

Adjustment Forum

March 2004



Presented by,



Facilitated by,

Gail Lawrence of TrendLine Consulting

INTRODUCTION

This Report summarizes the input of contributors invited to participate in an Adjustment Forum held on March 24, 2004. The purpose of the Forum was to gather perspectives from a wide variety of experiences with labour adjustment issues in our region.

For its purposes, the North Superior Training Board (NSTB) has defined “adjustment” as change/transition in the workplace, in organizations, in sectors, and its impact on communities and community economic development related to labour market changes. Although not all affected groups and organizations were able to send representatives, contributors to the Forum were representative of many aspects of adjustment, at the individual, group, community, organization and governmental levels. A list of all contributors is appended for reference. Members of the NSTB Board were also in attendance to assist in gathering input and to hear from contributors first-hand.

Contributors addressed two central questions in smaller break-out groups and shared the major points which came out of the break-out sessions with the larger group. Those questions asked contributors to offer their insights and perspectives concerning trends and opportunities related to adjustment issues. The Forum then moved to identification of priority issues based on the small-group discussions and large group presentations. The raw data from the break-out sessions and the closing session is appended for reference.

As the Facilitator for this session, I have been asked to pull together the various thoughts, ideas, and visions communicated during the Forum. In doing so, I have identified “themes” and attempted to encapsulate the related material from the Recorder’s notes. This approach has meant that this Summary touches on the majority, but not all, of the points made. As well, because I could not be present in all three of the break-out rooms, it is likely that I will fail in some instances to fully capture the intent or the substance of some points. I hope contributors reading this document will pardon any oversights or misunderstandings which may occur as a result of those limitations.

I want to thank all of the contributors for their open and insightful input, and also extend my appreciation to the members of the Board for their assistance and efforts in facilitating and recording for each break-out group. Special thanks to Marg and Joanna for their superior organization and attention to logistics which were so very responsible for making the Forum run smoothly and effectively.

TRENDS

Contributors were asked to consider what trends they saw developing across our region, and how those trends might require proactive and/or reactive adjustment. My review of the input on this question identified four major themes of concern: Our Youth; Knowledge Management; Changes in Available Work; and Changes in the Regional Labour Force.

OUR YOUTH

Concerns about trends affecting youth in communities across our region were raised. We need to be proactive in efforts to get young people involved in preparing themselves for skills in higher technology employment. Growth in the Aboriginal population will mean greater numbers of young people from remote communities will be preparing for employment and entering the job market. An insufficient number of young people are being drawn into our traditional logging and forestry industries and into the trades, either because they do not see these areas as holding promise for them, or because they are not adequately informed concerning these occupations as options to them.

Youth out-migration was identified as a growing concern. There are concerns about whether our region can offer opportunities which demonstrate the value of education to young people and which encourage skilled young people to stay in our region.

Contributors made note of some initiatives or trends which may positively address some of the concerns raised. It was noted that “tech” programs are available at the high school level again, and that the “Widening Horizons” program will be launched this coming year. This program will educate individuals studying for their teaching certificate about opportunities for young people who go directly into the workforce rather than entering post-secondary education.

INFORMATION & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The concerns about access to information and being informed revolved around the observation that as a society living and experiencing the “information age” we seem not to be well-informed. One of these concerns is again about our youth, and the lack of information and/or understanding about their work options. Another is about us as parents, and our own lack of knowledge or mind-sets about opportunities outside the spectrum of post-secondary education. A third concern about information centred around the availability and access to information which is or has been gathered through studies or government agencies, but which either lacks specificity with regard to our region or which it was felt is not widely distributed or readily accessible to the general population.

CHANGES IN AVAILABLE WORK

Trends in the nature of jobs and wage rates were of concern. There are more service-sector jobs, such as in retail, hospitality, and call centres, and fewer jobs in the resource sector and in skilled trades. At the same time that work for skilled trades and construction is down in our more populated centres, there is a growing interest in attracting industry to First Nations communities, with a related need and interest in the trades in the far north. In general, there is a shrinking labour market in higher-paid areas of work, including the resource sector. The growth in service sector work tends to be lower-paid, and there has been an increase in part-time and contract positions.

CHANGES IN THE REGIONAL LABOUR FORCE

The Aboriginal community was noted as showing the largest population growth in our region, and attached to that trend is the increasing urbanization of the Aboriginal community. Our regional population is aging --- proactive initiatives could be helpful in predicting where and when the skill gaps resulting from retirements will occur. There is also a trend toward post-retirement employment for retirees, which impacts opportunities for those entering the workforce.

Shortages are projected in health care professionals and teachers.

In the past it was common for the 30 to 60 age group to access assistance with skill development, but more recently this trend has altered to include individuals in the 20 to 30 age group who are also needing skills upgrading. It also appears that labour adjustment issues are affecting non-unionized and unionized workers alike.

OPPORTUNITIES

Three themes were clear from the small-group work on this topic: Information Sharing & Building Awareness, Influencing Work Availability & the Workforce, and Community Capacity Building.

INFORMATION SHARING & BUILDING AWARENESS

Conferences were suggested as vehicles for information gathering and sharing. An opportunity exists through the upcoming Workforce Development Conference to bring the many players with a stake in adjustment issues together. It was also suggested that a joint conference for NWO could be used as a vehicle to identify gaps experienced by that group. Information about available resources could be inventoried and disseminated to the public--- the Great Rendezvous conference with Northwestern Ontario Development Network was suggested as an example.

A “centre for research data” was suggested as an opportunity to gather and develop regional statistics which would make information more easily accessible and meaningful in enabling individuals, groups, business and government to more accurately predict, plan and prepare for shifts in jobs and people. The Thunder Bay Business Retention and Expansion survey offers opportunity to collect research data to assist in making informed decisions.

It would also seem that some opportunities are here, but are not sufficiently promoted. Examples ranged from a lack of awareness regarding available government programs to a lack of awareness outside our region of the lifestyle, tourism and hospitality possibilities we offer.

Contributors also saw that there were opportunities to involve representatives from a broader range of groups and agencies than were able to be present at this Forum, and suggested that more time to discuss the issues with a broader cross-section of stakeholders is required. (Workforce Development Conference 2004)

INFLUENCING WORK AVAILABILITY & THE WORKFORCE

Opportunity exists for First Nations communities in partnership with the College and University to access funding for special courses and business development for Aboriginals. Training opportunities exist to better prepare Aboriginal workers to make the transition into urban centres and successfully enter the mainstream labour market. Conversely, training opportunities exist to prepare non-aboriginal workers to work within a more diverse workplace. Thunder Bay Ventures may have seed money to get training programs such as “Service Plus” launched.

It was suggested that the Fast Forward Thunder Bay initiative might be encouraged to take the lead in bringing industry representatives together to formulate strategies to retain skilled workers who have been displaced from that sector.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building in Greenstone was identified as an example of the opportunities which exist. Positive opportunities exist for clustering industries and for value added production. Opportunities for training could be more readily accessed if daycare were made available for adults to attend evening and night courses.

PRIORITIES

Flowing from the Trends and Opportunities identified by the contributors, the following priorities for Adjustment issues were identified during the closing session of the Forum

Priorities Relating to Government:

Government support at all levels to make initiatives feasible.

We need to educate government – the government of Alberta has first class example of “how to” work with Aborigines – look at that model.

We need to communicate needs of the region to all levels of government.

The process of labour and community adjustment needs to be re-evaluated, there is a need to look at innovative ways to get process started earlier and perhaps to provide broader reach.

Build Community Support & Awareness:

We need to get locals involved – they have the big picture.

Need to develop partnerships to educate population.

Better research is required. We need a Northern Research Centre which would provide information that is relevant and specific to our region.

The traditional concept of adjustment was to “relocate” workers to other labour markets. We need to re-think this and advise the government that this is not the solution. Developing replacement jobs in our communities is the answer.

Organize more of this type of meeting and commit more time to these very important issues --- hold another meeting before the Workforce Development Conference in October and make use of the Workforce Conference itself to address these issues.

Education:

Educate our youth about adjustment issues before they graduate.

Educate our regional consumers: to have sustainable, good Canadian jobs we need to purchase Canadian products.

Educate our population about the importance of quality jobs to sustain our lifestyle, economy and a future for our region

APPENDIX A

Notes from Flipcharts at Adjustment Forum – NSTB Boardroom, March 24, 2004

Yellow Room (Facilitators F. Pullia/D.Rossi)

Trend

1. Aboriginal community is the largest single growing population in the region; increasing urbanization of the Aboriginal community.
2. Proactive – seize the opportunity for employment for training – need an on-going strategy to be effective.
3. The need for higher tech skills – proactive would be to continue with trade fairs, junior achievement and get young people involved
4. Aging Population – to be proactive would be to study the information out there and identify where the gaps are going to be. Studies and stats are out there we just need to access them.
5. Skills trades are down, apprenticeships programs are down – to be proactive we need apprenticeship programs – should be a provincial responsibility and involve labour in the planning and execution.
6. Elimination of many government sponsorship programs i.e. Apprenticeship – many small businesses cannot afford this
7. Increase in part-time contract positions
8. Decrease in regional development i.e. pilot projects – it is either the whole province or nothing – we need regional programs; we should approach the government with a succession plan.

Opportunities

1. Hold a youth conference jointly for NWO and to identify missing links
2. Create a greater demand for jobs in the north.
3. Support the adjustment for youth and Aboriginal population.
4. Create more unique products in this region to increase employment.
5. Get the word out that NOW is here and a wonderful place to live – great lifestyle
6. In the upcoming Workforce Development Conference, bring in all partners i.e. industry, government, business and individuals, educators, First Nations.
7. Do an inventory of our resources and what we have to get this information out to the public i.e. Great Rendezvous conference with NODN.

Blue Room (Facilitators M. Richardson and D. Farrell)

Trends:

1. More service oriented jobs and lower pay – such as retail, hospitality and call centres
2. Decline of resource industry
3. Aboriginal growth population

4. Youth out-migration
5. Older population – retirement
6. Innovation – government priority (adjust population) challenge
7. Recruitment and retention (Lakehead University).
8. No young people in forest industry and evolution to new requirements but not qualified (logging); and youth pay attention to trends in the environment/forestry
9. Trades have wrong perception – relevant choice
10. Access to skilled trades – process to get kids involved in region
11. Not really any building going on – construction
12. Some jobs in mining, some mills.
13. First Nations in industry/trades in the far north
14. Lakehead University teacher course for future teachers aware of college/trades and other career options - Widening Horizons program which is being launched into teacher's college next year. Ultimately the goal is to get university educated teachers to connect to the real world of work and opportunities that lie therein for kids who go directly into the workforce – 60%)
15. Parents need to be aware of opportunities outside of the university spectrum
16. Tech programs available in high school again
17. Usually 30-60 age access job help but now this has broadened into the 20-30 age group who need upgrading skills. Realize value of education
18. Health Care Professional perspective shortage
19. Teacher shortages projected.
20. Workforce change – retirees are now going into other jobs and reducing opportunities for those entering workforce.

Opportunities

1. Not enough training for skills development - training focussed on tourism.
2. Aboriginal Service Training - those moving into the City require transition assistance “how to move into mainstream”
3. Sensitivity Training - for non-aboriginal workers
4. Tourism and hospitality – make more people aware of this area re: economic development.
5. Certification and college program – Thunder Bay Ventures may have seed money for projects; (e.g. Service Plus)
6. Decline of resource industries – let us retain the labour force that we still have, involve affected industries - driven with Fast Forward which could take the lead
7. Capacity Building in Greenstone – other opportunities
8. Collaboration and plan i.e. FedNor funding.
9. Clustering – positive opportunities in clustering industries.
10. Need more middle income jobs
11. Aboriginal – involvement and partnership development; College and Lakehead University – special courses; there is \$\$ available for business development for Aboriginals.
12. Youth out-migration – how skilled 20-30 year olds can stay in our region? Mainly low skilled stay here. Need to focus on parents to change mind-sets. We desperately need regional statistics so that we know precisely what our labour market is all about – Stats Can is too general and not specific enough to our

unique area; we need to have a better handle on what our workforce is made up of – we need a centre for research data to be able to answer people’s questions on what potential areas there are for jobs in skilled trades etc.

13. Business Development – need more immigration to our area – these are the risk takers
14. Transparent and with opportunities identified for our kids who need – we need to work together.
15. Research – again we need good information to make decisions – the BR & E will assist.
16. Holistic approach to training and jobs and education will lead into opportunities.
17. Daycare centre needed for night courses.

Red Room (Facilitators F.M. Bell/B. Jensen)

Trends

1. Temporary layoffs and recalls in the forest and lumber industry.
2. New Technology
3. Very competitive job market
4. Shrinking job market in the well paid areas and resource jobs
5. No new industries in Thunder Bay and Northwestern Ontario
6. Global Economy
7. Descaling of the work force
8. Very competitive in attracting businesses and industry to cities and towns.
9. Global forces
10. Halt downward spiral- change in economic policies needed as well as change in political thinking
11. Dr. Suzuki said it best “Think Globally, Act Locally”

Priorities

1. Real Economic Development is required.
2. Need to look at value added
3. Get people involved – more people with more time to discuss more issues
4. Take advantage of all the resources in our towns to draw from.
5. Market will not take care of people.
6. Training and Support
7. Financial and personal supports needed as well as educational in connection with entrepreneurial initiatives.

Wrap-Up Notes:

1. Adjustment Issues affect non-unionized and unionized labour alike.

Priorities

1. Government support at all levels to make initiatives feasible.
2. We need to educate government – the government of Alberta has first class example of “how to” work with Aboriginals – look at that model.
3. Why do Aboriginal nations have to turn their leadership over every 2 years? It is much too soon – we need to introduce a level playing field for this group.
4. We need to communicate needs of the region to all levels of government.
5. We need to get locals involved – they have the big picture.
6. The process of adjustment needs to be re-evaluated – right now it is funded for 12 months – while the process is beneficial overall, it takes so long to get up and running and before you know it the process is almost over – need to look at innovative ways to get process started earlier.
7. We need creative ways of integrating this into our systems – be proactive.
8. Also Community level adjustment via HRDC/MTCU needs to be broadened.
9. Now it is restricted due to legislation.
10. It can take 3 weeks to get running and it can take 2 years – each case is unique; government is not good at promoting their own programs – no-one is quite sure who is doing what – need awareness program.
11. Need to develop partnerships to educate population.
12. Better research required.
13. This lack of communication is happening at all levels – not just province.
14. We need a Northern Research Centre – which would provide information that is relevant and specific to our region – the current information available is too broad based.
15. It is just as important not to collect the information, but to disseminate it as well – why do some organizations hoard information?
16. Education was stressed throughout the forum by all groups.
17. We need to ensure the graduates of programs are educated in process before they graduate.
18. The traditional concept of adjustment was to “send workers away” – we need to re-think this and advise the government that this is not the solution ...”we are at the ass end not at the right front end”
19. Let’s get together more often and commit more than 2 hours to these very important issues.
20. To have sustainable, good Canadian jobs we need to purchase Canadian products.
21. Quality jobs – requires education..
22. Invite the Aboriginal Partnership Advisors to next meeting.
23. People very much in favour of both having another meeting before the Workforce Development Conference in October and of the Workforce Conference itself.

APPENDIX B

List of Contributors

Bart Pilato — New Directions
Paul Pugh — Bombardier
Terry Walker — MTCU, Adjustment Advisory Program
Carolyn Dowdell — March of Dimes
Bob Baker — Thunder Bay Ventures
John Cole — Mattawa
Moses Sheppard – Adjustment Practitioner
Vince Young — President Carpenter’s Union
Jim Foulds – NDP leader (retired), Adjustment Practitioner
Shannon O’Donnell — Northwestern Ontario Development Network
Heidi Strobl — FedNor
John DeGiacomo — Human Resources Professional Association and Lakehead University
Susan Forbes — Ontario Works
Pauline Shesnicky — Thunder Bay Ventures
Melissa Alers — Northwest Literacy
Dave Isherwood — Lakehead Public Schools
Francis Bell — NSTB
Bryan Jensen — NSTB
Doris Rossi — NSTB
Frank Pullia — NSTB
Madge Richardson — NSTB
Dave Farrell — NSTB
Marg Scott — NSTB