2007 and has seen almost one hundred Aboriginal youth interns accepted into the program since its pilot year. This award-winning program is a multi-stakeholder partnership initiative and has caught the attention of provincial and federal government officials across the country.

The program engages Aboriginal youth from urban, rural, reserve and northern communities and has been described as “the best example of the New Relationship” by its Aboriginal leadership champions, as well as a best practice for Aboriginal leadership and management training.

The program has a 90% completion rate and has partnered numerous ministries and Aboriginal organizations since its inception. This evaluation project of the 2008/2009 Program Year is being completed to give voice to the intern experience of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. It will also include experiences and recommendations from the supervisors and mentors who are also key program participants in their daily interactions with the youth interns and their relationship with program staff.

PRIMARY RESEARCHER

In following my First Nations’ protocols, my name is Allison Beardsworth and I am from the Dene Nation in Dehcho region of the Northwest Territories. I was raised in New Brunswick and attended post-secondary schooling at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where I completed a Bachelor of Social Work degree in 2001.

In 2007, I moved to British Columbia to attend the University of Victoria to complete an M.A. in Dispute Resolution. In fall 2007, I joined the BC Public Service in the Ministry of Economic Development as a policy advisor on Aboriginal economic development. As of October 2009, I have been the Program Coordinator for the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. This evaluation report is being submitted as a degree requirement for my M.A. at University of Victoria.

In Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, I supervised one of the Year 2 interns and because of this; safeguards were built into my research proposal and were approved by the UVIC ethics committee. It is my hope that this research will help inform present and future program practices, as well as provide a voice to the experiences of our program partners --the interns, the supervisors and the mentors.

I give thanks to the Year 2 interns, supervisors and mentors for contributing their experiences to this important piece of work. Mahsi Cho.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was created in 2007 as a partnership between the Government of British Columbia, the First Nations Leadership Council and the Métis Nation of British Columbia. The concept was brought to life by staff at the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and the Public Service Agency after engagement with key stakeholders, more specifically, Aboriginal Youth councils representing major agencies that form the Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective.

Program Goals

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program major goals are to:

- Encourage Aboriginal youth to consider the BC Public Service or Aboriginal organizations as a place to pursue a rewarding career;
- Support Aboriginal youth to develop their leadership skills;
- Provide opportunities for Aboriginal youth to contribute and improve relationship building between Aboriginal communities/organizations and the provincial government; and,
- Contribute to closing the social and economic gaps that exist between Aboriginal people and other British Columbians.

Policy and Government direction

The program was first announced in the Speech from the Throne in February 2006 outlining that:

New steps will be taken to recruit qualified Aboriginal individuals to fill openings in the public sector. A new Aboriginal internship program will be established to provide opportunities for learning throughout the provincial and municipal public services. (Government of BC, 2006)

This program would be a key initiative under the New Relationship between First Nations and Aboriginal people. The New Relationship was a signed policy direction statement of intention put together by the provincial government in consultation with Aboriginal organizations. Three accords were signed by members of the First Nation Leadership Council and the Métis Nation of British Columbia (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2006).

The spirit and intent of the Accords is to begin a new approach to working together between government and Aboriginal people, communities and organizations. The *New Relationship* can exist at a broad level between the province and organizations or at a smaller scope, such as between one specific ministry and one First Nations community. This new working relationship allows for new negotiation committees to be formed, as well as key targets in areas such as relationship building, Treaty negotiations and dispute resolution.

“All British Columbians will benefit from a richer understanding of First Nations culture and from economic, political and cultural partnerships with First Nations.” (Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2006)

AYIP Year 1 – Pilot

In 2007, the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program entered into its Pilot year. A Program Lead was hired and 15 youth were accepted into the program. This was a key year for the program to test out some of its goals and principles and a number of the interns were involved in the program development consultations.

The Program Lead was the only dedicated staff available for program administration and intern support, however halfway through the year, a program assistant was assigned to complete the year and begin Year 2 recruitment.

Program Structure and Timeline

The key characteristic of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is its partnership with Aboriginal organizations it has retained since program development consultations. The program has maintained a partnership with the four major Aboriginal political organizations in British Columbia and their respective logos appear in marketing, recruitment and promotional material:

- BC Assembly of First Nations
- First Nations Summit
- Union of BC Indian Chiefs
- Métis Nation of British Columbia

The program also considers each intern, ministry and Aboriginal organization an important partner and key to program success.

In order to be eligible to apply and participate in the Aboriginal Youth Internship, program applicants must meet the following screening criteria:

- Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Non-Status)
- Under the age of 29
- Residing in British Columbia
- Grade 12 diploma or equivalent
- Knowledge of Aboriginal organizations in BC

The program begins in September every year and lasts for 12 months. Interns spend nine months (September –May) in their ministry placements and three months (June – August) in their Aboriginal organization placements. Recruitment of the next year’s interns begins in March of every year and there is a four-month time period where staff manages two cohorts of interns.

Interns gather in the first week of their internship for one week of training workshops to orient them to the program, discuss the roles of program staff, and understand Ministry processes. The interns are also welcomed into the program in a traditional First Nations longhouse ceremony, carried out in Year 2 at the Esquimalt Nation Bighouse.

Three *training days*, known as “Program Days”, are planned at different points in the internship year. Interns are brought together with program staff in Victoria or other regional locations. The agenda for the days include a Role Model Leadership speaker series, skills workshops and other guest presenters.

The *selection process* for the next year’s interns begins in April and May of the current program year. A Selection committee is created with members from key program partners including a representative from the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and two members from the Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective. An intern alumni representative is also invited to sit on the panel.

In order to vet key program documents such as Expressions of Interest and Ministry Proposals, an *Advisory Council* was struck made up of senior Aboriginal public servants. Their advice on placements for both ministry and Aboriginal organizations is taken into consideration by the program. The Council meets twice per year to vet documents for the program, although technology such as email, are used to connect virtually as well. A Terms of Reference outlining roles of program staff and its members also guides the Advisory Council.

Interns spend the first nine months of their internship year in provincial government ministries. Government ministries are also responsible for funding the interns for the full year. In the *Ministry Proposal* document, ministries sign off in agreement to the terms of their relationship to the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. The projects and deliverables are outlined in the proposal so interns can select their placement based on their qualifications and educational/career interests.

Interns spend the final three months of their internship year in an Aboriginal organization. To ensure that both the organization and intern are prepared for the placement, the position is developed in the form of an *Expression of Interest* outlining key projects and qualifications. The template is very similar to the Ministry Proposal.

At the end of the internship year, a *completion ceremony* is held to celebrate the intern’s accomplishments with their families and friends. The ceremony is attended by Aboriginal and provincial government politicians to honour the interns. The event is hosted by the government and showcases a combination of traditional and contemporary protocols throughout the evening.

In each placement, the intern is matched with both a *supervisor and mentor*. The supervisor is the primary contact for the intern in the workplace who has responsibility for their workload and deadlines. The mentor is someone in the workplace whom the intern can access to discuss workplace culture, training opportunities and career development or other job shadowing opportunities.

AYIP Year 2

Development of the second program year began in May 2008 through the creation of the Selection Committee and the vetting of ministry proposals through the Advisory Council members. Program staff numbers were also expanded to support the Program Lead with the addition of a Program Coordinator and Program Assistant.

Due to the success of the AYIP Year 1, at least 30 ministry proposals were submitted for consideration and approved by the Advisory Council. Ministry placements were spread out through the province in Victoria, Vancouver, Prince George, Kamloops, and Smithers. Participating ministries offered placements that ranged from youth engagement, program development, policy analysis, forestry, and environmental emergencies.

25 interns were accepted into the program in Year 2 and matched to the ministry placements based on their career and educational interests and qualifications. Interns represented multiple nations around the province and across Canada.

Approximately 12 ministries participated in Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, with some ministries hosting up to four interns in different branches and in different regions across the province. Approximately 75 Expressions of Interest were submitted from across the province in a variety of Aboriginal organizations at the provincial, Tribal Council and community level. Of the 75 submitted, 53 were approved for consideration of the Year 2 interns.

Completion Rate of the Year 2 interns

25 interns were accepted into Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. At the completion ceremony, 20 interns accepted their completion certificates. Throughout the internship year, four interns withdrew from the program due to personal and health reasons.

The program also suffered its first intern loss when Marshal Boucher passed away due to a pre-existing medical condition.

Program Structure and Design in Year 2

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is housed and delivered by the BC Public Service Agency within the Talent Management Division. This division is responsible for the hiring and learning needs of the public service as a whole. In Year 2 of the program, the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was located in the Hiring Centre with the Corporate Initiatives and Solutions Branch.

While program delivery was the responsibility of the Public Service Agency, program staff kept in close communication with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation as a key program partner.

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program operates from the Public Service Agency however; intern's placements are funded by individual ministry branches that submit Ministry Proposals that become approved by the Advisory Committee. By submitting a signed ministry proposal to the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, ministry branches are committed to host and fund an internship position for twelve months. The majority of that funding is dedicated towards the intern's salary. The rest of the funding is provided to the Public Service Agency towards a program administration fee, which covers the cost of program training days, travel for program staff to conduct a site visit for the ministry and Aboriginal organization placements, as well as other resources for the interns throughout their year.

In Year 2, there was three core staff involved in the delivery of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. The *Program Lead* has overall program oversight and decision-making authority. Reporting to the Director of the Hiring Centre and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Talent Management Division, the program lead is the primary support to the supervisors and mentors in the program, as well as to the interns.

The *Program Coordinator* is the first line of support for the interns in the cohort. The Coordinator supports the interns with any issues related to their ministry and Aboriginal organization placements such as project support. They also provide some support to supervisors and mentors. The program coordinator works closely with the program lead to ensure that supportive models and consistency were maintained throughout the year.

The *Program Assistant* provides the administrative support required to manage contracts, vendors and files required in the internship program. They also assist with booking travel and accommodations for the interns to attend program events, as well as work closely with financial departments on program administration policies and procedures.

A Special Note about Year 2

As noted earlier, Marshal Boucher passed away on May 29, 2009. In memory of his contribution to the internship program and to his community, the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program created the "Marshal Boucher Citizenship Award". It is awarded to a member of the cohort that represents the spirit of citizenship Marshal contributed to the Year 2 cohort. The recipient of this award is nominated by their peers in the program. It was first awarded at the completion ceremony for the Year 2 interns in October 2009 and will be awarded annually.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education and Aboriginal People in Canada

Since contact with Europeans, traditional Aboriginal teaching systems have been minimized as a result of colonial practices – even documents and stories have some relationship with contact. A more specific example of this is that Aboriginal education is legislated by the federal government within the *Indian Act*. Within that legislation, a part of Canada's colonial history was cemented through implementation of a policy that all Aboriginal children would attend a Residential School designed to fully assimilate the Aboriginal population (Burton & Point, 2006). The impacts of this policy are still being felt, with the last residential school in Canada closing its door in 1996.

Effects of the residential school system are echoed through generations and educational attainment levels demonstrate a major gap needing to be addressed with the Aboriginal population aged 25-64 lagging behind with 34% having less than high school (50% on reserve) compared with 15% of non-Aboriginals of the same age (Census 2006).

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood presented a paper entitled “Indian Control over Indian Education” to the Government of Canada. In the paper, it outlined how First Nations envisioned educating children in their communities, including guiding values, philosophies and the role of the parent. Today, still, First Nations organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations (formerly, the National Indian Brotherhood) use this document as a guiding vision for an education system for their communities (AFN website, 2011):

The time has come for a radical change in Indian education. Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability.

(National Indian Brotherhood, 1972)

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program recognizes that formal education institutions are always available as a choice or as a preference for pursuing training and skills development. To accommodate this reality, the program minimum educational requirement at time of application is Grade 12 or equivalent high school completion.

Aboriginal Youth in Canada

The Aboriginal population in Canada is young and growing. Census data collected in 2006 revealed that 48% of Aboriginal people are less than 25 years old (31% for non-Aboriginals) and that the median age of the Aboriginal population is 27 compared with 40 for non-Aboriginals. Recent research into population trends has shown that the population of Aboriginal communities will continue to grow while the rest of the population will continue to decline. In particular, the 2001 Census data shows a trend

that indicated that the number of Aboriginal people ages 15-29 will continue to grow at a rapid pace until this year, 2011 and then begin to slow down (Hull, 2008).

The youthfulness of the Aboriginal population will continue to have many implications for various socioeconomic initiatives. With a particular focus on investments in education, there are opportunities for improving the overall well being of Aboriginal people. There have been positive developments in the past decade such as a rise in educational levels of the Aboriginal population indicating more than 20,000 students enroll annually in post-secondary courses. Entrepreneurs in Aboriginal communities are making their mark, as are Aboriginal artists and writers. Programs to encourage youth mentorship and attention to youth needs in cultural centers and urban environments have been launched (Castellano, 2008).

In 1995, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report argued that youth issues could not be treated in isolation from the larger challenges of education, justice, health, and economic development. The report emphasized that involvement of youth in effecting change was essential and recommended that the diversity of cultures and social realities could best be accommodated by local authority to adapt program initiatives (Castellano, 2008).

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is targeted towards Aboriginal youth in British Columbia under the age of 29. Whether it urban, rural, northern, etc. -- recognition of the diversity of the Aboriginal population is important to ensuring that all youth interns feel welcomed, included and that their voice is heard when working in ministries and Aboriginal organizations.

Aboriginal Youth in the Canadian Labour Market

A key factor in labour market participation is the completion of various levels of educational certification, such as a high school graduation certificate or a post-secondary certificate or degree (Hull, 2008). At lower levels of education however, there is a large gap between the Aboriginal and other Canadian employment rates, especially among those without any type of high school or post-secondary certification.

The Aboriginal population is a significant potential labour market resource within Canada – a resource that is underutilized in the current economy. Hundreds of thousands of young Aboriginal people will enter the work force over the coming years. Any success that can be achieved in improving Aboriginal educational levels will pay dividends to the Canadian economy by improving the availability of skilled labour and reducing labour shortages (Hull, 2008).

In recognition of this significant labour market resource, the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is ensuring that Aboriginal youth are receiving skills and training to assist them in their workforce participation. They are also ensuring that the BC public service is more reflective of the demographic that it serves by having Aboriginal people working on Aboriginal policy and programs.

British Columbia Public Service Internships

In 2009, a discussion paper was prepared by the Office of Knowledge and Information Services, the Office of the Chief Information Officer and the Ministry of Labour and Citizen Services detailing a review of Internship programs across the BC Public Service. It was prepared for a Community of Practice on Internships to consolidate data and criteria on program scope and salaries.

An internship is defined as referring to “work of a temporary nature that provided real world experience related to an individual’s academic study. They are often regarded as a way to ‘bridge’ or transition individuals from school to work.” (Office of the Chief Information Officer, 2009)

All internship programs in the BC Public Service follow guidelines outlined in the Terms and Conditions outlined in a Memorandum to Understanding in 1998 between the Public Service Employee Relations Commission and the BC Government and Service Employee’s Union. The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program follows these terms and conditions with the exception of the requirement of a post-secondary degree – where the minimum education requirement is a high school degree or equivalent.

The report also outlines several factors as considerations for developing an internship program (Kimmit-Huxley, 2007):

- *Utilization of Structured Planning Processes* to ensure clarity in describing the problem being addressed by the internship program and how it fits with human resource strategies and performance measure considerations.
- *Involvement of Participants* (interns) in the development of their programs and allow them to share in the accountability of their designs.
- *Program Sponsorship* by senior levels to enhance credibility.
- *Internships as a long-term recruitment strategy* needing long-term financial and executive support.

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program has demonstrated three of the four considerations outlined above. The program has clearly stated goals that align with the current policy direction of the BC Public Service and Aboriginal policy statements. It was developed in consultation with its key program partners, including the Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective. The program is endorsed by senior members of government in the public service and at the political level.

The current program model has executive support however, does not ensure that it will remain a long term recruitment strategy. The current funding model is dependent on ministry’s motivation and current budget realities. If a ministry does not have the funding available for an intern, there is no alternative means to provide a placement.

Aboriginal Youth Employment programming in Canada

In *Winnipeg, Manitoba*, the Ministry of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors has partnered with FireSpirit Inc. to deliver an Aboriginal Youth Internship Program (AYIP) for Winnipeg and capital region Aboriginal high school students.

The AYIP provides an opportunity for local high school students to access work experience and employment opportunities that might not otherwise be readily available to them. The program will usually allow a student a half day (3 hours) per week or one day (6 hours) every two weeks, maximum 16 weeks, attending an on-site work experience. This portion of the program will be unpaid and will normally take place between February and June. Students who successfully complete their work experience will be offered summer employment during July and August.

The program is run as a partnership with each partner playing a distinct, but integral role. The partnership exists among the participating student, the school, the employer, and FireSpirit Inc.

In *New Brunswick*, the Joint Economic Development Initiative has developed the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. This internship provides Aboriginal university graduates with experience and training in the business administration and economic development fields to contribute to the region's growth. It is also meant to enhance the capacity of Aboriginal communities and organizations in their economic development work.

The goal of this program is to provide Aboriginal people who have graduated from university within the last three years, preferably in the field of business or related areas, an opportunity to work in the field of economic development and gain meaningful work skills, knowledge and experience, as well as giving opportunity to AYIP Host Organizations to identify potential qualified employees.

AYIP is overseen by the AYIP Working Group and coordinated by the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI). JEDI is also responsible to its funding partners in the federal and provincial government, private and First Nation sectors.

The AYIP is focused primarily on recent Aboriginal university graduates who have graduated within the last three years with a business degree or a degree in a related field and are currently unemployed or underemployed. Businesses looking to host an intern need to indicate the interest in hosting an intern, provide an orientation plan for the intern, and finally, provide a workplan (including skills and knowledge outcomes).

In New Brunswick, the AYIP is funded centrally. Provincial and federal government departments, agencies, crown corporations, Community Business Development Corporations (CBDCs), and Community Economic Development Agencies (CEDAs) that are part of the New Brunswick Enterprise Network are eligible to apply for AYIP funding.

At the federal level, the *Government of Canada*, in partnership with Aboriginal communities, is providing the resources necessary for Aboriginal youth to succeed in the job market so they can build better futures for themselves and their families (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2011).

Under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), Aboriginal agreement holders determine the type of youth programs to deliver based on the needs of the Aboriginal youth served. They may design, develop and deliver unique partnership-

based and demand-driven youth programs, while supporting Human Resources and Skills Development Canada objectives.

These are just a few of the programs in Canada providing targeted programming to Aboriginal youth. Each program is unique in its funding and program design, but they are all targeted towards developing skills and training for this key demographic and labour market resource.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program has four major program goals. The goals encompass benefits to government and Aboriginal youth, communities and an improvement to socio-economic outcomes. In order to reach those goals, the design of the program is a key indicator of intern success rates and the intern experience during their internship is just as important as the quantitative results of intern completion, or where they chose to be employed post-internship.

In order to achieve those goals, the program has incorporated features and characteristics that both make this program uniquely successful. Information on these features were chosen by the primary researcher as themes that often appear in program promotional and marketing material, press releases and speeches by program champions. Further information was provided by the Program Lead to inform and validate the framework.

Cultural Responsiveness

- The following wording is provided in the job posting for recruitment of new interns, “the Aboriginal Youth Internship program offers an innovative, 12 month paid internship program that is culturally responsive and supported.”

The AYIP recognizes the diversity of Aboriginal identities and unique journeys of every intern vis-à-vis cultural experiences, identities and needs. Interns are learning how to navigate the government system while keeping true to Aboriginal identity and values. They are carrying the ceremony within – to deal with professional life in a professionally and culturally respectful way.

Workshops are specifically designed on Aboriginal perspectives, skills and conflict resolution techniques are also made available. While the program staff maintain a professional focus with the interns, they also recognize the needs of the whole person and use a medicine wheel approach to ensure that interns assess their needs in all areas. Staff are not experts in all areas and provide referrals to Aboriginal Elders, counsellors and other community resources.

Building Relationships between Aboriginal People and Government

- This thematic area is also a key goal of the program – “to provide opportunities for Aboriginal youth to contribute and improve relationship building between Aboriginal communities/organizations and the provincial government”

The program provides an opportunity to build a relationship between Aboriginal people and government by having an Aboriginal person work within areas of government that have traditionally not been inclusive of Aboriginal voice. There is reciprocity in cultural exchange - interns bring their cultural and community values and perspective into branches/ministries – then ministries provide insight into provincial government processes which interns find beneficial on individual and community levels.

The Internship program also operates across the majority of ministries which allows the program to provide opportunities for intern project collaboration – which may not have

occurred without the program. Following the ministry placement, the three-month placement is key to knowledge transfer of provincial government processes to Aboriginal communities.

Interns are also able to provide a personal perspective on their experience which can demystify processes about government work and workers. Through understanding the processes and hierarchies of provincial government, interns are able to provide perspective on decision making and timeline processes.

Building Relationships Among Interns

- One of the key program principles for the program is the cohort model – as outlined in the Intern Handbook (2010): “Interns go through the whole program together [...] – developing this level of trust and understanding amongst young colleagues leads to program retention, information and resource sharing, present and future connections, and personal resilience to face challenges.”

The interns are brought together in the first week and spend four days with the program staff to ensure they build a healthy support system amongst each other. Once in their ministry placements, the interns are in constant communication virtually through emails and teleconferences.

The intern cohort model ensures that all interns begin at the same point and experience key milestones together, such as orientation, training days, special invitations, as well as completion. This common program experience enables all interns to share in each other’s success and support each other through difficult and challenging times.

Week long internship orientation is essential to initial cohort development, as well as the following of Aboriginal protocols such as the talking circle. The curriculum of orientation week allows interns to learn about each other in a structured way. The balance of formal, professional and optional social activities enhances the development of genuine professional and friendship bonds.

The internship provides a unique and powerful opportunity where interns can have a powerful shared experience – i.e. talking circle in the legislature, blankets at the traditional welcoming ceremony, and talking with political leaders about their own community issues. These are opportunities and memories that an intern can reflect back on and draw strength from for years to come and draw strength from those bonds formed during the internship year.

Opportunities for Youth Voice or Influence

- The Aboriginal Youth Internship job posting promotes, “through your work as an intern, you will also have an opportunity to help build the New Relationship and make positive differences for Aboriginal people and communities across the province” (Public Service Agency, 2010).

Through creation of the positions themselves – there is an opportunity for an Aboriginal voice and presence at the branch level. The program also provides support for interns to

work in a developmental and progressive way to increase influence on programs and policies.

The program encourages youth voice in program and policy development. Interns were instrumental in creating some of the program policies through voicing feedback on approaches.

Program Image and Reputation

- The program is strongly guided by program goals and principles and sets very high expectations and standards for interns and ministries alike. Interns are featured at high-level ministry and cross-government events. Each year, the number of applicants is increasing – indicating that youth are being encouraged to apply for this innovative program.

The program continues to grow an outstanding reputation within government and Aboriginal communities. It is an example of what is working in the New Relationship because the program insists upon a respectful and reciprocal relationship between government and Aboriginal people.

The reputation of the program exceeds provincial boundaries and has been used as a model for the federal government Aboriginal Internship Program, BC Region Pilot Program. Program staff have also been contacted for information on the program model information from three other provinces.

These five program areas are what make the Aboriginal Youth Internship innovative and unique. Providing the interns with an opportunity to speak about their internship experience firsthand and validate the official goals of the program, as well as other key program features will enable an opportunity for the intern voice and experience to be highlighted, while also providing an opportunity for recommendations to enhance the program with new ideas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Objective

Program data such as completion rates were readily available for publication and have been showcased in a variety of other reports including estimates briefing notes; however information that was not available more broadly was the intern experience of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. Program celebrations and successes are showcased by government and Aboriginal leadership in press releases (attached in Appendix V). Survey interviews were used to collect qualitative data about the intern experience in Year 2.

Research Design

Interviews were conducted between the months of November 2010 and February 2011. The letter of information was sent out by the Evaluation manager in the Learning Centre to the contact list of interns from Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program via email (Appendix II). Contact information for the primary researcher was included. Participation was voluntary and consent to participate was provided by signing the form attached in Appendix I.

An interview was also conducted with the Program Lead to validate and inform the research framework. Handwritten or typed notes were taken during the interviews, which were done either in person or over the phone.

Interview participants were asked questions about what worked well, what did not work well, and what they view could have been done better in each of the thematic areas. They were also asked to provide recommendations on what could be done to change or improve on each of the thematic areas:

- In what ways is the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program culturally responsive to the needs of interns?
- Provide an example of how the program benefitted you in your internship by being culturally responsive?
- Provide an example of how the program was not helpful by being culturally responsive?
- What would you do to change to improve the culturally responsive nature of the AYIP?

An electronic survey tool was also used to collect the data for the supervisors and mentors (Appendix IV). Given that the sample size was much larger than the intern sample, this would enable the most individuals to participate, while ensuring confidentiality and scope. Four of the questions in the survey were on a likert scale, while two of the questions provided the opportunity to provide comments on “areas for improvement” and “other program recommendations.”

With an electronic survey, both supervisors and mentors were able to comment equally on their internship experience. The same questions were sent to both. In most cases in

year 2, interns did have a separate mentor, but in some cases, the supervisor filled both those relationships, or the mentor fulfilled the supervisor relationship for a specific project – and therefore they could comment equally regarding their internship experience.

Research Sample

N= 20 interns that successfully completed the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program

All interns are Aboriginal people (either First Nations or Métis) from nations across Canada, residing in BC at the time of program application. They all have a high school diploma and were under the age of 29 before the program start date of September 6, 2008.

The response rate for this sample was 12/20 or 60%.

The sample size of the ministry and Aboriginal organizations' supervisors and mentors is:

N= 20 Supervisors and mentors that completed the survey.

Supervisors and mentors are those people employed by a ministry or Aboriginal organization partner organization that hosted an intern in Year 2 and fulfilled the role of supervisor or mentor to an Aboriginal youth intern.

Research Considerations

Since the primary researcher had participated in the Aboriginal Youth Internship program as a ministry supervisor, provisions were made available for the Evaluation manager in the Learning Centre to conduct that interview if requested.

Contacting interns was done first through email. A few interns indicated they would like to participate however, did not have time to book a telephone interview. It was also difficult to know whether or not the contact information for the interns was accurate as a number of them had changed email addresses or had moved on to other provinces to pursue post-secondary education or employment.

Contacting ministry and Aboriginal organization supervisors was more difficult than expected. A few had been impacted by the 2009-10 government staff reductions or had left government to pursue a career in the private or non-profit sectors. Aboriginal organization supervisors and mentors had also moved on from their projects and were no longer employed at the organization that the intern was placed with.

Data Analysis

The data from the interviews was analyzed and themes were pulled out from the responses that make up the titles in the "Findings" sections. These themes were ranked in terms of frequency – there was no more than two responses found in all themes. In some cases, interview data contained information that referenced other program years – this data was not considered for this report. The quantitative data collected by the electronic survey data is also showcased within the themes.

Most of the data was utilized and is showcased in the findings due to the fact that while all interns are in the same program – their ministry experiences were all unique. Their intern perspectives and their willingness to participate in these interviews to share their stories are considered particularly valuable with respect to Aboriginal culture and protocols. Their recommendations are particularly important to ensuring their voice and experience can lead to further program growth and influence on government program practices.

Reviewing Results

The data in the findings section of the report, as well as a completed draft will be presented to the interns that participated in the interviews to ensure its accuracy before it is finalized.

FINDINGS I: PROMISING PRACTICES

These findings represent qualitative data that was collected in the intern interviews. These promising practices are examples of program successes as outlined in the first two questions. The questions can be found in the interview guide in Appendix III.

The data from the interviews was transcribed and themes and frequencies of response were noted for each area. Several of the interns discussed program events and milestones that resonated with them throughout the program year, while others discussed their ministry experience and other more situational experiences. Each section outlines findings in order of importance or frequency.

Cultural Responsiveness

Interns were asked to discuss whether or not they felt the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was culturally responsive and to provide examples of how the program achieved this. The following was provided:

Cultural Exploration

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program allowed interns from a diversity of Aboriginal ancestry and nations to explore their own culture, share it with other interns, as well as learn about other intern's cultural practices. Promotion of open dialogue and respect allowed for cultural learning, teaching and sharing to take place throughout their internship experience.

During program events such as Program Days, ceremonies and informal gatherings, interns noted that it was easy to share stories, songs, and experiences from their nations with each other. When interns would share their own individual knowledge of language, dances, and songs, it encouraged other interns to take the opportunity to conduct their own explorations.

Interns acknowledged an appreciation for the opportunity to learn about other Aboriginal cultures. They noted that the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program brought to life values that they already held but had been hesitant to explore. They appreciated that program staff ensured speakers and presenters were from a diversity of Aboriginal backgrounds.

As one intern stated, "the program is respectful and open to all interns and other beliefs, values, religion and practices. They honor Aboriginal culture and teachings in the program, also making it possible for its participants to learn other's practices, backgrounds, cultures, religions, etc." (Year 2 Intern).

Program Gatherings

Program design includes two ceremonies throughout the year. The first is a traditional Coast Salish welcoming ceremony in a longhouse on the territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt people. When interns finish the program, they are honoured at a completion ceremony that is a mix of both traditional and contemporary celebrations. Interns also

appreciated the acknowledgement of traditional territories by local Elders and the talking circles to end the day.

Throughout the year, interns attend many gatherings and training days. It was noted that the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was careful and respectful in incorporating traditional protocols at gatherings, where appropriate. Interns indicated an appreciation for incorporation and recognition of traditional needs, while also recognizing that “not everything is a ceremony.” The program was culturally responsive while also recognizing that the interns required or requested training in other skills to assist them in succeeding in the workplace. This mix of cultural and contemporary learning was welcomed.

“During my time in the program as a group we went through many difficult times and we were all feeling lost and down at times and because of how much culture was respected and practices we were able to use our culture to heal both individually and as a group. We prayed, we sang, we had ceremonies and we were all there for each other with wise words that we had learned from our Elders – the program supported that sharing and we were all stronger for it.”(Y2 Intern)

Support from Program Staff

In Year 2 of the program, Aboriginal employees of the Public Service Agency held all three program staff positions. Interns found it was helpful to have program staff that could relate to their experiences throughout the year.

Interns also noted an appreciation for the work that program staff and the Advisory Council had undertaken to ensure that a diversity of projects and placements were available and the thought put into the matching process for interns and their ministry placements. Program staff also took a holistic approach to dealing with individual issues with respect to intern support roles. Their needs were looked after at gatherings as well, noting an appreciation for how staff was responsive to their requests and needs for cultural learning, as well as non-traditional skills development.

In Year 2, there were 10 regional placements. Interns noted that email check-ins led by Program Staff were helpful in providing virtual support throughout the year: “[it was a] huge year of personal and professional growth and I am thankful that it was in a culturally safe environment with lots of opportunity to dialogue with other interns” (Y2 Intern)

Acknowledgement of Diversity and Unique Aboriginal Cultures

Throughout the program year, interns noted that there was an appreciation and acknowledgment on behalf of the program staff that the province of British Columbia is home to a diversity of Aboriginal governments, nations, and communities. The cohort represented a diversity of Aboriginal youth including First Nations and Métis, northern remote, urban, and rural. This was particularly noted when interns would require time off to participate in ceremony and return to their home community for funerals and potlatch gatherings. These gatherings could take interns away from their placements and require a long bereavement period. Program staff would work with ministry supervisors and mentors to ensure that the intern took the time necessary to be in ceremony before returning to the office.

The program selection committee is made up of six people, mostly of Aboriginal descent. This was reassuring and appreciated by interns through the interview process. It also assisted in reinforcing the partnership relationship between the program and Aboriginal communities and organizations such as the Unified Aboriginal Youth Collective (UAYC).

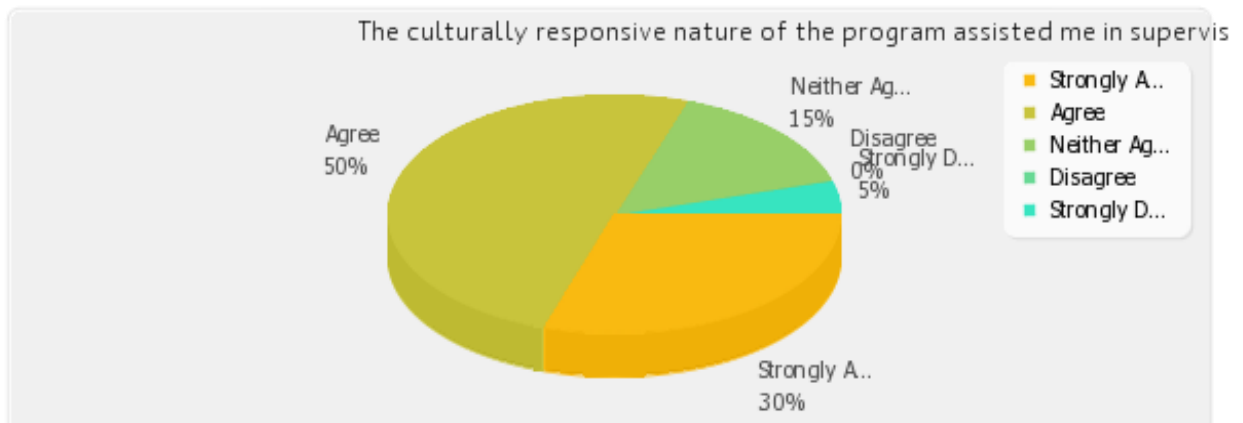
Other Culturally Responsive Supports

Interns in Year 2 were introduced to other Aboriginal public servants throughout the year and were able to build a network of other supports around them. Interns felt that the larger Aboriginal public service community was supporting them.

During key events throughout the year, an appreciation for the attendance of government and Aboriginal political leadership was noted.

The majority of supervisors and mentors responded that the culturally responsive nature of the program assisted them throughout the program in supervising their intern. 20% of respondents indicated that cultural responsiveness was not a factor in their internship interactions, or that they strongly disagreed that cultural responsiveness assisted them throughout the year.

Table 1: The culturally responsive nature of the program assisted me in supervising an Aboriginal youth intern.



Building Relationships between Aboriginal People and Government

Interns were also asked to articulate how the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was helpful in building relationships between Aboriginal people and government and to provide examples of how this was achieved. The following four themes were pulled from their responses in order of frequency:

- The program was a *two-way teaching tool* between Aboriginal people and public servants.
- The projects that interns were able to get involved in with their ministries crossed over among ministries enabling a wider *scope and reach*.
- The program provided opportunities for interns to have *access to decision-making* process in government.
- The ministry placements enabled an *increased awareness of Aboriginal issues in the public service* through dialogue and presence of the program.

Two-Way Teaching Tool:

Interns indicated that the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program provided an opportunity for government and Aboriginal Youth to learn from each other. During their ministry placements, interns gained a network of contacts within government and vice versa. The internship acted as a “two-way teaching tool” for both parties to learn about each other’s realities. It was noted that it was helpful for the interns to learn about how change can be slow in some policy and program areas, which lessened their frustration when they returned to their communities. Youth also shared knowledge about their community, their culture and forms of governance to the ministry environment.

At the end of the nine-month ministry placement, interns had gained numerous skills that they were able to bring back to their Aboriginal organizations and to their communities. Interns noted that two years later, they are still appreciative of their skills and networks that they gained in their ministry placements. They have also been working within their communities to ensure greater understanding that there are public servants working very hard towards reconciliation and implementation of the New Relationship.

As one intern noted in their interview:

“Having open communication and entering on a positive note really help to establish a foundation -- I felt welcomed at my ministry placement and I felt heard and respected – that helped me to trust my supervisor and my ministry, which made it easy to move forward to build a positive relationship.”

Demographic Representation

Interns were aware that the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program ensured that some workplaces in government offices were more representative of the population. It represented a major recruitment to bring Aboriginal people into government employment opportunities – and even though they are only temporary positions, it was noted that they “leave a footprint” behind of their presence. Interns also appreciated having the opportunity to have Aboriginal people working on and providing input to Aboriginal policy and program portfolios.

Scope and Reach

Interns noted that projects identified in the ministry proposals that are prepared in advance of hosting interns often intersect – which offered opportunities for interns to collaborate on projects. They were also aware that their cohort represented a large network of colleagues they could access for feedback on approach and other community outreach techniques while in their ministry placement.

Access to Decision-Making

Some interns noted that their supervisors and mentors in their ministry placements provided access to decision-making forums and processes, which was very appreciated. They were exposed to day-to-day operations as well, which provided them with another opportunity to participate and assist with the New Relationship. They described feeling as if they were ambassadors for their communities, which added to the experience.

Increased Aboriginal awareness in the Public Service

Throughout their ministry placement, interns took every opportunity to have informal educational dialogue with their co-workers about the reality and the barriers faced by Aboriginal youth in society. These conversations took place over many different informal and formal interactions. Formal interactions included training days, committee work and other meetings with management on issues from growing up on a reserve to issues related to Treaty negotiations.

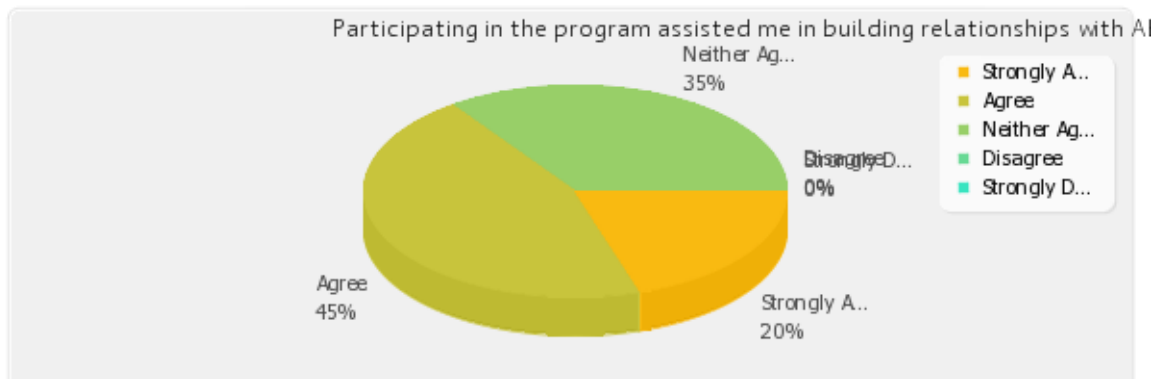
As one intern noted, “I think that Aboriginal youth working in their respective departments through example that Indigenous youth in British Columbia are important carriers of cultural knowledge with a wide range of career and personal goals.” (Year 2 Intern)

Supervisors/mentors noted the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program provided Aboriginal organizations with an opportunity for the interns to see the difference operationally between government and First Nations organizations. As one supervisor/mentor noted, “this experience will assist them in bridging organizational difference when they enter the work force.”

Supervisors and mentors were also asked to rank whether or not their participation in the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program assisted them in building relationships with

government/Aboriginal organizations. All respondents indicated an agreement in the program assisting in achieving that goal.

Table II: Participating in the program assisted me in building relationships with Aboriginal communities.



Building Relationships among Interns

Intern interviews also included questions related to the intern cohort model and whether or not they felt the program assisted them in building a group bond together and to provide examples of how this was achieved.

The following themes were pulled from their responses in order of frequency.

- *Orientation week* was a common experience that assisted in bringing the group together as a cohort;
- As interns were placed all over the province, a virtual network was helpful in maintaining communication with each other;
- The program brought together like-minded Aboriginal youth with a desire to be *change agents* in their communities;
- *Program days* brought the group together to share experiences and reconnect with each other.

Orientation Week

Interns noted that a bond was created in orientation week. Most interns had to relocate for their ministry placement in the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. For those that found themselves living in a new city, this bond was important to ensuring there was support for each other in their new location. Interns also noted that the traditional welcoming ceremony signified an intention for the group to move forward together:

“The first initial week of preparation for the program and professional development is crucial. This gave interns a perfect opportunity to meet and get to know one another. It was encouraging to meet other

role models. This was the foundation that first bonded us all together, which developed into a wonderful support group throughout the program.” (Year 2 Intern)

Virtual Network

In Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, there were a number of placements in regions across British Columbia. In order to keep in touch, interns described the email distribution list that was used to keep everyone informed. Emails regarding upcoming program events, news from communities and other informal information sharing were examples of this and interns noted an appreciation for this method of keeping in touch. The interns located in placements away from Victoria especially appreciated being able to keep in touch with their fellow interns, noting that “knowing that if I physically can’t see them – I can express myself over email and someone will respond” (Year 2 Intern).

Change Agents

The cohort model was described by interns as a group of “like minded people coming together to create change.” For some interns, it also represented the first time they were interacting with other youth leaders from other communities, who hold similar visions for positive change in their communities.

Program Days

Interns appreciated having the program days to reconnect with each other on a personal and professional manner. They noted the three formal program training days, which include workshops, guest speakers and cultural sharing were meaningful opportunities to reconnect and share experiences.

Aboriginal organization supervisors also took note of the importance of the cohort model:

“I would like to commend the program managers and all those involved in the program design. It was so important for them to build relationships and go through training together at the onset so they have a peer support as they begin their career journey.” – Y2 Supervisor/Mentor

Opportunity for Youth Voice or Influence

Interviews also included questions regarding whether or not the interns felt the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program provided them with an opportunity have a voice or influence throughout their internship experience. The following themes were pulled out from the interviews in order of frequency:

- Interns brought their *youth voice to their projects in ministry placements* and were able to influence program and policy development within government;
- Day to day conversations and *informal interactions* with colleagues made interns feel like they were listened to and able to influence perceptions of Aboriginal people;
- *Program events* provided interns with the opportunity to dialogue with government leadership and decision-makers; and
- Program staff support and encouragement provided the skills for interns to voice their experiences.

Youth voice within Ministry Placements

Youth enter into government and would leave behind, as one intern articulated it “a footprint.” Interns that were provided with projects related to Aboriginal community engagement, policy and program development were able to influence those projects and sometimes even create new projects and initiatives to include Aboriginal youth where none existed before.

The projects made available to the interns in their placements were identified as a major opportunity for them to exercise a voice and influence on how to conduct business with First Nations and Métis communities in British Columbia. They noted projects ranged from external youth engagement, public service engagement, as well as internal staff engagement. With these projects, interns were very pleased with the impact they were able to have on government operations and programming.

Interns also appreciated participating in different committee work that spanned across ministries. Participation in these committees helped interns to have a voice or influence in different sectors, as well as have a front row seat to some high-level decision-making.

“I was given the opportunity to work with incredible people within government and learn from them and work alongside them and out in the province with them, pushing forward meaningful improvements.”

(Year 2 Intern)

Informal Interactions

Interns are placed in ministries for a nine-month period. Over that time, they build relationships on an individual level with their co-workers. They noted that the daily informal interactions and opportunity to provide an alternative and more accurate view to their reality beyond the stereotypes felt just as influential as being able to speak to a high-level public servant. Conversations over lunch and coffee enabled interns to tell stories, to talk about protocol and to ensure that their co-workers understood the importance of traditional practices in their lives and the lives of their families and communities:

“Within my ministry I had a lot of voice – I spoke with different administrators and managers about Aboriginal culture and history.” (Year 2 Intern)

Program Events

The key events that happened throughout the program year also enabled the youth in Year 2 to feel as if their voice was heard and they had influence over government programming. A welcoming atmosphere and an openness to the dialogue provided interns with the ability to speak their mind about their experience. This also translated into their ministry placements, as well as into the informal dialogue with colleagues.

The completion ceremony was also noted as an opportunity for youth to feel as if they had a voice and influence. The year 2 interns chose an intern speaker to articulate their experience over their year with the program – and this speech was delivered to an audience that included the Minister for Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, the Minister of Citizen's Services, Grand Chief Ed John and Métis Nation President Bruce Dumont. The dignitaries and special guests were seated amongst the interns, which also provided an opportunity for the youth to dialogue with them, as well as with other high level representatives from the Public Service Agency, including the Head of the Public Service Agency.

Program training days also provided youth interns with an opportunity to dialogue with high-level government officials. In year 2, the interns were able to meet the Deputy Minister to the Premier on a special invitation day in December. On Program Day 2 in February, interns were able to attend the Speech from the Throne in the legislature and mingle with government ministers. Interns were also invited to participate as volunteers and performers at the annual Premier's Awards dinner in Victoria. These opportunities stand out for the interns as key moments where they were able to demonstrate their commitment to positive change in the relationship between their communities and government under the New Relationship.

Program Support and Encouragement

Interns also noted the importance of the effort put forward by program staff to ensure they had the tools available to them to speak and have their voice heard. From orientation week and program training days, interns were provided with workshops on creative problem solving, facilitation and teamwork. The program staff also ensured each workshop was evaluated at the end so that interns had a voice or influence on program operations. This training and opportunity for consistent feedback made the interns feel a sense of pride to be a part of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program and were empowered to ensuring their voice and influence was used to promote the importance of it. For example, one intern mentioned that "it was helpful that staff were familiar with how government works and were speaking from real life examples. They were advocated for interns as employees and as human beings." (Y2 Intern)

Program Image and Reputation

Interns were also asked to articulate thoughts on the reputation and program image of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. They were also asked how they heard about the program.

Interns noted awareness that the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is a high-level professional development program that recruits future and present youth community leaders. They were also aware that expectations for this program to succeed are high, since it was developed at the highest levels from the Premier's office to political executive in the First Nations Summit.

The Year 2 interns that were interviewed learned about the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program through a number of different avenues -- through email distribution lists at their universities and colleges, community newsletters, and college professors. Gathering our Voices was also an important event that stands out as an example of program recognition. The annual youth conference attracts over 1000 from across British Columbia. Year 1 interns were in attendance in 2008 and word about the program began to spread. The program was also lauded by First Nations and Métis leadership in different forums and their support was noted as being helpful to add to the program's credibility.

Words used to describe the reputation of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program included:

- Glowing
- Innovative
- Phenomenal
- Strong
- Positive
- High Esteem

The findings outlined in this section demonstrate the positive impact the program has had on interns as well as on the supervisors and mentors. These impacts were reached through formal and informal interactions with each other, as well as with leadership. The five unique aspects of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program are providing mechanisms and opportunities for youth to grow both professionally and personally throughout their internship year, while also contributing to positive change in how government and Aboriginal organizations build relationships with each other.

FINDINGS II: AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Interns were also asked if there were areas that the program was not helpful in 5/6 of the thematic areas.

Rates of response were 58% (7/12) in sections other than the “Building Relationships between government and Aboriginal People”, where the response rate was 100%.

Cultural Responsiveness

Interview participants were asked to indicate if and how the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was not helpful by being culturally responsive. The two areas identified by respondents were:

- Lack of access to *intern supports* required to transition into the program, as well as throughout the program year; and
- Lack of *Aboriginal awareness* in their ministry placements.

Intern Support

Aboriginal youth face a number of issues related to health, family and community. Interns indicated that these realities placed a lot of pressure on the interns throughout the internship year.

Interns noted that having to relocate to their ministry placements to either Victoria or an urban centre nearby was a major contributor to their experience and some required support to make this transition. Interns do not have access to benefits as Auxiliary appointed staff. While they are offered employment coverage by the union, interns had to find new doctors and access services that are away from their home for their internship year.

Aboriginal Awareness

For some interns, there was a lack of awareness among their colleagues of issues facing Aboriginal people in British Columbia and Canada. This lack of awareness impacted intern’s placements in their ministries and affected their internship experience due to the constant education they felt was needed to help others understand their realities.

Building Relationships between Aboriginal People and Government

Interns were asked to identify anything about their internship experience that was not helpful for building relationships between Aboriginal people and government. The following areas were identified:

- Interns were exposed to program and policy approaches that *re-affirmed their initial assumption* about the government relationship;
- Placements in Aboriginal organizations did not have any *sector continuity* from their ministry placements;
- Interns felt as if they were perceived to have *special treatment* because of their participation in the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program;

- The *post-internship experience* did not allow for continuation of employment with ministries; and
- *Ministry placements* did not seem prepared to host an intern.

Re-affirming Assumptions

In the same way that the ministry placement was helpful in providing the positive “two way teaching tool”, some interns indicated they were also exposed to initiatives and public servants that did not seem interested in helping Aboriginal communities and were involved in initiatives that were counterproductive to the New Relationship. In some cases, funding was pulled on important initiatives and the cultural importance of oral contracts was not honoured. Interns were also exposed to practices within workplaces such as teleconferences, in lieu of face to face meetings that often cause frustration and are not productive towards relationship building.

Sector Continuity

Year 2 interns also indicated that while they appreciated having an Aboriginal organization placement that was career-focused, there was sometimes no sector continuity from one ministry placement to the Aboriginal organization placement. Interns indicated that sector continuity would help with continuing the relationship from the ministry to the community level.

Discrimination and Perception of Special Treatment

While the interns noted a pride for being a part of the program, they also noted that colleagues in their workplaces let them know that they were receiving “special treatment”. In these cases, interns noted that this treatment also translated into other relationships with Aboriginal communities.

Year 2 interns also indicated that they did experience discrimination in their ministry placements. This was either in the witnessing of prejudicial comments towards other Aboriginal people or overt discriminatory action in the workplace. The impact of these interactions would cause them to question their decision to participate in the program.

Post-Internship Experience

In the Year 2 post-internship experience, interns noted that there was a lack of employment opportunities available to them. While they noted that this was due in part to the economic downturn that was occurring, it was surprising to them that there were few opportunities available in either their Aboriginal organizations or ministry placements.

Ministry Placements

Preparation for hosting an intern is an important consideration in order to assess the work environment the intern will be entering into.

Supervisors and mentors also indicated areas for the program to improve the relationship building experience for them as well as their intern:

Working with Ministries

The program fulfills a goal to teach Aboriginal Youth to work with government, however, supervisors and mentors noted, it could do more to teach government employees to break down the myth and improve the understanding and perspective of Aboriginal people.

Intern Supports

Interns should be enabled and empowered to take leave to participate in their community potlatches, sweats and other ceremonies.

Relationships among Interns

The following areas were identified as areas the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was not helpful in developing the relationship among the cohort:

Structured Training Days

Interns noted that program training days were too structured and could sometimes make for a very long day of intense learning and listening.

Informal Activities

Activities outside of the workday and professional development provided by program days were often centered in a restaurant or bar. Interns found this to be not only expensive, but unhealthy as well – as alcohol would often be a key factor in these gatherings.

Opportunity for Youth Voice or Influence

Interns were also asked what was not helpful about the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program in ensuring they had a voice or influence. The following was identified:

- Ministry position development work could include an emphasis on ensuring interns have access to decision-making; and
- Specific program training could be provided to ensure youth are able to use their voice throughout the year in different scenarios.

Position Development

Interns noted the importance of program promotion and work done by program staff on the front end of the internship to ensure that the projects outlined for them would enable them to have a voice in decision-making or policy/program development. “Sometimes at the meetings, interns feel like they are a fly on the wall. They need encouragement and certainty to speak up.” - Y2 Intern

Program Training

A number of the projects that youth undertook in year 2 had a public speaking or community engagement component. Youth noted that while they were excited to undertake these projects, not all of them had experience or training behind them before they went into communities.

Program Image and Reputation

Program outreach to First Nations communities was mentioned as one area that could be improved upon. In most urban centers, where there are universities, colleges and Aboriginal organizations, the program is quite well publicized. Smaller communities are not as aware of the program or its reputation.

With improvements made to outreach to more individual communities, interns also noted that the bigger story would be told – about the need for this program and the need to address the gap in living standards between Aboriginal people and the rest of the population.

In Year 2, it was noted that there could have been more media interaction to get the message about the program and about recruitment activities out to communities.

While the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program experience is generally positive, there are areas for improvement in each of the thematic areas. Interns noted that their experience was not without struggle to educate their colleagues about the realities facing them today or about program goals and purpose. This may have been due to the program only being in its second year; however, it will be something to monitor in future program years to improve on the internship experience for all program partners.

DISCUSSION

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is offering a unique and innovative experience to Aboriginal youth in British Columbia. The five thematic areas provided an opportunity for interns to reflect on their experiences and to provide feedback on thematic areas that were working well, meeting expectations, and should be cemented in the program design. Feedback also indicated that areas such as “Building Relationships between Aboriginal People and Government” would still require work and time to ensure interns were valued in their workplace and provided with an opportunity to use their “Voice or Influence” to inform government program and policy.

Holistic View of Program Experience

In the interview results, interns provided a wealth of insight into their internship experience through exploration of the framework. They provided information willingly, thoughtfully and respectfully on their complete internship experience. It was also apparent that the full internship experience went beyond the regular work day. While the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is a professional employment program – interns also relate informal interactions with supervisors, colleagues, program staff, and each other as contributing to their year. Interactions outside of the office in informal social gatherings with other interns also make up a significant piece of the experience.

Aboriginal youth interns care about each other and motivate each other to succeed and those relationships still continue two years later. The cohort model enabled their relationships to be developed and to be nurtured throughout the year. Program staff are an equally important part of that cohort model as they are responsible for guiding the interns through the milestones and roadblocks they may encounter.

Aboriginal Awareness in the BC Public Service

A major theme brought out by the interviews and the survey is the education or tools required within ministries to enable supervisors and mentors to provide a supportive work environment to the Aboriginal youth interns. Interns noted that while they were eager to share information about their nation, culture and language, sometimes the work environment was not conducive to that sharing. Program staff also have a role to play in ensuring ministry placements are offering a productive training ground for skills development and knowledge transfer, however, their roles could be expanded to include more education about the realities of Aboriginal youth in today’s society.

There is also a larger issue of increased awareness of Aboriginal issues across government and the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program can not be solely responsible for providing that education. However, the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program should be an integral part of a larger effort to educate the public service about the demographic realities of a dynamic multicultural workforce that is inclusive and welcoming to Aboriginal people. The program has many best practices the broader public service can benefit from.

Major Accomplishments and Promotion

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is an innovative and award-winning initiative developed in British Columbia. In Year 2, the Program Lead and Manager presented information on the program model to the federal government and the First Nations Public Service Initiative, which eventually gave way to the development of a Federal Aboriginal Internship Program. Program staff in year 2 were also contacted by at least two other provinces to consult on the program model. Media interviews were provided to Aboriginal publications in British Columbia and in Canada. While these efforts are important for spreading the word about the program and its existence, program experience will also be promoted effectively from former interns speaking about their experience, such as the video on the Public Service YouTube Channel of Year 2 intern, Sarah Robinson (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nh6ObLu6-JM>), presentations at career fairs and conferences such as Gathering Our Voices, and finding opportunities for current interns to interact with past program participants.

Nurturing the Relationships

Interns spend the majority of their internship year in their ministry placements, allowing opportunities for relationships to be built with ministry supervisors and mentors. Aboriginal organizations also mentioned the importance of bringing them together for networking and discussion about meeting program goals and providing a meaningful learning experience for their interns. Whether this is carried out in the form of a focused site visit, or a gathering of Aboriginal organization supervisors and mentors, nurturing this relationship and ensuring their inclusion in program activities is equally important to the continued success of the program.

Post-Internship Follow-Up

Interns invest one year of their time to the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. Throughout the year, they are provided the skills and training to succeed in their placements in the public service and Aboriginal organizations. Interviews also brought out messages indicating a need for post-internship follow-up – whether it be resources provided for enhancing job search skills and tools, or even an informal opportunity to the interns to reconnect and network amongst each other. Whatever the reason, the bonds formed in the internship year are long lasting and meaningful relationships that interns would like to have nurtured and coordinated by the program staff.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is providing an experience for interns to gain practical professional skills in a ministry and Aboriginal organization setting. The feedback is generally positive and interns have described an enriching internship where they were able to gain knowledge and skills, network with leadership, and provide a voice and influence to government policies and programming.

The following recommendations are grouped by the thematic areas outlined in the research framework. They were submitted as feedback by the interns and supervisors/mentors in the interviews and survey as recommendations for improving the internship experience for all partners.

Cultural Responsiveness

Program Resources and Supports

- Development of a list of community health and medical resources available in each placement location during the internship year.
- Examine options for interns to have access to a specific benefit such as the Employee Family Assistance Plan that is available to employees under their benefits plan for permanent employees.
- Program staff could engage an in-house Elder that would be available to the interns regardless of region in the province.

These various approaches would ensure program staff is able to support the interns, while also respecting the limitations of not being certified professional counsellors. It would also ensure program staff are able to refer interns to the appropriate supports within their placement location, as well as ensure that interns have resources readily available to them if they do not feel comfortable approaching program staff with the issue at hand.

First Nations interns have access to federal Non-Insured Health Benefits – however as auxiliary staff, Métis and non-Status interns have no workplace health benefits. As auxiliary employees, interns are also not entitled to paid sick days, vacation days, bereavement leave, or cultural leave. Interns should be enabled and empowered to take leave to participate in their community potlatches, sweats and other ceremonies.

Supervisors and mentors also recommended the program to provide regular access to an Elder to assist in a personal wellness development plan. Elders can provide guidance on any number of issues and support them on a path of work-life balance, as well as balancing family, community, and contemporary/traditional cultural values.

Regional Placements

- Advocating for an increase in regional placements across the province.

Provincial government offices are located around the province in large urban centers and small municipalities and towns. More regional placements would ensure the stress of

relocating from northern and remote communities was diminished – as well as being culturally responsive to the needs of interns.

Aboriginal Awareness

- Presentations and workshops could be held with future supervisors and mentors on understanding the realities facing Aboriginal youth, including cultural protocol awareness and different approaches to working with youth.

These proactive measures would be one step towards educating the public service more broadly on understanding Aboriginal people and communities and ease the transition of interns entering the ministry environment. Use of technology such as LiveMeeting and virtual webinars could be created and could be accessed by supervisors and mentors not able to attend the training in person. Inclusion of former AYIP interns could also enhance this training and provide an understanding of the intern experience.

Intern Gatherings

- More than three Program Days could be added to the program architecture.
- Supervisors and Mentors could be invited to attend or participate in program gatherings and events.

The AYIP Program Staff could investigate options for holding more program days in different regions to ensure maximum exposure to a diversity of cultures and communities. Program Staff could also investigate options for virtual sharing of cultures across regions of the province through technology.

Increased inclusion of Supervisors and Mentors would allow for more connection between branch/ministry and the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program that can be very high-level focused. It would provide the tools to ministry branches to strive for cultural competency – which will ensure the intern has a positive experience.

Building Relationships between Aboriginal people and Government

Recruitment and Community Outreach

- A specific recruitment plan could be developed to ensure adequate outreach to communities in various regions of the province.
- Program days could be held in different regions of the province.

Program Staff and other government representatives working in Aboriginal relations in the regions could promote the program throughout the year in different communities across the province. Recruitment efforts could include career fairs and other events in areas that the program has not been traditionally visiting in previous years.

Holding program events in different regions would provide an opportunity for the interns to learn more about other Aboriginal cultures in British Columbia.

Post-Internship Experience

- Employment opportunities and options are made available to the interns if they wish to continue working in the public service and within their ministry.
- A second term or tier of the internship could be made available for interns to compliment their year of learning into more field work within ministries or Aboriginal organizations.

Once the interns leave the ministries and Aboriginal organizations, the post-internship experience sometimes does not meet the interns' expectations.

Work with Aboriginal Organizations

- A meeting with Aboriginal organizations during the Expression of Interest development period in January or February would ensure that mandates are consistent, as they can change with each fiscal year.
- Program staff could meet with Aboriginal organization supervisors to assist in developing training and project plans for their intern.

This would assist the interns in understanding how best to use their gifts/skills to build capacity within the Aboriginal organization. They also noted the importance of ensuring that the program is promoting the Aboriginal organization as an attractive post-internship employer. The salary wages may not be competitive, however highly skilled youth will be attractive resources to Aboriginal organizations with a fast path for upward mobility.

While the interns are only in their Aboriginal organization placements for a three month period, this extra relationship building will ensure the program experience is productive for the organization as well as the intern.

Central Funding

- The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program could operate on a central funding model to ensure broad participation by branches within ministries.

Due to the current funding model, many interested branches and program areas are not getting approval needed to forward a proposal to host an intern. As one supervisor/mentor explained:

“The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is an excellent program that produces tangible results for First Nations youth and ultimately, will strengthen relationships between government and First Nations as well as First Nations communities – it must be sustained.”

Program Promotion

- The program could also be promoted internal to government.

Promotion could include education about Aboriginal youth demographics and issues in today's society to ensure government officials understand the importance of developing talent among the Aboriginal youth demographic.

Relationships among interns

Informal Gatherings

- Leading up to training days, gatherings could be organized where everyone could participate the evening prior.
- Activities could focus on and promote healthy living, fitness or community outreach and fundraising.

Interns also noted an interest in providing a service back to the community such as fundraising and participating in local First Nations and Métis community outreach and activities.

Opportunity for Youth Voice or Influence

Job Titles

- Program Staff can promote that interns incorporate common job titles before the intern is placed in the ministry.

Interns noted that the title seemed to set them apart from their colleagues. The job title of “junior policy analyst” or “junior program officer” could be more effective in ensuring interns felt more included in day-to-day operations in their workplace.

Public Speaking Workshop

- A specific workshop on public speaking and presentation skills could be provided at the beginning of the internship program during orientation week. This training could continue throughout the internship year.
- Program training days and orientation could include information on what resources are available to them in government, including training courses on conflict management and other processes in the Public Service Agency.

Training would enable interns to be prepared to begin their engagement projects with some training, as well as ensure they were prepared to use their voice to influence programming and policy development.

Post-Internship

- A post-internship gathering – connected to the completion ceremony could be arranged for interns to debrief their experience and network amongst each other for employment and training opportunities moving forward.

More opportunities for interns to reconnect when they complete their program year would ensure the network that has been created is maintained. This large province-wide network could gather to discuss their current work and opportunities to work together in their current studies or organizations.

Resource Document

- Interns could leave “a legacy” behind in their ministries or Aboriginal organizations.

This “legacy” could be in the form of a report, a presentation, or work on a specific community project that would be a branch resource, as well as a resource for future ministry proposal development.

Program Image and Reputation

Internal to Government

- Program Staff could meet with the supervisor and mentor in advance of the placement to discuss program goals and operations, as well as past experiences from other interns.
- The Public Service recruitment strategies could begin earlier, in high schools and elementary schools. Interns noted that a career in the public services was never really provided as an option to them until this internship experience. Funding could be provided for ministries that have never hosted an intern before to ensure there are a broad variety of ministry options available to the interns in varying fields of study and career paths.

Efforts internal to government on marketing of the program would assist in promoting the high level expectations for success and need to support the incoming interns to enable future program successes.

External to Government

- Program staff could develop an external communications and marketing strategy for the program to ensure outreach to Aboriginal and mainstream media outlets.
- A specific recruitment plan could be developed to ensure outreach to smaller, northern and remote communities.

Aboriginal Youth are seeking a place in society that affirms their value as citizens and as Aboriginal persons alike (Castellano, 2008, p. 12). Throughout their internship year, the program provided culturally responsive supports in the form of protocols and ceremony. It provided an opportunity for interns to build a relationship with government, as well as with each other as a cohort. Interns provided input to government policies and programs and relayed their life experience to their colleagues on a daily basis. The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program provided interns with the opportunity to explore their career and educational path with professional skill-building experience. Their experience was not without struggle however, it was meaningful, rewarding and an opportunity to develop key leadership skills needed to take the next step in their lives.

At the completion of Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, Grand Chief Ed John noted, “it is important that our youth have the opportunity to learn about the policies and political processes that make government work, so that they can bring this valuable knowledge and experience back to our communities.” (Ministry of Citizen’s Services, 2009). Twenty Aboriginal youth completed the program in 2009 and received certificates and carved silver paddles as a symbol of their achievement. Some of their experiences are told in this report – as well as their recommendations - provided respectfully and with good intentions – to build on a program that has already seen a lot of success in developing and nurturing the potential found in the Aboriginal youth in British Columbia.

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Program Evaluation: Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, Year 2 (2009/2010)

You are invited to participate in a study entitled **Program Evaluation: Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, Year 2 (2008/2009)** that is being conducted by Allison Beardsworth.

Allison Beardsworth is a Graduate Student in the department of Human and Social Development at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by phone at 250-356-7949.

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Dispute Resolution. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Bart Cunningham. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-8059.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to conduct a program evaluation of Year 2 (2008/2009) BC Public Service Aboriginal Youth Internship Program.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because:

- An evaluation has been requested by senior government officials as well as from the First Nations Leadership Council. The program is a continuing program within the public service with ongoing support and limited core funding. The research undertaken could assist with securing more permanent funding, staff resources and support from the BC Public Service Agency senior management.
- The program staff of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program has received numerous requests from other levels of government, industry and Aboriginal communities for advice on duplicating the program or curriculum development for similar programs in other regions of the country

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were selected to be an intern and participated in the program beginning in September 2009.

What is involved:

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include participation in a 30-60 minute telephone or in-person interview regarding your experience in the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program.

Audio-tapes/and-written notes will be taken. A transcription of the interview will be made.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include:

- Program continuity
- Continued skills development of Aboriginal youth
- Increased health status of Aboriginal youth and families
- Increased awareness of Aboriginal realities in the public service
- Increased employment participation of Aboriginal youth in the public service and in Aboriginal community organizations.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be used only if you provide permission for its use.

Anonymity

In terms of protecting your anonymity, you will only be identified in the final report by the fact that you were an intern in the 2009/2010 Program Year. However, in the process of conducting the research, there will be loss of anonymity through the interview and selection process.

Confidentiality

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by the researcher.

The data will be kept in the Internship Program space in a locked cabinet. Electronic data will be kept on a removable storage device (jump drive).

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

- final report submitted to the School of Dispute Resolution/Public Administration;
- final report submitted to the Program Lead, Director of the Learning Centre, and the Assistant Deputy Minister of the Talent Management Division;
- The report will be kept for use by AYIP Program Staff and interns.

Disposal of Data

- The data will be kept indefinitely. The Internship program has a filing system and the data will be kept in a secure locked cabinet with those files.

Contacts

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Dr. Brigitte Harris, Learning Centre Consultant, Public Service Agency:
250 356-1327

Dr. Bart Cunningham, Professor, University of Victoria
250-721-8059

Allison Beardsworth, Researcher, Public Service Agency
250-356-7949

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

[WAIVING CONFIDENTIALITY] PLEASE SELECT STATEMENT

I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study.

I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

_____ *(Participant to provide initials)*

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix II: Email Introduction

Dear AYIP intern --

I am contacting you to ask for your feedback on Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. As an intern, your experience is critical to helping us to understand how to make this program the best it can be. Your feedback will be used to inform future program revisions and modifications. Feedback will be gathered through a 30-60 minute telephone interview with Allison Beardsworth, the primary researcher.

I've attached a letter of information for you to review, outlining research protocols, confidentiality and potential benefits of the evaluation. The letter also includes contact information for the primary researcher, Allison Beardsworth.

Once you reviewed the information provided in the letter, if you would like to participate, please get in touch with Allison at Allison.Beardsworth@gov.bc.ca. Allison will provide you with a formal process for providing your consent to participate in the interviews as a part of this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely, Brigitte Harris

Dr. Brigitte Harris, Learning Evaluation Lead

The Learning Centre | BC Public Service Agency

3rd Floor, 940 Blanshard Street, Victoria , BC | V8W 2H3|

NEW 250-356-1327 | Fax: 250-387-0749 | Blackberry: 250-507-4292



Where ideas work

APPENDIX III: Interview Guide for Y2 Interns

Evaluation of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program (Year 2 interns)

- *I am conducting interviews as part of a formal evaluation of Year 2 of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. This evaluation will assist program management and staff in noting successes and areas for improvement and further development.*
- *I am interviewing the Year 2 interns regarding their experience participating in the AYIP.*
- *The focus of the evaluation will be on program characteristics that are unique and innovative for the AYIP. You will be asked to comment on your experiences in these areas as they relate to your experience with the AYIP.*
- *Your participation in this interview is voluntary. Information provided in your interview will be anonymous and confidential.*
- *You can decline to comment on any questions that are uncomfortable for you.*
- *All information will be confidential and your name will not be associated with any of the information you provide.*

1. Culturally Responsive

- Ensuring youth take pride in practicing cultural protocols. Elders attend training sessions, ceremony and protocol are followed in each meeting or training opportunity.

Q: In what ways is the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program culturally responsive to the needs of interns?

Q: Provide an example of how the program benefitted you in your internship by being culturally responsive?

Q: Provide an example of how the program was not helpful by being culturally responsive?

Q: What would you do to change to improve the culturally responsive nature of the AYIP?

2. Building Relationships with Government

- The majority of the placements are in Victoria and Vancouver, where most government headquarters are located. Youth are supported in their placements by a supervisor and a mentor, as well as by two program staff, to assist them with navigating government processes and protocols.

Q: Please describe how the internship program provides an opportunity to build a relationship between Aboriginal people and government.

Q: Provide an example of an experience in your internship that helped you build a better relationship with government.

Q: Describe an example or experience during your internship that was not helpful in building a better relationship with government.

Q: Provide an example of how the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program could provide other ways to foster and build a relationship with government.

3. Relationships with other interns

- The interns are brought together in the first week and spend four days with program staff to ensure they build a healthy support system amongst each other. Once in their ministry placements, the interns are kept in constant communication virtually through emails and teleconferences.

Q: Describe an example of how the internship program provided you with opportunities to build relationships with other youth interns.

Q: Provide an example of how the internship program was not helpful in providing opportunities to build relationships with other youth interns?

Q: How could the internship program offer other ways to build relationships among the interns?

4. Opportunity to have a Voice/Influence

- Youth are provided with a project within their placements to lead and coordinate. Youth are also asked for their perspective on a regular basis to inform Aboriginal policy and practices within ministries.

Q: Provide an example of an experience during your internship when you felt as if you had a voice or influence:

Q: Can you provide an example of how the internship program is helpful in enabling youth interns to have a voice or influence?

Q: Can you provide an example of how the internship is not helpful in enabling youth interns to have a voice or influence?

Q: How can the internship program improve ways or offer more opportunities for youth interns to have a voice or influence?

5. Program Image and Reputation

- The program was created by First Nations and government leaders. It has been described as the “best example of the New Relationship”. Interns are featured at high profile ministry and cross-government events. Each year, the number of applicants is increasing by over one hundred – indicating that youth are being encouraged to apply for this innovative program.

Q: How did you hear about the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program?

Q: How would you describe the reputation of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program?

Q: What could be done to improve the reputation of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program?

APPENDIX IV: Supervisor and Mentor Electronic Survey

Number	Question	Type
Question 1	I chose to participate in the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program because (check all that apply):	Multiple Checkbox: I wanted to have an Aboriginal youth work in my branch; I wanted to be a part of the New Relationship with Aboriginal people; I wanted to have an Aboriginal perspective on work in my branch; It was an interesting opportunity; A supervisor prior to me submitted the proposal to host an Aboriginal Youth Intern; Other.
Question 2	I understood the goals and objectives of the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program.	Likert Scale
Question 3	The culturally responsive nature of the program assisted me in supervising my intern.	Likert Scale
Question 4	Participating in the program assisted me in building relationships with Aboriginal communities in British Columbia.	Likert Scale
Question 5	My intern provided me with valuable knowledge regarding Aboriginal community engagement that affected program/policy development work.	Likert Scale
Question 6	What would you suggest as a key area of improvement for the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program to focus on?	Long Answer Type the answer options here, separated by semi-colons
Question 7	Do you have any other program recommendations?	Long Answer Type the answer options here, separated by semi-colons

Appendix V

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2009CITZ0008-000531
October 27, 2009

Ministry of Citizens' Services

<http://search.news.gov.bc.ca/Default.aspx?keyword=Aboriginal+Youth+Internship+Program&x=0&y=0>

ABORIGINAL YOUTH COMPLETE UNIQUE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

VICTORIA – Twenty Aboriginal youth were honoured last night for successfully completing the 2008-2009 Aboriginal Youth Internship Program, announced Ben Stewart, Minister of Citizens' Services.

“The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program was created to build relationships between government, Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal organizations,” said Stewart. “In the last year, these interns have gained knowledge and skills that will not only benefit them, but their communities and the province as well.”

“This program is giving Aboriginal youth from around the province hands-on job skills. I can see its success in my own ministry – one of last year's interns is now working as a project administrator,” said Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation George Abbott. “Other provincial employees also benefit from this opportunity to learn more about Aboriginal culture.”

The program began in September 2007 after extensive consultations with five Aboriginal youth organizations, the Métis Nation British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council. The 12-month program is designed to increase Aboriginal youths' leadership capacity, education and career opportunities.

The interns have participated in a nine-month placement in a B.C. Government ministry or agency, followed by a three-month placement in a selected B.C. Aboriginal organization. Through these placements, the interns have received professional experience and development, as well as mentorship, support and guidance for their education and career paths.

“I'm pleased to see another successful year of interns completing this program,” said Grand Chief Ed John, member of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “It is important that our youth have the opportunity to learn about the policies and political processes that make government work, so that they can bring this valuable knowledge and experience back to our communities.”

“The Métis Nation British Columbia fully supports the Aboriginal Youth Internship Program. This program provides very valuable experience and opens many

doors for our Métis youth,” said Bruce Dumont, President of the Métis Nation British Columbia. “By working for the provincial government and Aboriginal organizations, our Métis youth are able to establish new goals for their personal and professional lives.”

The Aboriginal youth interns have contributed to projects and initiatives such as community development, policy research, communications strategies and youth engagement programs. In 2009-10, the internship program has forged ahead into its third year by welcoming 25 new interns in September 2009.

“This program has truly been a life changing experience for me,” said Sarah Robinson, a member of the Fort Nelson First Nation. “I have acquired new skills, made contacts, seen innumerable doors open in both my personal and professional life and - importantly – I have left this program with many new best friends.”

The Aboriginal Youth Internship Program is a partnership between the BC Public Service Agency and the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. The program reflects the Province’s commitment through the Pacific Leadership Agenda to build a new relationship with First Nations and Aboriginal people and close gaps in health, housing, education and economic opportunities.

-30-

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